

Recreating a Life
by
Joan Snell



to
Laurie Snell
without whom this book
would not exist.



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Prologue

There were fireworks last night, which might have been part of a class reunion at the college. The fireworks were close. My husband said at first he had half-wondered if they might be an extra-terrestrial invasion. They lasted a long time. And there were three noisy finales, not just one.

Preparation for Commencement began a couple of weeks ago, beginning with the painting of the flagpoles on the Green. Then the chairs were set up, hundreds, white chairs for the graduates and green for everyone else. It rained on the day itself, but that didn't seem to matter.

Then came the returning classes. An extra this year, 2007, was a gathering of all those who had participated over the years in the development of computers. The more recent graduates listened in awe to the older ones who had devised the early versions, perhaps regretting they themselves had only served to fine-tune them. One student was asked if his social life had suffered. He laughed, perhaps ruefully, answering he didn't meet his classmates until he came back for reunions. Another question was, how hard had it been when Bill Gates took over all their ideas. But the daughter of the professor who had instigated the computer projects claimed her father had been genuinely happy that his dream of the universal use of the computer was being made to really happen. She was the only woman on the panel.

My brother went to his Harvard Business School reunion. One of the speakers there was the new, and first, woman President.

Perhaps it's time now for me to try bringing together my writings, beginning with the first stories I wrote my freshman year in college. There have been very many changes in these sixty years.

There is a tendency to mock Memoir Writing (for which my answer tends to be, "so what isn't Memoir writing?"). But how better to try yet once again to achieve that elusive "Know Thyself?" I might at least gain a better perspective, as I did through writing the Isle Royale booklet. That booklet was my response to my son, who asked what it had been like on the family island in the middle of Lake Superior fifty years ago. Afterwards my son's only comment was: he just couldn't believe I did no reading at all that entire summer but spent most of my time fishing, keeping my elderly father-in-law company, who was the age I am now.

I may indeed be a duty-bound sort of person. But after all, I remember a lot more about fishing on the island that summer than I do about any of the books I read that year.

My first stories are all in the third person. A recent article, discussing the difference between third person and first person writing, claims there's more insight in the former, more emotion in the latter. I do know I'll keep the names changed. I am not Barbara, nor is my husband Jim. My children are not Peter and Elizabeth. My brother is not Richard. My friend is not Anna. My American cousin is not Jeanie. My French cousin is not Annette. How I see them may not have much to do with how they see themselves, even as how they see me may not have much to do with how I see myself.

Suddenly I realize I have forgotten the two key people in my list of significant others, the two without whom I quite simply would not exist - my parents. Luckily, though, for me as for most children, parents don't have names of their own, just the generic ones.

There has been recent and revolutionary research on chimpanzees that suggest peers are more important than parents. But for me, the jury is still out on this, the question of the importance of parents, even though I did forget mine just now. As both a parent and a child, I know, from my own experience, that what parents say or do can be exaggerated by children, made larger by far than intended if intent was even there to begin with.

Perhaps, by the end of my work, I will have an end for this Preface. Then again, perhaps not.

Part I

Chapter 1

Anna

Two-and-a-half-year-old Barbara knew a baby had been born, named Anna. Barbara's mother had walked through the snow to Anna's house. Later, Barbara went too. She wondered what you did when a baby was born.

People were drinking tea in the living room with Anna's mother who was half lying and half sitting on the sofa. Anna was in a basket. Barbara was just big enough to see over the basket's edge. Inside was the top of Anna's head, the rest of her hidden under a blanket. She didn't move. She didn't make a sound. "You were a baby once too, Barbie. You and Anna are going to be friends. Just wait and see."

When spring came, on nice days Anna would be outside in her playpen, when she wasn't taking a nap. She had a lot of toys. Anna's mother would be out with her. Often Barbara and her mother and another lady came over to see them. The ladies sat out on the porch in the sun, talking. Anna lay in her pen, and Barbara played with the toys. Sometimes Anna's father and his dog Black came out to work in the garden. First Anna's father would talk with the ladies. Then he would come over to smile at Anna. Just before walking away, he would put his hand on Barbara's head. He would pretend she grew a little, under his hand, like the flowers in his garden.

Another year in spring, Anna was big enough to walk with Barbara to the Egglady's. The Egglady lived in a yellow house with a green roof and a large back porch full of things hanging on clotheslines.

Anna and Barbara each had a pail to put eggs in. Barbara's was blue and Anna's was red. Their mothers put money in the bottom of the pails. That meant the girls could not play with the pails in the dirt piles, left by ants who usually weren't there anymore, along the road. At the Egglady's

they walked down some cement steps, with tall red and yellow tulips on either side, to a walk, which led to the back porch. They opened the screen door into the porch, ducked under what was hanging there and knocked on the back door.

The Egglady had a sweet, small, high voice. She wasn't very much taller than Barbara and was round. The girls wiped their feet on a special rug before going in. The Egglady's husband had to take his shoes off before he went in.

In the kitchen the girls sat down carefully on two of the honey-colored wooden chairs at the matching kitchen table. They put their pails on the table, after taking out the money. The pails and the money looked a little dirty there. They kept their hands on their laps while the Egglady went into the pantry and brought out a shining aluminum bowl full of clean, fresh eggs. With her soft fingers she put them one at a time into the pails, talking in her high sweet voice. The girls looked at her and at the shining shelves, the white sink, the white stove, the white refrigerator, the white starched curtains in the bright windows and at the blue and white checked linoleum floor.

After the Egglady finished filling the pails and putting the rest of the eggs back in the pantry, she reached for the candy jar, on the shelf over the sink. The girls each took one of the red and white hard candies. They said thank you before putting the candies in their mouths. Then they slid off the chairs, picked up the pails and left. The Egglady came to the back door to watch them duck under things, making sure the screen door at the end of the porch got closed all the way behind them.

One time when the girls were almost home, they decided to scuff through one of the dirt piles, and they raised clouds of dust. And, after they put the pails down a little distance away, they came back to scuff through the pile again and then again until their shoes and socks and legs were gray with dust. And they reached down with their hands, sweaty from being closed over pail handles. The dust turned brown in the creases of their hands. They rubbed their hands off on their dresses.

Anna's father and his dog Black must have seen them from Anna's front porch. They came to meet them. Anna's father picked up the egg pails, carrying them himself. The girls walked home either side of him, Black just behind. Anna's father didn't say anything, about the dirt or anything, even though Anna's face was streaked by then. His eyes were crinkling, the way they did when he laughed.

One fall day, Barbara and Anna needed more leaves for their leaf pile. So they went to the garage at the end of the road behind Anna's house.

Two old trees stood beside the garage, roots in and out of a ditch. The girls found lots of leaves.

They began to play at the garage. It had a cement floor. The doors were dark, splintery wood with cross-boards. Soon Anna managed to climb a door to the roof. Barbara tried but gave up because of splinters. The cross-boards weren't very wide either. Anna was smaller and Barbara could lift her part way. But finally Barbara did climb up too. And the top was worth it all, much larger than she had expected. Together, the girls sat down and looked around.

After that they played on the roof all the time. Climbing up got easier. They even learned how not to get splinters.

They could see airplanes coming long before they could hear them, if they watched. One afternoon, near the end of fall, they were watching for airplanes when they heard a thump against the back of the garage. They looked at each other, and then tiptoed over to the edge of the garage roof. Looking down, they saw a pheasant, shining in the sun. He was lying down. They didn't move. He didn't move. After a while they sat, swung their legs over the roof's edge, and wondered if the pheasant was dead. They decided to climb down and see.

They hadn't been around the back of the garage before. In a ditch, part of an old wire fence was tangled up with weeds and tree roots. Barbara wondered how they'd get out of there fast, if the pheasant suddenly flew at them. Anna went first until she could almost touch him. The pheasant still lay on his side, feathers glistening in the gray weeds. They had never seen one so close. His head was small with a black eye stuck on. He must have flown up hard against the garage - except couldn't he see, and wouldn't there have been more noise? By now they were pretty sure he was dead, and Anna announced she was going to poke him. Carefully she stuck out her foot and flipped a tail feather. The pheasant blinked. They could hardly believe it. They turned and scrambled to the front of the garage and ran down the road to Anna's house, to get her father.

They found him in the basement, fixing something at his workbench. His dog Black was watching. Slowly Anna's father finished what he was doing as he listened. Then he and Black returned with them to the garage. The pheasant was still there, but the shadow of the garage had moved over him. He looked small and not beautiful. And he looked as if he had been there a long time. Black went to sniff, and then changed his mind. Anna's father crouched down, found a little stick, and stroked the bird's feathers. Nothing at all happened, the bird was dead. Anna's father took a handkerchief from his pocket, wrapped it around the legs and tied them with a string from another pocket. He stood, lifting the bird up. It looked heavy, and it was stiff and hard. He asked again what had happened. "But Daddy, it winked at us, it did, really. Didn't it Barbie!"

They walked back to the house to the basement, and Anna's father tied the pheasant upside down from one of the pipes. He told them not to touch it because it might have been sick. The next day Anna said her father had taken the pheasant away because its feathers were falling out.

The girls didn't go back to the garage for a while. When they did, there was snow. They tried to climb up on the roof, but the door was too slippery, and their feet, with boots on, were too big for the cross-boards.

On days in late spring and in summer, when the farmers irrigated the fields, the sound of water rushing in the ditch outside Barbara's bedroom window would wake her. She'd get dressed just as fast as she could, but Anna was always out there ahead of her. They would watch the brown water overflow the small ditches and pour across the fields. The farmers, sloshing in boots up to their knees, moved long guide boards from one place to another, spreading water around as much as possible. When the farmers were through, the water stopped. The ditches would empty, and the water would soak into the fields, leaving dark, rich and smelly mud. As Barbara and Anna grew older, they began following the ditches to see where they came from. The small ones led into large ones. And two main ditches led to either side of a small pond. The pond filled from, or sometimes emptied into, a big central ditch, winding like a river along the slopes of low hills.

They began to go for walks along the top of the big ditch, following it from the pond to a bridge where the county road crossed over. Sometimes the ditch was full. Sometimes there would be no water at all and they could go down in. When there was enough water, they would race sticks. The first stick out the other side of the county-road bridge won.

One early spring they decided to follow the ditch beyond the bridge. They hadn't been for a walk since fall, because of the snow. There were still snow patches, but you could almost see them melting in the sun and wind. The ditch was full. Their sticks sped under the bridge and disappeared around the bend. They ran after them. Beyond the bend, the ditch widened. And they found their sticks waiting there in quiet water. Then the ditch narrowed, and the sticks sped ahead again. Here the ditch, full of roots and weeds, caught at their sticks until the rushing water forced the sticks free. And there wasn't a path any more along the top of the ditch. But the new grass had not had time to grow and tangle yet.

Barbara was watching her stick get stuck again when Anna, up ahead, called her. She waved to Barbara to come. She had found a wild duck floating on the current! So they followed the duck, hoping he wouldn't fly away. He was small, speckled brown, the color of prairie grass and irrigation water. Anna said she almost hadn't seen him at all.

The duck moved fast and then faster, with the current. The girls walked fast, full of sun and wind. It was exciting. And at first they felt rather than heard the sound. It sounded, it didn't seem possible, it sounded like a waterfall. There was a wide curve in the ditch because the hill was sloping away. So they left the ditch and ran straight across the prairie to where the ditch curved back again. There the ditch straightened. There was a waterfall, there must be; they could really hear it now. They ran, and then crawled, to the edge of the ditch. Water was sweeping over and down. Snow and great icicles were in the hollows behind and beside the fall. At the bottom, the water spread into a wide ditch leading to the reservoir, which they had seen before from cars, on the road way over there, on the other side. They looked in wonder. The reservoir was immense. It was dark blue, except the parts of it that were black with water birds. On the other side was the prairie again, gold in the sun, and the sky.

They crawled back from the edge, dizzy. Then they remembered the duck and went up the ditch again to scare him away. When they found him, they shouted at him. He didn't fly away. So they threw some dirt. He still didn't fly away. And they began to realize he couldn't fly away for some reason. They started screaming at him, throwing handfuls and handfuls of dirt. He couldn't even turn against the current and swim away.

Finally they stopped screaming and throwing. And they decided not to watch him go over the edge. Anyway it was getting late. They started for home. By the time they reached the county road, the sun had almost set. The wind had stopped. It was cold. The sky turned green. Ahead the prairie stretched out to the mountains a hundred miles away, in another state. They began to wonder if they ever would get home. Then one of the farmers came by in his truck, opened the door and asked did they want a ride. They climbed up into the front seat and shut the door. Inside were the familiar smells of barn, horse and tobacco. Soon, they were home.

Just before Anna came to stay at Barbara's house for a while, they found out that Anna's father was sick and had been sick for a long time. Now he was going away to a special hospital in a big city, and Anna's mother was going with him. When he came back, he was thin, the hair around his ears white. His eyes looked funny. He had turned yellow.

When he died, Barbara's mother went to Anna's house. Later Barbara went too. She wondered what you did when someone died. People were drinking tea in the living room with Anna's mother, who was half sitting and half lying on the sofa. Barbara looked around for Anna but she wasn't there. Someone thought she was in her room.

Anna was on her bed reading comics. They read comics the rest of the afternoon. When it was time to go, Anna said "see you tomorrow".

When Barbara came the next morning, a friend of Anna's mother, who had spent the night, was making breakfast. Anna's mother was gone and wouldn't be back until after lunch. Anna was sitting at the table, on her stool by the window. Barbara went over and stood beside her, leaning back on the shelf. It was pretty late not to have had breakfast yet. The friend was trying to make pancakes. Anna spread butter and poured syrup over what was finally put in front of her and even ate some. Barbara turned around, not to watch. Behind, on the shelf, were telegrams. She had heard someone say how much Anna's mother had appreciated the telegrams. She wondered about that now, seeing them all piled up there.

The friend left the kitchen. When she was gone, Anna and Barbara made faces at each other about the pancakes. Anna fixed herself a peanut butter sandwich. They decided to take the pancakes outdoors and put them on the birdfeeder. But before going out, they stopped to check on poor old Black, Anna's father's dog. He was under a chair in Anna's father's room. All they could see, in the dark under the chair, were the white spots over his eyes. He wagged his tail against the floor. But he wouldn't come out. Anna changed the water in his dish and told Barbara about seeing her father a few days ago, at the hospital in town. He had not been able to talk. Right before time to go, he had put out his hand and snapped his fingers. Black should have been there too, to run up and be patted.

A month later, Anna and her mother moved away. Barbara went with them to put Black, who was in a box, on a train. Anna and her mother were going on an airplane the next day. That afternoon, Barbara and Anna went for a walk to where there was a bridge with wooden railings. The last time they had walked to that bridge, Anna's father had been with them. They had stopped and he'd carved his initials on one of the rails with his pocketknife. The initials were still there. Everything was so quiet. Usually there were at least some birds, but the birds had gone away because it was going to be winter. They'd be back in the spring. The next day, Anna's house was empty.

Chapter 2

Richard Coeur de Lion

Sam, surrounded by the kids, stood at the end of dock, clipboard in hand. “Aw, Sam, c’mon. Don’t cancel, you can’t!”

It was time for the boat race, 2 o’clock, an hour before high tide. Small waves lapped the edges of the dock, pushed by small, very small, puffs of wind. Otherwise, nothing stirred in the hot and heavy August afternoon.

Sam, blue-gray Sam, eyes and clothes that matched the blue-gray sky and water, looked across the harbor. They were all busy remembering last year’s race when the kids, becalmed, had not returned till after dark. A larger puff of wind fluttered the red pennant above the dock. “Hey, lookit that, Sam!”

“All right, all right. You’ve got fifteen minutes. But I’m changing the course - 5, 6 and home, got that? No 8 - just 5, 6 and home.”

The kids sailed beetle cats. Some kids had their own beetle cats. Sam owned five, all named Molly something, Molly R, Molly B, Molly H..., which he rented out by the hour, by the day, by the week, or by the season.

“Thomas, you take the Molly R, but you be careful! Who’s your crew?” “Not Marion!” Thomas guffawed and everyone else guffawed too. Marion, in great demand when there was a real wind, was off swimming anyway. Betsy, teensy Betsy, was right there but hadn’t made up her mind about crewing today.

“Richard, you can keep the Molly H, if you want.” Richard nodded. He’d been sailing with Barbara since about noon. When people began gathering for the race, Richard had brought the Molly H up to the dock and Barbara climbed out first, legs shaky. “Who’s your crew?” “Barbie, I guess. Hey Barb, come back!”

So she came back and got in the boat again and sat down where she’d been. Richard, holding on - not to the mast but to the thin wire next to it - stood on the boat’s orange deck with one foot and pushed away from the dock with the other.

What if he fell in, but he didn’t. The boat drifted backward from the

dock with what was left of the incoming tide, sail flapping until it caught a little wind. Richard sat down too, opposite her on the boat's gray floor, their feet almost touching. Slowly the boat moved forward. "Hold this." Richard handed her the rope that went to the sail. "No, just a second...." He took the rope back and shook it, letting the sail out some more. "Okay, here."

Barbara gripped the rope. For a while she stared at the boat's gray floor and at Richard's sneakers and baggy socks, still not getting used to the boat's funny feeling. Finally she looked up again. They were passing Helen, sailing in the opposite direction. Helen and Richard waved and grinned at each other. Timmy, Helen's little brother, was with her, holding the rope and staring at the bottom of his boat.

On shore, Sam shouted through his megaphone: "Five minutes - five minutes." All the boats that were going to race were out on the water now. The wind picked up and the boats went back and forth, edging closer to the starting line, a pretend line between the red pennant at the end of the dock and the rowboat tied to the Molly B's mooring. Barbara had finally asked about that.

"Four minutes," called Sam. Then "three minutes." Richard took the rope from Barbara. "Okay, we're going to turn. When I say - um - 'duck', you duck. Now - duck." He pushed the steering stick way over and the sail swung slowly, but scarily, over their heads. When the wind caught the sail, the boat leaned over on its side - but not too much. "One minute," Sam called out. (What happened to "two"?)

Thomas' boat was coming up behind them. Betsy had finally decided to come. The Molly R was moving faster than the Molly H. Richard muttered something about "blanketing". He decided to keep the rope.

"Five seconds - four - three-two-one...": Sam blew the horn for starting. Two boats had to turn back and start over because they had crossed the pretend line too soon. Richard was fourth over and Thomas fifth. Thomas soon pulled ahead, though.

5 was straight down the harbor. So far, the wind was holding. Richard came up behind the Seagull, the McCarthy twins' boat, "blanketing" them, he said. And Richard was fourth again. He stayed fourth until after they rounded 5. 5 turned out to be a stick which came up out of the water with a black can on top. A white 5 was painted on the can. Thomas, just ahead of them, swung around 5, missing it by inches. He looked back over his shoulder at them, grinning.

6 was across the harbor. Away from shore, there was less wind. The boats behind got a chance to catch up until they too were in the middle of the harbor. The wind stopped. The boats stopped. It was high tide. No one even drifted. Thomas, Richard and the McCarthy twins were close enough to talk. Betsy leaned over the side of the Molly R and splashed some water

at Thomas. Then she pretended to paddle with her hand. “Hey, no fair. You’re not supposed to do that,” said Jack McCarthy. “Yeah, no fair,” said Sandy McCarthy, reaching over the side of the Seagull, paddling too. “You can’t do this.” Everybody laughed.

How still it was. They’d be out here forever. The current of the turning tide began pushing the boats down the harbor until a wind, strong enough for long enough, moved at least some of the boats across the current. By then, the boats were so far off course they had to zigzag back and forth. Wind puffs came and went, reaching some boats, leaving, reaching others. Groups of boats stayed together, zigzagging together. Finally the McCarthy twins decided to zag instead of zig. Thomas and Richard kept on zigging toward the marshes. Then Thomas decided to zag too, looking back over his shoulder at Richard, not grinning this time, not so sure.

All by himself, Richard kept zigging. A family of ducks poked their heads through some marsh grass, surprised to be having company. For the first time in her life, Barbara began to wonder if Richard (Richard Coeur de Lion she called him - to herself, not to him - like the one in the story Mom had read to them) knew what he was doing. The other boats were far away, but they weren’t moving at all. The Molly H was moving.

Finally Richard decided to turn, not saying duck, just letting out the sail. There was a good breeze here. It began to make ripples on the water. All the way to 6 there were ripples for the Molly H to sail on. The other boats still weren’t moving. By the time the Molly H reached 6, she was first, by far.

Richard said they shouldn’t talk about winning yet, not until they crossed the finish line. Barbara hadn’t said a word. Up ahead, the late afternoon sun was a red ball in the hazy sky.

Lots of people were on the boardwalk above the dock. Behind, the other boats were catching up but they were too late. Sam’s horn was blowing for the Molly H. Richard had won. Barbara could hear the people clapping and yelling yay. Richard brought the Molly H all the way in to the dock before the horn blew again for Thomas who was second. More boats were crossing the finish line, but everybody was still cheering for Richard. They cheered for Barbara too. Her friends leaned over the middle rail on the boardwalk and yelled “Yay, Barbie,” waving. Graciously, she waved back.

Sam gave Richard a blue pennant. He gave a red one to Thomas and a white one to Helen. Richard said Barbara could help him put the boat away. Sam grinned at them both and helped “cast off”. So Barbara thought Sam might understand about Richard Coeur de Lion.

Chapter 3

Grade School

There weren't many kids for the school bus to pick up. But they were scattered all over the prairie. The bus ride was long and slow and noisy. Sometimes the kids wondered if the bus would fall apart on the bumpy roads. Dust came up through the floor.

Jerry was the only one who didn't ride the bus. He lived in a railroad car on the tracks across the highway from the school. Jerry's mother walked him across the highway when she saw the bus coming. And Miss Hayes, who lived at school in the basement where the bathrooms and the furnace were, would come upstairs for another day.

Usually nothing happened in school. But one day there was a knock at the schoolhouse door. Miss Hayes sent Barbara to see who was there. It was an Indian. He wore a feathered headdress and said his name was Big Bear. He said he had a magic show for the children if they would all bring ten cents tomorrow. Miss Hayes said he could come tomorrow after recess.

The next day, Jerry forgot his ten cents. Charlie said how dumb can you get. Then all the kids said Jerry was dumb. Jerry looked down and started picking at the big scab on his elbow.

Ina Mae's mother wouldn't give her ten cents. So she'd sat up close to the bus driver on the way to school. When he was busy stopping and starting at the railroad tracks, she had reached into his greasy old overalls pocket. She'd found a dime and two pennies.

It was always forever until recess. Barbara and Charlie were supposed to be helping Odessa and Toby learn to read, copying words for them from the first-grade reader. Charlie wrote bad words instead.

The room was hot. Barbara and Odessa got sleepy, leaning their heads down on their arms. There was always a fly buzzing around Odessa. If it landed on her, she never brushed it away.

The second and third graders colored in workbooks until recess, and the sixth grade did arithmetic. Everybody sort of listened to the fifth grade geography lesson. Shoes were made in Boston and cars were made in Detroit.

When recess finally came, Miss Hayes asked Charlie to stay and help set up for the Indian. She figured out ways, now, not to let Charlie and Tommy out on the playground together. They'd fight. Tommy was big, even though he never got enough to eat and was always cleaning up other kids' dinner pails. Charlie was tough. He could run. The day Odessa fainted, Miss Hayes picked Charlie to run to Mrs. Barker's and back, where the nearest phone was. Mrs. Barker was the school principal. Even Miss Hayes was scared of her.

Before recess was over, an old black car drove into the schoolyard and Big Bear hauled himself out. He looked sleepy. He had a broken suitcase with a strap around it and his headdress. The kids stood around the car until Miss Hayes rang the bell. They came in, then, and hung their coats on hooks in the cloakroom and stood in line for a drink at the water fountain before going in to sit down. There was a funny smell from the open suitcase and from the Indian. Miss Hayes opened a window and asked Charlie to please collect the ten centses. Jerry looked down at his scab.

Some of the tricks didn't work, but it was fun. Anything different from every day was fun. At the end of the show, Big Bear told everyone to watch closely. He began to puff out his chest. It got bigger and bigger.... At first the kids didn't really watch much. Then they did. Soon there wasn't a sound in the room except for Big Bear's catch breaths. Charlie said afterwards there must have been a balloon in there. The Indian's face got red. And he was getting bigger still when Mrs. Barker came through the door.

Before anybody knew what had happened, Big Bear was his right size again and was pulling the strap back around his suitcase. He was gone. Mrs. Barker told Miss Hayes never to let anyone into the school again, wasting these children's time and money. And she told her to come down to the house as soon as school was over.

When Mrs. Barker left, it was time to get dinner pails from the cloakroom. Miss Hayes, who looked tired, didn't pay attention the way she usually did when Charlie cracked his egg on Ina Mae's head who hollered. Instead she said something about being sorry for people like the Indian, trying to make his way.

But the kids weren't at all sorry for the Indian. For weeks afterwards they practiced puffing out their chests to be like him.

Every year at Christmastime, the kids at school put on a play. This year Ina Mae got the lead. But Barbara was chosen to be the Queen of the Christmas fairies. Tonight she would sing a song all by herself and wear a crown. Miss Hayes had made the crown out of cardboard and had trimmed it with white crepe paper and silver tinsel.

Tonight, Barbara was wearing a beautiful long gown, made from a sheet, and big cardboard wings. The smaller fairies had on short gowns and little stretched-out crepe paper wings. The boys, except for Charlie, were elves in red paper hats and green paper vests over their best clothes. They looked as if they felt very special. Charlie, who was playing the part of Ina Mae's brother, looked as if he felt special too, even just in his everyday clothes. Ina Mae had on a new dress. It was her first ever new dress, all her own at least till she grew out of it but it wouldn't be new for the next person.

Right before time to begin, Miss Hayes asked Barbara to go out on stage, very quietly, to make sure everything was where it was supposed to be. Miss Hayes said "shh" and opened the door, which led from the back hall to the stage.

Out in front of the curtain, people were talking and getting settled. Barbara wished she could see them. The stage was dim, lit only by the light that could get in through the curtain material. Oh. The curtain had a hole in it! Barbara went over and peeked through the hole. She found her dad and mother. Next to them was Mrs. Barker, the school principal. Close to the piano was Miss Hayes' married sister, who was going to play. The man next to her was her husband, wearing dark glasses because he was blind. Over there was the man who worked at the filling station. So many people! Lights were on everywhere and the decorations were beautiful. Silver icicles, hanging from the red and green paper chains the kids had been making all week, danced and glittered. She couldn't see the Christmas tree. It was too far over. There was Mrs. Cacciatore from Italy who couldn't talk to any one except her son. But she always smiled. Her eyes were big and dark, tonight more than ever.

Barbara stepped back to check around. Everything was where it should be, at least she guessed. Miss Hayes was waiting at the door. She was holding the crown. She put it on Barbara's head and stood back and said "lovely".

Miss Hayes' sister started to play the piano. Miss Hayes said "shh" again. She snapped on the stage light and snapped off the lights in front. Two big boys from the High School pulled back the curtains.

Ina Mae and Charlie went on first. Barbara stood beside Miss Hayes to watch and listen. Nobody forgot anything. It must have been hard for Charlie because his little sister kept saying: "There's Charlie, Momma, there's Charlie!" Miss Hayes whispered to Barbara to help line up the elves so they would be ready. Toby suddenly decided he didn't want to be an elf after all. Miss Hayes whispered: "never mind". But Ben, the littlest, went right out there.

Then it was time for the Christmas fairies. And Barbara sang her song. "Saccharine", Mom had said, one time but not again, new word. Barbara didn't quite know what it meant. This was how the song went:

Speak kind words and wear a smile,
Think of others all the while,
Remember the lonely, poor and sad,
Try to make somebody glad.
And happiness will come to you,
On Christmas day and the whole year through.

And the other fairies joined in, also singing:

Happiness will come to you,
On Christmas Day and the whole year through.

That was all. The play was over. Everybody clapped. And all the children in the play, Toby too, came out to the front row of the audience and sat in the seats that had been saved. Miss Hayes asked Barbara and Ina Mae to help the younger ones and also to collect all the wings and put them in the box in the back hall.

When everybody was quiet again, Miss Hayes welcomed them all and thanked the children for the fine job they had done. After that everybody sang Christmas carols. Suddenly the door from the front hall opened and in walked Santa! He came and sat down on a folding chair beside the tree, near the stage. All the children went up to get paper bags full of candy and a big popcorn ball, wrapped in waxed paper. Santa said: "My, my." Then again he said: "My, my" and again. But he looked wonderful. When he left, everybody called out: "Good-bye, good-bye Santa". Then people got up, looked for families and started to go home. Miss Hayes asked Barbara if she would get the music from the piano and bring it to her in the back hall.

Miss Hayes' sister was standing near the piano with her blind husband. She said "hello" and how lovely Barbara's song had been. Then she said her husband wanted to meet her. To tell the truth he didn't look like he wanted to meet her at all. Miss Hayes' sister took his hand, brought him close and lifted his hand to the crown on Barbara's head, which she had forgotten about. Barbara could feel his touch, very light, on the paper and tinsel. He was blind.

He couldn't see. He was blind.

Miss Hayes' sister and her husband turned away. Barbara picked up the music from the piano. In the back hall Miss Hayes was busy, so Barbara put the music on a table. She took off the crown and put it on top of the music. She touched it where the husband had touched it. The white paper was rough and the bright tinsel prickled. Blind.

Charlie came by saying: "Hey, your dad's waiting for you...." Barbara went to the front hall to find her coat and where Daddy was. Mother had gone ahead to the car.

It was cold outside, a really cold winter night. All the cars parked in the schoolyard were starting up and backing around and turning, yellow headlights and red taillights all mixed up in clouds of steam from the motors. Finally Daddy got the car out of the schoolyard. From the back seat she could see candles in the windows of the filling station next to the school. The sky was full of stars. Lights sparkled from the few small houses scattered across the prairie. Barbara closed her eyes, opened them, and then closed them again - blind. The husband couldn't see. He was - blind.

It was lovely of Mr. Marston to have Sunday school for the children. Anna was his godchild, of course; but it was so thoughtful of him, really it was, to have Barbara come too. Every Sunday just before ten, Anna and Barbara met in front of Anna's house to walk to Mr. Marston's.

Mr. Marston lived on the second floor. So people couldn't just knock at his door. Someone had to open the downstairs door and sort of holler. Barbara felt silly about hollering. So she'd make Anna do it because she was younger and couldn't be expected to know any better.

And they would climb very carefully up the middle of the stairs so they wouldn't forget and put their hands on the walls. The walls were white, and Mr. Marston's tall white wife didn't like hand marks on the walls. It was fun to make a lot of noise going up. Anna and Barbara didn't have stairs in their houses except to their basements.

Mrs. Marston was usually in the kitchen with the door shut. But she liked Anna to come in and say good morning. Barbara fixed the chairs in the living room. She fixed them away from the window and in front of the big leather chair by the bookshelves. Anna had a red chair and Barbara had a yellow one, with straw seats.

When Anna and Mr. Marston came in, Mr. Marston would reach up for the Bibles on the bookshelf, pass them around, and then they'd sit down. The Bibles, paperbacks, had purple covers and yellow letters. Anna and Barbara had brought twenty-five cents the first Sunday for the Bibles. Mr. Marston's black Bible was on the table next to his big chair. He'd take it and read. And read. If Barbara and Anna just only moved, their chairs squeaked.

That year it seemed like an especially long time until spring. But it came, finally. Spring was at real school too. Primroses grew in the schoolyard. But mostly there were wild onions. The boys got their hands all onion-smelly and rubbed the smell into the girls' hair. It was getting hot. Lots of wasps at school sounded as if they were hot too.

But soon school would be getting out. Barbara was thinking about school getting out when she was still in bed one Saturday morning. Mother

didn't make breakfast so early on Saturdays. Russell and the rubbish wagon didn't come by until 8:30. Barbara thought about how she and Anna rode the rubbish on Saturdays. After school got out they'd be riding the rubbish three times a week. They rode all over, from house to house, until Russell came to a big ditch and dumped everything out and burned it.

When school was out, they'd be riding the rubbish three times a week. They could play in the alfalfa field every day. Anna couldn't see over the alfalfa now, when they were in it. It was fun to press down the thin stiff stalks and make tunnels to crawl in. There'd be so much to do, every day.

That's when Barbara started to think about Sunday. When was Sunday school going to be over? Mr. Marston hadn't said. So Barbara got up and went out into the hall and called him up on the telephone, to ask when Sunday school was going to be over. He was awfully nice and said, "Why for goodness sake". Just like that, he said: "Why for goodness sake." It sounded as if he were trying to decide because he hadn't had time to think about just when he was going to end Sunday school.

But Mother called to Barbara suddenly. So Barbara hung up. Mother was out of bed. It was still early, but Mother was out of bed. Barbara went to the door of Mother's room and stood, because Mother didn't say anything for a minute. Mother went to the closet to get her housecoat from the hook and put on her slippers. She turned around and started buttoning her housecoat until she came to the button that wasn't there, and she said, too: "Why for goodness sake." Just like that: "Why, for goodness sake."

Barbara began to feel that Mother was feeling that Barbara had done something bad - maybe not bad, exactly: not bad, anyway, like sometimes, like going somewhere without telling her, or not emptying her jeans pockets before putting them in the laundry: not that kind of bad. Mother wasn't mad either. Barbara decided that was worse, after a while. And Mother didn't say anything more except to tell Barbara to get dressed and breakfast would be ready in a minute.

At breakfast, Barbara sat against the wall behind the table and worked the toaster. They still didn't have the pop-up kind. Anna did. The toast burnt.

It was raining out, now, which meant they wouldn't be riding the rubbish today after all. Barbara would go to Anna's after breakfast. They'd have to decide what to do instead. Mother brought hot milk from the stove for the cocoa. When she poured it, she said Barbara had to go and say she was sorry to Mr. Marston. Mother said so very nicely. And she said Barbara couldn't go to Anna's till afterwards nicely too. It was funny. If Barbara'd done something wrong, why didn't Mother talk as if she had done something wrong. They kept on talking nicely. Mother didn't even get mad when the toast burned again.

Barbara started thinking about going to say she was sorry to Mr. Marston.

She'd never said she was sorry to anyone, except to Anna sometimes. And Anna was always sorry first. She'd never been sorry to anyone. What was she supposed to say, what was she sorry for? She'd be going to Mr. Marston's house and hollering at the door, and climbing up the stairs and he'd come out of his study and look down from being very tall.... What would she be sorry for? For calling up on the phone and asking when Sunday school was going to be over, because Miss Hayes had said when regular school would be over, and there were so many things she and Anna were going to do? When they could ride the rubbish three times a week?

Except when it rained. It was raining now, but not hard. There was one big cloud on top, and underneath it there were longer ones that moved fast over the barn roof. Barbara could see the top of the barn roof through the window. And she heard the new lambs crying softly, far away. The rain made bubbles on the clothesline, and the bubbles dripped and dripped. Under the window next to the sink was some parsley drooping over the edge of a cheese glass with blue flowers on it. Anna had sixteen cheese glasses, with blue and red and black and yellow flowers. Barbara only had nine. Why couldn't Mother get more? Why did they all have to be blue?

Barbara made her bed after breakfast. She walked into the living room, where Mother was straightening up magazines. Barbara walked around the living room and threw some paper into the wastebasket. She emptied an ashtray. Mother didn't say anything. Barbara wished she'd say something.

Barbara went into her room again and picked up her blue sweater from the floor and put it on. Then she thought of her red sweater in the drawer, dropped the blue one and took out the red one, putting that one on. She stood in front of the mirror and pulled her collar out over the red sweater. She couldn't wear the blue barrette, now. She took it off and brushed her hair. Then she couldn't find the red barrette. Finally, there it was, in the back of the top drawer.

It was raining out. Probably that was why Mother called from the living room, saying to be sure to wear boots when she went to Mr. Marston's. Barbara looked into the mirror and thought, not for the first time, how dumb mothers were. Of course she'd wear her boots.

Barbara guessed she'd better go now. She told Mother she guessed she'd better go. Mother said yes, she'd better go. So Barbara put on her boots and her raincoat and rain hat and went out the door.

It was raining. The lawn squished. The rain made the dirt road soft and brown. There were two long puddles where a car had been, and other puddles. Rain plicked into them. It seemed very quiet, outside, which was funny because the rain made noise. Barbara felt she ought to be quiet too. She stopped in the middle of a puddle and watched the white bubbles turn brown and the water stop moving, and the rain plick by her boots. She thought she'd go to Mr. Marston's the long way, this morning, to see if the

sheep were out. She guessed probably they wouldn't be, and they weren't, but she thought they just might have been.

Mr. Marston might not be at home. The door did look as if he might not be home - the door she was going to have to open and holler into. She'd feel sillier than ever about hollering this morning. Mr. Marston must think people had to see him pretty badly to want to holler that way. She didn't want to see him at all. What would she holler, anyway - she couldn't say "Here we come," which was what she and Anna had decided to say on Sundays. The only other time she'd been here was once with Daddy who'd hollered, "Hi, Ken." "Hello, Mr. Marston", but still, even that wouldn't sound, when she hollered it, as if she was coming up to be sorry. Maybe if she just knocked loud enough?

So she went and knocked at the door. Nobody answered. Maybe nobody really was home. She knocked a little louder. Then she went away before Mr. Richardson, who lived on the bottom floor, would think someone was at his door instead.

When Barbara got home she told Mother no one was at the Marstons'. She even believed it, almost, until Mother called the Marstons on the telephone and someone answered. Barbara got out her jacks, pulled back the rug, and started to practice. But it was Mr. Marston's wife who answered. She hadn't been quite dressed yet when she'd heard someone at the door. Mr. Marston was at the post office. No, Mr. Marston hadn't minded too much being waked up early this morning. Barbara wondered what had waked Mr. Marston up early this morning.

Mother put on her coat and rubbers and told Barbara to come along. When they went out, it wasn't raining any more, except just a little. The ducks had come down to the pond and were dipping their heads into the water. Barbara couldn't stop to watch because Mother kept going. They walked up the road, which turned the corner by the house next door. It wasn't raining much any more, but the lilac bushes around the corner dripped and dripped and dripped. The purple bunches were closed up, looking cold against the green part.

Mother was going fast. They'd come to the little ditch by the corner of the post office. There was water in the ditch, and Barbara thought she had never seen water go so fast. They were almost at the door. Barbara didn't know what she was going to say. What would she say? But at least Mother would be there. They were at the door, and the post office was just up the stairs inside. Barbara opened the door. What would she say?

She looked around. Mother was going away. She was walking fast, not looking around, over the little ditch. Now she was really gone, around the corner.

Barbara turned back and went up the stairs. There was Mr. Marston, just inside, with a book in his hand, saying something to someone. He

turned and saw her. Barbara said: "I'm sorry," she started to say. Only it wouldn't come out. She couldn't say anything and started to cry. She was so mad she was crying...

She went and put her arms around him. Mr. Marston put his hand on her shoulder, the hand without the book. And he said: "What's the matter?" She hung on tighter. After a while he said again: "What is the matter?" So she said something about Sunday school. She hoped he knew what she was talking about. Finally he said she'd better go home.

She ran and ran - and jumped across the ditch and ran around the corner. Anna was calling, but she didn't pay attention. She ran by the lilac bushes, too close so that the wet leaves and flowers swished wet all over her. Her boots got heavy and sticky, and she almost fell where the road came to the lawn. She was hot under her raincoat.

She came to the pond. She decided to sit down by the tree there for a minute. She took off her rain hat and set it on her knees. A wind pushed into her hair and made soft noises in the tree and then was quiet again.

Chapter 4

High School

Just before Christmas vacation, the girls heard that Miss Cate was coming back.

“No kidding!” “She is?” “Oh, oh - my sister said she’s tough.” “Yeah - but my dad says she’s a really good teacher...”

And after a while, still standing around their homeroom desks, the girls began wondering why Miss Cate had left in the first place. Someone said she’d heard she’d had a heart attack. Another said oh no. What really happened was, she’d heard Miss Cate had been part owner of the school and that, well, maybe there’d been some kind of fight. But, after all, no one really knew. Miss Cate had been gone several years.

The school to which Miss Cate was returning was in the bluffs east of town. Most of the girls there were boarders. But some were day students, who came to the school each day on a bus. Barbara was a day student. She spent nights in town with friends of her parents, going home weekends to the boys’ school where her parents lived and taught. She came to the girls’ school tuition free in exchange for the grandson of the girls’ school’s headmistress. He went to the boys’ school.

There was also a school in town for younger children, part of the girls’ school but for both boys and girls. Barbara had gone to the nursery school and kindergarten there, and her mother had taught French to the first and second graders. “Voici le crayon bleu,” her mother was saying one day, when Barbara was sent in with a message.

And now, on bad-weather days the day students would wait for the bus at the town school. How odd it was to be in that same place once again, with some of the same teachers. Barbara did remember Miss Cate from those earlier years. Miss Cate had not taught at the town school, but she had supervised the rehearsals and performances of the annual Christmas carol service, given “as a gift to the community” in the nearby college chapel. In a back hall, which had a curious and very nice leathery smell, Miss Cate, in a coat with a big fur collar, would line up the singers, all in red gowns, white

surplices, stiff white collars, red ties and red beanies. There was always a row (the fourth) of girls from the “big” school who carried candles. They led the procession from the back hall, singing “On Their Way”. They stood in front until everyone else had filed up where the organ was. Then the candle row girls would go into their fourth row, blow out the candles and put the candles under their chairs. Near the end of the service, when the others were busy singing, in parts, the last alleluias of “Angels We Have Heard on High”, the fourth row people would reach under their chairs for the candles, carefully re-light them and then, everybody singing “The First Nowell”, return to the front while the others filed out. Finally they would file out themselves.

The most important person, though, was the heavy girl who came forward to declaim “And it came to pass...”, which she did by heart, in her clear, strong voice, from the time she was in first grade until she graduated from high school. She had some kind of sickness. Her sister, very thin, had died by the time Barbara met the heavy one again, who never seemed to be bothered in the least by the fact she was so very heavy.

And, now that Barbara thought of it, Miss Cate never seemed bothered either, by the fact that she herself was kind of ugly. But she dressed well. Even Barbara could see she dressed well, Barbara who hated clothes because clothes meant being dragged through stores in town by Mother who hated clothes also. Mom had made Barbara’s dresses when she was little. That had been fun, except for standing still on a table while Mom pinned up the hem. And Miss Cate had shoes to match whatever she put on, hundreds of shoes, said the one whose sister had had Miss Cate for a teacher. Suddenly Barbara remembered the shoes too. Miss Cate was tall. When you yourself were little, you started with looking at shoes. You could only see Miss Cate’s head when she was down in the chapel aisle and you were up near the organ. Her head would be like an egg, in the nest of the fur collar.

Miss Cate would never have been chosen for the candle row, no matter how well she dressed, any more than the heavy girl ever was, no matter how well she spoke. They might even have been able to persuade themselves they preferred to dress well or speak well than be in any candle row. Maybe they saw themselves as more perfect, not less. Unlike the girls in the candle row, they were unique.

Miss Cate specialized in European History. Around the end of October, their new young European History teacher had quit, unable to adjust to life at the school. First of all, the school was a ranch school, with an emphasis on horses. Right after breakfast and late in the afternoon before dinner, everybody, students and teachers alike, went to the stables to take care of the horses. That’s what they had come for, at least the students. Also, all classes were held outside on the wide porches, until the temperature dropped below 40. That meant sheepskin boots, on cold days, and green eyeshades

on sunny ones. The teachers had to face the sun. Blackboards, hung on the porch walls, tended to crack from the weather. On each porch, three classes met at once, with study halls in between the classes. If it was sunny, the students occupied themselves with getting tans, legs out at odd angles, unless the headmistress, in her brown cloche hat, appeared unexpectedly. The headmistress was also the one who decided if the temperature was below 40.

Indoors was rather cramped, in the four buildings that were originally a catholic retreat. One was built into a bluff, stone steps leading up to where the classrooms were. Outside was best, with hundreds of miles of prairie to the east and south. To the west, above the town, were the purple mountains of “America, the Beautiful”, which was the school song. The last verse had to be memorized for school occasions.

Also, salaries for the beginning teachers were minimal and so was freedom, which consisted of one night off every two weeks. The school bus driver drove whoever had the night off into town. He returned at ten.

The first morning after vacation there was excitement among the day students waiting for the bus. It was a cold day, but sunny, so they gathered at the corner by the greenhouse instead of at the town school. On the way to the greenhouse Barbara had said “Good Morning” to the old gentleman she usually met, out for his daily walk.

Ellie, who always saved a seat on the bus for Barbara, was nervous about Miss Cate, fun and funny Ellie, but who did have trouble getting good grades. On the way up to the main building of the school, the bus passed the last of the students returning from the stables. They waved and broke into a run, still needing to change from jeans to the brown-skirt-and-tan-sweater school uniform. The day students cooperated as much as they dared, slowly getting out of the bus and slowly walking to their homerooms, hoping the headmistress in her brown hat would not appear out of nowhere to say “hurry up, hurry up”. Classes would be indoors for sure because it was way below 40. Snow and ice crunched underfoot on the paths and porches. Someone said Miss Cate had indeed arrived, late the night before. But no one had seen her yet. Barbara dumped her books on her homeroom desk and went back outside because it was her turn to ring the bell for classes to begin. The bell was near the school kitchen. You rang it by pulling on its great chain. It sounded through the air even to the smallest building the other side of the now-frozen garden, where the sixth, seventh and eighth graders could hear.

After morning classes came lunch, which meant standing in line in the main building’s front hall, moving slowly into the dining room where the meal was served buffet-style, and then sitting down to eat at the long green tables. After lunch was free time. The boarders would all go into the brown library, the other side of the front hall, waiting for mail to be delivered.

Barbara loved that library. One of her summer chums wrote to her there, sometimes, long detailed letters about her own school in New York City.

The bell rang for afternoon classes, including European History. Indoors, that class met in the narrow space back of the dining room, just wide enough for two long rows of desks, one in front of the other, with the teacher's desk in front, reminding Barbara of the two-straight-line Madeline stories. There were windows along the far walls. Outside in the pine trees, power struggles were played out between the jays and the squirrels.

There was Miss Cate, impeccable in tweeds, unchanged since Barbara had last seen her, showing no sign she recognized Barbara, who had been ready to smile. Barbara squeezed herself down the aisle to the next available seat. In the silence before class began, Barbara wondered again why Miss Cate had ever left, and also, of course, would she indeed be a good teacher. Barbara's freshman English teacher had been good, a small woman with dark braids folded on top, who had taught at the school forever, accepting the school as the most natural place in the world. And who's to say it wasn't, or that any school is natural or unnatural. The English teacher had made "Dover Beach" come alive. But she had had to leave to help her husband with his hot dog place south of town, after he got sick. Barbara and her mother had stopped there once. Being served hot dogs by her English teacher had not felt natural at all.

The European History class began and ended. It began and ended again, three times a week for the rest of the school year, always inside that room back of the dining hall, not once outside. Miss Cate didn't take care of the horses either.

It wasn't a great class, not in the mind-wrenching way a history class can be. What did intrigue Barbara was Miss Cate's predictable, somewhat cynical approach. Repeatedly they were told that, for essay questions, they should twist the question around to what they really knew and then answer. Barbara never quite mastered that, which would have made life in college easier. But, during the long, quiet evenings at the home of her parents' friends, she had plenty of time to memorize dates, events, everything.

Quite a few years later, Barbara met Miss Cate again. She happened to see Miss Cate's name in an Illinois phone book, on the way to looking up another one. Barbara and her professor husband were at the University on sabbatical. She asked the person Jim was working with if he knew Miss Cate. He didn't, but Barbara certainly should phone, he said. Teachers love that, he said, when old students remember and get in touch years later. So Barbara called. Miss Cate answered and invited her to lunch at her club in two days.

As it happened, Miss Cate came from one of the oldest families in town and was well known at the club, treated deferentially by the other guests as well as by the waiters. They were seated at a table by the window

overlooking a garden.

“So you really did like the school, then”, said Miss Cate finally, looking at Barbara hard. “I was never quite certain - just what it was we were trying to do out there...” “But it was so beautiful!” Barbara burst out. She couldn’t help herself. Miss Cate nodded.

Of course one indeed could ask what some of them, at least, were doing. One year Barbara’s “famous last words” in the yearbook were: “No, no, don’t light it, Mr. Stewart!” Mr. Stewart’s science class concoctions sometimes did explode, one causing a small fire. Outdoors, the Science class met on the porch of the younger girls’ dormitory, a smaller, newer building with no trees around it, open to the best view of all. How could any of them keep their minds on science, especially the teacher himself who faced the mountains. And in spring, someone might be working in the garden, and the cook, and often even the headmistress in her brown hat, would come out to consult.

One person in the science class really did know more than the teacher. And on a sparkling blue morning, that person in total exasperation picked up her books and walked away. Barbara could hardly believe it. Then, slowly, finally, she picked up her books and walked away too. Soon a third followed - to the school office to complain to the headmistress. The fourth in the class did not follow.

The headmistress said nothing and did nothing. Nothing changed, the science class continued as if nothing at all had happened, right to the end of the school year.

Barbara’s father told her in no uncertain terms she should not have walked out of that class. She wished she hadn’t told him. The student who first walked out went to a school in the East for her senior year. And, early that last spring, the school ran out of money. The headmistress had to ask the parents of the seniors for extra money so the seniors could graduate in the middle of May, with extra classes on Saturdays. The seniors did graduate on the last Saturday and it rained.

Summers, sooner or later most of the teen-agers in the village found themselves working at The Little House, the boys as dishwashers and/or outside on the grounds, and the girls as waitresses. One summer Barbara too worked as a waitress there. She began by “trailing” Mattie, quiet and steady Mattie, learning from her how to do the job those first exhausting days. The other waitresses were glamorous Peggy and Lil, Jorie who talked pig-latin, calling herself Eiroj Sille, and strange, sad Joanna. Sometimes they would bring pictures to show each other of little sisters, nieces, cousins, saying: “In’t she cunnin’?”

Lil and Peggy worked and joked together, and dated all the time. They had it all and did it all, managing still to be fun and nice. How did they manage - the work was hard. Barbara never got completely used to it, perhaps partly because she had to eat at such funny times. Even if she ate before rather than after work, if she ate at 4:30 and didn't get off work till after 10:00, which happened weekends sometimes, she would be hungry again. Lil and Peggy always went out afterwards, meeting their boyfriends at the drug store across the street.

Once, when Barbara had gone to the drug store too, after work, her dad, who was waiting in the car to take her home it was so late, came sweeping in, ready to buy everybody sodas. In self-conscious desperation, she gestured to him not to, and he had gone out again, hurt. His idea might have worked, but nobody else's father would have done such a thing. Maybe no one else even had fathers - or mothers either, for all Barbara knew.

And how startled she had been, one afternoon, about to ride home on her bike between lunch and dinner, around 3:00 - a little early since they had not been too busy that day - to discover both her parents standing at the front door of The Little House. They were all dressed up and were saying hello to the owner. Later they explained they'd wanted to see what sort of person Barbara was working for.

The person she was working for had bought The Little House, which had at one time been one of two excellent small restaurants quite near each other. On weekend evenings, in those days, it was not easy to get from one end of the village to the other because of all the parked cars on the narrow street. During World War II, the other restaurant had closed. The Little House was sold and then sold again. The present owner was tall, thin and nervous. Even unflappable Mattie would sometimes turn away, lips pinched, from what seemed like contradictory instructions and unreasonable demands.

Superficially, The Little House was the same as ever, with its three porches that could all be opened up to the sea air. The sea itself was visible, a thin blue line beyond the lawn and trees, from the end porch called "Thousand Islands". The porches took their names from their glassware. The glasses on "Thousand Islands" had little bumps over them, though hardly a thousand. On the biggest porch, the glasses were green. The ones on the smallest were lacey.

Mattie worked alone on "Lace". Jorie and Joanna worked on "Thousand Islands" and each time some one said: "Oh! You can see the ocean!" even Joanna would giggle. Barbara worked with Lil and Peggy on "Green".

One Saturday night toward the end of summer, Lil and Peggy were planning to go into Boston with their boyfriends. They had arranged way back at the beginning of June to have that night off. But the owner either forgot or changed her mind. On Monday Lil and Peggy discovered they didn't have Saturday night off after all.

All that week, Lil and Peggy tried to decide what to do. They couldn't let their boyfriends down. They couldn't let their fellow waitresses down either. They didn't seem concerned in the least about the owner or the customers, or even themselves. Finally they decided to come to work as usual and then leave at 7:30. They told only Barbara and Jorie.

Of course it had to be one of the busiest nights of the whole summer. Even though Lil and Peggy did their absolute best to get things done, more people kept coming. At 7:30 Barbara and Peggy were together, unloading trays of dirty dishes for the dishwasher. Peggy took off her apron then and looked at Barbara not saying a word, nearly in tears. Lil came. They left, carrying their aprons.

Back on "Green", alone, Barbara plunged in, beginning with the table where friends of her parents were sitting, over in the corner. They had been waiting a long time. She cleared their table and got their desserts and coffee, ignoring everyone and everything else. Every table, but one small one, was full.

The owner came and sat a couple at the small table. The couple wanted to get to the theater at 8:30. Barbara took care of them next. They, in time for the theater, tipped her half again as much as for the meal itself.

Jorie appeared at her elbow, saying she had been transferred from "Thousand Islands" and what did Barbara want her to do. Barbara, only just then realizing she herself was in charge, decided they had better divide the place in half rather than quickly try to figure out a way to work as a team.

Eventually everyone did get served. And at one point, the grumpy cook smiled at Barbara, the first, last and only time ever. The salad lady, the one who on a hot day had taught Barbara about holding her wrists under cold water, even told a joke.

That was the end of Lil and Peggy's careers as waitresses. Some one else was hired and began to "trail" Mattie. Jorie stayed on with Barbara. It was beginning to get chilly out on "Thousand Islands", where Joanna had to work alone.

Business dropped off. Maybe word was getting out that The Little House wasn't so good any more. Not that year, but eventually the owner gave up and The Little House was turned into an Antique Shoppe.

Everywhere is beautiful in moonlight. But sometimes the moonlit prairie is more beautiful than other places. The moon seems to come close in the clear, dry air. And, since there are so few trees, each one fills with light. By the side of Barbara's house, there was a Russian Olive tree. In summer, its greenish-gray leaves would turn white in the moonlight.

Almost every night, one summer, Barbara had sat on the porch and looked at the tree with Dan. Dan had come from the East to work on the

ranch, which belonged to the school where her father taught. She had met him the day he arrived, after he'd ridden 2000 miles on a Greyhound bus. Barbara had come into town that morning to do errands. She was to meet the pick-up truck from the ranch at noon, at the bus depot, for a ride home. Dan looked awful when he got off the bus. He was pale, with blue under his eyes, and smelly and messy-looking from sleeping in his clothes. He didn't know where his suitcase was, and the driver from the ranch had to find it. The driver put him and her and the suitcase in the pick-up and started sourly for home. Nobody said much on the way. Barbara was left off at the road, which led up to her house from the highway.

She didn't see Dan for a while. Then one day she met him in front of the post office. He looked so lonely she asked him if he wanted to come to the house after supper. He came before she'd finished the dishes. Dan went into the living room. Barbara's father came out from his study. Dan was scrubbed clean, his hair slicked back on his head. He shook hands with her parents and then everybody sat down.

After a while, her father went back to his study and her mother said she would finish the dishes. Neither Dan nor Barbara could think of anything to say. So they decided to go out and sit on the porch. Soon Dan asked if it would be all right for him to come again tomorrow night. She said sure. They sat for a few more minutes, and then Dan got up, said goodnight, and left.

He came the next night and then just about every night till the end of summer. He always said hello to her parents, then she and Dan would go out on the porch. They went there because it was dark, and, sitting side by side, they wouldn't have to look at each other. They looked instead at the Russian Olive tree.

Barbara wasn't sure what she was expecting. Things happened in movies and stories. She wondered what Dan was expecting. Finally, she really didn't understand why he kept on coming over. Maybe he liked to sit and cool off after all the hot work he did. He once said he missed seeing trees. Maybe he liked looking at the Russian Olive. After a while they got used to the idea they weren't going to talk or anything. And they looked and looked at the Russian Olive tree. In the daytime, it wasn't very pretty. But at night it filled with light.

Before he went home at the end of the summer, Dan came over as usual. But he said he had a lot to do and couldn't stay. Everybody walked out to the porch with him.

Outside was almost lighter than inside. There was a full August moon. The tree was glowing. Barbara's mother and father shook hands with Dan and went in. Then, after a moment, Dan walked off down the road. They didn't look at each other or even say good-bye.

Chapter 5

College

In the college infirmary, Barbara, a sophomore, tried again to convince herself she was sick, licking her fingers, buttery from the breakfast toast. She pushed back the tray and looked out the window. It was raining still, the way it had rained yesterday. Some leaves from the nearest tree were sticking to the glass. She sneezed. When the nurse came in to get the tray, hopefully Barbara sneezed again and leaned back against the pillow.

Hers was the last room on the hall. The woman who made beds and straightened things would not be here for a while.

Barbara was almost asleep when a nurse came in. The nurse said there was going to be a special review class for philosophy students in the sunroom. (Final exams were next week.) In half an hour, the nurse said, for everyone able to attend.

Barbara thought of sneezing again.

The woman who made beds and straightened things appeared. Without thinking, Barbara got out of bed, put on a bathrobe and slippers and walked to the other side of the room, to the sink. Then, holding a wet washcloth, she stared at her own face in the mirror above the sink. Through the mirror, she could also see the woman making the bed. The woman was old and gray and tired. How did she manage - probably without thinking, the “unexamined life”. Barbara bent down and rubbed her face hard with the wet cloth, over and over again.

Five girls and Miss Smith were in the sunroom when Barbara arrived. Catherine was there. Barbara hadn’t seen her for several weeks. Catherine and Barbara spent summers in the same town. This year they were in the same philosophy class.

They all settled themselves with books, papers and boxes of Kleenex, in the big, comfortable, green-cushioned bamboo chairs. The rain, washing the windows, now seemed good. They were discussing the Platonic Ideal, and Barbara tried to connect the good rain with the idea of good rain and thought she understood. Maybe. It didn’t seem to matter much.

After an hour they closed their books and were about to leave when Catherine got up and began pacing the floor.

“But what about evil?” she asked. “How does evil fit in to the Platonic Ideal?”

There was a silence. The other girls left. Miss Smith began to explain a little and then, quite practically, she said: “Miss Chamberlain, that’s a big question, and you have the immediate problem of passing your exam. The question of evil will not be on the exam this year. Let it go, for now.”

Catherine kept on pacing. For a minute, with her square-cut black hair, she made Barbara think of a picture in her old paperback Sunday School Bible - of Jacob - or had it been of one of the angels?

A nurse came in, took Catherine by the arm and led her away saying it was time for her medicine. Miss Smith put on her coat and collected her papers. She left too.

There was a table, under a window, with magazines. Barbara went over and picked one up. Then she stared out the window. Someone was riding a bicycle all alone down the rain-splattered road. The rider vanished. The sunroom was quiet. It was too quiet. No one ever seemed to come here. This was the first time Barbara had been further than the sunroom door. She put the magazine down and thought of trying to find Catherine’s room and wondered if she would be able to visit her. Visiting was not always permitted.

She found Catherine, sitting in the chair by her window. They talked until lunchtime about summers and mutual friends.

After lunch everyone was supposed to rest. Barbara’s bed had been made too tightly. She couldn’t even get in. She decided to loosen it. Her elbow knocked down some books she hadn’t piled very carefully on the bedside table. The top one should have been on the bottom - Plato’s Dialogues. It was heavy. She read a little. She could see Miss Smith sitting on the edge of her desk, in her classroom, reading aloud, one foot swinging over the wastebasket.

Barbara put the Dialogues down on the table and put the other books carefully on top, one by one. It was then she faced the fact that she was going to flunk Philosophy. At first she had blamed poor marks on anonymous paper graders. She hadn’t even thought the course was hard. Several times she had thought of talking to Miss Smith. She’d hung around after class but couldn’t decide how to begin. Other people flunked courses, even flunked out of college. The thought of herself flunking, a disaster in the world of college, was always there somewhere, at the right distance. But it was happening, now, really, to her. Barbara crawled into bed and lay there. She felt worn out. Sniff. Poor Barbara. Self-consciously, she giggled to herself.

When the rest period was over, Catherine’s door stayed closed. A nurse said she must not be disturbed. Someone else Barbara knew slightly said

"Hi" from the room across the hall. Even though Barbara didn't really want to, she went in.

"Catherine isn't sick," Barbara was told, "just upset. When she first got here she was screaming. But she's quiet most of the time now. She takes pills to sleep at night and more pills to wake up in the morning. She's trying to catch up with her work, and she walks around more and talks to people. The doctors say she had an unhappy childhood." "Oh," Barbara answered.

They talked for a while longer about doctors, then teachers, then exams, not knowing what they were going to do this summer, and, after college, what would they do then. And when would the rain stop.

Barbara went back to her room with a headache. Catherine's trouble was an unhappy childhood. But that wasn't true.... Supper didn't look good. Barbara was given a sleeping pill that night. It was the first one she'd ever had. She slept.

She heard a voice ask: "Are you all right?" "Yes, I'm all right," she heard another voice answer. Maybe the other voice had been hers.

After a while, she sat up and looked out the window. The rain was over. She had to get used to the light from the sun hazily setting behind Fellows Hall.

She must have slept not just last night but all day today!

On the bedside table, instead of the books was a paper cup full of tiny lilies of the valley. Unexpected, unexplained, their smell filled the room.

The next day, Barbara was well and left the infirmary.

A week later, she was working in the study room on the third floor of Fellows Hall, a large room in the center of the building, full of doors. The Philosophy exam was over, though she didn't know yet how she'd done. Now she was memorizing, for Zoology, the stages of growth of a worm.

The bell rang and people started walking through the study room. Suddenly, there was Catherine. Barbara had heard she was still in the infirmary, but coming out for exams. Lots of people seemed to know about her.

Catherine stopped and leaned heavily on the study table. She had not looked bad in the infirmary, but here she looked terrible. And then, without smiling, she went on, full of pills for sleeping and waking, stumbling over a chair, on her way to another door.

Barbara turned back to her book. She was having a hard time focusing ... ECTODERM, the outside skin of a worm, blue, in the diagrams. Endoderm. The inside skin was yellow in the diagrams. Well - yellow in all the diagrams but one. In one diagram endoderm was pink. Since she had to pass an exam, Barbara, gripping the book with both hands, decided to forget pink and learn only yellow.

Listening to Nora talk was fun. She was the housekeeper who did cleaning in the women's dorm. She'd talk and talk to everyone, in her own special version of Irish brogue. Usually she didn't get to Barbara's room, on the third floor, until after lunch. Today she arrived even later, just as Barbara was getting ready to go for a walk. David was coming.

Nora stood in middle of the room, one hand on her hip and the other on her broom. "My, oh my! Preparin' to meet your young man, I s'pose."

Barbara giggled. Nora began sweeping and talking, rather wildly, about - Friday? Today was Friday...oh yes, oh right! This was the Friday. Today Catholics could eat meat, if they wanted to, for the first time. "I just can't understand," Nora went on. "Last week, if I'd had meat for dinner on Friday, why, 'twould've been a sin. This week, 'twon't be a sin a 'tall, 'tall."

Someone called, up the stairway: "Barbeeee, David's here." "Be right there," she called back. She reached into the closet for her jacket. Then she decided her sweater would be enough. "Bye, Nora...I have to go." Nora smiled and waved a quick little wave. Barbara almost turned back, but instead she ran down the stairs to David, who'd be embarrassed about having everyone in the whole dorm know he was there. So was she, embarrassed. Everyone downstairs, looking at David, said "Hi Barbara" and "Hey Barb." It was good to get outside and be walking down the wide driveway toward the gate.

They decided to walk to the lake. It was November. But, even though the leaves were gone and the sun was pale, it wasn't cold. They crossed through town, coming to the lake road. There was a path up on the bank by the road, inside the trees. It felt like country, in spite of the steady swish of cars. He took her hand. She looked up and he smiled. And he slung his arm around her shoulders. They laughed, leaning against each other until Barbara broke away. "Race you to the bench."

He won. They sat down for a moment. From the bench, a small backless one that had been put where the path turned, they could see the lake down below. It was very quiet except for the cars and Barbara trying to catch her breath. After a while they got up and walked on. The lake was gray and still. When they stood near the edge of it, they could hear the quiet lap of tiny waves against the bank.

They returned up the path to town, coming to the bench again. David said: "Barb? - Barbara, look at me." She did, after a moment. He put his hands on her arms. He sat her down on the bench. He sat down too, the other way, and held her. Was she really, or just trying to be, moved by his gentleness? Her eyes filled with tears. He touched her face with his hand and then bent his head and closed his eyes. The sun was setting, and the quiet gray afternoon became deep red. David's face was in the light, in the rich color. Barbara looked away from him and then gasped: "Dave, look - look at the sunset!"

Together they watched the sky and the whole world around them transform. Afterwards, when they stood to go, they didn't speak, shaken. The sky grew dark. They did not go further into the woods, away from the path and the road, even though they were trembling, only partly because of the sudden cold. Now without the sun, it was very much November. David took off his jacket and put it over Barbara's shoulders.

They walked back through town, past the gate and up the drive to Barbara's dormitory. She was warm in David's jacket. When they reached the door, she gave the jacket back to him and turned and went in and up the stairs. On the second landing, she stopped at the window, leaning her head against the glass, looking out into the black. The dorm was very quiet. Nobody had started getting ready for supper yet. After a while, the supper warning bell rang. Suddenly the halls above and below the landing were full of people, talking, banging doors. Barbara went the rest of the way to her room.

At supper she sat next to Jackie McClane. Someone started kidding Jackie about not going out for supper with the rest of the Catholics. Since fish was being served in the dorm this Friday too, as usual, the Catholics had decided to go out, for real meat, for hamburgers. Some one else said: "Boy, did I get an earful today from Nora!"

The subject changed, eventually. A student waiter cleared the table. Everyone passed empty plates up and passed dessert down. There was comfort in routine.

After supper, Barbara left the dining room with Jackie. On the way upstairs, hesitatingly Barbara asked: "Jackie, don't answer if you don't want to, it's none of my business...but why didn't you go out?" "Oh, well - there's a retreat this week-end...I have to finish a paper..." "Oh. I was - I guess I was wondering if maybe you felt - the same way Nora does, for some reason."

They reached the second landing and stopped by the window. "Barbara - actually, maybe I do in a way: it's a little hard to explain." They both leaned with their hands against the wide windowsill, looking out into the dark. "I feel - sort of - the whole point of - prohibitions - is to make us more, um, more aware..." And, after a silence, Jackie went on: "...not to take for granted - special gifts? Those who become - aware may receive - well, visions, maybe - and, without visions, real faith isn't possible." She looked over at Barbara, a little embarrassed. Then she laughed. "Have I made myself quite clear?"

Someone called out: "Barbara? Anybody seen Barbara?" "I'm up here," she called back. "Hey Barb, telephone." "Okay, thanks. Be right there." Jackie had lost her, but she tried to think of something she could say. She shrugged, shaking her head. And then she turned, moving away. She turned back. Jackie was looking out the dark window again. How alone she seemed.

“Jackie?” Jackie wasn’t listening. Oh well. Barbara turned away and ran to answer the phone.

Chapter 6

Adulthood - The Early Years

In October, Barbara bought a small washing machine. It fit perfectly in their small kitchen, in their small apartment, and would be perfect for diapers. Yes, this time she was pregnant for sure. There had been times before when she had thought, when the doctors had thought too, she was pregnant. Why had even the doctors been wrong?

One time, her dad had told all his cronies at his club he was going to be a grandfather. He was a little mad at her when it turned out he wasn't going to be a grandfather after all.

Jim and Barbara had been married for three years, now. They had met at a farewell party for David who had gone overseas to make money.

Barbara decided to figure out how to work the machine by washing Jim's socks. She discovered the machine needed to be set up on something. She brought a sturdy crate from the grocery store and lifted the machine up on it. Ugh. Heavy. She shouldn't have. She knew at once she shouldn't have.

She lost two baby boys, twins.

The next afternoon, at the hospital, someone came into the room next to Barbara's for her fifth child, bringing lots of magazines to read. Very soon, though, she was on her way to the delivery room. Barbara was close enough to hear, the sounds like the ones she herself had made. But at the end, a baby cried. That was how it was supposed to be. Barbara got out her deck of cards and started playing solitaire. She played solitaire on into the night. A friend of hers had taught her many different kinds. She would get tired and put the cards down and try to sleep until - she would sit up and start playing solitaire again, not to be overwhelmed with grief.

Late the next afternoon her doctor said she could go home. She almost did cry then, thinking about going home, to her own things, her favorite records to listen to. She was so glad to go home.

Her breasts turned hard and blue. She called her doctor at his home and, hearing his baby cry in the background, nearly fainted from new pain. He arranged for some codeine. She spent that night sitting motionless in a

chair.

The end of November she went for her check-up. It was late, a dark afternoon. Not many people were still in the waiting room. One was a new mother, with her baby beside her in a car bed. The nurse called the mother, who told her baby she would be right back, calling him - Barbara couldn't believe it - the name she and Jim had been considering.

She could have taken the baby: she felt sick and dizzy from not taking him. Never, not ever again would she hear of some one kidnapping a baby without feeling sick and dizzy.

In the doctor's office, she had to wait a long time. Outside the carillon in the college chapel started playing rock-a-bye-baby, for the new son of the band director, she found out later. The doctor, when he finally came, was kind enough to examine her quickly and let her go, after saying the babies had both been born alive and could be deducted from their next year's income tax.

Friends with a new baby invited them for dinner. The friends were apologetic when they had to take care of the baby in the middle of dinner. Barbara was given their baby to hold, just for a minute. The mother seemed uncertain....

A letter came from a friend of Barbara's mother, saying that Barbara's mother was better now, she'd been so upset. Mother - better now? How dared Mother be upset, was Barbara's instant, outraged reaction. The babies had been hers, not Mother's. But she got over that.

Beautifully stitched crib sheets came from Barbara's aunt in France. In another package were little sweaters knitted by her French grandmother, both packages mailed before the news had reached them. Barbara put the packages away and went for a walk.

Barbara returned to work the beginning of January, happy to be able to run up the stairs to the third-floor office again, at least.

She sold the washing machine, half-price, to someone who already had a baby.

And on a bright blue day the end of that month, she went back to her doctor. She was pregnant again.

From a distant airport, Barbra drove home past small New England villages with their white churches, through the summer afternoon and into the evening. Now, fog began to drift mystically over the dark hills by the river. She drove past an intersection and a Howard Johnson's, and around a deep bend in the superhighway. Beyond the river, through a break in the fog a valley opened wide. For her, she thought, the hard part about dying might be not ever to see such places again.

There was a curious glow surrounding the next hill. Coming around a turn in the highway, she saw the glow again. It began to take the shape of - a cathedral? Close to home, surely she'd know about the existence of a cathedral.

It really was a cathedral, like Chartres but with four towers, not two. Its light filled the foggy sky and down into the dark pines of a hillside. This couldn't be.

Was it a vision? She thought of her friend Jackie from college. And she was reminded of Lourdes, of an evening she had spent in the mist-filled, vision-filled hills outside of that town. Mountain cattle, wandering loose, ringing deep-toned bells hung around their necks, loomed through the mist, vanishing again. Could she be having a vision, like Bernadette? After all, she was half-French. But why would a vision of hers be a gothic cathedral? New England churches with their white rectangles and modest spires, doubling sometimes as town-meeting houses, were more her style.

The next day, feeling foolish, she returned to the highway to see if the cathedral was still there. It wasn't. She drove on to the Howard Johnson's to buy an ice cream cone. On the way home, she stopped the car at the side of the road, where the cathedral wasn't, to finish her cone. She stared at the hill. Among the trees an outline began to emerge. Gray bars and wires...oh, it was an electric power tower, in daylight scarcely visible among the trees.

A few weeks later, during a heat wave she and her husband went to have dinner in the blessedly air-conditioned dining room of the Howard Johnson's. On the way home she pointed out the power tower, lighted and still impressive though not, this time, magnified by fog.

Near the end of summer, the Inn was torn down. It had stood on the corner of Main Street, facing the college Green and the campus buildings. Its large Victorian porch, full of rocking chairs, had stretched from the Inn's entryway to its outdoor dining terrace. From the chairs, guests of the Inn could share in the life of the campus, watching softball games, people meeting on paths, and, at night, the lights of the campus buildings.

First the porch was pulled down. Across from the Inn, people sat on a low fence to watch. Then real destruction began. Iron balls smashed into the brick. Cranes picked out heavy beams and parts of walls. Main Street storekeepers and shoppers gathered to watch, near windows or out on the sidewalk. Evenings, people passed by and stared at the exposed rooms, at the once-so-elegant wallpapers, the large bathtubs with legs, the heavy radiators....

On a rainy day in September, when summer people had gone and before the return of the college students, the paneless windows of the coffee shop,

next to the Main Street stores, stared out blank and empty. The following day a wooden screen had been erected around that part of the Inn. By the time the students returned, the Inn was gone except for a few bricks and some broken glass. The big hole gave Main Street the look of a jaw with a tooth out.

For several weeks, nothing more happened. Leaves turned color and fell.

One day during this time, Barbara was walking down Main Street and decided to stop at Esther's Beauty Shop for a haircut. The shop was in one of the Main Street buildings, on the second floor in a back corner. It had two small windows, one facing an air vent and the other a brick wall. Esther had hung pink curtains around the windows and booths, to match the three pink chairs and the three pink hair driers. Esther, dressed in a white uniform and white shoes, seemed to accept long hours of sitting at the official-looking appointment desk. Usually, no one else was there.

Barbara went up the stairs and through the door that had "Esther's" written on the door's glass window in swirly gold. Esther, at her desk, was eating a sandwich. Why of course she could give Barbara a haircut. "Please finish your sandwich..." "No, no, sit right down. I've got just time."

Barbara hung her coat up and went into the nearest booth. The room looked pleasanter than usual. She sat down and glanced in the mirror. Goodness, she herself looked pleasanter too. Esther must have done something to the lights.

Esther came to the booth and swung the chair away from the mirror toward one of the windows. Why, the brick wall wasn't there! Students were playing touch football on the Green. Beyond them, people were meeting on the paths. Barbara said what a difference it made, not having the Inn right there. Esther smiled and then asked about Barbara's children. Some one else came in.

When the haircut was finished, Barbara got up, paid and put on her coat. Another person came in. "I'm early, Esther." "That's perfectly all right, Edith. Have some coffee and I'll be with you just as soon as..." (a little breathlessly) "...just as soon as I can."

Once outside again, Barbara looked for Esther's window. In a narrow wall, across the alley from the hole, were two windows, one above the other. The higher one, yes, the one with the pink curtains, was Esther's. The other, below, was blocked with boxes.

In November, machines moved in to start work on the foundations of the new Inn. Cement trucks mixed and poured. At night, each day's work was covered with heavy, dark canvas. Six-foot high metal markers, placed halfway into the street, more or less walled off the construction site. Traffic moved over. Pedestrians risked their lives or crossed to the other side.

Shortly before the students went home for Christmas, the foundation was finished. Then the building itself began. Machines roared everywhere,

adding to the confusion of Christmas. Between shopping expeditions, Barbara watched the supply room's window disappear. She missed when Esther's window disappeared.

By Spring, a new Inn stood on the corner of Main Street, facing the college Green and the campus buildings. Its large Victorian porch, full of rocking chairs, stretched from the Inn's entryway to its outdoor dining terrace. From the chairs, guests of the Inn once again shared in the life of the campus, watching softball games on the Green, the people meeting on paths, and, at night, the lights from the campus buildings.

When she was little, Barbara had hated trips into town unless her mother was going to the hospital to visit a sick friend. Children were not allowed in the main part of the hospital, so she would be left to sit on a long wooden bench in the hall just inside the entrance. The hall went from one end of the hospital all the way to the other. The floor was dark brown. An old man with a mop and a bucket was always washing it somewhere. The walls were light brown. There were no windows, just yellow light bulbs.

Most of the time the only other people in the hall were the nuns, in long, black, flowing robes. There were always two together. Two would move down one side of the hall. And two more would move up the other side. They'd be close to the wall, except when they came near Barbara or the washing man. Then they would make a half-circle. Once one of the nuns smiled at Barbara. But that never happened again. They were part of another world.

Nuns in black robes never lost their fascination for Barbara. And the summer when one nun - a single one - appeared among those who had signed up for a Computer Science course at the college, Barbara was intrigued. Computers were still very new and the nun, a teacher at a Catholic college, had received special permission to come alone.

One morning Barbara was downtown and happened to meet the person who was giving the Computer Science course. So she asked him about the nun. "Well!" he said. "As a matter of fact, we've had quite a time." He grinned and put a foot up on one of the brick tree-planters at the edge of the sidewalk. "It was the darndest thing - the computer wouldn't work for her. She'd come near it and it would quit." "You're kidding...." "Aw, c'mon, Barb, would I kid you? She'd come near it and the computer would - it would just turn off. I'd fix it - but there was never anything wrong to fix. Then the same thing would happen all over again. She'd come near it and it would quit. I mean, it was weird! After a couple days, I got that kid - what's his name - I got him to come over, during the class. And, just like I said, when she came near, it quit. No one else was having problems." "Oh

gosh, the poor lady” ”Yeah, I guess! She was really nice about it. So, we were all just sort of standing there - and I happened to notice some of her - her, you know, dress - seemed caught in the bottom of the machine. And - would you believe? - that was it. Her dress was getting caught in an air vent, which turned off the machine. That’s all it was. Can you believe it? That’s all it was. She pulled her dress away - it wasn’t really caught, just enough, I guess - and presto, the computer worked again. How about that! So the kid, oh, what’s his name - went and got an inner tube to put around her skirts, and, oh, oh hey - ’scuse me, Barbara - hey Rodger, wait up.”

Usually the drive to church took five minutes. Barbara directed the choir. Every Thursday night, she went to rehearsal and, of course, to church on Sunday. This was the Thursday before Easter. Instead of rehearsal, there was to be a special Holy Week service. But tonight she wasn’t sure she would get there at all. It was snowing hard - large, heavy flakes out of the dark. There would be broken branches tomorrow. Spring leaves had begun to grow and the snow was piling up on them.

The hill down to the river had not been sanded yet. At the top, Barbara stopped and watched a car come, slide across the road, come higher, give up, back-back down to the bottom, then turn away. Slowly she drove down to the river and across the bridge. She didn’t even try to go up the hill on the other side.

Near the bridge was a small grocery store, where several cars were parked. The owner was keeping the place open. Barbara decided to telephone Ann, a soprano, who had a jeep, who answered she’d be right down.

Barbara went to the counter with the other people who were talking about the weather and being stranded. It was cozy. The owner said Barbara could leave her car.

Ann came the long way, on the dirt road beside the river. They went back the same way. Arriving in front of the church, they laughed at a little patch of crocuses, colorful in the headlights against the rising snow.

Except for the minister and the organist, they were the first to arrive. The organist was practicing hymns and the minister was standing in front of the altar. The new overhead light, which had just been installed so the choir could see to sing for evening services, shone on them. Two or three other people came, stomping and laughing because of the snow. And they all walked down the aisle through to the back to change coats for choir robes.

More people came that evening than had been expected. The weather seemed to give an air of excitement to the otherwise somber service. Near the end of the service, all the lights were turned off, leaving the church in darkness. But someone had forgotten to turn off the light outside. Those in

the choir could look through the window over the heads of the congregation at the peacefully falling snow.

The minister lit one candle. Then all the lights went on again, and the service was over. People left talking about Christmas.

When everyone was gone, Barbara sat down in a pew to wait for Ann who had to get something ready for Easter. The minister was standing in front of the altar again. And the organist was stacking music on the back of the organ. He was an old man: his movements were stiff and slow. But he was in no hurry. Once in a while he would stop, turn around and peer over the top of his glasses at the minister, at Barbara and around the church. She wondered what he was thinking.

She wondered what he had thought during the service. During the darkness there had been silence. Then after the lighting of the candle, he had played a quiet hymn. The candle had been twenty feet away from him. She wondered if he'd practiced the hymn with his eyes closed.

When he was through stacking music, he shuffled over to the front of the organ and sat down. He was so little the organ bench had had to be built up almost to the keyboard. And, seen from the back, his head nearly disappeared behind his bent shoulders. He began to pull out stops. Then, lifting his hands high, he brought them down on the opening chords of Handel's Hallelujah chorus, which he'd probably memorized long ago.

The minister looked up. Then he walked over and stood by the organ. Barbara came up too. Finally the organist stopped playing, pushed in the stops and turned off the organ. He stood up and shook his head. There'd been too much sad music, he said - couldn't wait till Sunday.

Ann came back and, after saying goodnight, they walked out into the snow. The streets had all been sanded, so they took the main road back to the river and the now-darkened store.

Barbara had no trouble at all driving home. The snow was coming to an end. But bushes were spread wide under snow-piles. Tree branches were broken. Barbara found herself hoping the branches would not still be broken on Easter.

The backyard of the first house the Veres owned joined the backyards of six duplexes rented to new faculty at the college. The faculty families would live in them for around two years before buying their own houses or moving away. The families usually had one child, between one and four years old. More than one child is what would add to the incentive to move, the need for more than two bedrooms.

The arrangement was ideal for the Veres. By the time Peter was in school, his friends had moved on and a new crop had moved in for Elizabeth.

The only problem was, the swing sets and sandboxes were in the other yard. There was a hedge between, so Barbara would feel somewhat obliged to go where she could keep an eye on Peter. The Veres solved that problem by investing in a swing set and sandbox of their own. The other fathers came over to help set up the swing set and then widen the path through the hedge.

For Peter there had been three little boys and one slightly older girl who had a gift for thinking up fun things for everyone to do. For Elizabeth the backyard was dominated by a great bear of a St. Bernard named Christian. The only drawback was that he too liked to be in a sandbox. His three-year-old owner learned how to shoulder him out, with some help. A two-year-old began getting big enough to play too. And then Amy arrived with her two-year-old. Elizabeth and Christian's owner welcomed the two-year-olds with glee, who were both already bigger than they were. Amy also had an English setter, company for Christian. Barbara has a picture of the two dogs, after a rain, supervising the construction of canals between the puddles in the Veres' driveway.

Amy lived in what seemed almost a fantasy world, a world of enchantment, but a world Amy made real. For instance, when her son began waking up early because the birds were singing, Amy would get up too and they'd go for a walk, out into the spring morning, taking with them a picnic breakfast ("provisions", she would say), attended by the setter who hoped they would get as far as the little brook so he could go wading.

One morning, when Barbara was in the duplex backyard trying to find the other of a pair of Elizabeth's shoes, she heard her name being called from somewhere up. Half expecting to see Amy in a tree, she found her instead waving from her bedroom window. Beside her was some one else, who was about to move into one of the other duplexes. Amy was showing the new person around hers and proceeded to introduce Barbara right then and there.

Amy came from Montana, where her father had been a doctor before his too-early death. Her mother was a quite well known writer. Amy herself wrote short stories and poetry. One summer Barbara met Amy's mother and also her two younger brothers at a party Amy and her husband gave in their part of the duplex backyard. There were torches stuck in the grass and wine and snacks as unexpected as they were delicious.

Barbara and Amy would often get started on conversations they could never finish because of the continual crises occurring in the world of two- and three-year olds, and then of three- and four-year olds. And after the arrival of their second child, Amy's husband was offered a job in California.

More people did move in, a couple with two girls, one a year older and one a year younger than Elizabeth. The three girls became inseparable, all three either at their own place or at the Veres'. One spring, the other mother made matching pink-flowered cotton nightgowns for her two - and

then a third for Elizabeth.

But none of the Veres ever forgot Amy, who even looked up Peter when he was in college, the time she and her husband were invited there, he to give a poetry reading.

Chapter 7

College Again

June 1968: The small classroom, its desk and blackboard facing a few rows of armed-for-writing brown chairs, is too bright. The big windows have not been opened. The room is stuffy and a little cold. Six or seven students enter and sit down. The professor enters, on the hour. He does not close the door to the hallway, still filled with passing students, nor open a window. He walks to the desk and sits down on the chair behind it. He introduces himself. He announces the name of the class - Expository Writing - and reads the class list, glancing up briefly to match name and face. He says this is the first and last meeting of the class. Each student will have a weekly conference on the four-to-six page paper due each week. The conferences will take place in his English Department office. Each student should sign up for a conference time on the list posted by his office door. The first paper should be on what the student plans to write during the summer. A sample of previous expository writing, such as a paper written for another course, should be left either with him or with the department secretary. Then, pleasantly enough he dismisses the class and leaves.

The class is over. The students can't believe their luck and most leave at once. The majority at this college are male undergraduates, but this summer for the first time there are a few women. In this class there are two women, one older and one much older. They smile at each other.

Barbara, the much older one, picks up her notebook and pocketbook, wondering briefly if the young man in the corner of the room, staring sadly out the window, is all right before she too leaves. She is in no hurry at all, now, having almost not managed to get here. Taking a course in the summer is going to be harder than she'd thought. The children (Peter, twelve, and Elizabeth, eight) had had a fight just as she and Jim were leaving, so Jim had stayed at home. He would not be expecting her back right away.

Outside the classroom, the hall is now empty and still. The gleaming black-patterned linoleum floor smells of wax. At the end of the hall, a heavy wooden door, not quite latched, leads outdoors to the cloudless blue

morning. Barbara continues on down the walk. Trees' leaves hang as if by design in the still air, a design repeated in the shadows over the walk and lawn. She turns and looks back at the four freshly painted white buildings with their dark green shutters.

On the other side of the road is the College Green. Many people cross the Green. How busy they are. Jim too. Barbara often wonders how he keeps up being so busy. Day after day he comes home pale, tense and exhausted. Classes, committee meetings, graduate students, research: she envies only the variety in his life which she cannot share.

Laughter comes from one of the open classroom windows. She smiles. She feels part of that laughter now, a little. She hears organ music on her way past the chapel, a lesson, maybe, or some one practicing. Across from the chapel, students and professors go in and out of the library. Her car is in the parking lot behind the library, under some trees. She gets in, rolls down the window, starts the motor and pulls away.

The Veres live across the river, in another state, in a town three miles away. First they had lived in faculty apartments near the football field. Later, when Peter was born, they'd rented a house at the top of a hill south of town. Then, just before Elizabeth was born, they had bought a house near the college tennis courts. The backyard of that house joined the backyards of other faculty houses. The children could play in safety, except from each other, watched from kitchen windows by their mothers.

Then last year, the first day of June they had moved to a house and to a barn across the river, a move that, more than it should have, had taken Barbara by surprise. Many things needed to be done to the house, large, square, built in 1777. Elizabeth, frightened by its size and strangeness, didn't always know where everyone was, anymore. Peter, trying to comfort her, played marbles with her down the wide, slanting floorboards.

In September, cold weather began to make escape from the continuous upheaval of house repairs harder. With the children back in school, Barbara decided to see about taking a course at the college, maybe something having to do with 1777 America, to get more interested in the house. Maybe she could take the course for credit. That's what a friend of hers was doing. Barbara had finished three years of college before transferring to a music school. Maybe her old college would accept credits from here toward a regular degree. In any case, working for credit would make her take the course more seriously. It might make whoever was teaching take her more seriously too.

She signed up for a course in American Prose. It was spellbinding, literally. One day the professor forgot some papers on the classroom desk and had to come back for them. He found everyone silently still sitting there.

Another faculty wife was auditing that course. The two of them sat in

the back row, trying to be inconspicuous. That winter, Barbara signed up for a course in American Fiction, taught by the same professor. This time she was the only woman. Twice a week students filled up an auditorium, except for the seat in the back row next to her. The best students sat in front. Several of them had been in the Prose course. More casual ones sat in the middle. In the back, students slouched in their seats, maybe asleep. They must have been listening on some level, though. When the front two-thirds of the class roared with laughter, a kind of wave would pass through those in the back.

In spring, she decided to take a course on four French novelists, including Rousseau who had been talked about in the Prose course. Barbara's French mother had often asked her, the first time she was in college, why she never took advantage of the fact that, at least as a child, she had been bilingual.

How different the French course was from the American courses! For one thing, the professor, very recently hired, was a woman. And the students were impressively unselfconscious, perhaps more used to the risk of making fools of themselves, in the process of learning a foreign language. Nor did they allow Barbara to sit in back and be silent.

The papers for the course had to be written in French. Barbara discovered that the many short papers assigned were just what she needed to recover the skills she apparently did have, at least on that not-too-advanced level. The emphasis in this course was on the style of what was read, not on the reaching for ideas that had made the courses in American Literature so extraordinary. Those papers, the American ones, had been different from any Barbara had ever written, handed in or had returned. Even her first shy paper had come back with words of encouragement and enthusiasm. Later came praise. Housewives and mothers are not used to praise. But she felt she must learn how to organize her papers and express herself more clearly. The American professor seemed to understand that ideas new to one are not always coherent - not that he objected to coherence. But ideas, not coherence, were what did, finally, matter.

The one thing she knows about the person giving the course this summer is that he is a Shakespeare scholar. Shakespeare. She should take advantage of that, even though just the name makes her feel weary. She and her friends had spent more time complaining about the play assigned senior year in high school than in reading it. Last winter she had read in a commentary that Melville had been influenced by Shakespeare. And this spring she had read the same thing about Balzac. What could have been meant, she begins to wonder. Not that she's an expert on either Balzac or Melville, having barely managed to get through "Moby Dick" and having read only one book by Balzac, without looking up all the words either. But one has to start somewhere. She had read in some magazine one advantage of getting old is that one dares do what one wants. She wonders about that as she drives

the rest of the way home, past one lovely old shaded house after another, to theirs, the most official of several candidates for third oldest house in the village. In front is a meadow and a brook bordered with forget-me-nots. Peter once caught a fish in the brook with his butterfly net.

Barbara turns into their driveway, between two maples. Around one of them is a circle of daylilies, which, last year, bloomed the entire month of July. Several cars are parked in front of the barn. Barbara happens to see a movement out of the corner of her eye. She gasps as she catches sight, in the rearview mirror, of a small boy where she has just driven, making his way toward the road. He must have been hidden by the lilies. She slams on the brakes, jumps from the car and runs after the child. Picking him up (Ben, Carol's youngest) she says: "Let's find Mommy."

Carol must have decided to come today instead of tomorrow to rehearse for Saturday's Barn concert. Jim has transformed the barn into a concert hall for amateur musicians. Summers, there are weekly concerts. Friends play and sing for friends, usually on Saturday evenings. Wine and cheese are served, paid for by the earnings from a textbook Jim has written with two colleagues, so successful that the book has been translated into seven languages. The concerts too are successful beyond Jim's wildest dreams. About half an hour before concert time, cars begin arriving, parking in the meadow behind the barn. Birds, sunsets, music, wine and then moonlight through the branches of a great elm by the barn are magical.

But right now, as Barbara comes into the barn carrying Ben, rehearsal is at a standstill. The pianist has brought along her baby who is crying, over there in its car bed. And Ben's older sister, Lynn, is earnestly telling Carol she has to go to the bathroom. Ben wriggles out of Barbara's arms and runs up to them. The violinist is clearly bewildered - a retired professor from the Engineering school, a gentle man unaccustomed to small children. Barbara looks questioningly at the pianist, whom she doesn't know very well, then picks up the baby and says to Lynn: "Come on, Lynn. We'll go into the house." Carol says: "Ben, you go with Lynn. Barbara, I left the others at home with your phone number. I didn't know nobody would be here."

Barbara makes her way to the house with the three children, across the driveway, up the stone steps, across the porch and into the kitchen. Nobody here? Jim? Barbara's children have long since learned to make themselves scarce during rehearsals, but Jim? Pointing through the dining room to a half-opened door, Barbara says: "The bathroom's over there, Lynn. I think you can reach the light. Call if you need help." Elizabeth comes around the corner from the hall, saying: "Hi, Mom. We're playing hide-and-seek, and I can't find Daddy. What's wrong with the baby?" Jim appears. Elizabeth shouts: "Daddy! Where were you?" Dust in his hair, mumbling that baby-sitters are underpaid, Jim says he'll be back around 6:00. Barbara calls after him to take her keys out of the car, also her notebook...oh, and her

pocketbook - leave everything on the grass. They do have a second car, they have to now, but it's being fixed. The telephone rings. A tear-filled voice on the other end says: "I want my mommy. David's picking on me...stop that, David!" "Can I talk to him? David? Oh, hi. Peter's here - he'd like to talk to you - hold on." Barbara goes into the TV room, where Peter is watching a cartoon. "Peter, David's on the phone." She feels a twinge of guilt as she returns to the kitchen.

Lynn comes out of the bathroom. Ben, being good, has been waiting. The two of them look up at Barbara. "Mummy!" says Elizabeth. "I thought you said we were going swimming when you got home. What's wrong with that baby?" "We'll go after lunch instead. Lynn, Ben, let's sit outside on the steps so you'll be all ready when it's time to go home."

Elizabeth does not come out too. And the baby cries on. Barbara wonders if something really is wrong with it. She listens to the sounds coming through the open barn windows, mingling with the baby's cries. The baby is inconsolable. Finally Barbara takes the three children back into the barn. "Sorry Carol. And maybe you'd better call home." "Okay," says Carol, cheerful as always. "But could we just go through this section once - tell us how the balance is, would you? And don't say it's good if it isn't." Barbara looks down at the crying baby in her arms. The pianist says: "You might as well put him back in the car bed." Barbara puts it - him - down. He stiffens but cries no louder. Perhaps, exhausted, he'll fall asleep. The music begins again.

Barbara walks away, listening for balance. Ben and Lynn run across the floor, laughing until Ben trips and falls down. But after a moment, he decides to get up and run again.

How good the three musicians really are. Barbara is beginning to wonder how much the hype of formal concerts has to do with the difference between professionals and at least some amateurs. Recently she read about a famous violinist who went outside to play on a street corner, and nobody stopped except a child, who wanted to stop but was pulled away by his mother.

The pianist, lost in the music, does not seem to even hear her baby. How beautiful she is, black hair slicked back into a bun and dangly earrings. Barbara tries not to feel critical as the baby cries on. Perhaps nothing can be done for him. Perhaps whatever is wrong just has to run its course. She doesn't know and she mustn't judge. She can't imagine not wanting to comfort one's own child, though.... But then she happens to remember the morning when Peter, a month old, was circumcised. At the usual time for that operation, right after he was born, the doctor thought he did not weigh enough. And she can still hear Peter's screams. There in the waiting room, when the nurse brought him back to her, a part of her deep inside had, just for a moment, resisted taking him back. She had failed him, she wasn't good enough to take care of him, something like that.

The music ends, and the performers look over at Barbara, waiting. "It's beautiful," she says. "Oh, she always says that!" they say to each other. But they are pleased and must know that what she says is true. So why do they still seem to need approval? They prepare to leave, collecting children and music. The violinist, looking tired, begins putting his violin in its case. Barbara remembers to thank them. She is never quite sure whether they, unpaid, feel they are being given an opportunity or being taken advantage of.

She closes the window so the pigeons won't get in and returns to the kitchen with the things Jim left on the grass and sits down for a moment. Elizabeth comes and climbs on her lap. After a while, Peter wanders in, and the cat. Soon they eat lunch and talk about going swimming. An hour after lunch they'll ride their bikes to the pool.

Chapter 8

The Barn

Having community art shows in their barn during the concerts had seemed like a good idea to Jim. But now, Barbara is not so sure. She watches Kathryn pace restlessly back and forth in front of the stage.

“You mean you don’t have more lights? This is all?” Kathryn comes up to Barbara and throws her arms around her, giving her a hug before saying again: “This is all? What am I going to do? I should never have agreed to this. And what about these - these posts?” She walks to one of them, shakes it, then returns to Barbara and gives her another hug.

“Kathryn,” says Barbara, “the posts hold the barn up. They can’t be taken out.” An architect friend had even persuaded Jim the posts added to what he called “the functional beauty” of the barn. Nor had he objected to a basketball net they had put up for Peter, to one side, away from the lights.

There had been complications enough with those lights. Jim had finally decided on yellow cones to be hung from the roof on long white cords. The electrician wasn’t going to forget that job in a hurry. The roof was way up. The cones, ordered in March, had arrived two days before the first concert last year. Red. Spray-painting them yellow had taken half the night.

Ever since Jim had asked Kathryn, a month ago, if she wanted to bring some of her paintings the night of this summer’s first concert, Kathryn had been on the phone about first one thing, then another. Today she had needed help bringing the pictures. (Luckily, the Veres’ second car was now repaired.) Both children had been home all morning. Barbara gave them the choice of staying home some more, being dropped off at the pool, or helping to bring Kathryn’s paintings to the barn. They had elected to stay home. But after two trips, Barbara had to insist that Elizabeth, in tears from being pestered, come along to help with the paintings. Pre-concert tensions really got to the children.

At least the pictures were all here, finally, the ones that could be fit into the cars. Some of Kathryn’s paintings were huge. At one point Kathryn

had suggested a U-haul. Fortunately there really hadn't been time: no need to go into who would arrange for, and pay for, a U-haul.

Barbara glances at her watch. It is nearly 4 o'clock. Kathryn hasn't even begun to think about where to hang the pictures. Thank goodness she had agreed to get the pictures here today instead of tomorrow, the day of the concert, when so much else would need to be done. One problem was, the barn couldn't be locked. After much soul-searching (and many phone calls) Kathryn had decided to take the chance - and had notified people her show could be seen in the barn all day Saturday. "You will be here, won't you Barbara?" she said, before adding: "All that work of bringing and hanging pictures for just one evening!" The fact that over a hundred people would see the paintings all at once did not seem equivalent to a hundred people seeing them over a period of several weeks. In a way, though, Kathryn was right about that. People coming to the barn for a concert very well might not see the pictures right there in front of them.

Kathryn had not been to the barn before. She'd said she had not known about it. One of the difficulties the first year had been how to let those, who might want to come, know the concerts existed, without making those, who wouldn't be interested in amateur music-making, feel they must.

Now, after giving Barbara another hug, Kathryn begins to line her pictures along the barn walls, until she comes to the wall where the folding chairs are, still under their plastic cover. Scowling, she leans the pictures against the chairs. Barbara follows, pointing out where the table with the wine and cheese will go, and the washtub with beer and soft drinks, and also the table for lemonade and coffee. Barbara warns that melting ice in the tub splashes, sometimes. Even though the tub is on the floor, perhaps no pictures should be hung till about - here? Barbara gets another hug.

The paintings, much aqua and red-violet, are very bright. But, especially as the light softens during the course of the afternoon, Barbara begins to see there is something alive, and humorous too, in them. Against the dark wood of the barn walls, they'll be fine.

At last, Kathryn walks to the middle of the barn and looks around. Barbara gets a hammer and a can of nails from the ledge near the light switches. When she returns, Kathryn is still - just standing there. Finally she asks quietly, "Barbara, don't you think - shouldn't that picture be over there instead?" Barbara, surprised, looks at Kathryn before looking at the painting. She has an odd feeling Kathryn is being impressed by her own work, maybe even for the first time. She puts the hammer and nails down on the floor and - this time she hugs Kathryn. Goodness, all this hugging. Then she says: "You know, Kathryn, we're not going to be able to finish. It's after five. Jim's coming home in about fifteen minutes and I've got to start supper."

Kathryn lives alone, perhaps not even aware of how others must mesh

their lives. Barbara continues: "Do you want me to finish for you? Do you want to come back tonight, say around 8:00? Could you do that?" Kathryn looks at her watch. "Let me think about it." "Well, I do have to go. Oh golly, there's Jim now, oh well, the nails are right there, go a little easy with them, okay?"

During supper, Kathryn knocks at the door and walks in. Supper has been edgy, Peter tipping backward in his chair which annoys Jim, Jim absent-mindedly chewing with his mouth open which annoys Peter, and Barbara trying to attract their attention away from each other which annoys both of them. Kathryn announces she has decided to stay till she has finished and can she use the phone and the bathroom. When she re-appears, Barbara can't not ask: "Would you like something to eat?" "Oh - I can't eat, I never eat when I'm putting on a show. Well, a sandwich, maybe?"

At the table, the only room for Kathryn is where Barbara is sitting. Elizabeth, who hasn't eaten anything, decides she wants a sandwich too. Barbara makes the sandwiches out of the sliced ham she had planned to use for supper before the concert tomorrow night. She hopes she remembers to ask Jim to pick up some more ham when he goes to the store to buy tomorrow night's drinks.

Kathryn makes Jim nervous. Without a word, he gets up from the table, finds an ice cream bar in the freezer and goes out to the barn to begin mopping the floor. He doesn't like company when he is mopping. Though nothing has been said, Barbara understands she is to keep Kathryn in the house as long as possible. Peter excuses himself and goes to watch TV. Luckily Kathryn and Elizabeth become friends, over their sandwiches. They begin to talk about the art program at school while Barbara rinses dishes. She listens to eight-year-old Elizabeth with astonishment. Then Kathryn makes more phone calls.

Jim is almost finished mopping when the three of them, Elizabeth too, return to the barn. Kathryn, who seems resigned - or even happy - helps move chairs to the middle of the floor before starting in again to hang her pictures. Even Jim seems happy. He says sure when Elizabeth asks if she can go to the store with him. Barbara even remembers about more ham. And by the time Jim and Elizabeth come back, the pictures are hung. Barbara walks Kathryn out to her car and waves good-bye before helping Jim carry boxes and bottles into the barn.

The next morning Barbara remembers someone has to stay around all day. So, when Jim goes to pick up cheeses (about twenty miles away, a small store, doubling as that village's post office, has the best cheese around) he'll also have to get the crackers, coffee and ice. Barbara, who buys crackers intuitively, tries to be specific about the number of boxes of crackers a hundred or so people might eat. No, it is not known how many crackers there are per box. Jim decides to get the cheese this afternoon instead of

now, so he can put off getting the ice as long as possible. He says: "Call me, if you think of something more. I'll have lunch downtown when I pick up the programs."

The programs: Barbara has forgotten all about them. Jim really does do a lot about the concerts. She only feels it is all up to her, sometimes, carrying out his dream which became possible after the publication of the textbook.

Today is another glorious day, making five in a row at least. Barbara spends the morning cleaning house, Elizabeth trailing along. Even though the concerts are in the barn, the house must be ready too, for the performers before the concert. And the bathroom and telephone must be available for everyone. After lunch, Peter, grumpy from a morning of TV, goes off on his bike. Barbara carries glasses out to the barn, Elizabeth trailing along some more. Jim and a friend of his had chosen the glasses. They had looked at every wine glass within fifty miles.

As she carries the sixty-cup coffeemaker out to the barn, a car drives into the yard with people who have come to see Kathryn's exhibit. Barbara was beginning to wonder where all the people supposed to be coming to see the exhibit were. She hasn't met these people before. They are very pleasant. They are more interested in the barn than in the paintings. They have brought along a girl about Elizabeth's age. The two girls become friends after standing around for a while. Peter arrives back from his bike ride, all cheered up. He goes with the girls around the house and the barn, being nice. And after the people leave, he offers to help with the washtub. The tub must be partly filled with water from the hose before it gets carried into the barn, so the ice will float over the beer and soft drink cans, keeping them cold. Peter often helps park cars too, but it does seem best not to really count on him. Something is troubling him - about the barn? Do his friends make fun of it? Maybe he is missing school, since summer vacation has just begun. It was such a good year for him.

Jim gets home late. Errands always take longer than planned. Barbara makes sandwiches and changes out of her work clothes. Together she and Jim carry the ice into the barn and dump it over the beer and soft drinks, which have been arranged in the tub. Peter helps Jim put up ropes around the meadow parking area. The performers are arriving and also the two boys from the high school, in charge of parking and general helping. The performers, even though they have been here before, have to be shown where to go. Just before a performance, performers seem helpless and vulnerable.

Crackers must be arranged, cheese cut, wine bottles opened.... Barbara nibbles cheese instead of having supper. People are coming. How can she welcome them and still do these other things. She fights off a moment of panic. Elizabeth and Peter come into the barn. Both have changed their clothes, all on their own. They look good. Peter starts opening the wine

bottles, the way Barbara's French mother had taught him last summer. Elizabeth offers to cut cheese. Seeing Barbara glance at her hands, she adds: "Mom, I just washed them!" So Barbara can talk with the growing number of people, though she stays near the children. Jim comes in, tall and handsome, with the programs he had picked up in town at lunchtime. He gives them to Elizabeth who goes to stand by the barn door. Her friend Margaret arrives with her parents. Elizabeth gives Margaret half the programs to help pass out.

Most of the cars have arrived, so one of the high school students comes inside to take over at the refreshment table. The other stays out until the last possible moment. Then he too comes in, taking charge of the lights and the door. He has learned how to open the sliding door of the barn silently for latecomers. People, drinks in hand, begin to sit down. It is time for Barbara to get the performers. She goes into the house where they are spraying each other with insect repellent. They collect their instruments while Barbara goes back to the kitchen to clean up in there a little. A small boy comes to the door asking where the bathroom is. The performers leave, going through the car-filled meadow to the back entrance of the barn. When the boy is through in the bathroom, he and Barbara go out to the barn together. The student slides the door quietly shut behind them. The boy finds his parents and Barbara looks for Jim. He's sitting near the front with some distinguished-looking visitors. Barbara wonders who they are. One evening last summer there had been three college presidents! Sometimes she has trouble believing all this.

Barbara gets herself a glass of white wine and signals to the student, now by the light switches, that the concert can begin anytime. She finds a seat near the back. The cone lights go off, the stage lights go on and the performers appear, climbing the stairs, smiling and bowing before they take their places. Then silence. And the concert begins.

The music, the rich sunset light, Kathryn's pictures, how good it all is. But six or seven children, after about ten minutes, have had enough. They are allowed to go outside. Soon they make noise. A mother goes out and comes in again. The noise continues. The student at the door goes out. When he returns, he comes to Barbara and whispers that two of the children have gone into the house. Barbara leaves, manages to find and gather all the children, in silence, near the barn door, promising intermission with soda pop and crackers. But after intermission the children go wild. Barbara doesn't know their parents. So she stays outside with the children. A large hay wagon stands in the center of the yard. She and Jim had brought it out from under the barn. Barbara joins the children who have climbed up on it. The moon is full against the dark sky above the big elm. They whisper ghost stories. Music sounds distantly. The smallest child falls asleep against Barbara's knee.

When the concert is over, people leave quickly. They must be gone by 10:00, so neighbors won't complain. Everybody wants to say good-bye and thank you. Barbara tries to talk to, shake hands with, everyone at once. But how genuinely nice and appreciative the people are. Professor and Mrs. Todd have brought their daughter, home on vacation from teaching in Korea. Barbara, looking forward to meeting her, had missed her at intermission and now.... Kathryn is trying to get her attention. Barbara's head begins to spin. Kathryn is saying she will come tomorrow for the paintings. "Tomorrow morning? Kathryn, morning or afternoon?" Barbara has to call after her. "What? Oh. Well, I'll think about it." Someone else comes up, the man who is giving next week's concert, so Barbara waves to Kathryn who beams and goes off, hugging people along the way.

And now Jim has finished checking ashtrays for smoldering cigarettes and has put the light on under the piano and the plastic sheet over it, to protect it from the dampness. They turn off the lights and slide shut the doors, leaving the mess for tomorrow. In the house, Peter has gone to bed. Elizabeth goes too. Four or five people have come in to talk. Barbara goes upstairs to give Elizabeth a kiss goodnight and to look in on Peter. She returns downstairs and closes windows in case any neighbors get the idea they are in the barn still.

The next morning, on the way to clean up in the barn, Jim asks: "When's Kathryn coming?" "I'm not sure." "We'll have to take some of these pictures down. You don't suppose she has told people to come today too, do you? How many came yesterday?" Barbara tells him, adding: "I don't think she'd like us fooling with her paintings." Jim takes down the ones where the chairs belong, laying them carefully on the stage. Barbara, on her way to the refreshment table, says: "Next time, we'd better get more cheese. Can Jack and his friend work again next week?"

Barbara puts as many dirty glasses as possible on a large tray and carries them into the house. As she steps over the barn threshold, she wonders, as usual, if this is going to be the time she trips and drops the tray. In the house, she puts the glasses into the dishwasher, as many as will fit, and starts it going. There will be several loads. She will get as much done as she can before Kathryn comes. There are clouds in the sky. Rain is predicted. Kathryn had better not wait too long. After Jim finishes putting away the chairs, Barbara helps him drape the plastic sheet over them. He mops the floor again, worrying about some new wine stains. Together they carry the washtub to the front of the barn and dump out the water. Finally, except for a couple of trays-worth of glasses still on the table (there's no more room in the kitchen) the barn is back to normal.

Tim and his sister come over to fly paper airplanes, made from leftover or left behind programs. Barbara asks everybody please not to fly planes up on the stage where Kathryn's paintings are. Jim goes for the Sunday paper,

which they read together at the kitchen table, drinking coffee. The classical music station drowns out the dishwasher, almost.

Kathryn shows up after lunch. She and Barbara spend the afternoon returning pictures. Kathryn asks Barbara to stay for tea. Kathryn's house, a small old one on top of a high hill, is quietly and simply furnished, not at all like her paintings, which she keeps separately in a studio added to one side of the house. As they drink their tea, Barbara and Kathryn look down on the whole river valley, watching the rain clouds gather.

Chapter 9

Toward Independence

The next morning, Barbara drives Jim to the office so she can have the car. When she returns, Peter has gone off. Elizabeth is sitting in the kitchen alone, waiting. “Mom, what can I do?”

Barbara rests her hand on Elizabeth’s head a moment, on the way to the kitchen sink full of breakfast dishes. “I’ve got some errands, want to come along? I have to hand in a paper first. You’ll have to wait a little, but you can bring a book.” “And then go swimming?” “And then go swimming.”

Barbara rinses dishes and does a few jobs around the house. Elizabeth, following, is careful not to help, though sometimes she forgets. Barbara leaves a note for Peter on the kitchen table, saying where they’ve gone and when they’ll be back. Getting her purse and the paper she has chosen for her writing sample, she joins Elizabeth who is now waiting in the car.

It’s another beautiful day. No canoes are out on the river yet, though. Several people on the bridge look down at the water. “Mom, are there fish?” “I don’t know. Maybe.”

On campus, Barbara finds a parking place near the west entrance of the library. The English department is in an extension of the library’s west wing. “I won’t be long,” she says to Elizabeth. “I’ll be up there somewhere.” She points to the windows at the top of the building, then opens the car door. “Bye, Mom.” “Bye.”

In 1954, when Jim began teaching here, Barbara had had a job in the library. As she puts a nickel in the meter, she remembers the times she had walked home past the English department, looking through the windows, on dark winter afternoons, at groups of people talking and drinking tea in the warm light. She had coveted their fellowship. It seemed to be the kind Jim described as having happened during the Princeton Math department teas in the early fifties, when the senior faculty, already legendary, held court. One day, Elizabeth would write a paper on Homer’s “Iliad”, ending with a description of the campfires, wondering where she could find a campfire for her. Now Jim found teas boring. Maybe the senior faculty at Princeton had

been bored too, only doing their duty by the graduate students and young instructors.

A friend of Barbara's, who tutored in the French department, described what had happened when a wall in the languages building between two large classrooms was torn down to make a coffee/seminar room, so all the language professors could have coffee together. But the Romance Language professors had coffee from 9 to 10: the Germans, from 10 to 11. The Russians asked their secretary to bring them theirs. And the Classics professors waited till lunch. Within departments, all senior professors grouped by the windows. Junior faculty stood by the coffee urn. A lot of the conversation was about the weather.

The door to the English department is braced open. Barbara enters a little hall. A few stairs descend from it to some offices and a partly underground passage leading over to the main library. Other stairs go up to a larger hall, off of which are the English department library, two meeting rooms and several medieval style seminar rooms. A great deal of money was given for this building. The donor must have dreamed a dream, shared by many, of recreating, at least physically, England's Oxford and Cambridge.

Continuing up more stairs, Barbara passes not just one but two other women. On the landing, there is a sign, written in long-hand on a sheet of notebook paper, that the bathroom around the corner is for women this summer. But the large, dark, wood-paneled room at the top of the stairs, and the sound of deep voices and the rich smell of pipe smoke coming from behind a half-open door, feel as uncompromisingly masculine as ever. A silent secretary, behind her desk in a far corner, is barely noticeable. Barbara is about to ask where she should leave her paper when she sees the Expository Writing professor emerge from his office half way down a narrow corridor. He sees her too and asks her to come in.

He is middle-sized and middle-aged. His small gray office has two or three chairs, a desk, a bookshelf, and a small standing lamp. Barbara is suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling she shouldn't be here. But she is used to that feeling. She grew up in a boys' prep school, which was both where she shouldn't have been and her home.

She hands her paper to the professor who, sitting down himself, asks her to sit down. He asks what she is planning to write about this summer. She tries to make a few sensible remarks about Balzac and Melville and what does it mean that they were influenced by Shakespeare. She is thinking of reading one play of Shakespeare's, probably "King Lear", to compare with Balzac's "Père Goriot" and Melville's "Moby Dick".

He keeps a straight face, for which she is grateful. He goes to get the list of conference hours from outside his office door. They arrange a time for her to come the following weeks. She leaves.

Elizabeth is waiting patiently in the car with her book. Barbara is very

glad to see her. She gets in the car. “Hi.” “Hi, Mom.”

Barbara drives the car around the library, around the Green and down into the main street. There is a parking place right in front of the bookstore. She’s in luck, this morning. “There’s a book I have to buy. Then let’s go get ice cream cones.”

This time, Barbara puts a dime in the meter. She and Elizabeth go into the bookstore together. It smells good. There are always people here and a kind of excitement.

Barbara already has a copy of “King Lear” in a collection, but she wants one that’s easy to carry around. A helpful attendant quickly brings her a copy. Barbara wonders if they stockpile “King Lear”. One time she had caught a glimpse of the stockroom, through a momentarily opened door, with copies of “Paradise Lost” stacked up to the ceiling. Barbara and Elizabeth join one of the cash register lines and listen to students grumble about how much books cost. She herself uses Jim’s faculty discount.

Outside again, the two of them make their way to the small restaurant that sells ice cream cones, the other side of two men’s clothing stores. It’s a good time to come here. During hectic lunch hours, people with only cones are not very welcome.

Elizabeth wants vanilla, please. Barbara asks for orange sherbet. She would prefer coffee ice cream, but she believes she is too fat. She has always believed it and is surprised, when she looks at pictures, to see she isn’t, or at least wasn’t.

They sit on stools at the counter where they can look out on the street, too busy licking to talk. Occasionally an acquaintance passes. People come in. People go out. The waitresses, in their too short, too tight, uniforms, keep busy. A busboy carries in a tray of clean glasses which he slides on to a shelf behind the counter.

Barbara finishes first. She reaches for a napkin from the black napkin-holder on the counter. A menu stands upright between the holder and a bottle of ketchup. She reaches for another napkin to put in front of Elizabeth, who lays the bottom quarter of her cone down on it announcing she’s stuffed. Barbara gives her another napkin and finishes the cone. She watches Elizabeth wipe her hands and her mouth. There is a smudge on her nose, now. “Here” says Barbara, pointing to the corresponding spot on her own nose. They giggle. Barbara says: “Okay, let’s go.” They leave the restaurant and walk back down the street to the car. On the way home, they decide to take a picnic to the pool.

Peter hasn’t come home yet. After making four peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, putting two of them in a bag with two apples and two cookies, and putting the other two on a plate on the kitchen table with another apple (Peter will find the cookies on his own), Barbara adds a note to the old one, telling Peter where they have gone this time.

They decide to drive to the pool, with their bathing suits, towels, sweaters and "King Lear". Behind the Veres' house, the road divides into three. They take the one to the left. The houses on this road are mostly small and new. After the houses is a turn-off that goes over a small bridge before joining another road. Not too much further, going right on that road, is a dirt road with just enough room for one car, through trees and into a meadow for parking. And then there is a footpath through more woods, filled with lights and shadows and with sounds of water flowing over a dam and shouts and laughter. Near the end of the path are two brown, wooden bathhouses, one for boys and one for girls. Barbara and Elizabeth go into the girls' house. Outside again, they follow the path, rough under their bare feet, and come out of the woods into the sun. To the left along a gentle hill are some swings, a few outdoor fireplaces and picnic tables, and the volley ball net where some boys are playing. Sometimes the ball rolls down the slope into the pool. It isn't really a pool, just a brook dammed up. Barbara and Elizabeth turn right and walk across the bridge over the top of the dam to the small beach of sand provided by the Lions' Club.

Elizabeth's friend Margaret is there. Barbara looks around for Margaret's mother who is not there. "I came alone!" says Margaret importantly. "On my bike. I brought my lunch."

Elizabeth's eyes open wide. So do Barbara's. When she was eight, had she ever gone anywhere alone? Sometimes she had gone somewhere with Richard, but alone? Margaret does seem glad to see Elizabeth. There are no other girls here right now, just a few people with little children and the boys playing volley ball. And the lifeguard. Barbara walks to the water's edge with the girls. The water is very cold. "I think I'll wait," says Barbara. She returns to where they left their towels and sits down.

Margaret has not been in yet. But soon both girls are splashing around. "Mom, look at me, watch this, are you watching?" "Look at me, Mrs. Vere." Barbara goes to the water's edge again. "You coming in, Mom?" "Maybe. No splashing me, promise?" "Cross my heart."

After quite a long time Barbara is in too. Then, after staying with the girls for a while, she slips under the rope marking off the section for children who haven't passed their swimming test yet. She swims slowly along the pool's edge. What freedom, now that Elizabeth is old enough not to need constant watching any more. Two birds chase each other through tree-tops. A squirrel peeks around one side and then the other of a stump. Barbara swims across, returning along the other side. Lilies, the ones in the sun, are starting to bloom. Out of the corner of her eye she sees the volley ball coming. One of the boys, racing behind, catches it just in time.

Barbara heads back to the beach, steering clear of the raft, with its divers and jumpers. She's getting cold. A while ago she saw the two girls leave the water and head for the bathhouses. They're coming back now, full

of giggles. "Mom, guess what!" The girls giggle some more, putting their hands over their mouths. "Don't tell her," says Margaret. "I'll whisper," says Elizabeth.

Barbara sits down on her towel, after drying a little, and puts on her sweater. Elizabeth bends down to whisper in her ear: "One of the boys made a BM, right in front of the girls' bathhouse!" The girls stand back to get the full effect of her response. How is she supposed to respond? She wants to, well, protect Elizabeth, who in fact looks not in the least in need of protection. So Barbara giggles too and says: "Why, the naughty boy!"

The girls settle down on their towels beside her and begin to look for sandwiches. After lunch, Barbara collects papers and apple cores to throw into the trash barrel near the picnic tables. "I think I'll get dressed. Then I'll go over by that tree," she says, pointing. "Watch your step, Mom." The girls start to giggle again, looking at the boys who are all on the raft now.

On her way back from the bathhouse, Barbara decides to kick the BM off the path. In several pieces, it begins to be part of the earth and last year's dried leaves, among the fresh green shoots. She wanders over to "her" tree and spreads her suit and towel out on the grass to dry. She sits down to read the first act of "King Lear". She can't get comfortable. She gets up and walks over to sit at one of the picnic tables. That's better.

Settled, she looks up to try to catch Elizabeth's eye, to show her where she has moved. A baby on the beach has allowed the girls to play with him, to dig in the sand for him, to bury his toes, to fill his pail with water from the pool. Barbara waves whenever Elizabeth seems to look in her direction.

Some of the boys leave the raft to play volley ball again. Barbara wonders what Peter is doing. She is training herself not to worry about him. There are boys here younger than Peter. She watches one of them, moved by his grace and confidence.

This time, when she waves Elizabeth waves back. Barbara returns to "King Lear". She reads, through the shouts and laughter and water falling over the dam and the sun and shade and the grass and flowers. Through the afternoon she reads, half dreaming. It is a different play from what she had expected. She begins to wonder what she had expected. She will have to read the play again. She'd also better forget about Melville and Balzac.

"Mom? Mummy?" Elizabeth and Margaret are standing by the table. They are both dressed. "Margaret has to go home. Let's go home too. Mom, can Mags come over tomorrow, at my house?" "I can ride my bike, Mrs. Vere." "Please Mom, please?" "Why, sure. And, Margaret, bring your suit. Then, if you'd like, you can go swimming together after lunch." "By ourselves?" says Elizabeth. Then she and Margaret jump up and down, hug each other, and, holding hands, spin around. "I'll have to ask my mother," says Margaret. "I'll call you tonight, Bettso. G'bye."

Margaret races off to her bike, in the rack at the top of the path. Bar-

bara collects her suit and towel, almost dry now. “Let’s put your things in my towel.” Elizabeth hands over her wet suit and towel. She had gone swimming again. She shivers and puts on her sweater. Her lips are blue. Barbara decides not to say anything. Elizabeth will be going swimming alone and must learn for herself not to swim too long.

The sun has dropped behind the trees. But at home, the air is still bright and warm. Barbara hangs the wet things on the line next to the house before going in. Peter, in the kitchen eating a cookie, is covered with mud and is about to go out again. “We’re building a dam behind Tim’s house. Mom, can I take the rest of these?”, meaning the cookies. Then he says: “Elizabeth, you can come too.”

They’re gone.

Tim lives in the first house around the corner. After a year of being shy, Tim and Peter are finally becoming friends. Tim’s sister is older than Elizabeth, but today Elizabeth too is being included.

Barbara feeds the cat and thinks about supper. First she had better make some more cookies, though.

Chapter 10

Woodchucks

The following morning, right after breakfast Peter and Tim go off on their bikes. Margaret arrives shortly afterwards. She and Elizabeth decide to play dress-up. They go upstairs.

Barbara sits down at the kitchen table with a second cup of coffee, listening to the girls chatter. An old-fashioned trunk had been left in the house. Barbara had cleaned it and had filled it with unused, outgrown, and rummage-sale clothes. She had put the trunk under the window in the upstairs hall, an area almost as large as the bedrooms themselves. There was a full-length mirror on one of the walls.

Suddenly Barbara realizes she has time to herself, unexpected, unplanned for, right now. She gets up from the table and goes to the foot of the stairs. “Elizabeth? I’m going out to the barn, okay?” “Okay,” Elizabeth calls back. Where would they be without “okay”? Barbara finds “King Lear” and a pencil and paper. Then she pulls the card table out from behind the big living-room chair. If she unlatches the screen door first, maybe she can also take the coffee.

Success. She lets the door slam behind her and manages to carry everything to the barn. Leaning the table against the barn wall and putting the coffee cup on the ground, she slides open one of the barn doors.

The barn is cool and silent, still smelling of hay, though its days of that kind are over. A year ago last spring the stalls and lofts had been removed. A new floor was put in, replacing weakened, rotting boards. Three-quarters of the way back was the stage, built of square sections that fit together, along with a set of stairs and a ramp. Yellow “wings” and yellow acoustical “clouds” were installed around and above the stage.

Barbara walks behind the stage and slides open the doors in back. The sun comes in at an angle. The view is south-east through wild plum trees. A small grass path leads across a meadow to several acres of bird-filled swamp. Beyond are some hills.

She returns to the front of the barn for the card table and coffee. If

using the back of the barn as a study works, she will leave the card table out here. She sets the table up by the open door, on the shady side so there won't be a glare. And she gets one of the yellow canvas chairs. The Veres had bought eighty yellow canvas chairs for audiences and then forty more. And then they had bought fold-up wooden ones the college was trying to get rid of to replace with metal ones.

She sits down. Silence. Absolute silence. The blue of the sky seems to intensify in the silence. Nothing moves. Then the top branches of a willow at the end of the meadow begin responding to a breeze. A fly by the sunny edge of the barn door starts to buzz. Quietly some birds begin conversing among themselves. Is this what it's like when no people are around? How disruptive people must be. She hasn't worried about that, not since she'd been little and had worried about how many ants she might be killing each time she took a step. There is a light sweet smell in the air, not hay. Perhaps it comes from the old and tangled plum trees, though their spring blossoms have long since vanished into the ground.

She hears a small scrabbling noise. Does she imagine it? No, there it is again, there, in that pile of rocks near, or part of maybe, the barn's foundation. Up through the rocks comes a little nose, two bright eyes, two little paws. Up comes the rest of it. A rat? No tail. It looks like a prairie dog. There are no prairie dogs in New England. It moves away from the rocks to the green path, stopping a moment to sniff some buttercups. Along comes a white butterfly. It circles the little animal's head, flip, flip, the sun on its wings. Slowly the two make their way down the path and disappear behind the plum trees.

Barbara stretches and then reaches for "King Lear". She opens the book. In less than a week, she must have four or five pages ready to hand in. The words blur. Once she had heard a student say: "I wrote three papers last night." Her own papers have become a three-step process. First she writes blindly, pretending to have a point. Then, reading over what she has written, she usually manages to find one. She re-writes. Finally she edits that into the paper she hands in. Sometimes the point changes, or vanishes. Twenty-five years ago she would have tried to begin again, too late, ending with nothing. But the American Literature professor would even encourage what he called "exploratory papers."

To work. This may be the only time she'll have, weekdays being unpredictable, weekends committed to concerts. She must, she has to, begin writing. Re-reading "King Lear" first will not be possible. A comparison of Balzac, Melville and Shakespeare, even over the whole summer, will truly not be possible. She closes the book and holds it in her hand. What to write. She re-opens the book randomly and reads:

.....take physic pomp:

Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.

The word “superflux” conjures up the image of the BM in front of the girls’ bathhouse. Barbara smiles.

The last author she had read, in the French class, was Robbe-Grillet, whom she had never heard of. His “La Jalousie” was almost more like a play, a movie, than a novel, each detail presented as if the reader were a participant, part of the action, the lead actor. Should she pretend the dramatic form in common makes a comparison possible?

The French course had begun with Flaubert’s “Madam Bovary”. Barbara, fresh from “The Scarlet Letter”, had made a mental note at that time to re-read “Anna Karenina” too, someday. Plunging in, Barbara writes: “I expected a culture shock, shifting from Robbe-Grillet’s twentieth century tropical banana plantation to Shakespeare’s stormy coast of England. I expected a shock last spring too, shifting from American to French nineteenth century fiction.”

Barbara sits back, sips coffee, now cold, and looks out over the plum trees. As a matter of fact, none of what she has been reading this year has been what she would call a culture shock. What had she expected. anyway, to be in these books that she had heard about all her life and, for the most part, had never read?

Flaubert wrote: “Madame Bovary, c’est moi.” Could Hawthorne have written: “Hester Prynne, that’s me”? Emma and Hester. What about Charles and Dimmesdale, Binet and Chillingworth? For Flaubert, weren’t Binet and Charles “moi” too? Moi the writer? And maybe moi the reader too. Barbara begins writing again.

Recently she had begun to wonder why she responded the way she did, not just to book-people but to the people around her as well. Could it be that she responded to them only as reflections of parts of herself? And, for the people around her, was she only a reflection of a part of themselves?

Barbara writes on. “All people are both a “moi” and a symbol. I believe no one realizes the extent to which each one of us deals with each other as a symbol of a part of ourself - perhaps even only. Perhaps that is the only way possible.”

Hmm. Barbara sits back once more. After a moment, finishing the cold coffee, she decides to think about form. “I understand form to be that which is intellectually coherent.” Barbara looks over what she has written so far and suppresses a giggle.

The girls have come outside to play on the swing. Barbara can hear them laughing. She gets up and wanders to the front barn door. She watches the girls take turns swinging on the swing under one of the maple trees and also,

after twisting the swing around on its ropes, twirling as the swing unwinds.

When Elizabeth sees Barbara she asks: "Mom, can we have something to eat?" "I think there are still some popsicles in the freezer." The girls disappear into the house. Barbara goes back to work. Taking up her pencil, with great deliberation she writes: "Mathematics is intellectually coherent. Art is intellectually coherent and can be seen. Music is intellectually coherent and can be heard. Is form enriched or cheapened by the senses?"

Barbara stops. She has become aware of the sound of an airplane. It's a while before she can see it, a dot in the sky over the hills. She remembers, long ago, listening for airplanes from the garage roof with her friend Anna. Idly she wonders if intensity of experience varies with distance. Then she wonders if the experience of art, dependent on sight, is less or more intense than the experience of music, dependent on hearing.

What sense, what senses, does literature appeal to? Language - not everyone has the same language. Does universality, or lack of it, matter in some way? A popsicle would sure taste good. But with grim determination Barbara writes on.

"What I hope to do, in my papers this summer, is to make a study of as many of the characters as I can, both singly and in groups, in Shakespeare's play 'King Lear', in an expression through my "moi" of Shakespeare's expression through his." There. That can be the ending. Meanwhile she will try to work out some links.

A small wind comes around the corner of the barn door and starts blowing papers off the table. As Barbara grabs for them, she hears the girls again, this time running into the barn. Coming around the corner of the stage, Elizabeth says breathlessly: "Mrs. Davidson telephoned. She has just caught another woodchuck in her have-a-heart trap and wants me to come see it before she takes it away." "Oh! Wait a second, I want to come too." Barbara grabs for the papers again and puts "King Lear" and the empty coffee cup on top of them. The Davidsons live next door. Barbara hears a car drive off. She says: "Come on. Let's go this way."

A bridge of two boards leads across the small gully between the back of the barn and the plum trees. Single file, the three of them walk down the boards, over the grassy path and around the plum trees. Peggy Davidson and her two little boys are standing at the edge of their driveway.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Peggy says. "Mike had to leave right away. He had errands that couldn't wait and he was going right by where we left the other woodchucks, near the river. Would you believe five? A mother and four babies, that's got to be all! Come look at what they have done to my garden!"

As they turn toward the garden, Barbara describes her animal visitor of earlier that morning. "Barbara Vere, you're not going to stand there and tell me you don't know what a woodchuck looks like? Under the barn? Can

we go see?"

They all turn around and walk the rest of the way around the plum trees and between a lilac and the elm which shades what used to be a horse-trough, and then over to the long side door to the lower part of the barn. Barbara slides it open. Underneath the barn, in the dim light they walk over dusty dirt full of old leaves, leftover hay, and ancient pieces of horse and cow manure to where there might be more woodchucks. There aren't any, or signs of any. Peggy looks around, her eyes getting used to the light. "Golly, this is great down here. From outside, it just doesn't look quite so - big."

They return into the sunshine, sliding the door shut behind them. On the way back to the garden, Peggy says: "Barbara, I've got a confession. Last fall I stole some plums. I couldn't stand all those plums going to waste. They make great jelly. Next fall, I'll make you some too." "Okay!"

They go into the garden and walk along the paths there. The children squat down to look at the empty-package pictures over sticks to find out what's sprouting. The lettuce is gone, every bit of it, but Peggy says she has lots more seeds and that lettuce grows fast.

When it is time to go, Peggy says: "Well, I'm sorry you didn't get to see the woodchuck. Maybe there'll be another, I hope not."

Barbara and the girls return the way they came, around the plum trees, over the grassy path, up the little bridge and through the back barn door. Barbara slides the door shut. She gives Margaret the coffee cup and Elizabeth the book and papers to take into the house. After folding up the card table, she leans it against a wall. She returns the yellow chair to its place with the others (under a plastic cover in case of pigeons).

When she gets back to the house, before starting lunch Barbara looks up "woodchuck" in the encyclopedia a salesman had persuaded her to buy when Peter was born. Yup. There's even a picture.

Chapter 11

King Lear

Barbara parks the car next to the library. She has managed, just barely, to put together almost four pages of expository writing entitled “Preface”. The typed words, looking more sensible than they had when hand-written, are far from nailing down her flights of fancy. But they have helped. More time would not have made much difference.

The rain, which had really poured down yesterday, has eased into a misty drizzle. Last night Margaret telephoned to see if Elizabeth could come spend the day at her house. Peter is home watching TV.

How long will the conference last? Barbara puts a dime in the meter. She can go look at the new-books shelf in the main library if there is extra time, or go say hello to her friend who works in reference. She enters the English department wing and climbs to the upstairs floor. The secretary says the person ahead of her is still conferring, so Barbara waits in the large, dark room. Shelves of books, behind grills, line the walls. On a table are magazines she has never heard of.

The student ahead of her comes into the room from the corridor, the student who had looked so sadly out the window last week. He says, hello, she’s next. He has cheered up.

In the office she says hello and sits down, wondering how this is going to work. The professor returns the sample paper she had left with him. He smiles and says: “I would like to have seen the comments on it.” He hands her a white note-card on which he has written some ideas for her to think about while he reads through what she has brought in today.

She is a little unnerved by having something she has written being read in her presence. She watches the pencil he is holding move down the margin of the first page, move into a line to draw an arrow, then into another for brackets, and into a third to underline.

She looks down at the note-card. “Mrs. Vere,” it begins. He has written out two quotations, one from Balzac and one from Shakespeare, about evasions. She is puzzled until she remembers that the paper she had given him

last week had ended with a statement about evasions in American literature.

“Oh,” he says: “You’re going to write just on ‘King Lear’, then?” just as she also remembers he doesn’t know she had changed her mind about Balzac and Melville. Bowing his head, after a moment he reaches for a piece of paper on his desk. “Well,” he says, speaking slowly: “First you will need a good edition of the play.” He writes and then hands the piece of paper to her. “This is the best at the moment, I think.” He gathers her papers to return to her. “I didn’t make many comments.”

Barbara looks at the markings on the first page. She is impressed, even startled, by their aptness. It is still a little unexpected to realize she is being taken seriously. On the second page there is only one faint mark. She guesses he may have liked that. Then no more. Had she lost him? She looks up doubtfully.

“I - unless you have questions? - think that will be all, then.” Somehow he manages to convey encouragement. At least he makes it possible for her to think so. She gets up to leave, saying “Thank you.”

There is time to walk to the bookstore for another “King Lear”, through the rain.

On the way home, Barbara makes a stop at the General Store. Mrs. Benton, one of the town’s old ladies, stands by the entrance, waiting for someone to talk to. Mrs. Benton can talk almost without taking a breath. She and Barbara enter the store together. People smile sympathetically at Barbara and keep their distance. She and Mrs. Benton get shopping carts, Mrs. Benton deciding to pull hers instead of pushing it, so she can walk right next to Barbara down the narrow aisle.

Mrs. Benton wants to talk about a play she saw at the Women’s Club. She is very upset about the way the three people in the play acted. Only half listening, then suddenly listening more carefully, Barbara begins to realize Mrs. Benton is not distinguishing between the three as they were in the play and the three as they are in the community. How strange. This could lead to problems.

Would Mrs. Benton ever try to interfere in a play? - not that she interferes in real life, unless this waylaying of people to talk to could be called interfering. Barbara and Mrs. Benton are beginning to block traffic. Smiling apologetically, Barbara eases into the line at the meat counter. Still talking, Mrs. Benton turns to push her empty cart back down the aisle they have just come.

When Barbara gets home, she finds a note from Peter on the kitchen table. He and Tim are working on the dam, again. But - it’s raining. Oh well, it is so warm he won’t get cold. He will be a mess. At least at last he is letting her know where he is.

Barbara puts away the groceries and decides to go out to the barn, her study, leaving a note for Peter, taking with her the new edition of “King

Lear” and an apple. In the damp air of the barn, the musty hay smell, usually hardly noticeable, is definitely present. Barbara glances at the light under the piano, wondering if it is keeping the piano dry enough.

She settles down with her book. It’s a lot fatter than the first one she bought. She flips through it: two prefaces and an introduction: in the back, one, two... good lord, seven appendices and additional notes. She skims the first preface, something about problems of authoritative texts. She skips the second preface and also the introduction, turning to the beginning of the play. There are about ten lines of play to forty lines of notes.

She looks out at the plum trees for a moment, before glancing over the notes. Holinshed? She looks for other names. Kittredge. She has heard of him. She had spent summers on Cape Cod when she was little, and his grandchildren had been in the sailboat races, which had impressed her parents. Duthie? Barbara gives up and returns to the text.

“I thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.” Affected? In case of doubt just read faster and if possible aloud, said Gertrude Stein somewhere. So Barbara reads faster and aloud until she gets to the word “whoreson”. She doesn’t remember this. She must have gone to sleep, reading at the pool the other day.

The division of the kingdom - she does remember that. Maybe, somehow, she already knew that, and also about the mad king. He doesn’t sound too mad. Cordelia is the good daughter, though sort of boring.

Goneril is one of the two bad daughters. So why is her speech, about her love, so beautiful. Barbara re-reads it.

Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e’er loved, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

Is putting such feelings into words suspect?

France, who turns out to be a person, comes to Cordelia’s rescue. On to Scene II. The first page has only five lines of text, the rest notes. Barbara, sighing, looks out at the rain. She reaches for the apple and takes a bite before reading on. Gloucester couldn’t possibly be so gullible.

“Fa, sol, la, mi,” sings Edmund, Gloucester’s bad son. Mi? Shouldn’t that be ti? Maybe there is a footnote. Yes, “the diabolical progression.” So mi must be a misprint. But - did ti even exist in Shakespeare’s time? She will have to look that up.

She smiles to herself. Aha. She can too get caught up in this sort of thing. She can almost imagine wanting to see some of those quartos and

folios written about in the first preface. (One day, she would turn the soft pages of a quarto to the place and discover Edmund's song wasn't even there.)

Goneril says, about her father, "He sets us all at odds." Barbara can certainly understand about that. A mathematician friend of theirs, who had, in fact, eventually committed suicide, had set them all at odds. Poor old Goneril, though she shouldn't be feeling sorry for Goneril.

At the top of the next page Lear says: "Let me not stay a jot for dinner: go, get it ready."

Suddenly, Barbara is transfixed, by that single line. Instead she hears their friend, shouting at her to bring him his breakfast. And she made scrambled eggs, the fastest breakfast possible. He kept shouting. Jim tried to quiet him for the sake of the children, who had come to see what was going on even though it was still so early morning. He shouted at the children, then.

She remembers the rest, leaving her own house, with the children. Never again would she take home for granted. Later that morning, after the children were in school, she returned to find Jim crumpled in a chair in the living room, his friend gone. There had been doctors, police.... One doctor was still there. Jim got up and left, saying he was going to the office. Barbara went into the dining room where the doctor was talking with their friend's wife, who was wearing dark glasses.

The doctor left. Barbara suggested going outside, to sit on the front stoop in the sun together. A kind, puzzled neighbor came by and then left again when Barbara shook her head.

Slowly the plum trees and the rain come back into focus. Barbara discovers tears on the page in front of her. She wipes at them. Then, shaking a little, she gets up and decides to go into the house to warm up some coffee.

While the coffee is heating, she remembers Mrs. Benton. Mrs. Benton is not the only one to get mixed up in plays. Barbara wonders, then, if she will be like Mrs. Benton someday. She would rather be like tiny Miss Lane who lives near the Beauty Shop, always thinking she can help. Betsy, the town librarian, so big she almost fills the one-room library all by herself, tells about the day old Mrs. Brackett tried to cross the street to the Beauty Shop in a howling wind. Out came Miss Lane to help her. Betsy, getting out of her jeep, had been able to reach the two of them just in time to keep them both from blowing away.

Barbara pours coffee into her cup and then holds the cup in her hands, feeling the warmth. She bends her head over for the smell. How good coffee is. She returns to the barn. The rain is about to stop. Its sound, soaking into the ground, is louder than the drops.

The card table and the yellow chair are still there, at the back of the barn, and the book and the apple core. Barbara sits back down, holding her

coffee, sipping. Looking at the book, she reaches to turn the page back to Goneril's speech about how Lear "sets us all at odds."

Maybe Lear's only force others to see how "at odds" they really are. Barbara picks up the apple core and gives it a toss. And she reads the play through to the end, knowing now she will read it again and again.

Peter and Tim come into the barn to shoot baskets but come around back first to say Hi. "Hi," she says too. "Did you get wet?" "Yup," says Peter. He has changed his pants and put on his old sneakers. As if drawn by a magnet, all eyes focus on the holes in his sneakers. He says: "They'll be okay. Come on, Tim."

They go, dribbling the ball back and forth between them. Barbara listens to the sound of the ball hitting the backboard, the rim, bouncing to the floor, eventually swishing through the basket. She smiles to herself, going back to work. After all, she's so glad Peter is learning it's okay to put on old sneakers and to get wet and muddy.

Barbara's master plan, outlined in her Preface, is "to make a study of as many of the characters as I can, both singly and in groups...." First the daughters. Then the sons. Next, King Lear, "singly". The last two papers will be respectively, on what Shakespeare is saying in the play and on what she thinks of what he is saying. She hopes.

This week should be an easy one, as far as the barn is concerned. The pianist for Saturday night's concert is an old hand at this sort of thing. He said he knew the piano well enough and didn't need practice time on it. And the exhibit is to be of sketches by a retired drama professor, who said he'd be over Saturday morning, at 10:00. He thought he'd just line the sketches up, along the ledge that went around the barn at about shoulder level. He said he'd collect the sketches right after the concert.

"Mom, okay if Tim and I make peanut butter sandwiches?" Peter has come around again, leaving Tim shooting baskets. "Oh sure. There are some apples, too, and I bought ice cream bars." It's on the tip of her tongue to suggest he bring her a sandwich, but better quit while she's ahead - Peter and Tim making their own. She isn't really hungry. What time is it, anyway? Late! Peter must have been sort of waiting. Perhaps the mail has come - no, Barbara. First, get a little more done on your paper.

There are going to be several problems. The biggest one is that the play, incredibly, seems to be about something she hasn't wanted to, hasn't dared to, think about. Madness. It is not mentioned much - jokingly, sometimes. It's not - real.

It has been, this morning. And it had been, that other morning. After that other morning, with their friend in and out of hospitals, they had tried to continue as if nothing had happened. For her, pretending was so hard that, the winter before they moved across the river, seeking advice, she had gone to talk with a psychiatrist, one of the many who knew their friend. She

was asked why she was concerned, the focus shifting to her, as if she were the mad one.

In mid-March, their friend vanished, after he had had dinner at their house. Barbara told the psychiatrist she believed their friend had killed himself, because he had walked off in a funny way. The psychiatrist kept setting up weekly appointments, though she said she wanted to stop since it was too late. About mid-May, a student from the college, walking in the woods, found their friend's body. Two weeks later the Veres moved across the river. And now, here she is, confronted with a play that deals with madness.

She has been using the white note-card as a bookmark, the card with the quotes from Balzac and Shakespeare on it about evasions. "Admirable evasion of whoremaster man." Edmund says that. Barbara wonders if Shakespeare ever worried about his own ability to evade evasions. Might there even be a point to evasions?

She looks out through the plum trees to the meadow, which is going to need mowing before the next concert. She hears Peggy's little boys who have come out to splash in puddles, no doubt wearing their new yellow boots. The world goes on, with a life of its own, here and in the play too. In the play, it is patience that occasionally makes the inevitable tolerable. (Does patience mean self-control?) Duty even makes life pleasant, sometimes. And love? (What happened, in the play, to the man called France?) Duty seems more important than love, although the word "duty" seems to have a deeper meaning than she has so far attributed to it.

The trouble with Cordelia is she seems so self-effacing. She picks a strange time to be truthful. And everyone is so surprised: does she usually allow others to make up what they think she is like? Of course, that can be hard to avoid. And even if Cordelia's motivation is concern about her father and his illusions, isn't that pride, an unrealistic pride, in her own effectiveness? She is also self-destructive. She would go into the storm herself rather than send her father into it. She says so. Maybe she really would. Barbara is beginning to wonder if, admiring Goneril, doubting Cordelia, she isn't just being perverse.

The sun is breaking through. But a cool breeze makes her wish she had brought a sweater. She'd better quit. Anyway, she's hungry now. And perhaps the mail has come.

Chapter 12

The Gallery

Once again Barbara parks beside the library, a little early this time. Once more, she is alone. Elizabeth and Margaret have discovered the summer recreation program. They not only like it, they “just love it” and go every day. Peter still watches TV, but he and Tim have more and more projects.

Last week had turned into nearly an entire week of freedom. Barbara had had time not just for getting her paper done but for doing it as well as she could. She is looking forward to this morning’s conference.

Saturday’s concert had been the best yet, in spite of the sudden down-pour which happened just as the pianist was going from the house to the barn. The rain had soaked his white summer jacket. But he had brought another in his car. He told Jim he always carried an extra jacket, ever since he had given concerts in the orient where sudden rains happened all the time.

The retired drama professor’s sketches, of costumes and sets for the plays he had directed, rich in memories for many, came close to upstaging the concert. At the end of the evening, people reminded each other they must leave, even as they were saying “wait, wait” when the professor began taking down the sketches.

Barbara smiles to herself as she gets out of the car. She looks up at the sky, bluer than ever above the trees around the library. On the stairs she meets one of the more - well, reserved professors. Does she imagine, not exactly a smile, no, but a glance of recognition? Too late for a tentative smile in return.

This time she can go right in to the office. The sad student is either not coming or has changed his time. The professor turns from his work when she appears at the open door. She feels not unwelcome.

This time they go through the paper together. He talks as he circles and underlines. She begins to understand what she has been trying to say. Smiling, he circles the word “evade” and draws a line from the word to her statement, two lines further down, that “It is a man’s world.” He seems to

understand what she means when she explains, in the following sentence, that “Goneril, Regan and Cordelia are the kinds of women that can survive in that kind of world, at least until the king himself goes mad.” But he doesn’t erase his circle or the connecting line.

Where she says Goneril and Regan are attracted to Edmund because he is the most Lear-like of the men in the play, he hesitates, and then says: “I think you might use more quotes.”

She hasn’t used any quotes, because she doesn’t know how, for plays. “How - um - is there a right way to footnote quotes from a play?” He looks at her in a curious way. Is he surprised she doesn’t know? Maybe he doesn’t believe she doesn’t know. There is so much she doesn’t know, not just about technicalities, but about ideas that must be so much a part of his work he takes them for granted. Talking mostly with his colleagues, or writing for them, perhaps he doesn’t remember anymore what he knows.

Shuffling through her papers, he pulls out the title page which has room enough for him to write: “Oh, reason not the need.” Under “need,” he puts: II,iii,198. He says: “That’s probably not quite right, but anyway this is how you footnote. And,” he looks at her like a fellow conspirator, “any paper on Shakespeare reads better with many quotes.”

Further on, he puts a large X in the margin next to her statement that Cordelia holds her own by “submitting, obeying, rather than by dominating.” The X is the only point-blank statement he makes, if it could be called a statement. They do not discuss it.

She has ended her paper with a cooking metaphor, comparing Lear to the lid on a pot which keeps Goneril and Regan from boiling over and Cordelia from sticking to the bottom. As he crosses out a final adjective so the paper ends strongly with a verb, he begins to laugh.

She has never made anyone laugh. She’s even a little frightened, not by the laugh but by the fact she caused it. He gives her back her paper, and she gets up to go. He gets up too, as she walks out the door saying thank you.

Barbara decides to go over to the main library to say hello to her friend there. “Oh Barbara, how nice to see you! Have you got time for lunch?” As a matter of fact, she has. She uses her friend’s phone to call Peter, who is not home. Maybe he needs to become aware of her independence as well as the other way around. “I’d better move the car,” Barbara says. “I’ll be right back.” “Fine. See you soon.”

When she returns to the library, Barbara decides to try again to get hold of Peter. This time, he’s home. She is shocked at her relief. It will be a while before she is independent.

She and her friend decide, since it is such a nice day, to go to the snack bar in the arts building across the Green. There they can carry their lunch outside. They can sit, with their backs against the brick wall, on the patio

beside the Green Room of the theater.

The summer theater season is in full swing. Today there's matinee. Some of the actors come outside, costumed, in high spirits. One of them has a flute. He begins to play and the rest start dancing on the grass, joined by two or three dogs and some paper napkins caught up in a breeze.

Barbara and her friend talk about their mother-in-laws. The time of annual visits is approaching for both. "I get along with her myself pretty well," says Barbara's friend. "What's hard is getting along with the two of them together," speaking of mother and son. "They just barely get along with each other, maybe only because I'm there. I feel they use me as, well, I guess I feel they just use me."

"You know, Jim - all six feet two of him - still can't stand up to his mother, and she's so - little!" "Mm. By the way, when's she coming?" "Mid-August. She came in September last year, and it was too cold, and there was ragweed - her asthma. This year, she'll be around for a couple of barn concerts. She doesn't approve of them or something." "How're you going to fit in Canasta?"

They laugh. But Barbara's heart sinks. And the children would so love to play Canasta with Grandma, but only Barbara will do. At night, with Jim, it has to be the three of them without the children. Maybe this summer, the children, a year older, will begin to be acceptable.

Does Jim's mother like the children? Sometimes Barbara has the odd feeling she is jealous of them. And yet, in letters, she often sends along a stick of gum or a balloon, which they love. Barbara can't talk about these things with her friend, who has no children.

"How's the course going? Haven't seen you since it started." "Oh, great. I'm writing on 'King Lear'." "Golly! I haven't read that for ages. Maybe I will, now wouldn't that be something!" She glances at her watch. "I'm afraid I have to be getting back."

They stand up, throw their cups, plates and napkins into a trash can and return into the arts building. Barbara says: "Well, as long as I'm here, I might as well take a look at the new exhibit." "You mean you haven't seen it yet? Have fun! I stuck my nose in the door and went right back out again. You know how I feel about modern artists, ditto the composers. I've even decided they can have the concerts without me, this summer. Anyhow, I've got the barn. Wasn't last week wonderful? Barbara, you can't imagine what that barn has come to mean to all of us!"

Barbara smiles, not grimly she hopes. At the door of the gallery, they say good-bye. "This was fun. Stop by again, Barbara. Please." "I will."

Barbara waves and, pulling open the door, enters the gallery. After several years, she has finally registered the fact that the solid door-handles in the arts building should be pushed, the rest pulled. Now she can watch others push when they should pull, pull when they should push, and feel

superior.

Barbara smiles at the receptionist, who sits behind a desk by the gallery door. She suspects the receptionist watches people push and pull too.

Then she looks around. Wow. Circling the gallery, she wonders, not for the first time, what the receptionist, stuck here day after day, must think of these exhibits. She is an attractive, nicely dressed, gray-haired woman. Last fall, committees from the local churches wrote to the newspaper complaining about one exhibit.

Barbara trusts, or at least tries to, that gallery choices, in some way at least, transcend the mockery and insult manifest here. She also continues going to the concerts, still part of the dwindling audiences. At least last year's season did end with a symphony by Stravinsky, and she found she now really did like that. Her ears must be stretching.

She is embarrassed by this exhibit. She's blushing. A hot flash maybe? No, she has always blushed. She probably really does have more hang-ups than most people. Growing up in a boys' school might have done it. At night, the boys used to sneak out of their dorms to come to her window, hoping to see her without any clothes on. Every night she undressed in her dark closet with all the lights out, always afraid.

Halfway around the gallery, Barbara stops in front of a naked lady, red and black and crooked, and as if someone had taken a bite out of her neck. And she starts to wonder why had the boys kept coming to her window? They could hardly have actually seen anything, except perhaps before she discovered they were out there, at the hardly ripe old age of twelve. It probably had more to do with themselves and each other than with her. That might just be the way boys are. Barbara begins to remember her brother's secret books, suddenly knowing what kind of books they must have been. And, oh gosh, Peter is about as old as those boys were.... So. Well then, maybe Peter had better have more privacy, a place where she and Elizabeth don't go.

Barbara moves on around the gallery, not really looking any more. Elizabeth is beginning to grumble about not having a big enough closet for her clothes. She might be willing to move into Peter's room, which has a closet almost as big as a small room, with a window even. And Peter could move into their room, hers and Jim's, which connects with a long shed over the garage. A little window at the end of the shed looks out over the meadow. What a perfect place for Peter.

Ah yes, and then she and Jim could move into Elizabeth's room, Barbara's own favorite, with its big old-fashioned windows and window-seats. They could continue using the closet in the extra room which had once been a ballroom, with springs under the wide floorboards someone said. The Grange had held meetings there in the late 1800's. Now the Veres use it for ping-pong. Jim might possibly object to being further from the bathroom,

so she'll have to check with him before suggesting all this to the children.

But - did girls, girls without hang-ups, want secret books too? Did - would Elizabeth? Barbara remembers Jim's story about Elizabeth at the dump. They had found an old board with four-letter words on it. Elizabeth, then six and having only fairly recently learned to read, had looked up at Jim with her big blue eyes and had said: "Daddy, I thought grown-ups weren't supposed to know those words." Then again, Barbara is not so sure how hung up she herself is, really. She's sufficiently unhung to have married and to have had two children. That should count for something. How could anyone possibly have hang-ups after that. On the other hand, a friend of hers had recently given birth, at home with her husband and two small daughters watching. The friend explained: "The girls' grandmother just died. We expect them to understand death. They should understand birth, too." The four-year old had fainted. Barbara has become less sure that she herself understands either birth or death.

She returns to the red and black lady. Why did the lady have a bite out of her neck? Why is she herself looking at the lady, or rather why does the person in charge of the gallery exhibitions think the lady deserves looking at? The artist is a he, isn't he? - yes. So what's wrong, here? This picture can't possibly be something transformed by art into beauty. She tries, and fails, to turn the picture into an abstract of shapes and colors. The only feeling she gets, other than hate, is that the artist had wanted more than what was given, more than, maybe, just sex, something like comfort, as in not too little and not too much. The two get confused, sometimes, sex and comfort, probably the reason why sanctions and taboos exist, to keep comfort and sex separate, particularly within families.

Are sex and comfort inextricably bound? Is an individual's need for comfort finally only part of the mechanism for the survival of humanity in general? Could taboos be just about all that makes an individual life possible?

Well then, maybe weak comfort-givers are more, somehow, individual than powerful sex-takers. Barbara remembers having read somewhere the odd fact that the survivors of Auschwitz seem to have been the comforters. Individually, could comforters also be survivors?

Shakespeare's powerful Goneril and Regan destroy each other. But Cordelia doesn't exactly survive. Maybe nothing works for more than a while. Possibly Cordelia could be guiding her father into the next world or something, but Shakespeare is so very this world. Cordelia: the name might be the feminine equivalent of Coeur de Lion. Barbara must indeed be wrong about Cordelia being submissive.

Time to go home. This afternoon may be the only chance she has to work on next week's paper. It's going to be a rough week in the barn. Barbara takes one more look at the red and black lady. She turns. Then she watches

as a man, talking with a friend, pulls at the gallery door. From inside, the door should be pushed. It even says so. PUSH. The conversation stops as the man works this out.

Feeling superior is fun. She smiles with the receptionist and, saying good-bye, leaves the gallery.

Chapter 13

Not Getting in the Way

That next week was even worse than Barbara had anticipated. Later, when she re-read the paper she had thrown together the morning itself of her next conference, on Gloucester's sons, she was startled by the sarcasms, the "good Edgar"s and "bad Edmund"s, a kind of rage between the lines.

Arriving home from the gallery, Barbara had found Elizabeth weeping on the sofa in the TV room, hardly able to say through her tears she had left the recreation program with a just awful stomach ache. Peter hadn't known how to find Barbara. He had done his best for Elizabeth, giving her ginger ale. He'd been frightened.

Elizabeth was running a fever. She had climbed into Barbara's lap and had gone to sleep in her arms. No one else caught whatever it was Elizabeth had. But the week was over before Elizabeth felt well again.

It was the perfect time to try changing rooms. Peter, happy with the thought of access to the shed, was even happier about being the one closest to the bathroom. Jim was won over by poor old Elizabeth's delight at the very idea of inheriting Peter's room. Inheriting Peter's room meant, not just a bigger closet, but also the great bed in that room, with its massive head-and-foot boards. The bed had been left in the house and in that room because of its size. Elizabeth pointed out that now she would have room for every single one of her "friends", her stuffed animals. Suddenly she confessed how afraid she always was of alligators who live under beds. Now she would never have to be afraid of them again, protected by all her friends.

And Barbara couldn't have been happier with their own new room, hers and Jim's. It was full of light. Morning sun came in through the northeast windows, through the maples. Afternoons, the sun streamed in through the windows on the northwest, through more maples. There was an almost matching sun-color in the carpet and in the pillows of the window seats and in the roses of the wallpaper. The dressing table with its three-way mirror, the small armoire-type closet, and the bookshelf were all painted moss-green. The painting, on the wood above the mantle, was mostly moss-green too.

Of four trees and some hills, it might have been the work of an American itinerant painter of the late 1700s, even possibly the view from the northeast windows before the barn was built.

Elizabeth supervised the move, seated on the trunk in the hallway and wrapped in a blanket. Moving, even just from one room to another, was real work. The next morning, as Barbara was making the bed in her new room, muscles aching, she suddenly thought - what if they all changed their minds and wanted to move back the way they had been! She collapsed on the bed, on their wonderful king-sized bed ("so this is how most people sleep!" Jim had said when they'd bought it, the first time he had been able to stretch out since he was thirteen). Then she rolled over on her back. She looked around the room, listening to Elizabeth talking to her "friends" in the room across the hall. Bliss. Peace.

Was that a car coming into the driveway? Barbara lifted her arm, ouch, to look at her watch. No one was supposed to come before 10:00. She got up and went into Elizabeth's room. "Sure-positive you don't want to come downstairs on the sofa?" "Sure-positive," Elizabeth answered, busily arranging her animals around her, being watched from a careful distance by the cat. Barbara picked up the water glass from the bedside table and took it into the bathroom for a refill, checking along the way to make sure a window in her own room, facing the barn, was open. "Here's more water. Do you feel at all like eating? A piece of toast, maybe?" Elizabeth shook her head. At least her fever was gone. "Call from my window if you need anything." Barbara wasn't sure she would be able to hear. So she added: "I'll be back to check."

Wham! She could certainly hear Peter and Tim come in downstairs. Wham! The screen door into the kitchen slammed again. There must be more than the two of them. They all, one, two, three, four, came up the stairs into Peter's room and on into the shed. Barbara kissed Elizabeth and went out to the barn. The person who had come early, who hadn't been here before, was struggling to open the barn door. She didn't know it slid open and was getting desperate. And so the week began. An artist and pianist were presenting their best students. The students were good, some very good.

The evening of the concert was bright and cool, filled with birds. The sixteen-year-old boy, who began the program, said afterwards he'd felt he'd come to an enchanted island. Some of the people, friends and family, had never been to a concert before. Barbara worried about inevitable comparisons reaching wrong ears. Last summer someone had taken to writing concert critiques on posts and beams, luckily in pencil. Barbara had gone around with an eraser, she hoped before anyone else saw. But even encouragement never seemed to be quite enough or quite what was needed. And being the encourager was draining.

Would it be possible to hire someone to do what she was doing, at least the physical presence part, the being around to help open sliding doors part (or a SLIDE sign, maybe, like the PUSH in the arts building over at the college)? All week Elizabeth had needed Barbara's physical and her encouraging presence. The less Barbara had been able to give her, between trips to the barn, the more she had needed.

Barbara did manage, at least a little, to think about her paper. If Edgar was Lear's godson, was Edmund his devilson? And she had kept thinking about what Lear had said about chance, too, there at the end, about Cordelia being alive (alive still? alive again?, alive symbolically somehow?). "It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows that ever I have felt." Jim's specialty was mathematical probability, chance. He and their friend, the one who had killed himself, had talked about Pascal's "il faut parier," the necessity of betting on the existence of God. Mostly, though, Barbara, swamped with the demands of family and barn, thought about Mrs. Gloucester, if indeed there was a Mrs. Gloucester. How had she managed to provide food and beds for all of her guests (at least fifty, and unexpected)?

When the concert was over, Barbara, sliding the barn door shut, decided this week she wasn't going to clean up until she was good and ready. Next Saturday Jim would be away at a math conference, so there wouldn't be any concert. Instead, all day Sunday and Monday morning, Barbara played games with Elizabeth. Peter was on his own, now, busy with his shed and his friends. He had also discovered the evening softball games in the meadow at the end of the road near the pool turn-off.

By Monday afternoon, Elizabeth was ready to go back to the recreation program. Finally Barbara settled down to work on her paper, at the kitchen table because she hadn't cleaned up in the barn yet.

Peter came and stood beside her, silently. After a while he said he needed a left-handed baseball glove. Sensitive - too sensitive? - about not intruding, he'd waited until she looked as if she might have a moment for him.

After checking first at the recreation program to make sure Elizabeth really was holding up, Barbara and Peter spent the rest of the afternoon looking for a left-handed baseball glove. The few they found were too large or no good. Peter seemed to know about gloves. They returned home without one.

At the dinner table, Jim became interested in the glove problem. He'd been a ball player himself when he was Peter's age. He told Peter he'd take the morning off tomorrow. They'd go look for a glove some more. The next morning, Jim and Peter found a left-handed baseball glove.

That was the morning Barbara wrote and handed in the paper on Gloucester's sons. She began it by quoting Edmund's little song, "fa, sol, la, mi." which seemed to her to suggest that Edmund, unable to sing an augmented fourth correctly, known as the "devil in music", made a poor devil. Edgar

himself was well aware of Edmund's virtues, acknowledging his half-brother's "strength, place, youth and eminence...victor's sword and fire-new fortune ... valour ... heart," just before killing him. Edgar killed.

That morning the professor had been charitable, quietly correcting the spelling of "priviledge," "falacy," and "acheive." Now it's next week. Barbara has written a paper on King Lear himself. There has been time again. She has spaced intense work with, little by little, cleaning up the barn.

It has been a hard paper to write. She has used her experience with their friend, weaving thoughts and feelings into careful sentences having to do with Lear.

Here in his office, the professor turns away to read through this paper. Has she - exposed her own self too much? Too late now to worry about that. Looking for distraction, she sees a copy of Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy," open and face down on the top row of books in the bookcase. She asks if she may look at it. The professor lifts his head to see what she is referring to. "Oh, sure."

She begins to look through the play, wondering at the strange names of the characters. Many of Shakespeare's names are strange too, not excluding his own. What if, in "The Spanish Tragedy", Hieronimo were named something like Dick and Bel-Imperia (!) something like Jane, would that make the play any more accessible?

It's a gray day in the gray room. The professor looks up again from reading her paper. He reaches over to the small iron lamp behind her chair and turns the light on. He doesn't write much or, afterwards, say much. But when she leaves it is still and always with a sense of encouragement.

Archibald Macleish once said, about teaching, in television talks with Mark Van Doren: "I think it's very rarely that a man is really shaped - given a new direction by a given individual." Both Macleish and Van Doren hoped they themselves had not given direction. Van Doren said: "I'd rather think that a certain number of persons had found out more about themselves with my help - that's about all you can ever do, is help a person to discover himself - you talk to him in such a way that you don't get in his way."

The Expository Writing professor knew how not to get in the way.

Chapter 14

Next

If it hadn't been for the arrival of Jim's mother, the summer might have come to a quiet end. Barn concert preparations had become more routine, and the children more accepting of it. And the last two Lear papers almost wrote themselves. Grandma Vere was perhaps very lonely, but by the end of this summer, Barbara needed to be alone more than Grandma needed company.

Besides playing Canasta, Grandma like to shop. She liked the process of shopping, the attention, being waited on. She never bought anything. Mostly she shopped for items she knew no longer existed. The only time Barbara ever saw her at a loss was the day a store attendant brought out a sewing machine attachment that Singer had begun making again. Speechless, Grandma Vere finally turned and walked away. Barbara, following, didn't dare exchange glances with the attendant who, over the years, had come to know them well. Grandma could have bought the attachment and saved her pride, but she cared even more, like Barbara's own mother, about saving money. Neither quite approved of the money spent on the barn. And Grandma certainly didn't approve of the time spent on the barn, which cut into shopping and Canasta.

The children still didn't count for Canasta this year, a fact more than compensated for, for them, however, by their growing interest in, fascination with, the power held over their parents by this little old lady hardly bigger than they were themselves.

Being a lady may even have been the source of her power. A lady was little, as she was, thin, as she was, clean, as she was, and correctly dressed as she always was. In summer, Grandma wore white shoes until exactly Labor Day, she really did, saying: "You can tell a lady by her shoes." Barbara kept reminding herself her dad felt the same way about shoes, but that didn't help. Grandma thought right, did right, was right. Jim agreed, and stayed away more than ever during her visits. Barbara must have agreed too. How else could the unspoken criticisms of Barbara's own unladylikeness have

got through to her the way they did? After one morning of card-playing, Grandma Vere, lifting her arms to examine the graying sleeves of her white sweater, would say: "I know your table top isn't dirty." It was too.

Clearing the table one evening after supper, Barbara glanced up and found four pairs of eyes quietly watching her. Suddenly they all, mother, son, even her own children, seemed together against her. She was exhausted. Nobody was helping. Never had she felt so - not alone, which can be good, but - isolated. She said something about going out to get ice-cream for later. Grandma Vere loved ice-cream-later. To be fair, they all did.

Barbara found her pocketbook, went out, and got in the car. She drove through town too fast, and, when she came to the river, almost crashed into the edge of the bridge. She slowed down, then, shaken. She crossed the bridge, signaling for a left turn. She drove into the large parking lot beside the river which was filled with color. There was a sunset and the bank on the other side was streaked with wild flowers.

Trembling, she tried to take stock of what had almost happened. She started to cry. Perhaps if she could find someone to talk to, but who? Friends may not be for real need. They can't, or shouldn't have to, be. After quite a while, Barbara pulled out of the parking lot and drove to the hospital emergency room where she knew there was always a psychiatrist on call.

The one on call tonight was a tall, thin, gray man, more unhappy-looking than anyone she had ever seen. The thought of such a person helping her seemed comical, which did help. He remarked she seemed wound up like a ball of string. That reminded her of long ago afternoons with her mother, of holding skeins of yarn which her mother would wind into soft balls. She felt much better.

An appointment was scheduled for her for the next day, with the doctor she had seen before. She wondered how she would manage to get away for that appointment. But the next day, a person from the hospital telephoned, canceling the appointment because the doctor's father had died.

Later, she started seeing the emergency room doctor instead. By that time, Grandma Vere had gone home. Barbara had even got around to telling Jim what had happened, the evening she had nearly crashed into the bridge. He looked incredulous. Several of their friends' wives were seeing psychiatrists, though, so she might as well too, if that was what she wanted.

When she saw the emergency room doctor again, he looked even sadder than she remembered. Without saying a word, he put her own unhappiness into perspective. She wasn't even sure she was unhappy. Anyway, it was nice to know she couldn't possibly have caused his. Nor was she responsible for making him feel better now. And yet she did find herself trying to figure out what he wanted her to say. Afterwards, remembering what she did say, she would be appalled. Then she would begin thinking about she had said.

She bought books to read. “You’re not supposed to do that, you know,” said somebody else who was seeing a psychiatrist. With access to the medical school library, she spent time there too.

Barbara continued taking courses at the college. Chaucer was next. That fall (’68) six other women were taking courses at the college for credit. They were part of a new, one-year, experimental program sponsored by the drama department, and one of them was in the Chaucer class.

At first, the drama student, not realizing how very different the situation here was from her own university, tried to sit among the others. But no one would sit next to her. If she sat by a chair which had some books and a jacket on it, the owner, when he returned, would pick up his books and jacket and sit somewhere else. Eventually the drama student gave up and came to the back of the room to sit with Barbara.

The Chaucer professor, as interested in art as he was in Chaucer, saw to it that everyone made at least one trip to the art library, where he had put on reserve handsome books of medieval paintings. One book, on architecture, had pictures of buildings with clocks. Before clocks, people had lived their lives by the sun. Barbara tried to imagine life, especially on cloudy days, without clocks or watches to coordinate children, husband, friends, groceries, lessons, classes, appointments etc. And now there were computers. Like clocks and watches, someday everybody would have one. Computers would help order and organize life too.

Winter came, with dreadful weather. Each morning the Veres faced the staggering task of getting the cars started and out of the snow-clogged driveway. Almost at once Barbara gave up on her next course, a selection of Shakespeare plays, taught by someone who specialized in modern poetry. But the children flourished. They would slide down the high piles of snow left by plows. And on moonlight nights, they would take their sleds to the big hill behind Tim’s house. And they discovered church that winter. First they decided to sing in the junior choir. Then they went to Sunday school and Peter joined the Junior Fellowship.

Toward the end of that winter term at the college, long before the real end of winter, Jim came home with the news that Helen had just had an operation. Helen’s husband Tom had joined the math department that fall, so Barbara didn’t know Helen very well. Jim said Helen wanted Barbara to come and visit her. Barbara went to the hospital the next day and then the day after that. Helen had had a growth removed. It seemed to be taking a long time to find out if the growth that had been removed was or wasn’t malignant.

Barbara was visiting Helen again when the doctor and Tom came into the room. They asked Barbara to wait outside. After a while they left the room and, without looking at Barbara or seeing her, they walked away. Not knowing what else to do, Barbara went back in. Helen shared her bad news,

holding pictures of her children, saying "I just don't want people going around saying oh those poor children...." Barbara had to leave, wanted to leave, but surely mustn't leave Helen alone. Leaving, she met Helen's next-door neighbor, just outside the door. For a moment they stared at each other. Then Barbara walked away toward the elevator, without saying anything other than nodding her head in the affirmative. Alone in the elevator, Barbara hit the metal wall with her hand, feeling silly afterwards. The next time she took the elevator, she saw a dent. Wow, she couldn't have hit it that hard, could she? A few nights later, Tom came home with Jim for a beer and said something about having made a dent in the elevator.

Spring term began. The driveway cleared. The cars started easily again. Barbara signed up for a course on Yeats, Eliot and Pound, taught by the professor whose course she had quit in the winter, so he wouldn't think she had quit because of him.

That was quite a spring, the year of the student uprisings. One day, a student came in and took over their class. He, bearded and long-haired, one of the first to be that way, got up on the desk and sat there cross-legged. The professor quietly found a chair halfway down the aisle. There was no question who was still in charge. And of course Yeats himself would have been interested. Barbara watched and listened to this student and to all else that was going on during that spring, often grateful for her faculty-wife cloak of invisibility.

The next fall, instead of taking another course, Barbara talked herself into taking a job she was offered by someone who believed she was intelligent and also that intelligence mattered more than experience. And she opened a bank account of her own, having been told it was important to have one's own money. The person she worked for was setting up programs for students to study abroad. She learned something really important. She learned how to pretend programs existed before they, in fact, really did.

Many women, exchange students, were taking courses for credit at the college by now. And more and more male Blacks and American Indians were being enrolled as degree candidates. One morning an Indian student found his way to Barbara's office. He sat down without saying a word. He stayed, without moving, for almost an hour. She tried to talk with him, but she gave up after a while. She couldn't imagine him in a country more foreign to him than the one he was in now. And to think that in fact this had all been his country once.

Another day, a Black student burst into the door, enraged at not having been accepted on a particular Foreign Study program, insisting on seeing his recommendations. Barbara did manage to calm him down, pointing out he had not taken the required courses yet. And finally she simply tore up his recommendations, in his presence, rather than let him see the strange, barely literate letter from one of his high school teachers.

By the end of the school year, Barbara had learned how ill-prepared she was for life not at home. Also, her entire year's salary was not quite equal to Jim's cost-of-living raise, given to all the professors that year. So she either quit her job, or was let go from it. That never was quite clear to her. And she deposited her earnings back into their joint account.

Chapter 15

Helen

A couple of days ago, Barbara read some essays. The person who wrote them called them a kind of prayer. She hopes the author got as much help from writing them as she herself did from reading them.

Helen is in the hospital. Barbara goes to see her almost every day. She looks like a starving Biafran, big stomach, the rest skin and bones. Helen said yesterday: "When I look in the mirror, I scare me." But otherwise she hasn't changed, or rather all that changes her in any way is how much medicine she has had.

Helen and her "women's lib" friends have fought hard to become an integral part of the academic scene, here at this men's college. Some of Helen's friends believe the fight has been too much for Helen, that the desperate need for creative growth becomes destructive when the opposition is too great. Barbara herself tends to resist ideas of physical indications of mental states and also the still prevailing idea that women are, because of their wombs, ultimately receivers rather than doers. But one's own life depends on breathing, in and out both. It is some one else's life that depends on the either/or of sex.

Culturally, however, there are times when Barbara suspects she knows better than almost any one else how separate women have become from the world of men, having grown up in a boys' school. James Joyce has a description of a bar room before a woman comes in and then after she leaves, which is the kind of thing Barbara means. For herself, she doubts she could survive in a man's world, except, as she has with some difficulty, as a secretary with a smile, support only, not power. In fact she often wonders how they, the men themselves, manage. It just might be nice if control could suddenly be turned into support everywhere. Philosophizing aside, though, she bets that what's really happening in the world now is that some women are being abandoned and a few are trying to cope with that situation.

Barbara doesn't think Helen has been told she will be staying at the hospital. She was going home Sunday, then Tuesday, then Wednesday, which

was her birthday. It's possible she has been told but has refused to accept it. Now she is staying until "next week sometime". She is using a new medicine and is all excited, calling herself a pioneer. She wants to get up and go back to work. Another friend, flabbergasted, said: "Who's she kidding?" Maybe that's why the doctors are dragging her on, from day to day, about when she can go home, helping her to kid herself.

Jim and Peter have gone to the family island in Lake Superior for two weeks. Elizabeth says the house is so quiet. But she seems to be getting used to it. This morning she and a friend played house, the first time in a long time, and for the whole morning. Peter probably makes fun of her, playing house. Perhaps Peter too is profiting, if Barbara dares call it that, from not having Elizabeth around.

Now that Barbara has a real chance to talk with Elizabeth, she is beginning to sense how vulnerable Elizabeth feels, though she doesn't look it or act it. They talk about that a little, and they talk about Helen too much. Barbara doesn't know what will come of their talks. At least Elizabeth does seem less restless now, or maybe that is just Barbara's imagination.

It is hard to write. Barbara really does turn off when she is unable to take in what is happening. She saw Helen yesterday, after a very bad weekend for Helen. Last night friends were notified not to visit anymore. Barbara feels there is a lot of life in her yet, but it's hard to tell how much Helen wills that for the benefit of visitors. She has moved to a cheaper room. For the first time she seems to believe she is not going home again. The room has a lovely view, not over the new cancer center that is being built but over the hills. She finds the strength to sit up to eat, or at least to look at what, yesterday, was a large hamburger. She is a skeleton, her skin fits badly, and her color is bad. When Helen saw Barbara she said "Ah! At last some one will finally tell me where I am." Barbara decided what Helen wanted to know was, in which direction home was, which is what Barbara told her. Then Helen said how tired her husband Tom was looking.

Barbara went to a picnic with someone who said she hadn't been able to bring herself to go visit Helen. People really are afraid. Barbara is too and had talked once about that with the young minister who seems to want to keep in touch. She also mentioned that Helen's husband Tom was always going off somewhere with Jim when Helen needed him. Perhaps the minister told Tom, though there could be other reasons why Tom and Jim see less of each other now.

They are all so vulnerable in the face of death, and so emotional. Everyone is being sincere, all the friends and family. But there are many misunderstandings and people are being blamed for being or doing too much or too little. And Barbara herself doesn't always feel well and wonders if her own symptoms aren't a kind of empathy. She can tell when all's not well in herself by the fact she doesn't want to read. When she is herself,

she loves to read, more than anything, though she suspects that everything she reads gets sifted through the same point of view, that she is not really learning anything new any more, that she is closed and must somehow get open again.

The cat is sick and is at the vet's. When the dog had to be put away, this winter, Peter said he didn't like the cat any more. Are survivors always hated? Would she rather be a victim than a survivor?

Helen has come home. Could the new drug be working?

Helen is still home and better. The cancer has stopped growing. She wants visitors again.

Helen really is much better. She was in rare form, this morning, outside on the porch, making her old funny-nasty remarks about people. So what would it be like, really, for Helen to get well now? Of course she can't, not completely. And what about all the rest of them? Having psychologically accepted her death, at least sort of, they're thrown off balance. Is accepting death a kind of murder?

When their cat was at the vet's, there were ads over the radio for new kittens. And Barbara began to think how cute, how nice. But their cat got well and came home. And it was wonderful to have her home, after all, it really was. And the cat was so pleased to be home. Elizabeth held her and held her. The cat is with Barbara now, here in the barn. She has just jumped up on the table, soft and very purry. Outside the barn door all is still. Sometimes a line of wind goes through the leaves making them look like little bells, wish they sounded.

Last night Barbara panicked for a few minutes, thinking about Jim and Peter coming home soon. She has almost forgotten what she cooked for a family of four instead of just for Elizabeth and herself. Next month is going to be so different. Her brother Richard's family may be coming, along with a relative from France. And four more concerts in the barn. The concerts are hard but a small price to pay for being out here. All this glorious barn, just for her, might otherwise make her feel guilty.

No one seems to know the name of the drug Helen is taking. That can't be possible. Helen seemed less well when Barbara saw her last. Once Tom came over for a short and very pleasant visit. Barbara and Elizabeth were playing cards in the kitchen when he came, and he showed them some card tricks. He said the sickness had been so long he had begun to lose his sense of humor.

Jim and Peter are home. Jim has taken Elizabeth to Boston for the day and Peter is at a party. Last night one of Jim's colleagues and a former graduate student came over and philosophized about mathematics till nearly 1:00. Jim hasn't done that for a long time.

After the last quartet concert in the barn, there was a party in a garden. Tom had a sore on his face which started bleeding all over his shirt and white

coat, impossible to ignore. One isn't supposed to bleed in public. Helen is sleeping more. The doctor said she would probably go into a coma and be dead within 48 hours. The last time Barbara saw her, Barbara was a little frightened and felt something real was missing. She bent over to kiss Helen's forehead and it was like kissing a porcelain doll.

There is a big elm tree outside the barn. Everyone is interested in how long it will last, because of the prevalence of Dutch Elm disease. Someone said there's a pattern: first one branch (and he pointed one out to her on their elm), then a side, then the whole tree. "You've got about five years," he said. It has already lived a very long time. There is a maple growing up under it. For the maple it would be better if the elm died. Elizabeth and Barbara have talked about planting a chestnut tree somewhere, except they want the nuts now.

Peter loved being on the island. And Grandma loved having Peter and Jim with her. Grandma left the island before her second son and his wife came. The first son's divorce seems to have divorced the rest of the wives too.

Peter is getting very tall and strong and handsome. He talks even less than he used to, though he did say he'd missed the house across the river when they had moved here. He is deeply affected by "last times" of doing things and being places. "I'm like that," he said, simply. He has had too many last times.

This is a bad night. Jim has taken pills and still can't get to sleep. Barbara is writing in the middle of the night, in the bathroom. There was a barn concert. Besides the usual too many people, there may have been a couple of new problems. The neighbor's dog came around and made a nuisance of himself. And it may be that some of the older boys have a cache of drugs under the barn. Jim dug up around a specific spot, at her paranoid insistence, and found nothing. Peter found Jim digging. Then the girls (including one of Richard's daughters who is visiting) admitted they had come across something going on and were told not to tell. Elizabeth seemed frightened. The whole evening was not pleasant, the concert too long given by people they didn't know very well, and a lot of strangers. Jim says this is the end - but then what to do with the barn. Mostly, she is upset by somebody threatening the children. Outside there are lots of crickets. Not much traffic. She feels - as if she were waiting. Several cars race by, noisily. Some doors are slamming. It is also beginning to rain. Jim seems to be quieter now. Maybe finally he has gone to sleep.

Helen died the night Barbara wrote in the bathroom.

How awful funerals are and cruel. Most people leave two by two except for the one whose person has died, Tom this time.

Chapter 16

Kate and Mary

December 1970. Perhaps they won't come. Outside, the trees creak in the wind. The wind, throwing fistfuls of snow against the windows, makes the back door groan. Barbara shivers where she sits by the kitchen fireplace. Oh, oh. Leaning over to push the fire further back, she hopes that, the next time the wind whirls around the chimney, smoke will not puff into the room.

Ah! They've come! Mary's jeep's headlights flash through the kitchen window. Barbara can't even hear its motor as it passes by and comes to a halt in front of the shed. She gets up to watch through the window. Mary and Kate are fighting their way to the steps. On the porch they stamp their feet and brush snow off their hats and jackets as Barbara opens the door, saying: "I can't believe you've come!" Laughing, Kate says: "Of course we've come. What did you think?!" She pulls off her hat.

Mary, pushing Kate in front of her on into the room, says: "Quick, shut the door. Oh - mmm, is that cider I smell?" And while Kate and Mary hang up their jackets and hats on the pegs to the left of the door. Barbara pours out three hot mugs full. Mary goes to the fire, rubbing her hands, saying: "No school tomorrow I bet - again! And just think, it's only December. We'll be having make-up days the whole month of June at this rate."

Mary teaches kindergarten, afternoons. She is also the director of the junior choir Peter and Elizabeth sing in. Kate teaches art at a high school several towns away. "June?" Kate, a little clumsy, slowly settles herself at the kitchen table and gently circles her hands around the mug Barbara has put in front of her. "June? What's June?"

Barbara and Mary sit down too, Barbara saying: "Mary, I'll call you if there's another snowball fight at the school tomorrow. Half the kids in town were there last week: your two would have loved it." "I'll bet! You know, we should just go ahead and have school. We'd get at least as much done as we do in June." Kate says: "Unfortunately, when the buses don't go, I'm stuck too. But who cares if the art teacher doesn't show...oh, I'm so mad! Today they scheduled an assembly during one of my classes and didn't even

tell me. But we're not here to talk about that. Don't let me get started on that. Come on, Barbara. Tell us more about your idea. I talked with Roger right after you called. He'd love to be involved. This is something he really cares about. Remember that art festival several years ago? Had we even met then? - though I'm sure I remember seeing you. That whole thing was Roger's idea. He met the head of the state Arts Council then, too. They've kept in touch."

"And definitely count Bill in," says Mary. "We've been wondering how on earth you Veres have managed to keep up what you've been doing. How many years has it been now, since you started your barn concerts? A community-wide organization could...." Mary is interrupted by a crash outside. "Good Lord, what was that?"

Barbara jumps up from the table and peers out the back window, her hands shading her eyes from the reflection of the kitchen light on the night-black glass. "I think - wow, what a storm! I noticed a loose shutter: maybe it blew off, but I just can't see...."

After a moment she returns to the table. They sit silently until Barbara says, trying to get back on track: "Well, I guess I won't worry about that shutter till next spring. You know, another trouble with this privately run show in the barn, besides the work and expense, is we've become kind of a clique. Only our friends, or people we find out about, take part. There must be others, who would make themselves known if we had the right set-up."

Mary nods her head. "I know what you mean about cliques. We've got that problem at church too. We mean to be welcoming, we try." "Oh Mary," Barbara answers, "the church is welcoming. It's hardly your fault if people won't be welcomed. But you know, that could be a real argument against having the center of activities in one of the churches."

Kate says, "What about the school, then?" "Or the town hall? More cider? There's lots" Barbara gets up, refills the mugs as they listen to the wind, and puts more wood on the fire. Mary says: "Look, I'll give a dinner. I'll invite - who will I invite, I mean whom?" "A dinner?" Barbara comes back to the table. "Sure, isn't that the way it's done?" Kate says: "You're right, Mary! I didn't even think of it! You're absolutely right!" And after a moment's silence: "I'd offer to have it at my house, but..." "No, no. Mine's more accessible, for one thing" Mary is talking as if she had thought all this out ahead of time. "Oh Mary," Barbara says: "Will it be okay with Bill do you think?" "If you must know, it was his idea." "Oh. Well, okay then. How swell of you, both of you. What can I bring? What can I do?" "Barbara, let me. It's easier that way, honestly. And I feel like doing something after all these wonderful summers. But let's think who should be asked, though - people like the Johnsons? Oh boy, Alice Johnson! Now if she'd be willing to get involved.... When should the dinner be? Not before Christmas, right? Barb, have you got a calendar?"

Barbara gets up, going over to the sink to reach for the calendar that hangs on the cupboard door there. “Whoops - no January. Just a sec, though; I think I saw Peter come home with a new one.” Barbara goes into the TV room. “Peter, did you... oh, good for you! Can I borrow it? In fact, can I have it, for the cupboard?” Peter grins up at her from the sofa, handing over the new calendar, open to July with his birthday circled in red. “Hm.” Barbara grins back at him.

Back in the kitchen, Barbara gives the calendar to Mary who lays it on the table in front of her. Kate scoots her chair around so she can see too. Looking at them both bent over the calendar, Barbara is suddenly overwhelmed with gratitude. She stands behind them, a hand on the back of each chair, supporting herself.

“A Friday - maybe that one? - or would the next one be better, when people have had time to recover from Christmas?” Kate points with her finger. Mary shakes her head. “We don’t want to wait too long, or everybody will be busy with something else.” They decide on the first one. Then Mary asks: “What time, seven? Seven-thirty would sure be easier with the kids, but I guess that might be a little late with so much we’ll have to talk about.” They decide on seven. Returning to her chair, Barbara offers to drive the Foley kids home after junior choir rehearsal that Friday and asks: “Do you drive anybody else?” “Sometimes Betsy - Betsy Saunders. Sure. Hey, that would really help. Okay, we still have to decide who - whom - we’re going to invite.”

Mary reaches into her pocketbook, down on the floor by her chair, and pulls out a pad of paper. She rummages for a pencil. Then, pencil over pad, she asks: “What shall we call this organization?” Kate says: “We’d better discuss that at the dinner.” “All right. I’ll put down something for now, though.” After a moment she writes “Music Organization Meeting” and, under that, the date, the time, their three names (the Veres, Jim and Barbara; the Thornes, Roger and Kate; and the Wrights, Bill and Mary) and then the Johnsons, Pete and Alice. Kate begins to giggle. Mary asks: “What’s the matter?” “Don’t you see? Oh, I don’t believe this!” Kate points out the three capital letters of the title. “M.O.M.? - Mom, oh no!” They all giggle, a little uncomfortably maybe. Mary almost draws a line through the title but then doesn’t. Kate, still giggling, asks: “Do you want me to do the inviting?” “No, I’ll do it, I might as well. I have to talk with Alice about something else anyway. And there’ll be only, what, three? four? other couples?”

After quite a lot of discussion, they decide on four, with an alternate in case anyone can’t come. And then they start talking again about using the school, or maybe the town hall. Barbara says to Kate: “Mary and I talked about this a little already, last Sunday. Did you know Professor Collins is retiring? Next week’s Christmas concert is his last one.” “Oh no, I didn’t

know. Gosh. The end of an era!”

After a silence, Barbara goes on. “Mary and I were thinking - all those singers and no place to sing, at least for a while. What if we started a chorus over here? Besides getting a lot of people involved all at once, a chorus would really help establish, say, the town hall - or the school - as a place for classical music.” “Oh. Except, well, of course you do know there’s no piano in the town hall.” “We’ll be needing a good piano eventually anyway. One immediate expense, though, will be chorus music. I could pay for that myself with the idea of being reimbursed. Since I’m for free, I’ll be the conductor. But we may have to make it look as if I’m being paid. All that is going to have to be worked out.”

Mary sighs and turns over to the next sheet on her pad, saying: “We really must try to get all this in shape enough so we can talk about it sensibly at the dinner. Boy, isn’t it always the same, needing an organization to raise money, needing to spend the money before there is any. Piano, music - what about an accompanist? Barbara, did you talk to Ruth?” “She said she’d love to and would certainly be willing to wait to be paid. By the way, she said that Marjorie has been talking about teaching a sight-singing class. What if we got her to teach in connection with the chorus?” “Hold on - wait a minute,” says Mary. “Piano, music, accompanist - and Marjorie. A class might even make money. I wonder how that should be set up. And the fundraising concert - we haven’t even started to talk about that. March? Liz? I suppose for that we would rent a piano. And maybe get the rent credited toward one we buy. How much should we charge for concerts, anyway?”

Silence. Wind and snow. Finally Mary says: “Well, we can’t load the dinner people with a whole lot of detail. We’ll need, um, committees.” They groan. Kate says: “Mary, you’re so good at this! Maybe we’ve done enough for now, though. We’ve got plenty to talk about with the others. And we do have to wait for their input, their support anyhow. Golly, look what time it is! I’ve got to get home. Maybe the schools won’t be closed tomorrow.”

“Righto.” Mary scribbles a few more notes before putting away her pencil and pad. She finishes off her cider and slides her chair back to get up. “Thanks Barbara. That cider hit the spot. And I really do think we’ve got something here that just might work out.”

“I still can’t believe you both came on a night like this.” The three of them look toward the window as lights flash in. “That must be Jim. His seminar must be over.” “Nothing ever gets canceled at the college, does it,” says Mary. “Well, most of them are within walking distance. At least they used to be. Anyhow, Jim likes the challenge, driving through storms.” “Me too,” says Mary. “Oh, oh - I bet he wants to drive into the shed and my jeep’s in the way. Come on, Kate” They get their hats and jackets. At the door, Kate, following Mary, pauses to say: “Barbara, I have a feeling I’m not going to forget this night....”

Mary opens the door and a blast of wind blows snow into the kitchen. Kate shrugs, smiles, pulls her hat down further and goes out, closing the door behind her quickly, uncharacteristically. Smoke puffs into the kitchen from the fireplace. Barbara watches by the window. In Jim's car's headlights, Mary and Kate wave at him through blowing snow. He blinks his lights and then keeps them on so the two can see to get into the jeep. Mary gets the jeep out of the way and Jim drives into the shed. Mary drives where he's been and on out into the storm.

Chapter 17

The Community Chorus

At least fifty people have come to this first rehearsal of the newly organized Community Chorus, in the basement of the town hall, in the nursery school room. Overhead, there's a basketball game.

With spirit, Ruth coaxes music from the nursery school piano. The singers have perched themselves on assorted chairs and large red or blue boxes. Barbara has promised the head of the school she would leave the room as she had found it. But she's too nervous to worry about that now. Making her voice loud enough to be heard takes all she's got. She can hardly believe she was ever this kind of interested in music.

Tomorrow she and Ruth are going to look at another piano. A friend of Ruth's recently bought a house and discovered a piano had been left in it. That piano has just got to be something they can use, at least temporarily, so rehearsals can be upstairs. Ruth's friend is doubtful. But, he says, they are certainly welcome to it if they'll pay for the moving.

Eight people showed up forty-five minutes early tonight for Marjorie's sight-singing class, two more than were needed to break even financially, enough to pay for moving the piano. And the chorus music had arrived on time. Barbara had chosen Cherubini's c minor "Requiem" because no soloists, to be paid, were needed.

The chorus has just finished reading through the last movement. The two best sight-readers, away in Hawaii, are being missed. Barbara is in the process of persuading everyone, including herself, that it is good not to have them to depend on so much. She asks the basses to sing through their part alone, just the last page. She adds the sopranos. Then she rehearses the two inner parts. Well, not bad. Why isn't this "Requiem" performed more often? Beethoven approved of Cherubini. He couldn't have been too wrong, at least not about music.

Barbara asks everyone to stand up to sing the last page. Ruth plays the notes that are missing in the nursery school piano in other octaves, managing to capture the accompaniment's bell toll effect, without being asked.

It is the first large chorus Barbara has worked with since music school, except for assisting Mr. Collins at the college once. She hadn't thought about how that was going to be, her mind only on how best to start the organization through which she hoped to ease out from under the barn without destroying what had begun there. The organizational dinner had gone well, with the alternate couple replacing the couple off in Hawaii. Alice Johnson had agreed to become involved, serving as vice-president of the four-person steering committee set up to 1) incorporate a town organization, 2) arrange for a first annual all-member meeting in April to elect trustees, 3) start a community chorus 4), buy a piano and 5), plan a fund-raising concert. The other members of the steering committee were Kate's Roger, who was president, Mary's Bill, treasurer, and Barbara, secretary.

They had already met twice. The head of the state's arts council had come to the first meeting, at Roger's. A distinguished, elderly gentleman, he gave them precise information on how best to get officially organized. Barbara had not understood most of what he and Roger were saying. Alice had at least managed to ask questions. Bill hadn't said a word. But, at the next meeting, at Alice's, he had arrived with a number of forms, such as one from the post office which qualified non-profit organizations for special postage rates. Barbara wrote an article for the local newspaper about the community chorus, adding a few words about the nascent arts organization. From her experience, working at the college, she remembered it was possible to pretend something existed before it really did. There could be no funding from the state arts council until late spring at the earliest. Any expenses would have to be covered by the fund-raising concert, plus the extra dollars that might be cleared from Marjorie's sight-singing class.

Barbara looks up and notices Jim signaling from the back of the nursery school room. He is sitting on the steps of a ladder he had found in the back hall. He points to his watch. Barbara looks at her own. It is time for a break.

People swarm to the table near the piano where Barbara has put paper cups and a jug of lemonade. They talk and laugh. Barbara finds herself standing next to Ruth's husband. She says: "I knew Ruth was good, but I had no idea how good. She is incredible!" "She used to do a lot of this kind of thing in Boston before we moved up here. You mean she didn't tell you?" Ruth's husband grins. He has a wonderful grin.

Mary is pouring lemonade. Barbara tells her, "You'd better pour some for yourself or you may not get any." Mary points to a cup behind a stuffed blue rabbit on top of the piano. "I already have. Oh Barbara, it's going so well - but isn't this funny?"

Ruth returns to piano and softly begins practicing the "Dies Irae" and says: "Barb, will we be working on this tonight? I'm missing two B flats - good thing this piece is in c minor!" Barbara answers, "Let's hold off on the

hard parts till we're all more used to each other. Is tomorrow at 10:00 still okay for you to look at the other piano? I don't know what we'll do if that doesn't work out! Golly, look at that chipped key - don't cut yourself... Oh Ruth, you already have!" They both look down at a small red slice on one of Ruth's fingers. Ruth says: "I'd almost forgotten about it." "Well, I just hope they don't let the kids fool with this piano. Which reminds me, I'd better ask Bill if he has checked on insurance. We'd better be getting started again. How about playing some chords..."

At the end of the rehearsal, Ruth is still smiling. As she puts on her coat, she says to Barbara: "See you at 10:00." Marjorie comes over to say two more people have signed up for the sight-reading class. She'll check with Bill herself about what to charge them, since they've missed the first lesson.

Then Jim comes and says: "Let's go." "I - guess I have to put stuff back and lock up. Maybe somebody could drop you off?" Jim says: "But I thought the whole point of this organization was so you wouldn't have to do this sort of thing. No, I'll wait. What do you want me to do?" Barbara looks around. Chaos. Jim asks: "Can't we just stack the boxes along the wall? Does it matter?" It does matter. In Peter and Elizabeth's nursery school across the river, there had been "areas." For a three-year-old, those boxes would be eye-level, not knee-level. She decides to come back early the next morning.

The next morning, the only one there early is the head of the school. "Oh Mrs. Vere, you needn't have come...." Barbara takes off her coat, putting it and her pocketbook on a chair, saying: "I'm really sorry I left the place in such a mess. I just couldn't remember..... Actually, there's a chance we'll be getting a piano right away and can move upstairs. By the way, one of your piano keys is badly chipped." "Yes, I know. Mrs. Smith has mentioned it. We are trying not to spend money, except for essentials, until we can get a place of our own and then leave this dreadful basement, although of course we are indeed fortunate to be able to use this space." "I know." Barbara can't help smiling. "And so are we. And I expect you didn't have much say, either, about our using this room too."

There is a silence. Barbara looks around, wondering who could have chosen the color for the walls. There must have been an off-pink paint sale, a color that had combined strangely with the cement wall. Funny she hadn't noticed it last night. "When we're through," says Barbara, "I'll make a diagram of how things should be. May I use a sheet of this?" Barbara points to a large pad leaning on the wall next to a small painting easel. "Of course. But please don't be concerned about it. We do change things around sometimes. And, as for having you people using the room too, perhaps some in your group, the ones with small children, didn't even know we were here until last night." "That's true. And there were several people I had never seen before who came. We do keep thinking this is a small town."

They work together, straightening the room. Finally, the head of the school smiles, smoothing her hands over her neatly coiled gray hair and then over the side pockets of her jacket. "I must do some work before the teachers arrive, so I'll leave you. This is fine. Do keep the extra key until you know you won't need the room any longer. And thank you for coming. I wish some of the others were as considerate, though I'm certain no one has meant to be inconsiderate."

Barbara spots a piece of orange crayon on the floor by one of the doll beds and goes over to pick it up. The head of the school is probably right, consideration cannot be assumed. But why not? She tears a sheet from the large pad, then decides to use the pad as a writing board. She takes it with her to the piano stool where she sits down to draw a diagram, using the orange crayon. Hmm. Oh well, good enough. She folds the diagram, returns the pad where she found it, throws the crayon into a wastebasket and goes to collect her coat and pocketbook. Opening her pocketbook, she puts in the folded diagram and takes out her car keys. A teacher arrives and says good morning. As Barbara leaves, a child enters. She hears the teacher say: "Why Bobby! Aren't you the early bird this morning!" Barbara closes the door behind her. Probably Bobby's mother will be getting a note, pinned to Bobby's jacket, about not leaving him off quite so early, please.

Outside, how still it is. The town's older children are all in school across the road. The first morning traffic, of people going to work, is over. Soon the rest of the nursery school children will be joining Bobby, but right now the only person in sight is Mr. Cobb, walking to the post office. It is cold and gray with the feel of snow in the air. A few flakes ease their way to the ground, not hurrying to become part of the grime already there. The sun was supposed to be out this morning.

Barbara drives home. There is time to do the dishes, and time also to straighten out the TV room. And she might read a little. She hasn't done much reading lately, really not since last fall. Early last fall she had applied to her old college about finishing work for her degree, hoping she might even be able to work independently without having to go back to be in residence. And for a while it seemed she would be accepted. They had even sent the routine medical form to be completed by her doctor.

Then she had not been accepted. It was a good thing she had been so very busy with all this business of the arts association. And most importantly, she was feeling really well again. How that had come about was strange indeed. She had been talking with Kate over coffee, one bleak November morning, grumbling about feeling numb in her left side. Kate, who belonged to a prayer group, said: "Next time we meet, we'll pray for you." And a few mornings later, when Barbara was walking from the kitchen to the TV room, suddenly, and she had actually stopped in her tracks, the numbness had lifted. Just like that.

She happened to see Kate in the store that afternoon. “Kate, your prayer group didn’t meet today, did it?” “As a matter of fact, yes, this morning. Why?” “Well, you’re not going to believe this, or I guess you are, but I’m not,” and Barbara described what had happened. Kate said: “Didn’t I tell you?” They never talked about it again.

Barbara walks from the kitchen to the TV room and again feels a lift in her spirits, just from the memory of that morning. The sun is coming out, too. A last whirl of frosty snow sparkles brightly around the maples outside.

The TV room is not bad. She decides to leave the comic book where it is, face down on the sofa, and goes upstairs to make the bed, hers and Jim’s. How lovely their room is, winter as well as summer. Before going back downstairs she glances into Elizabeth’s room. Elizabeth’s long green serpent twines around the headboard of the big bed. It has a sweet smile. Most of the other animals seem to have found their way to a low shelf in the closet.

Barbara almost never goes into Peter’s room now, except, after fair warning, to clean. He is busy with sports, with a job shelving books at the town library, and now he is in a high school musical. The other night Elizabeth had asked him: “Peter, someday how can I get to be in a musical?” “Be a great singer, a great dancer, a great actor, or,” he shrugged his shoulders, “be a boy.”

Time to get Ruth. In fact, it’s past time, she’d better hurry. Ruth has to be home by 11:15 when Joey gets back from kindergarten. Petey will be coming along with Ruth. Barbara puts on her coat again, which she hadn’t bothered to hang up, and picks up her purse. She checks the stove and leaves, carefully closing both the door and the storm door behind her. The cold bright air is breathtaking, in every sense. Enough new snow has fallen to freshen the world.

Ruth and Petey are in the yard, building a snowman, when Barbara arrives there. Ruth waves, picks Petey up and comes over to the car. Holding Petey in one arm, she opens the car door and slides into the front seat. She settles Petey on her lap and closes the door. “Wave bye bye to the snowman.” Petey waves and then leans back against his mother and laughs. Ruth and Barbara laugh too. Petey’s eyes shine and his cheeks are pink. He has on a bright red scarf.

“So. Where to?” asks Barbara, driving toward the bridge over the river. “The old part of town, behind the supermarket. No, Petey, they put the boats away, remember? Now, go to the right, up this hill. Howard is planning to turn the place into apartments, can you imagine? And on a professor’s salary? Of course he’s a bachelor. Okay, go right again. It may even be two houses, I can’t quite figure out from what he says. He plans to live in one of the apartments himself. Left, after the white house.”

Petey sees a dog out the car window. “Woof,” he says, trying to wiggle

out of his mother's arms so he can keep watching the dog. "Hold still, Petey. Howard's going to keep his old place, but there's something about residency over here and taxes. He also wants to be within walking distance of the college. Winter driving is getting to him." "Mm," says Barbara. "I can understand that."

"We should be almost there - oh, just look at that view!" Barbara stops the car. Silently they look out over a snow-filled ravine, wide and deep. After a moment Barbara says: "I walked over here with the wife of the head of the math department the first time we came, when Jim was being interviewed. Ruth, they had us stay overnight in their own house, can you imagine? They couldn't have been nicer. If I tried to do all the things for new people they did for us.... They live a couple of streets over. He's retired now, more or less. Last fall he was asked to help again with registration."

As Barbara starts the car again, Ruth says: "Their everyday lives were very different from ours. My mother's certainly was, from mine. Keep going up this street - oh, my God!"

Barbara stops in front of a huge unpainted rambling building. Two large porches, front and side, barely hang on. The place looks haunted, even on this shining day. Barbara takes the keys out of the ignition and puts them in her purse before saying: "At least I suppose his neighbors will be grateful, no matter what he does with the place." The Veres had had a little trouble with some of their own neighbors.

"There's Howard, oh good. Here we go, Petey." Howard walks over to the car and greets them with his gentle smile. "Hi there, Pete," he says. "Woof," says Petey to Howard's dog. But when the dog come up to him, Petey, suddenly shy, takes hold of his mother's leg. "Nice doggy," says Ruth. "Petey, say good morning to Ajax." Petey doesn't say anything and Ajax comes around to Barbara. Ruth says: "You've met Barbara, haven't you, Howard?" "Oh sure. Hi Barbara. Now about this piano - I really don't think you're going to want it. Come on in, though, over this way."

A wide plank leans up to the side door, over a part of the porch that has collapsed entirely. "Watch your step," says Howard. Ruth decides to pick Petey up. Ajax brushes ahead. They enter a hallway and go into a room on the right. Howard says to Ruth: "No one seems to know how long it's been since anybody's lived here. The place has been tied up in some legal thing. That's the piano, over there."

"Oh," says Ruth. She puts Petey down, who stays close beside her. They all walk to the piano, in a dark corner of the empty room. It's a grand piano, but the smallest one Barbara has ever seen. Its legs are skewed. "Careful," Barbara says, as Ruth lifts the cover up from over the keys. "It doesn't look very steady. I've never seen such a small grand piano, have you?" "I wonder if they even make them this size anymore," says Ruth. "Petey, stand back a little, that's the boy." She runs her fingers over the keys. They all play,

yellowed but working - and whole, unchipped.

“Why, it’s really not bad!” Surprised, Ruth looks up at Barbara. Barbara asks Howard: “May we look inside it?” “I haven’t yet,” says Howard. He adds: “There might be rats.” Ruth and Barbara giggle. Looking at Petey, Ruth says: “I doubt that!” Howard lifts the lid, and they look down into the piano. Barbara says: “Those strings are pretty rusty, but they can be cleaned, can’t they, Ruth? I’ll ask Mr. Dixon. Look at that sounding board, though. It’s so warped there must cracks somewhere. Do you see any?”

Barbara goes around to the front of the piano and plays a scale. Then she gets down on her knees and looks up from underneath. She gets up again, then puts her hand against the side of the piano. “I’m going to try to move it, see if I can, alone, without its collapsing. Here goes. Watch out. Ugh.” The piano moves. It doesn’t collapse. She and Ruth look at each other.

“Howard, I think - we want it.” Ruth nods in agreement. Barbara goes on: “I’ll call Mr. Dixon as soon as I get home. I don’t know when he’ll be able to come. I - I can’t believe this! Howard, I’ll have to call you, what times are good? Let’s see, this is Tuesday. Tuesday or Thursday mornings?” “Okay. But. Yes. Well. Mm. If. Okay, you call me.” Howard scratches his head. Ruth says: Howard, may we see the rest of the house - have you got time?” “Oh, why sure.”

Ajax leads on, expecting the tour. Barbara starts to follow, after taking another look at the warped sounding board and the rusty strings. Then she returns to put the top down and the cover over the keys. She gives the whole piano another wiggle. She’ll have to be very careful when she moves it. Maybe Mr. Dixon can tighten screws or something. (Has Bill checked yet on insurance? The piano could collapse on - somebody.)

When Barbara catches up with the others, Ruth says: “We were beginning to wonder if we’d lost you, like through a floor. Howard, can we see the other house too?” “It’s not really another house. There are a couple of connecting hallways. It’s in pretty bad shape though, and I’ve got to go. I told someone I’d be in my office later this morning.” “Oh, I’m sorry. I hope we haven’t made you late. This is quite a place! Thanks, thanks for everything. And - well, I guess Barbara will be calling you.”

They make their way outside without going through the piano room again. Petey, feeling at home now, is getting rambunctious. “Easy there, Pete,” says Howard. “Ruth, you’d better carry him.” Howard locks up and, with Ajax, goes off toward the college, almost without saying goodbye.

Back in the car, Barbara says, “Do you suppose we kind of snowed him?” “Seems that way, doesn’t it. Oh well. I’m certainly glad that’s not my house.”

When they reach Ruth’s house, Ruth says, “Can’t you come in? It won’t

take a second to warm up some coffee.” “No, thanks. I want to call Mr. Dixon right away.” “I do have a phone....” “No, but thanks anyway, Ruth. You’ve been great. I can’t believe the piano just might be going to work out. And it will give us time to look around for what we really want.” “Oh gosh, which reminds me,” Ruth says. “I almost forgot to tell you I ran into Liz yesterday. She’d like to help pick out the piano.” “Really? Terrific. Of course saying you’re interested is a whole lot easier than actually getting out and going somewhere - like today, for instance. I repeat, you’ve been great.” “Well, thanks. You too. Keep me posted. Okay, Pete, off we go. Wave bye bye to Barbara.” Ruth lifts Petey out the car door. He runs to his snowman. Ruth follows him.

As Barbara drives away, through the rearview mirror she sees Ruth turn and wave. She taps the horn and waves back. Almost immediately, coming the other way, she passes the yellow school bus full of kindergartners, just as well Howard had not had time to show them the rest of his extraordinary house.

Chapter 18

The Concert

It is six o'clock and Liz's concert is at eight. Barbara, with one hand, struggles to unlock the heavy old door of the town hall. Cars splash along the dark street behind her. It's mid-March, mid-mud-season.

She will have to use both hands for the door. Barbara bends down, checking first to see how wet the cement step is before laying her purse down on it and also the tin box for money she has been holding under one arm. She stands again, turning to watch cars for a moment. Some of the cars pull in to the brightly lit store across the street. Where would this town be without its store, open on into the night and weekends and even Christmas morning. She has just come from there, after writing out a check for the dollars and small change in the tin box.

She turns back to the door, wondering if she should have called Mary to remind her about selling tickets. She moves to one side so that light from the cars and from the store will shine on the lock. She inserts the key. There. When will she learn not to try do it first with only one hand? She braces the door open with her right foot and, with her left foot, reaches over to kick a stick out from under the radiator. She puts the stick under the bottom of the door to hold the door open.

Next she gropes for the light switches. In the dark, the big, drafty, slightly smelly town hall is a little spooky. But after nearly two months of coming in early to set up for chorus rehearsals, she is getting used to it. Sometimes the janitor, Dick, is still around when she comes in. She's afraid of him. He's drunk sometimes. But then, she is too, sometimes, a little. Being drunk helps get her through the cleaning up of the stage, which at first was almost unbelievably dirty. Usually the stage curtains need adjusting too, hung on heavy wooden beams worked by a system of ropes and pulleys. Then, for the rehearsals, she sets up chairs and moves the piano out from its corner. Mr. Dixon had fixed the piano pretty well.

Whenever the hall is used at night, Dick, the janitor, the only one who has the key to the furnace room, must come in to turn the furnace on and

come in again to turn it off. He's nice enough about it. Sometimes she thinks she is learning to like him, as they weave around the hall.

Being a little drunk also makes it easier for her to shoo away the kids who want to play basketball. She wishes they would check the calendar in the town office first, to see if the hall is free, before they come. Of course, usually it had always been free.

Barbara finds the light switches and turns on the entry light, then the outside light, and then the light downstairs leading to the bathrooms as well as to the nursery school room. Collecting her purse and the tin box from the cement step, she closes the door, testing it to make sure it is unlocked, and kicks the stick back under the radiator. She goes up the few stairs to the basketball court, which is now a concert hall.

Five people, along with others who came and went, had spent today achieving the transformation, spreading rugs, borrowed from the basement nursery school, and setting up folding chairs. They had lined the back of the hall with coat racks collected from here and there in the building. Barbara's daughter Elizabeth, along with her friend Margaret, had been put to work untangling piles of coat hangers. Coats, hung in the coat racks, might also help quiet the too-live acoustics, if the hall ever got warm enough so people would want to take off their coats. Barbara shivers as she walks down the aisle they had left between folding chairs. The light switches for the main part of the building are on the stage. Where is Dick, anyway? He was supposed to meet her here at six.

Up on the stage, Barbara turns on the stage light and two of the four rows of "house lights". The place really doesn't look bad. The grand piano Mr. Dixon has bought over for the concert, free in return for being acknowledged on the programs, gives the place class. Barbara sits down to play the few measures she still remembers from a Mozart sonata she'd memorized when she was nine, her purse and the tin box beside her on the piano bench. She gets up to lift the piano lid, then returns to play again.

What if Mr. Dixon's name got left off the programs? Barbara stops playing. She hasn't seen the programs. Alice is going to bring them when she comes at 7:15, in time for Barbara to dash home to put on a long skirt, but not in time to do any last-minute writing in on every program. She should have brought her skirt with her. Oh where is Dick! She had better call him.

Barbara goes downstairs to the pay phone, with her purse and the tin box. There is no dime in her purse, she discovers. So she takes one from the tin box. A phone book hangs on a chain by the phone. Dick. Richard. But she doesn't know his last name. Barbara leans against the wall by the phone. Who would know Dick's last name? Then she remembers Mary saying once that Dick was the brother of the Smiths who lived at the end of their road. She looks in the phone book. There is a Richard Smith. She's

in luck, unless he is Mrs. Smith's brother, not Mr. Smith's. Or unless he doesn't have a phone. She dials. Dick answers. He doesn't sound so good. He says he'll be right down.

Barbara goes back to sit behind the card table, set up for selling tickets, at the top of the stairs. A lot of tickets have already been sold. Liz had suggested people sell tickets to friends. And the bookstore had sold some. So had the camera shop. On this side of the river, tickets had been sold at the Beauty Shop.

They had considered not having tickets. People could pay at the door. But when Alice had talked with Mr. Carter, the printer, about the programs, he had suggested an inexpensive way of printing up a combination of tickets and mailing cards. The mailing cards had been an inspiration, perfect as well for tacking up on bulletin boards too full or too small for posters. Kate had made the posters, using a photograph she had taken of bare trees. She had projected the trees into blue shadows on a lighter blue background. Kate explained she had wanted to suggest the new beginning, the pre-beginning, the promise of very, very early spring.

After about fifteen minutes, Dick stomps in. He is eating a sandwich. With his free hand he waves at Barbara before heading down to the furnace room. Barbara hears the motor go on. Dick returns and comes up the stairs to where she is. He leans against the banister. "You said to come back at about ten?" Barbara nods. He wipes his hand over his mouth and looks around. Then he shrugs and leaves.

About five minutes after the furnace has been turned on, Barbara braces for the sound of the blowers. Whoosh, there they go. She hasn't dared to talk with Liz about that. The blowers do turn off when the hall reaches the right temperature, then on again when the hall cools down. With all the people coming in, opening the door, there is no chance that the hall will not cool down.

A quarter to seven. She could go home and get her skirt now, except she had promised the selectmen she would not leave the hall unlocked and unattended. Liz had said she might come early. Roger had said he might come early too. Idly, Barbara wonders why Roger might want to come early, and why hadn't she asked him to come early for sure so she could go home and get her skirt without having to rush. At one point, Roger had talked about having an art exhibit with this first concert. But, being a perfectionist, he hadn't wanted an exhibit unless it could be done well. There were many problems, such as lighting, security, the brick walls....

There is an art committee now and a music committee. Barbara is secretary of the music committee as well as of the steering committee. The first all-member meeting is going to be two weeks from Tuesday. The notice for it, run off on the church's ditto machine, will be sent out to everyone in town day after tomorrow. Too bad there is no art exhibit tonight. But

Barbara can sympathize with Roger's concern for perfection. One of the blowers is developing a rattle.

Next Barbara wonders if the painter-artists are at all in touch with the craft-artists, especially the weavers. Weavings on the wall would help with the acoustics. Until recently she had not known there were any weavers. Then one of the math instructors had come to a party wearing a jacket his wife had made for him. Not only that, she had woven the material herself. Barbara, in awe, had gone over to talk with her. In fact, she learned, there were quite a few weavers in the area. No, they had never exhibited, but yes they might be willing to if they knew well ahead of time. Barbara decides she will talk with Roger about the weavers tonight, right after the concert.

She stretches and stands up to take off her coat. Then she walks over to hang it up, conspicuously she hopes, on a hanger in one of the coat racks. And she wanders around the hall, looking at the brick walls and up at the great windows. The windows are covered with grills, protection from basketballs. Some panes are broken, no wonder it's so drafty, in spite of some plastic covering. Do the windows get fixed from the outside, or from the inside? Barbara happens to glance up at the overhead lights. They too are covered with grills. She hadn't noticed that before. How do light bulbs get changed, she wonders, hoping she is not going to have to find out.

Someone is coming in. It's Liz. Without speaking, Liz strides up to the piano on the stage. She starts to take off her coat, looks for a place to put it down, decides to keep it on, open, and sits down to play. Not only is Liz a gifted pianist, she is also dramatically blonde and beautiful.

Is it possible Liz does not notice the sound of the blowers? Her husband will notice. Maybe he'll stay home with the children. Barbara sits on one of the folding chairs in the audience. Eventually the blowers turn off and, when they do, Barbara realizes she had forgotten about them. She looks around and sees that Roger has come in and is standing at the back of the hall. Barbara glances at her watch. 7:15. Alice can be counted on to arrive on time. Barbara gets up, moving quietly. She and Roger exchange looks of admiration for Liz.

Alice comes up the stairs, carrying the programs. "Aren't they nice?" Alice beams. She hands Barbara the programs while she takes off her coat, going over to hang her coat next to Barbara's. She has on a handsome flowing gown. Her very presence can create an occasion. Barbara looks over the programs. Mr. Dixon's name has not been left off. And the programs are indeed very nice. Alice is saying: "Mary called. One of the kids has chicken pox, they just found out. She tried to get hold of you, but you had left already. I told her I was sure you and I could manage." "Oh. Oh gosh. That's too bad. But, well, I guess I can sell tickets. I just wish I'd bought my skirt with me! If I stay behind the table, maybe nobody will notice. Anyhow, you'll do for both of us. That dress is gorgeous! Oh, did Mary

get the tickets to you?" Silence. After a minute Barbara says: "Maybe it doesn't matter."

Looking out into the hall, Alice says: "There's Roger." Barbara answers: "I'll go ask him to do the lights. I'll mark the switches for him if I can find a pen or something..." "Here, I've got one." Alice reaches into a little bag that hangs gracefully from her arm. "Tell him to turn off the house lights at five after, okay? Let's check our watches." They check watches. Barbara says, "I'll be right back."

Roger looks unusually pre-occupied as Barbara explains about Mary. They go together up on the stage. Barbara shows him the light switches, marking the ones for the house lights. The marks don't show up very well. Roger doesn't have a watch. Barbara gives him hers. "Barbara, um, I'm thinking of saying a few words before the concert as, um, you know, chairman of the board." Roger gives small laugh. He is very shy. "Oh. What a good idea." "I was going to practice, but Liz beat me to it. If she finishes before too many people come, I was, er, wondering if people could hear me." "I'll wave at you if I can't, okay? Good luck! I'd better get back."

Alice is talking with three early arrivals. Barbara slides into the chair behind the table, opens the tin box, and then looks up officiously. The early arrivals move away into the hall with their programs. The man takes off his coat and hangs it up in a coat rack. Alice turns to Barbara. "What nice people! They're from out of town, friends of somebody on the Arts Council. They all had tickets. Barb, do you think you could collect tickets too? Unless everyone goes through you, I won't be able to tell who has paid at the door and who hasn't. I'll put these, well, how about putting tickets in the box lid, that'll work, won't it? I'll stand over here and greet people as I give them their programs."

People are beginning to come. At the sight of the grand piano on the stage and rugs on the floor of the basketball court, they stop short and then laugh. Liz leaves the stage. Barbara hasn't had a chance to tell Alice about Roger's speech. People are coming, they really are. The blowers go on again, but they aren't too noticeable in all the commotion. Maybe they will have turned off again by the time Liz begins to play.

Fewer people are coming in now. They don't seem to have minded waiting in line. It is five past. The house lights go off, then on again. The volume of conversation drops. The blowers are very conspicuous, suddenly, rattle and all. The house lights stay on. Alice and Barbara exchange glances. A few latecomers are grateful to still be on time. Not turning off the house lights again, Roger comes out on stage. He smiles whimsically and shrugs his shoulders. He points to one of the blowers. Then he puts his fingers in his ears, looking like Danny Kaye. The audience laughs and then settles down to wait until the blowers turn off, which they do almost at once. Roger gives his brief speech and leaves. The house lights go off and Liz makes her

entrance to enthusiastic applause.

There are people here who have never heard Liz play before. And the ones who have, including Barbara, keep forgetting how good she really is. She has a style of her own, not in the current fashion of precision. The vitality of her approach to the Bach partita she is playing right now has all but the purists on the edge of their chairs. The moment the house lights come on for intermission, someone races up to Barbara, behind the card table, saying: "I can't believe it! I really can't believe it! I saw Liz at the store with all her kids, just this morning. That's our Liz up there!"

Roger stands near the stage. Barbara asks Alice to keep an eye on the tin box so she can go talk to him. "Roger! Hey, you did good." "Thanks." He grins. Then he looks up at the blowers, which are on again. "I'll just let intermission continue a little." "Okay. See you later."

The second half of the program, Chopin, is nothing short of spectacular. The applause at the end is deafening, growing into a standing ovation. During the applause, Dick, the janitor, bleary-eyed, slouches in and asks if it's time yet to turn off the furnace. Alice tells him to go ahead, the concert is almost over. She reaches into the tin box and gives him ten dollars. That wakes him up. He almost runs down the stairs to turn off the furnace and leave. Alice's *savoir faire* never ceases to astonish Barbara.

Liz plays two encores, both of them familiar, the first a showpiece and the second a quiet arrangement of a folk song. The quiet ending, plus of course the fact that the hall is getting cold, brings the concert to a final close. Mr. Dixon's men, who arrived during the first encore, move in to take away the piano. Mary's Bill appears, making his way with difficulty up the stairs through the excited crowd. He grins at Barbara, who stands guard by the tin box, and says: "Hm. Seems to have gone well." Then he says: "Mary thinks you'll need help putting away chairs." He goes into the hall, picks up two chairs, folds them and takes them to one of the trolleys along the wall. He moves the trolley out into the hall. Bill turns out to be a godsend, as usual, although maybe putting away chairs before everyone has left might seem a little unfriendly. Others begin to help. Jim and Tom come over. Tom beams. He really is warm and wonderful. Jim says: "Impressive!" Then he asks: "Are you coming home now?" Barbara shakes her head. They don't see much of each other these days. Jim and Tom wander off.

Liz comes out from backstage with her coat on. Crowds have surrounded her. More people go up to her now, Alice among them. After a while, Alice and Liz come over to Barbara together. Alice takes her coat from the rack and puts it on. She says: "I told Bill I'd take the cash box home with me. And we'll meet at the bank Monday morning. Just look at that! Liz, the check Bill wrote you is not going to bounce." Liz smiles, maybe a little stiffly. Liz goes off alone.

Maybe there should have been a party. Well, Liz is getting paid. There

isn't money for parties. Maybe Liz didn't quite realize her concert was also paying for everything else. Alice takes the lid of the cash box over to the wastebasket in the corner and dumps the tickets. She returns, puts the lid on the box and tucks it under her arm. "Goodnight, Barb. If you need help with the mailing, Monday, give me a call." "I won't. It's all ready to go. But help me remember to write a thank-you to the church secretary. She did it almost all, on her own time." "Bless her! I'll call you in the morning to let you know how much we made. Nine-ish okay?" "Thanks. Yes. I'd love to know."

Barbara watches Alice leave. Then she looks around for Roger. He seems to have gone too. There should have been a party. After hanging her pocketbook up under her coat in the coat rack, Barbara goes to help Bill finish putting away chairs. The mother of a friend of son Peter is still here too, helping. She and Barbara roll up rugs and carry them, one at a time, downstairs to the nursery school room where they spread them out again.

Finally Bill says: "Guess that's it." Barbara says to Peter's friend's mother: "Thank you for staying!" All at once, Barbara finds herself close to tears. She must be more tired than she feels. She says to Bill: "I'll get the lights and lock up. Oh, oh damn, would you check the bathrooms? I forgot. Make sure the windows are shut and that the lights are out? Thanks! You were so great to come. Tell Mary we missed her. How's the chicken pox?" "Okay. Kind of messy though. Well, see you in church." Barbara grins. That's a joke, but it's true. "So long, Bill."

Barbara walks across the basketball court and up back of the stage to turn off lights. Then she re-crosses the court, dark now except for the light from the hallway and from a street lamp shining through a window. Down the stairs, Barbara opens the outside door to see if there is new ice on the step before turning off the outside light. She snaps in the door lock. Finally she turns off all the lights and goes out, closing the door behind her, carefully making sure it is really locked.

The ice is gravelly rather than slippery. And, in puddles, there is more water than ice. The trees no longer creak in the wind. They too are softening. Across the road, metal syrup buckets attached to the sides of some maples catch the lights of a passing car. In the dark, Barbara steps into a puddle, getting a shoe-full of ice water.

She takes her shoe off in the car. Then she changes her mind and puts her shoe back on. She drives home. The dark house looks empty. Neither she nor Jim are very good about remembering to leave on some lights. Barbara gropes her way into the kitchen, locking the door behind her. She dumps her coat and purse on a kitchen chair and takes off both shoes, kicking them under the table. Then, turning lights on and off in relays, she makes her way upstairs. She can hear Peter breathing, through his open door. She stops to check on Elizabeth.

Jim is deeply asleep. Barbara goes to bed in her slip, partly not to disturb him. Mostly she's just too tired. There should have been a party. There should have been a party....

Chapter 19

Poolside

“In the two communities I know most about,” says Barbara, hoping she sounds wise, “the emphasis seems always to have been on active participation, at least in music if not in all the arts.” She is sitting behind a microphone, at a table with others behind other microphones, “poolside” at a motel, speaking on the arts. Barbara had tried to visualize “poolside” earlier this morning, as she was driving through Vermont-in-October to the state’s capital, where this grand gathering sponsored by the state’s Arts Council, was to take place.

The invitation to speak had come to Roger, the chair of the community arts organization, by far the largest in the state consisting, as it did by definition, of everyone in town. Alice, second in command, had insisted someone must go. But she couldn’t and Roger couldn’t. Bill, the treasurer, laughing, wouldn’t, which left secretary Barbara.

“Poolside” was not quite as glamorous as it sounded. The pool itself was small with greenish water. But it was only an incidental part of a much larger room very practically arranged for conferences.

Barbara had come to the capital once before. A year ago last spring, after the first all-members meeting and with the agreement of the others on the executive committee, she had come and talked head-on with the Arts Council people. A good solid grant was going to be essential to the proper running of their organization. The immediate and growing interest was overwhelming. The phone rang day and night. To Barbara, the proper running of the organization began to mean just one thing - hiring an executive director. That time when she came, she had driven through a howling late-spring snowstorm behind a large truck, the only other vehicle on the highway. And then she had almost not managed to find the Arts council office - in the kitchen of an old house across the street from the capitol building. The very young woman in the office, offering coffee, made appropriate remarks about the unseasonable weather and seemed impressed that Barbara had come.

This morning it was fun to see the very young woman again, looking

younger than ever. She greeted Barbara and introduced her to the two other speakers, ushering the three of them to their places at the speakers' table. Immediately after they were seated, the conference began. The very young woman stood up and said who she was and then said who the three speakers were, in the order in which they would speak. Barbara was relieved to find she herself would be the last. Her hands were shaking and she was having trouble pulling the pages of her speech out of her knitting bag.

She had written out her speech. The first speaker, a woman dressed in a handsome suit and silk blouse, had not. She also had a leather briefcase. Barbara wondered what was in it. The speaker described her organization, in the state's only town big enough to be called a city, which had been established to bring in big city events. She spoke well and clearly - and in terms of more money than Barbara had imagined possible. She thanked the Arts Council for all it had done. Her only complaint concerned newspaper and radio publicity. Interesting. It had never occurred to Barbara that newspapers and radios might not cooperate in every way possible, even to contributing their own promotional ideas.

The second speaker was a somewhat older man. Barbara had the feeling she had seen him somewhere before. He explained he had been hired, with an Arts Council grant, to develop a community theater through his town's recreation program. And all at once she remembered where she had seen him - after a concert she and a few singer-friends had been invited to give. He was a writer, a good one according to the person she had spoken with later about him. So apparently he was an actor too, though today he seemed to have trouble simply talking. Her own hands were not shaking anymore. She even managed to look up and then around. The conference room was full. Who were all these people, anyway?

And now she has survived her own first sentence. "The other day," she goes on, "I was talking with Dave Whitman, the minister of the church in the next village. Next month both our towns are going to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of a woman who has made a life and a career out of helping with the music programs in our schools and churches. Dave began telling me stories about a family named Worcester who had been, in the old days, singing-school teachers, teaching singing in the old traditional way, with a set of tuning forks. Neither the lady whose 50th anniversary we'll be celebrating nor the Worcesters ever questioned that music-making was for everyone." Hmm. This is not going to be as hard as she had expected. "Twenty years ago," she continues, "when my husband and I first came, there was a great deal of community music going on, at the college where he teaches and also in private homes. There still is, although the presence of the new arts center at the college, with its understandable emphasis on professionalism, has made the people at the college a little nervous about encouraging groups who have more enthusiasm, perhaps, than talent."

Barbara looks up at her audience, and then down again. “I have hoped, from the beginning of the establishment of our organization, that we would always be in a position to take chances on enthusiasm. Many of our events take place in the town hall. Using a place like this hall, with its unusual acoustics, is a chance in itself, so other chances seem mild in comparison. The great advantage of the hall is that many of the people we are trying to reach are already at home and comfortable there. They know it well as a gym, a dance hall, and a place for town meetings. Rehearsals and concerts are held in their own territory, not in a separate world.”

Barbara looks up again. The audience does seem interested. “Our organization began in that hall in February, 1972, with once-a-week rehearsals for a community chorus, which I directed. I ordered what I thought was surely an optimistic amount of music - sixty copies of the Cherubini Requiem - and had to order fifteen more before the performance the end of May. We were given the use of the hall. I bought the music for the chorus, for which I was later repaid. The accompanist and the sight-reading teacher agreed to work on faith, until they too could be paid.” Money, money, money. Barbara takes a breath and looks up again. Standing in the back of the room is Roger’s friend, smiling gently.

“Our first concert was arranged for mid-March, featuring a gifted pianist from our town, Elizabeth Hall. Mr. Dixon, who sells pianos, contributed the use of a Steinway Grand. This first concert was to publicize the existence of our organization and to begin to raise some money. Enough money was made from this concert, from the chorus concert the end of May and from the \$1 dues solicited from active members, to pay concert expenses and the organizational expenses involved with incorporation, becoming tax deductible, getting a special mailing permit and for the announcements of the first annual open meeting in April. Four of us did the organizing between February and April. At that point ten trustees were elected and the four of us became the executive committee. The state Arts council gave us a good deal of helpful advice but no money until we could prove we had community support and that we could raise money on our own.”

People were really listening! “Seven years ago, my husband and I bought a barn, in a romantic moment, which we converted into a concert hall for local amateur musicians. The enthusiastic, almost frightening, response to the venture made it quite clear there was a great need for such a place. But the time and expense that went into running the barn were more than the two of us could handle. Perhaps you can begin to guess my own reasons for wanting a community organization: to discover locations for the arts other than our barn as well as to get some help with running the barn itself. The organization put the barn through zoning so that a subscription series could be sold for eight Barn concerts. Two volunteers ran the concerts, that first summer, and raised nearly a thousand dollars. In the fall the state Arts

Council gave us a matching grant.”

Barbara dares to be silent for a moment. Her voice is getting stronger as she gains confidence. This sort of thing could even go to one’s head. “A decision that could hardly have been more unanimous was to hire an executive director with half the grant. The organizational aspects of a community arts group can be difficult.” Should she try to ad lib an example? She’ll never have a chance like this again. “A small example.” She looks up and talks to her audience. “We have an arts or crafts exhibit with every concert. Shortly before our last concert, a potter arrived to discover there was no table to put her pots on. Not even only tables just happen. They have to be thought of and put there by someone. Should that someone have been the potter? But potters think pots, not tables. Thinking tables, and knowing that potters don’t, at least not amateur ones, takes experience and imagination of the kind that is crucial and, incidentally, worth more than half our grant. It may even be possible that that kind of experience and imagination doesn’t exist, and that what is really being paid for is - well, someone to dump on.”

Oops, that may have been going too far. Back to the written speech. “This April we will have our third annual meeting. We have bought a grand piano, gradually being paid for, and have given concerts, plays, art shows, and held classes of a wide variety. The art classes in particular are a success. The community chorus continues to attract a lot of interest. Our November performance of Vivaldi’s Gloria will be a joint concert with the high school chorus and orchestra. In December we plan to go to the high school for a second performance of the Gloria. And we’ve borrowed the music from two other choruses here in the state. I have dreams of, eventually, some kind of state music library run by and for us all.

“Only the accompanist for the chorus is being paid now, in a drive to pay off the loan on the piano. There is concern anyway over whom should be paid, if anyone. I very much believe everyone should be paid something and that there should also be a great deal of experimenting - that the only way to find out if a particular idea will work is to try it. But I am being overruled more and more often by those who believe people should donate their talents and that we should strive for known quality. This has been the approach of most arts organizations. And the people in our town who might be persuaded to give more financial support feel that way too. It seems to me, though, that emphasizing quality, hard to define, finally, kills off all but the toughest, and that the toughest are not necessarily the best.

“At any rate, our events now happen in all the churches in town and in the school, in cooperation with the Historical Society and the Library and, this last summer, through the recreation program. We provided a free course in weaving and held two private classes, one in drawing and one in potting - all of these for children.”

She has spoken long enough. A lot of this reporting stuff can get boring. Or, maybe only she is bored, talking about the recreation program. She had fought that development. The kids already had more than enough things to do. It was the grown-ups who mattered. If the kids needed anything it was to see that active participation in the arts didn't just end with graduation from school. Barbara was also beginning to suspect that all this emphasis on kids might have in it a little something to do with brainwashing them, so that, when they grew up, they'd support the arts, financially especially - the arts of others, not their own.

"The locations where we have held our events have been rent-free. We are now beginning to be in the position to offer, at least, to pay utility bills. The churches have been particularly generous. In closing I'd like to tell one of the stories Dave Whitman, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this talk, told me about the Worcester family. When the congregation decided it was time for their church to have a bell, the Worcester in charge was sent off to upstate New York to see about getting one cast. But before he hitched up his buggy, Mr. Worcester took his tuning forks over to the academy and figured out exactly the pitch of the bell over there, to make sure the two bells in town would be in tune. I don't think I'm overdoing the symbolism by emphasizing many of our programs would not be possible without the help of the churches in our town and their continuing efforts to stay in tune with the community."

Done. There is applause. The very young woman, who has been sitting in the front row on the aisle, gets up to thank the speakers and to ask if there are questions. There is one question, about executive directors. The first speaker answers. She says there are always people around who like to organize. There's no need to pay them. That somehow reminds Barbara of the person who told Barbara how great running the barn must have been for releasing aggression. The first speaker also repeats that she believes the primary purpose of the state Council should be to help communities bring in professional events. The second speaker sits hunched around the corner of the table, his back turned. He looks more inclined to leave, fast, than to speak. Barbara, having nothing to add to what she has already said, decides to remain silent. Does the first speaker speak for the audience? Could she even be speaking the truth? A mathematician friend often says thank god mathematicians don't have to be as good in math as musicians have to be in music to make a living.

Lunchtime. First Barbara looks for the ladies room. There's a line. There's also a line for the cafeteria-style lunch. By the time Barbara sits down, beside two older women who smile, the after-dinner (-lunch) speeches have begun.

Apparently the governor was supposed to have come but had been unexpectedly called away and sends his regrets and his congratulations. Now

more than ever, Barbara doesn't understand what is really happening here today. Nothing like being part of an official-appearing event, though, to make one feel important. The food is good, too - very good. The rolls are still warm, and she had been nearly the last in line. How had that been managed? She hasn't been listening and she must. At home, the others are going to want to know. A girl comes by, in the nick of time, to pour coffee.

The after-lunch speeches are over, there weren't many, and people are getting up to leave. The very young woman, passing, waves. By the time Barbara finishes her coffee, she is almost the only one left, and the serving girls are laughing and joking among themselves as they clear the tables.

She leaves the dining room, going into the lobby. Where is everyone? She wanders into the conference room, poolside. No one is here either. The chairs have been put away. Barbara wouldn't be at all surprised if she were to wake up and discover she has been dreaming. Let's see. There were some workshops scheduled to be given this afternoon, one by the actor/writer on theater. Is he still around? She had half looked for him at lunch and hadn't seen him. She feels more like getting in her car and going home, but she really must take advantage of whatever it is that's going on. Also, she doesn't want to be marked absent, in case anyone is keeping track. She searches in her purse for the schedule of events. She can't find it. Oh well, she had noticed on the way in that the schedule was posted in the lobby. She returns to the lobby - not a soul - and reads the schedule. The theater workshop will be poolside at 2:00. It is 1:45. You'd think somebody would be around. She decides to go to the ladies' room again. She takes her time combing her hair, and it is past two when she reappears poolside. Five people have gathered near the north end of the pool. The actor/writer shows no sign of ever having seen her before.

They all sit on the floor, since there are no chairs. The writer says a few things about theater in general and the community program he is involved with in particular - the things he had said this morning. The other man there asks some questions. He is probably a friend. After a while, the writer asks them to stand, and he places them in certain positions. They are going to pretend to be a machine. They are supposed to count to four together and to keep repeating the count - one, two, three, four. On the counts of one and three, Barbara is to put her right hand out in front of her. On the counts of two and four, she is to bring her hand back to her side. The others are told what they must do. And they proceed to create a machine-like image, amusing enough which, however, soon jams. At that point, the workshop ends.

Barbara decides it is okay to leave now and goes out to the parking lot to find her car. She had been seeing that word "workshop" around quite a bit lately and was beginning to wonder what one might be like. Now she knows, maybe. As she drives home along the highway, Barbara puzzles over

the events of the day. Everybody else had at least seemed to know what was going on. (Had Roger, or Alice, known? Bill? Maybe Bill - well, maybe not.) Had she made a fool of herself? Probably, but she doesn't even know that for sure.

At least by now she has definitely woken up again, and what glory to wake up to. The fall colors, against the deep deep blue sky, glow in the afternoon sun. Relatively speaking, human efforts at grandeur are so trivial, laughable even. Today was laughable, even not relatively speaking. Barbara giggles to herself until, going around another bend, she is silenced.

Chapter 20

Gloria

What would happen if she - just left? Barbara avoids looking at the singers on the stage, the orchestra below them and, here in the audience, people shuffling up and down the aisles searching for empty seats on the chance someone left at intermission. The high school music teacher, in the viola section, has just finished tuning the orchestra. Clutching the blue score of Vivaldi's "Gloria", Barbara gets up from her chair on the aisle and walks into the black circle marking the center of the town hall's basketball court. Not much of an entrance for a conductor. People continue to shuffle around her. A fancy entrance would be hard to manage under town hall circumstances, for which she is grateful. With deliberation, she places the score on the music stand, just in front of the black circle. She opens the score to the first page.

She raises her head. The singers, there must a hundred of them, some spilling down the stairs on either side of the stage, seem miles away. Below, merging into the first rows of the audience, are the orchestra players behind their music stands. The audience continues to murmur and shuffle. People stand along the walls. Looking down again, at the blue of the open cover, the white of the first page, Barbara makes out the large 4 she has written in, in red pencil, for herself at the top of the white page. She must give a downbeat, only she can. Then, god willing, a two and then a three and then a four. What would happen if she couldn't? No one should ever have such power, certainly not if it really mattered, over so many people. Well, if she doesn't give a downbeat, people can just go home, nobody will die or anything.

Lifting her head again, seeing that the players are watching her, she decides to begin. Vivaldi. Think Vivaldi, and of this piece of his that continues to mean so much. She gives the downbeat. And she is swept into the orchestral introduction. The visiting string players, who had performed chamber music for the first half of this Sunday afternoon concert, are now playing in the orchestra. It is they who are making the difference, especially

among the cellos. The dark-haired girl from the high school, sitting next to the cellist from across the state, is suddenly transformed, giving her all.

The audience has stopped muttering and shuffling. And the singers make their entrance, as if they can't help it, with the two-fold "Gloria", almost exactly the way she hears it in her own head. Well, now. "In excelsis deo!" And again, "in excelsis deo!" There among the violists, the high school music teacher looks as if she had died and gone to heaven, not expecting to.

The orchestra had not been part of the original plan for today's concert. When the high school music teacher had received the Arts Association's fall events mailing, she had telephoned Barbara in a panic. The high school chorus and orchestra were planning to perform the Vivaldi this year, the music had already been ordered! Barbara, after a pause, suggested they join forces, a November concert in the town hall and a December one at the high school. Over the phone there had been a sudden silence. Finally the teacher said joint concerts might be a very good idea. She would like to think about it. Barbara asked her to try to call back by tomorrow night when the trustees of the Arts Association were meeting, who would have to approve. The teacher called back in fifteen minutes. And Barbara said she would call her back at school the morning after the meeting. Then, before Barbara could make sure the teacher would conduct both concerts, the teacher said she would conduct the concert at the high school but would play the viola in November. The viola section was not very strong and the recent graduate, who had agreed to play in December, would not be home from college yet. The teacher seemed pleased to know that, in December, Barbara would be part of the chorus. And Barbara had to begin wondering what, if anything, she remembered from six weeks of orchestral conducting back in music school.

The trustees had been enthusiastic. Barbara had even managed to contact all the members of the music committee, needing their approval too. All those phone calls! How much more time an organization took than an individual enterprise. It was also much more expensive, for reasons Barbara never could completely work out, but not for the Veres alone any more. Soon her terms as secretary both for the music committee and for the trustees would be over. She would then truly be shifting responsibilities over to the community. And yet, in her heart of hearts she knew, without daring to, that the community would not be any more equal to such an effort than she had been. For instance, someone else was now in charge of taking around posters. But, after a phone call from the music teacher who wondered why there weren't any posters at the high school, Barbara had called the new person in charge. Well, the person's child was sick and anyway, were the posters really so important? Barbara offered to take posters around for her, reminding her own self this must be the last time. The posters were beautiful, rich red-purple with the composers' names in dark blue on gold suns.

Kate had outdone herself. What would Kate have thought if the posters hadn't appeared? She was still donating her time and talent, though by now the association was at least paying for her materials.

Soon Barbara would no longer even be aware of what wasn't getting done. But then again, sometimes something magical would happen almost without anyone doing anything at all. Today's art exhibit was a case in point, watercolors of local scenes, painted by an English woman who had moved here last year. The English woman had made herself known to the art committee. She had been asked by the committee to exhibit at this concert. She had come to look at the town hall, all on her own. She had counted the windows. And today she had arrived with two pictures for each window, setting them on the wide sills, leaning them against the grills. Barbara, who had come early to let her in and to help, had had trouble dragging herself away when the players and singers began to arrive, on schedule forty-five minutes before the concert.

Forty-five minutes had not been too early, either. As the players and singers were taking off their coats downstairs in a cleared area of the nursery school room, one of the young players asked: "Mrs. Vere, where are the music stands?" At the same time one of the boys over by the nursery school piano started to play it. Suddenly he jumped back, yelling "Ow!" Looking down at his finger, he added "Sh-t." Then, looking at the piano, he said: "Geeze! It bit me." So the piano still hadn't been fixed. Barbara caught sight of the music teacher who had just arrived with another group of students. Barbara answered, to the question about music stands: "Just a minute. I'll ask."

"Music stands?" said the teacher. "Oh, golly! Well, I guess I forgot. Oh dear." Barbara and the teacher just stood there until a voice next to them said: "Mrs. Vere?" They turned. It was Jen, the oboe player. Jen said Tony had his family's VW bus, and all the seats in it were out so, if she could please have the key to the high school music room, she and Tony and maybe somebody else could..... The music teacher started fumbling in her purse, finding the key, holding it out, holding it back: "I really don't know if I should....." "I'm sure it'll be okay," Jen said. "We drove by the school on the way over and I saw Mr. Brown go in. We'll knock on his window so he'll know who's there." Mr. Brown was the school principal. The music teacher handed over the keys. With a final "Don't worry," Jen, collecting Tony and another boy, vanished through the growing crowd.

"Barbara?" This time it was the violinist who was playing in the Mozart trio. "Barbara, there's got to be paper cups somewhere." "Hold on." Turning back to the music teacher and pointing to the boy by the piano, Barbara said: "Somebody may need a band-aid. There's some in the glove compartment of my car, the green one just outside the side door." "If I could just have some water by me...this wretched cold...if I start coughing..." Barbara

asked someone in the chorus, who was a member of the church next door, to run over and get a glass from the parish house kitchen. The nursery school paper cups were kept in a locked cupboard.

And so on. Finally Barbara went back upstairs. People were flowing into the hall. And, as if it had been planned that way, Jen and her crew appeared with music stands. The orchestra players took the chairs reserved for them from the front rows of the audience, placing them behind the stands. Mr. Brown himself had been pressed into service, with his station wagon. One trip had taken care of all the music stands. When all the players were accounted for, a few remaining chairs were returned to the audience. This was becoming an event.

And now, already the first movement of the Vivaldi is over. The singers and players exchange looks, as they turn pages to the next movement. Small waves of whispers pass and vanish through the audience.

“Et in terra pax.” In rehearsals this part had always gone well, especially in comparison with the rather poor recording Barbara owns. One reason she had known about the “Gloria” was that, after she and Jim were married, their first purchase together had been a dozen mail order, on sale, records. Barbara had grown to love those first records, the Vivaldi among them, returning to them again and again. Right now, Barbara can hardly believe what she is hearing, the ending benediction especially. The group has moved beyond her.

Now the violins begin the “Laudamus Te”, sung by two clear-voiced sopranos. Girls from the high school will sing the duet in December, and as many of the other solos as the music teacher feels they can handle. Again the chorus comes in, as if it couldn’t wait. The high school boys manage that difficult running passage well, with the help of the community chorus singers. Now the reedy-sweet, sure sound of Jen’s oboe introduces a soprano who is making her first public appearance, trying to overcome stage fright. Her slightly tremulous “Domine Deus” is truly exquisite. And now, Annie. It is as if the “Agnus Dei” were written for her. “Miserere nobis,” she sings, accompanied by the cellos. The dark quality of her voice is echoed by the chorus, haunting this place now no longer either a basketball court or a town hall.

Vivaldi’s music is doing this, Vivaldi, the red-headed violinist, teacher, composer, priest. Strange chord progressions lead into the “Qui Tollis.” And the music continues, changing like sun coming from behind clouds, into Marjorie’s solo, followed by the lively, if not close to manic, finale. What a way for this piece to end! The dark-haired girl and the cellist from across the state begin to laugh, they are actually laughing, playing as one. And the wild dance opens out into the fugue, “Cum Sancto Spiritu”, ending by encompassing the audience which irrepressibly bursts into applause. Barbara lifts her hands to the people in the chorus and they are laughing too. The

applause goes wild. She should, she must, turn around. She looks down at the white last page of the music, on which she has red-penciled "soloists!" How will she ever manage to acknowledge each of them? She folds the blue back cover over the white and, in a daze, picks up the music and holds it over her head. Some of the high school girls are crying, clapping, laughing all at once, everybody is clapping. Holding the music up still, Barbara turns around.

Under the basketball net at the back, a very tall man is standing. She keeps turning. Then, hugging the music, she walks forward into the orchestra. The violinist with the cold, who hasn't coughed once, gets up and gives her a hug. What has happened to the water glass? Oh boy, she mustn't forget to return it to the parish house. Next to the violinist is the boy who was bitten by the piano, a band-aid on his bow hand and not on the other, phew. Now he is waving his bow. What an afternoon, and what a chance for her. Imagine, though, being a president or a movie star, being a public figure like this as a usual thing! For a moment, Barbara finds herself next to Jen, who is clapping and laughing. Jen stops clapping long enough to whisper: "I'll get the stands back to the school, Mrs. Vere, thank you so much!", before clapping again and giving a little whoop. At the back door, Barbara turns around once more and bows. Everybody is standing. Barbara attempts to acknowledge the soloists up on the stage, but all of them are clapping. So she bows once more, without lifting the music again - had that been presumptuous, maybe, or corny? - and goes out the door and down to the nursery school room. What an afternoon! And yet. Just now she is thinking gratefully more about Jen than about Vivaldi, knowing she herself must gear up for putting away all those chairs yet once again.

Chapter 21

Graduation

The wail of bagpipes pierces the air. Two plaid-kilted pipers strut forward from the back of the college gym, down through the rows of black-robed, alphabetized, graduating seniors, and out the door. Deafened, mesmerized, those seniors whose name begin with A start to follow.

When the pipers are gone, the room echoes still. Eventually, and still slightly mesmerized, the V's - Vaughan, Vere, Vernon - begin to follow too, out through the door, down the stairs, out the front doors opened wide to the broad cement steps leading to the sidewalk and the street. They blink their eyes in the sun. People with cameras are running around everywhere.

Stepping into the street, the black robed figures in front of Barbara wheel to the left. A light breeze blows the robes gently. No longer mesmerized, Barbara begins to think, yet once again. about ceremonies. Man-made, have any been woman-made, except in imitation? Perhaps childbirth ones. Somewhere she had read that in pre-Christian times women went with their women friends to a river to give birth, draping themselves over crosses. Could ceremonies even be attempts to make events seem as real as childbirth is?

Along the roadside, young mothers are watching the graduation parade, their carriages, strollers and red wagons filled with small children. How curious no longer to be among them herself. "There she is! Hey Barbara!" She looks over, grins, waves and says "Hi" back. The kids wave too, more doubtfully, not quite recognizing her in her black robe. The procession speeds up. By the time the V's reach the college Green, the pace has picked up considerably. And by the time they reach their chairs, grateful for the shade of an elm in the library quadrangle, they are breathless.

These last three days have been among the strangest Barbara has ever lived through. Friday was Class Day, then yesterday, and now graduation. She had not intended to go to Class Day, just to the required rehearsal for graduation beforehand. Arriving at the gym for rehearsal, she had found a note on her chair. No one else had a note. She opened it. It said if she

came to an office in the Life Sciences building by 4 o'clock that afternoon with \$10.00, she could become a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Was this a joke? Anyway, she didn't have \$10.00. She looked at her watch. Quarter past two. She did have to get something for the kids' supper (she and Jim were going out), and could cash a check at the store, she supposed. But then she'd be late picking up Elizabeth at Choir rehearsal.

Bob Vaughan, whose younger brother was a friend of Peter's, came to sit down next to her, what luck to have someone she knew, someone whom her own presence would not make too uncomfortable. Only 36 women were graduating, this first time ever. Two were faculty wives, the other wife not very much older than everyone else.

At the rehearsal, first each graduating senior was efficiently accounted for and some awards were given. Then they all stood to practice marching as they would for graduation, without bagpipes which were to be a surprise, out the gym door, down the stairs, out the front door, and then straight on to where the Class Day ceremonies were held, in an outdoor glen. An inconspicuous escape was quite simply not possible. Passers-by stopped to watch. Among them was the young professor who had taught the Chekov course that winter. He caught sight of Barbara and his jaw dropped. She grinned at him, remembering an evening in early March, warm and full of mist, when the class had met for the last and hauntingly memorable Chekovian time, in a small attic room in one of the old campus buildings. At the entrance to the glen, each graduating senior was given a long-stemmed clay pipe with tobacco and two matches. Tradition held that, at the end of the class day ceremonies, each senior would break the pipe on a particular old tree stump. When that time came, there was such a crowd by the stump that Barbara, feeling silly anyway and a little worried that her own inappropriate presence might turn the tradition itself silly, decided she could now make her escape.

"Barbara, hey Barbara!" She turned. It was one of Jim's colleagues. She waited for him to catch up. "Looks like you made it. Congratulations!" "Thank you." She smiled, holding the clay pipe and the note that had been left on her chair in the gym. He was looking at them. Barbara asked: "Would you like a pipe?" But it was the note he was interested in. He seemed to know about it - oh right. She had forgotten he was one of the officials for Phi Beta Kappa, here. When she confessed she didn't have \$10.00, he said "What?!" and pulled out his wallet. "Here. My graduation present." He gave her a \$10.00 bill. "Oh, but you can't do that! Anyhow, look, it's too late, it's - it's a quarter of four." "Go on, run for it, go on, go on!" He shooed her off, so she ran.

Now she was really feeling silly! She could at least have given him the pipe, just put it in his hand, the way he had put the \$10.00 in hers. She stopped to catch her breath. She had taken the path up over the hill. On

the sidewalk below, she saw someone else running. She started off again, running after him, following him into the Life Sciences building and down some stairs into a long hall. He seemed to know where he was going. When he got there, up ahead, Barbara decided to stop to recover her dignity. A tall professor, his back toward Barbara, asked the student to wait in his office. He shut the door behind the student.

The professor was talking with a woman Barbara had met once before at a party, a very interesting person who was trying to carve out a career for herself, no easy task around here even for a man not connected with one of the going institutions. It was she who was doing most of the talking, the shouting almost. "This should never have happened!" The tall professor gestured, trying to quiet her, reminding her of the student in the office behind the closed door. There was more, not at all more quietly, about "grade inflation", "a quarter of the class", "membership in Phi Beta Kappa becoming meaningless", etc. Finally the woman stomped off past Barbara, nodding briefly.

Wearily, the professor, his back still turned, opened the door to his office and went in. Since it was exactly four by the clock in the hallway, Barbara decided she had better make her presence known. The professor looked up when she knocked at the now open office door. He asked her to wait there. (Had he too glanced at the clock?) Barbara watched from the doorway as the student paid his \$10.00. The student was told the initiation ceremonies would be the next morning in the auditorium, and to come half an hour early to the room above the auditorium. The student left.

Turning to Barbara, the professor said, looking tired indeed: "Are you sure you want to become a member of Phi Beta Kappa?" She handed over her graduation present and received her instructions about the next morning. She hoped either Jim or Peter would be able to bring her. The Veres now had three cars. The two old ones continued taking turns needing to be fixed. The Veres had just bought a new car, which was called Barbara's graduation present. Tomorrow morning, Jim and Peter would need both the new car and the one that was working at the moment. Today Jim had left the new car for her behind the Math building, about a block away. Later Peter would come by for Jim in the other.

And now, as Barbara walked over to the Math building, how quiet the campus seemed, almost ominously so, or was that her imagination? She drove across the river directly to the church. She was late and Elizabeth would be impatiently waiting.

The minister himself was standing in front of the church. He waved when he caught sight of her. Barbara had the curious feeling he was relieved to see her. He said choir rehearsal would be going on a little longer than usual. He added he was outside waiting for her and also for Edie's mother. Then he explained a man had escaped from the mental health center. He had last

been seen near the bridge on this side of the river. It seemed foolish to take unnecessary chances with the children, the ones who lived outside the center of town.

Eddie's mother drove up. She thanked the minister for telephoning and said her husband, a doctor at the hospital, had also phoned. He had agreed it was a good idea to come for Edie, who would otherwise be walking home alone, out into the country.

They entered the church and made their way to the room where the children were singing. Mary, playing the piano with one hand and directing with the other, waved at the three of them between beats. When the song ended, the minister told the children a man who was sick had left the hospital when he wasn't supposed to. Today they should go straight home after choir rehearsal. The man was very unhappy and might not quite know what he was doing. Then the children sang the song again for the minister and the two moms, since Elizabeth wouldn't be there on Sunday but at her mom's graduation.

On the way home, Barbara and Elizabeth stopped at the store to buy chicken pies for supper. At home, they found Jim and Peter sitting together on the kitchen steps. Barbara gave the clay pipe to Peter. Jim had heard she had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He got up and put his arm around her shoulders and also pooh-poohed her concern about leaving the children alone tonight. Peter said he was definitely staying home, by now all six feet of him, since there would be good TV.

Little more was heard about the man who had escaped. He seemed to have been found "down the road" (down what road?). It was all very vague and was not reported in the papers or on the local TV and radio stations. Later Barbara heard, or did she dream it, that his plan had been to "get" the women who were graduating on Sunday, the first women to be graduating from the college. Barbara managed, more or less, to avoid formulating the thought that she herself was the only graduating woman this side of the river.

The next morning, Peter left Barbara off near the auditorium building on the way to his library job. Afterwards, she would walk to the Math building and Jim would take time out to drive her home. Elizabeth was spending the morning at Margaret's.

Since it was early, Barbara wandered up and down Main Street. The day was cool and bright. Many other nicely dressed people were wandering up and down Main Street too, looking into the store windows, looking pleased with the displays and with each other and with themselves.

After a while, Barbara decided it might be time to see what was going on at the auditorium. By the door of the building, Barbara met the woman who had been haranguing about too many Phi Beta Kappas, yesterday. She greeted Barbara like a long lost friend and presented her with a small bottle

of champagne, delicately wrapped in pink tissue. She left. Barbara, holding the bottle, remained by the door.

Many people were coming in. Barbara, with her bottle, continued standing there, wondering what to do with the bottle. Finally she made up her mind to put it in the corner behind a large pot with a plant. A cobweb from the back of the plant stuck to her hand. She managed to get the cobweb off along the banister as she walked up the stairs to the room above the auditorium. Across the room, Jim's colleague, the one who had given her the \$10.00, was busy organizing. Another official ushered Barbara to her alphabetical place in the long line which had already begun to make its way downstairs.

In the sudden quiet of the softly lit auditorium, Barbara was at once caught up in a dignified and impressive ceremony. The other students looked exceptional indeed, every single one of them, as separately they walked up to the podium to receive some papers and a small red ribbon to pin on their robes for graduation the next morning. Barbara could remember having seen only two of the students before, an oriental girl and the other faculty wife. She began to realize, as she read the program, that over half of the first thirty-six women graduating were here in this room.

There was a reception afterwards. She stood on the outside of it for a moment, the solid pack of people filmed in smoke from cigarettes. Suddenly exhausted, she decided instead to see if her champagne bottle was still behind the pot.

It was. She picked it up and brushed it off. Near the bottom, some dirt had settled into the creases of the pink tissue. Never mind.

She made her way across campus to the Math building, her white Phi Beta Kappa papers, red ribbon and pink-wrapped bottle bright against her dark dress. She had meant to be inconspicuous.

Up on the fourth floor of the Math building, Jim was the only one around. Bent over his desk, he raised one hand, indicating he knew she was there. Barbara put her champagne bottle down beside the extra chair, where she sat after picking up the math journals there to hold on her lap. She looked at the blackboard. She could never look at the blackboards in this building without remembering once again the one in their friend's office. The math symbols on that blackboard had kept right on going, off the blackboard and onto the walls.

There was usually a part of Jim's blackboard, not always the same part, staked out by Elizabeth for a drawing. Jim often brought her along, when he needed something at home that he had forgotten at the office. There was a drawing on the blackboard now, a stick-figure girl riding a bike. The balloon from her mouth said, "Hi Dad." "Let's go", said Jim. By needing a ride home, probably Barbara was delaying the course of mathematics. She had been told she should feel angry at such times, not guilty. But now more

than ever she sympathized with Jim's being interrupted. Yes, mathematics was important.

So was Elizabeth's "Hi Dad." Of all that was presently on Jim's blackboard, Barbara was sure that would be the last to go and not until it was washed off by a janitor. Barbara wondered how much Jim missed being around the children because of his work; more than he said, she suspected. He had had to choose. No, he hadn't chosen. Neither had Barbara, not in the 1950's. In the 1980's, for Elizabeth and for Peter there would be many choices, and continuing choices. Would their lives be forever unsettled? Were their chances of "growing up" any better than hers and Jim's had been? What did growing up mean, beyond the implication of being able to support oneself financially? In that respect Barbara had abandoned the idea of every growing up herself. Being able to experience life in all its fullness? And what did that mean? If she knew, she might be more inclined to envy her children's prospect of freedom for choice rather than to appreciate more and more her own freedom from choice.

Jim dropped her off by the kitchen door and drove away again without saying a word, having emerged from his thoughts just enough to be able to negotiate the drive home and then back to the office. Barbara hoped the same parking place would still be there. "Don't be that way, Barbara!" one friend kept saying. Another said: "It's as if you didn't exist." She and Jim did lead parallel, rather than intersecting, lives. Even at parties, he liked the crowds by the food and drink. She liked the edges and the one-on-one conversations. But she did like parties. Without Jim, she wouldn't be invited. Shortly after they were married, a graduate school friend of Jim's had said to her: "I hope you realize what a genuine person Jim is," as if that were the highest praise he could give any human being. She agreed and she did realize. Plus Jim was there, always, never closer but never farther away either.

And now, here it is, Sunday morning. Here she is, under an elm in front of the library, about to graduate. A brass band, on the steps of the English department wing, plays a fanfare, and the two front rows of graduating seniors stand up, ready to process toward the platform. Off they go, and the next two rows stand. Eventually the two rows which include the Vs stand. And then go. As Barbara walks past the faculty, she sees Jim grinning at her. Peter and Elizabeth are around too, somewhere.

Up the steps to the platform, she mustn't stumble. At the high school graduation last year, the son of one of her friends had turned a cartwheel. She's next. There's a shuffle. The president himself comes forward to give her her diploma. He shakes her hand, and then kisses her cheek! On the way back to her chair, Barbara notices her fellow graduates are staring at her, wide-eyed. When she reaches her chair, Bob Vaughan turns to her and holds up his diploma triumphantly. So she holds up her diploma too,

triumphantly.

And then graduation is over. Everyone spills out over the lawns and the college Green. The Veres have arranged to meet by the flagpole. So have several hundred others. They do manage to find each other. Almost at once the town begins returning to normal. By the time the Veres get back to the car, parked behind the Math building, and start to drive home, everyone has vanished.

In front of the auditorium building, an honorary degree candidate stands alone. He is a distinguished and internationally known biographer, a retired member of the faculty. He has been the focus of numerous college events, not just for the last few days but all spring. Now, he's looking beached. "Isn't there a luncheon?", Barbara wonders aloud. Jim stops the car. He gets out. They all get out and go over to him and Jim shakes his hand. The man says he's waiting for someone, he thinks. Jim asks if he can take a picture of him. Jim borrows Peter's camera. Then Peter asks if he can take a picture too. So does Elizabeth. Finally they say goodbye and, everybody waving, the Veres get back in the car and drive home.

The next year in the fall, at a photography contest sponsored by the the Arts Association, one of the three pictures, taken of the honorary degree candidate in front of the auditorium building, won a prize. It was Elizabeth who had thought of entering the picture, even if she wasn't sure it was the one she had taken. Afterwards, the picture was given to the candidate's wife, who said it was the best picture of her husband she had ever seen.

Chapter 22

The Readers

The fire in the kitchen fireplace burns brightly, without smoking. The sun, this 1974 January morning, streams through the windows. Outside, it is zero. Barbara and three others sit around the kitchen table, rather self-consciously. In front of them are copies of "Paradise Lost". Two of the copies are paperbacks, one new from the bookstore, and the other bought in Chicago six years ago. Of the two hardbacks, one was bought about twenty years ago in Boston. The other is a family copy (New York) from the last century, elegantly bound and illustrated but rather faded and perhaps unread.

The leader, whose name is Ellen Price, surveys the assortment of books doubtfully. "At least are all the lines numbered? I was planning to make specific references." She sips coffee from the mug by her hand as the others check. The books do all have numbered lines.

Barbara and Ellen's friend Carolyn hold pencils, intending to mark in their books. The third person, a distinguished gentleman in his seventies, has brought a small black-leather notebook. He opens it. At the top of the first page, he carefully writes in the date with a pen. His name is Charles.

Barbara had talked with Charles at a Christmas party. He had asked her what their town Arts Association was up to now. Barbara had answered that a group was being formed to study epic poetry, beginning with "Paradise Lost" in January, the "Iliad" in spring, then on to the "Odyssey", the "Aeneid", the "Divine Comedy" and "Faust". Ellen Price would be in charge of "Paradise Lost". Ellen had moved here in July with her husband, a resident at the hospital. She had spent most of her senior year in college studying and writing on "Paradise Lost". In his courtly way, Charles had then inquired if he could become a part of this project.

Barbara had met Ellen and her husband through the Community Chorus, which Barbara directed. The Prices had also been the ones to buy the little grand piano, when it was replaced in September by the big new one. They had sung in the Vivaldi "Gloria" and were singing in the March performance

of Haydn's "The Seasons".

Last year in March, the chorus had sung Mendelssohn's "Elijah", the first half on a Sunday afternoon and the second half in the evening after supper. "The Seasons" would be performed that same way, first "Spring" and "Summer", and then, after supper, "Autumn" and "Winter". Haydn's music was more subtle, more difficult to get at, than Mendelssohn's. Sometimes Barbara had trouble persuading the chorus the music and words were humorous rather than silly. Haydn himself may not have been entirely happy with the text. During one of the rehearsal breaks, Ellen had come over to Barbara, wanting to pursue a comment Barbara had made about the relation of the text of Haydn's earlier work, "The Creation" to "Paradise Lost". Then Barbara had asked Ellen if she had by any chance read James Thomson's poem "The Seasons". Ellen's friend Carolyn, nearby, overheard the conversation and came up to eavesdrop.

During the next week's rehearsal break, Carolyn came over and said to Barbara: "You know what? I've had an idea!" Carolyn, bird-like, must often have had trouble being taken seriously. Barbara found herself resisting an impulse to laugh. Carolyn continued: "I've never read "Paradise Lost" or a whole lot of other stuff. Now why don't we, through the Arts Association, set up a reading group, not just a for-fun one, but with a leader we pay?" "Well, um," Barbara answered as somebody else appeared at her elbow saying: "Barbara? A few of us are wondering if we can buy our copies of the Haydn so we can mark in them." "Oh!" The scores of "The Seasons" had been expensive. The trustees would not mind at all! Carolyn said quickly: "I'll get back to you," and went off as Barbara started trying work out, in her head, an instant system of collecting money. The trustees had just met, so she would have to telephone them all, nuts to that! This organizational red tape had led, also, to a class in jewelry-making starting up without even trying to go through the Association.

After the rehearsal break, Barbara announced that anybody who wanted to own the Haydn music could pay her directly. The right change would be appreciated. This did not mean anybody had to buy it. Much as the Association would like the cash, it was also trying to build up a music library.

At the end of rehearsal, Carolyn came around again. "Barb, can you come to my house tomorrow at ten? Ellen will be there." "Great. Sure, where do you live?" "Ah yes. You know the road by the library? Go around that corner and we're the brown house on the left."

The next morning, Ellen and Barbara arrived together and were greeted at the door of the brown house by Carolyn and two little red-headed, blue-eyed boys. While Ellen and Barbara took off their coats and hung them in the closet by the door, Carolyn sat the boys down at a small table next to a wide sunny window. She gave them some juice and Irish soda bread, and also paper and crayons. There was soda bread for Ellen and Barbara too,

with coffee served in glass cups and saucers. As she sat down, Carolyn made a show of tearing her hair, announcing she was pregnant again, adding: "If I don't do something besides be a mother, right now, I'll forget how!"

By the time Ellen left to pick up her own son at nursery school, the three of them had drawn up a proposal for Barbara to present to the trustees at their next meeting. As she said goodbye to Carolyn and the little boys, Barbara wondered if she were feeling old or simply grateful that both of her own children were grown up enough to be in the big school across the river.

At first they had thought of trying to connect the study of Milton's "Paradise Lost" to Haydn's "The Seasons", to be able to work through the music committee. But Barbara, who in fact did hope to do just that, was the first to admit the connection might seem pretty far-fetched. And they began thinking in terms of a whole new committee, a literature committee, opening the way for more than a reading group. Carolyn said a friend of hers, interested in writing, might want to organize some kind of writers' workshop. They also talked about the possibility of play readings, maybe formal ones, even simple productions. But right now they knew for sure they wanted to read epic poems, beginning with "Paradise Lost".

They proposed setting up a committee of four, with Carolyn (chairman), Barbara (secretary - oh no, not again), Ellen and one other person eventually (who would be Charles), with their first business being to initiate a series, six sessions each, on epic poetry, at \$125.00 per series, led by someone appointed by the literature committee, to be paid \$150.00 per series. So, if six people signed up, the Association would break even, or just about, Barbara had to remind them, counting administrative costs. "Well, who knows," said Carolyn: "Seven people might sign up." Ellen wasn't sure she herself would be much of a drawing card. Barbara was impressed Ellen was willing to give it a try.

The trustees were very reluctant to form another committee. Barbara guessed she had rather railroaded the idea through, probably on the strength of the still-fresh success of the Vivaldi. And, other than Charles, no one did sign up for the first series. Ellen settled for \$100.00 rather than \$150.00, in spite of Barbara's protestations to both Ellen and the trustees that some of the art classes had not broken even either, at first. And now they, the art classes, were the major contributors to the Association. Barbara decided to ask Ellen if she, Barbara, could use the last, the sixth, session to talk about the connection, if any, between "Paradise Lost" and Haydn's "The Seasons".

So here they are, this lovely winter morning, beginning their study of epic poetry. First Ellen talks about John Milton. Charles writes in his little notebook, Barbara pencils comments inside the back cover of her book, and Carolyn underlines in her text's introduction. Ellen begins the discussion and Carolyn takes part with a will. Barbara has never met anyone quite

like her. Charles is utterly charmed. The morning goes well, and so do the following ones.

Along with "Paradise Lost", Barbara read James Thomson's "The Seasons". Thomson's poem was much easier, but the two did have a surprisingly similar feel to them. Similar parts of both poems, about nature and people in nature, had been chosen for both Haydn oratorios. She learned that the original English had been translated into German for Haydn by a Dutchman named Van Swieten and that, without Van Swieten's encouragement, even arm twisting, Haydn might never have written either work. Van Swieten was a diplomat turned librarian. He had done some composing himself, not much good apparently though it was probably no longer possible to judge that for oneself. If even Bach's music was used to wrap garbage, why should a better fate have met Van Swieten's? Van Swieten had become a patron for composers ("the original Dutch Uncle" was Carolyn's comment), arranging concerts so composers' works could be performed for several patrons at once.

Barbara's term as secretary of the Arts Association had ended after the meeting which had established the Literature Committee, and Carolyn had taken over. Barbara, in full throttle began also planning the fall concert, ordering Vaughn Williams' "The Holy City" to be performed in conjunction with some piano pieces by Ravel. A pianist had been hoping for an opportunity to work up those pieces. It had not even crossed Barbara's mind the trustees would vote her proposal down at their April meeting, but they did. Both the chairman of the Music Committee and Carolyn found themselves comforting Barbara, trying to explain the trustees really did have their reasons. Financially "The Seasons" had not been a success, though musically Barbara had been happier with it than with anything else she had ever done. One of the town's selectmen had come over to her before going home at the half for supper, saying: "But where is everybody?" He had offered to call up the radio station. "People don't know what they're missing!"

Up until now, Barbara had chosen music with the prime consideration being publicity for the Association. Mendelssohn's "Elijah" could be counted on to be a crowd pleaser, even among those who grumbled about Mendelssohn's being "too facile". And indeed both the rehearsals and the performance of the highly dramatic music had been wonderful fun. In the process, Barbara had taken a course at the college called "The Bible in Literature" and had written both the assigned papers on the prophet Elijah. Nearly everyone who wanted the chance had taken part in singing the many brief solos. Mendelssohn had a gift - the awareness, the experience - for writing effective music that amateurs could perform well.

There were only three soloists for "The Seasons". And Haydn's music is not for everyone, its depth and subtlety well below the surface. But perhaps more importantly the chorus at the college had started up again, under a

new director, offering once again the chance to sing with an orchestra rather than just a piano. Quite a few of the singers returned there. But the ones who remained had learned the Haydn music well. For Barbara, knowing that certain effects they had worked on would surely happen was a new and luxurious experience.

Now, after the trustees meeting, Barbara did not know what to do about the Vaughan Williams' music. Finally she decided to perform a part of it at the Pops concert in late May. That way, she could pay for it with the money budgeted for new Pops music. And then, for the fall concert, she would re-propose the chorus perform Beethoven's "Mass in C". Music for that could be inexpensively rented. And it was also a safe and interesting piece to work on and listen to, easy enough to prepare in time, and long enough to be a whole program. This proposal was accepted without a murmur, according to the Music Committee chairman. But what if it had not been? There were just too many people involved with the chorus. Decisions really did have to be made well in advance. Also directing a chorus was a lot of work, it really was. Should she consider giving it up, now that the chorus had done all it could, politically, for the Association, and now that the college chorus had started up again?

Meanwhile, on a happier note, the "Iliad" series was in full swing. The meetings had to be moved from the kitchen to the dining room. Other than the original four, three new people had signed on. One was a friend of the leader's mother. Another, a tall and striking gray-haired woman had just moved to the next town, whose name was Ellen too. The third was named Carol, almost, but not quite, as confusing as two Ellens. Charles, undismayed at being the only man still, kept right on coming. One warm spring morning, he even brought with him a bottle of golden mead he had found in the village store near where he lived. This day they met in the back of the barn, rather than in the house. And, at 9:30 in the morning, they found themselves drinking toasts - first, of course, to the gray-eyed Athena, and then to each other, to the wild plum trees in full bloom, and to the whole beautiful day around them.

Chapter 23

Moving On

So. She has graduated. The music/arts association at least appears to be a going concern with trustees, committees and money. All the things she has worked for, planned for, are happening, kind of a lot of success all at once. The spring barn recitals were memorable. One group of children rehearsed on a Saturday morning. Those who weren't rehearsing were outside on the swing, playing softball in the field, or talking under the trees. What a truly beautiful old place this is.

A neighbor wants to know when barn concert rehearsals are going to be so she can be home, not so she can be away! The problems with the neighbors, except for the ones who sold their house and moved away, have been mostly resolved, thanks also to Elizabeth. A neighborhood daughter and Elizabeth are now friends. The family has been kind to Elizabeth, giving her a glimpse of a very different life. Elizabeth and the daughter are on the school softball team, and they play at the neighbors' every evening with other friends. The father comes out and gives them fancy pitches, which they love. Elizabeth catches for the team. She is still so little she can hardly reach around the catcher's pad she must wear over her front.

Peter, at the end of his junior year, came home from school the day college admissions were received, saying: "Gosh, Mom, you should have seen what it was like in the senior corridor!" He said they were laughing, they were crying.... How tough for the ones not accepted, shot down at such a vulnerable time - and then others maybe having to go to college, some hating it, some not daring to hate it.... But some would flourish.

This year Barbara is working with a town planning commission, through which she is getting the chance to meet a number of people whom she didn't even know existed. She has been charged with compiling a report on the town's "cultural, spiritual and social life". This morning she went out to one of the old schools, now closed, in the next village with the woman who used to teach there. The teacher's face did light up when she climbed the steps, bad hip and all. The school is used for storage and was full of chairs. But it

was in good shape and made Barbara think of her old school in Colorado. Afterwards the teacher took her to a little church nearby, which was in less good shape.

Another small village church, Methodist, is in better shape and still functions. The minister is shared with a Methodist church in a neighboring town. In this New England world of Congregationalists, the Methodists have to work hard to retain a foothold. Barbara noticed, looking through some of the church's records, the only entertainment allowed at one time was Christmas.

She has signed up for an art course, through the now expanding arts association. At the first meeting, for three hours they drew a pile of books, which after all turned out to be interesting and fun. A friend teased Barbara, later when she was describing the class, about "putting Mommy's picture up on the refrigerator", the way the kids had done when they were in kindergarten.

Today it is too cold, out here in the barn, but she really doesn't want to go in yet. There is more hot coffee inside, which she has made because the next person to give a concert in the town hall is coming over to talk. That person has stage fright. Over the phone she said something about giving a concert being presumptuous on her part. All Barbara could think of to say in reply was that the barn was presumptuous. Hey, old presumptuous barn, with your wind, sky and gorgeous yellow maples. Barbara is drinking coffee from the bowl she bought for her old backyard friend Amy while she was in France with Mother this summer, at the market in Castillon. She hasn't sent it yet. (For graduation, Barbara received both a new car and a trip to Europe.)

It was important to have gone to France. Barbara's 98-year-old grandmother, Mamé, retained her humor and enthusiasm. She has just died. Mother was told Mamé got up the other morning, asked Mother's sister where she was because she couldn't see her, and died. After talking with Mother, Barbara talked with her brother Richard for nearly an hour. They all seem to have thought Mamé was immortal. He said bullsh-t when Barbara suggested it couldn't possibly have been that easy for Mamé to just die. Richard and Barbara talked about Papé's notebooks. A few years ago, Richard had made a family tree. He said he was discouraged by the idea of all these people just being born, getting married and dying with no other record. He wants to make a real effort to get copies made of Papé's notes.

Elizabeth is organizing a soccer team, because there is no soccer program for girls. And Peter is getting seriously interested in drama. He is also helping with the cub scouts and the town recreation program. There is also a gas shortage, and an energy crisis. The Veres are talking some about leaving this place.

Richard and his family came for Thanksgiving. The gas lines were long.

And now Barbara is back in the barn again, the end of December, trying to pretend the sun is warmer than it is. In front of the house there is lots of water in the brook, which re-freezes every night. The bridge over it gets very slippery. Last night two cars went off the road. The people in the cars came to the house to make phone calls, and then to help with the Christmas puzzle. Jim tried to find someone who would at least put up an official warning, if not also spread around some sand. No luck. This town still manages not to get too uptight about anything. And after all, it would be pretty hard for anyone to have a really serious accident right there. Christmas night the kids skated all over the yard and in the driveway and in the swamp. Barbara and Jim even joined them.

They have decided to sell the house. Already one family has looked at it. And Barbara has found a house in the town across the river, quite close to where they used to live. It is very small, what a change, and very private. She remembers not knowing the house was even there. Jim and Elizabeth will look at it with her on Monday, and Peter too, maybe, if he wants. He can't bring himself to even think about the move.

March 4: They have made an offer on the house. On this soft gray day, it is either starting to rain or the ground is soaking up melting snow very noisily. Barbara has just come back from a walk, after peeking into the sap buckets up and down the street.

May 17: Barbara is reading a book on the mathematician / renaissance man, Cardano. Next year Jim has asked her to help him with a freshman writing seminar, about the development of the subject of probability. Jim has no confidence in his ability to judge good writing, as if she did. Meanwhile, the subject itself is fascinating.

The plum blossoms are in full bloom. She seems to remember there might be an apple tree behind their new house, but it is so private she hasn't been able to see into the back yard and doesn't want to disturb the people still living there for another look.

Chapter 24

Home

The Veres have sold the house across the river. Peter calls the new one they have bought “Our Mobile Home.” Its carport, which juts out in front, is also a covered walk to the front door. Inside, a small hallway leads to three little bedrooms and a bath. On the left, a living-room, dining-room, kitchen and laundry circle a large chimney. In one respect the house is unique, at least in the Veres’ experience. The light switches are covered with pastel-colored angels, saints and members of the holy family.

Today is moving day. Both children are in school, two weeks before summer vacation. Elizabeth has been dreaming of this day, when at last she can walk home from school. No more buses for her! After supervising the movers to make sure the big furniture remains in the old house, Barbara and Jim drive across the river by way of the used car lot. The owner of the lot has bought two of their three cars, one of which Jim and Barbara deliver. The other was towed over yesterday. Barbara drives Jim to the math building, where he will stay near a phone in case of need.

So here she is, sitting in the car in the carport of their new house. She gets out, walks up to the front door, unlocks it and walks in. She is confronted by the Virgin Mary on the hall light-switch. With a sinking heart she realizes it will be a while before this little house becomes truly theirs.

There is brightness to the left. The sun is streaming in through the big windows that run the length of the living-room-dining-room part of the house. Yes, there is a yard out back. When she had seen the yard before, it had been covered with snow, beyond a dreary gray “deck” splotched with ice and chipping paint. Barbara goes to look out a window and, and, dumbfounded she goes on out the door of the dining area to the deck. Outside on the left, long delicate tree branches are fountains of white flowers. Birds sing, some darting in and out of the branches of a large apple tree in the center of an expanse of lawn. To the right up a gentle hill, several trees, one a great pine, grow through tangles of vines, grape and honeysuckle. There are two more apple trees up in the corner. The porch rail feels smooth under

her hands. She looks down. It has been painted. The whole deck has been freshly painted.

The doorbell rings. In a daze, she goes back inside. The movers have arrived, after stopping off downtown for coffee. Their big, noisy truck is turning and backing, towering over the carport. Barbara had not heard it come. The house is close to the street, and cars are whizzing past. Out back she hadn't been aware of them at all.

The bottom half of the king-sized bed is on its way up the walk. Galvanized into action, Barbara points it toward the room at the end of the hall. She follows, then backs away. The king-sized bed and the two big men with it fill the room. Well, so there will be no place for the chair, which will have to go downstairs, with Peter. She has begun to lose track of all that will be going downstairs-with-Peter. At least, the roll-top desk, the one big piece of furniture belonging to the house across the river that they had decided to bring with them, does fit exactly next to the wall of the bedroom which will become Barbara's study. She has never had her own study.

Enter the piano. The movers say they will miss taking it back and forth between the barn and the house every spring and fall, as they have been doing the past seven years. The piano fits pretty well along the wall by the nearest living-room window, its bottom coming out into the hall only a little. And the sofa. The movers finally bring that in by way of the deck. Barbara plans not to be responsible for ever getting it out again. She and Jim have been thinking of this move in terms of the rest of their lives.

The Veres' move had been precipitated by the sudden and dramatic increase in fuel oil prices. Barbara, entering the web of real estate agents, had found this house, near the tennis courts, near where they had lived before. First she had looked at the house herself. Then she'd brought along Jim and Elizabeth. Peter was always too busy.

The owner, the retired head of Maintenance at the college, had worked on the house himself, along with a local contractor. With justifiable pride, he showed the Veres the handsomely drawn plans. Downstairs he pointed out details of the foundation. Besides the furnace room and another room he used as a shop, there were two more bedrooms and a bath with a shower. Also there was an area, with an outside door, equivalent to the living-room-dining-room upstairs, which could be Jim's study. The wall between the two downstairs bedrooms could be taken out, making one big room for Peter, who would be going off to college next year anyway.

The owner and his wife were perhaps in their seventies. Why were they moving? The husband said one of their four children lived in the south. They themselves had both come from the south, and he wanted to go back. Even after all these years, he still wasn't used to the cold weather. His wife didn't say a word. Barbara asked if she could take a few room measurements, so she wouldn't need to come again. If the Veres could sell their own house,

they would definitely buy this one.

And one sunny Monday in the middle of March, a couple decided to buy the Veres' house. A colleague of Jim's had just been by with a huge bouquet of flowers, an apology because he and his wife had not been able to come, at the last minute, to a dinner the Veres had given that weekend. Barbara gave part credit to the flowers, handsome in the center of the dining-room table, for the couple's decision to buy the house on the spot.

The man was tall, the woman small and warm and attractive. Barbara had not met them before, but she was sure she had seen the man somewhere. They said they had moved here last fall and were renting, to find out how they liked being in this town. They were now looking for a place to buy. They said what had decided them about living here was the Sunday afternoon Vivaldi concert. And then Barbara remembered. The man was the one who had been standing under the basketball net when she had turned around to take a bow.

The woman talked about her father, who had been an architect. How interested he would have been in this house! Together the couple discussed restoring small window panes and all the old fireplaces. As Barbara listened to them, she began to realize how much she had not allowed herself to worry about what would become of this house. She knew there had been people considering it for apartments. It had been a privilege to live here, even though she had always felt it was never really quite hers, somehow.

For Peter, though, it had been his own. How he hated the thought of leaving it. The new owners, who weren't moving in immediately, had said Peter could spend one last night there if he wanted to, in the empty house....

Peter had had quite a year, his last one in high school. One morning last December, he had come home from across the river later than expected. Barbara had been rinsing dishes and had said "Hi" without looking around. He had sat down at the kitchen table. After a while he said he had had an accident. He said he had been driving too fast across the river. The bridge had been icy and he had smashed up the car. He said the car had been taken to the town garage and someone had brought him home.

Barbara turned from the sink, wiping her hands on her skirt, and looked at him. He sat there, looking down, white, trembling a little, staring at the table, trying to maintain control of himself. She had wanted to go up to him and hug him, dear, quiet, self-contained Peter. He might leave if she did, the way Jim had left when, that awful time when their friend....

The cat wandered into the kitchen and rubbed against Peter's leg and then, insisting, jumped up on the table in front of him, giving him a nudge. Peter started petting her and then he put his face down on her fur. She began to purr. She had a very loud purr. Barbara turned back to the sink, rinsing dishes again, taking time, hoping this would help. Carefully, slowly, she rinsed last night's glasses, grateful for the cat. After a while Peter and

the cat went into the TV room. And Barbara telephoned Jim. Quietly she asked, weren't there things that needed to be worried about, like police? insurance? Jim said he would find out and be home as soon as he could. Yes, okay, for lunch. Yes he would pick up Elizabeth.

At lunch, Jim looked at Peter in a funny way. He said it was still very slippery on the bridge. Two more cars had had accidents. Peter replied he had been driving too fast, he had been late. Jim said he didn't think so, the bridge was very slippery. Then Jim said Peter had done everything right, the car was taken care of and could be fixed, though it would take a while. The chassis had been thrown out of line. The police had been impressed with the way Peter had handled things. By the way, they had said he should go up to the clinic to be checked over. No? Well, at a signal from Barbara, okay. Peter was not comfortable with doctors. Barbara was pretty sure he was all right, enough to take the chance. He could walk. She had seen him bend over to untie his boots. He had bent his head and neck over the cat.

Then she noticed he was wearing his second pair of glasses. She asked about that. Peter answered his glasses had flown off and had broken against the windshield. He had been wearing his seat belt, of course. He always did. He had made Barbara promise she would too, before he agreed to disconnect the seat belt buzzer. Peter pointed to a paper bag, on the hearth of the fireplace, saying someone had given the bag to him to put his broken glasses in.

After lunch, Jim asked Peter to drive him back to the math building. Off they went, Peter carrying his glasses in the paper bag to see about getting new ones in the old frame.

Elizabeth had been silent during lunch, round-eyed. She began talking now about the the time she had almost died. On a picnic with the family of a friend, she had been swimming in a river. She had lost her balance and had been swept away. She had managed to grab hold of a tree branch, clinging to it long enough to be rescued. Elizabeth came over to sit on Barbara's lap, even though she was too big, but she would never be too big. Barbara found herself blinking away tears, hoping Elizabeth wouldn't notice, trying not to hug her too hard.

During the period the car was being fixed, Peter kept the other two cars running, all through a bitterly cold January. And in January, Peter got the lead in the school musical, scheduled for the end of February. Not only was he a boy, he pointed out to Elizabeth, he was also a tenor, or close enough.

To Barbara and Jim's astonishment, quiet Peter asked if he could give a cast party after one of the performances. Barbara bought food and drink. A friend of Peter's brought over some records and the big old rooms were filled with music, dancing and laughter. One of the girls even coaxed Jim out among the dancers. Elizabeth, overwhelmed, went up to her room and into her big bed, resurrecting some of her animals. Peter's girl-friend missed

her and went upstairs to see if she could cheer her up. She could, though Elizabeth still refused to come down again. Everybody went home at midnight, since there was a matinee the next day. They said thank you and what a great time they'd had. Were these really the same kids everyone was always worrying about?

After the party, Peter loved the old house more than ever. He refused to admit they were moving. Not until the week before, when Barbara said he'd have to organize the books and magazines in his shed himself, putting them in boxes so the movers could handle them, did the inevitable register.

Tonight, he would be spending one last night there. Barbara was a little sorry the new owners had offered this. They had a son too, not much older than Peter. Had he too been upset by their move? Were they somehow trying to make up for it this way? Well, Peter might still change his mind, although he seldom changed his mind. In fact, Barbara had left the cat over there. Peter would feed her and bring her back with him tomorrow.

By the time Elizabeth gets home from school, walking with two friends, the movers have gone. The girls take ginger ale and cookies to the picnic table out on the deck. They can hardly believe the tree-flowers.

In the evening the backyard fills with fireflies. The next night, Peter's friends come over. Shouting back and forth in the dark, they catch fireflies, letting them go again.

Chapter 25

The French Grandparents

For her parent's Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary, Barbara wrote about her French grandparents, because no one from the French side of the family would be there for the celebration.

"Our three-week visit to Prats was half over when Mamé gave me Papé's notebooks to read. I read them too fast. Perhaps I will have the chance to read them again, if they haven't been thrown away, either accidentally (for they were just notebooks) or because Papé intended to be truthful. He himself was tearing out whole pages at the end. Then he stopped writing entirely. He hoped he would be remembered by the pictures he took, instead. I saw many of his pictures too, some of which Mamé gave me. The clarity and color of the best ones astonished the local camera expert who could hardly believe they were taken fifty years ago, by an amateur, except that they are printed on glass.

"Papé stopped writing his notebooks at the end of the war. I suppose I should specify - World War II. He seemed to be unable to accept the war and the effect it had had on his neighbors and family. Or he began to question the fairness of his judgments, at least to himself.

"I read the notebooks, sitting at the table with a vase full of flowers on it, near one of the windows of the big room upstairs. I want to call his notes essays. Montaigne called his notes essays, and Papé had him in mind when he began writing. Montaigne is always a presence in the valley of the Dordogne. Even I would pretend, what might possibly be true though I didn't make a point of finding out, that the church bells were the same ones Montaigne heard - and objected to. I rather liked them myself, but Prats is a little further away from them. I was almost never awake to hear the morning bells. And the evening bells would blend with the sunset into whatever else was going on. When I was little the pigeons came home. When I was older, milk was delivered at the gate and the local ox team passed by - 'Arrêt, Là' - with their driver. This time the bells rang when, after supper, I walked to see the river from the back of the garden, on the way looking down one of

the long alleys of pine trees at Pitray next door, where we used to play.

“Montaigne dedicated his essays to his family and to his friends, for them to remember him by after his death. Papé dedicated his to his grandchildren and named the six of us. It gave me a curious feeling to see my name in his writing, the youngest, at the end. My cousin Annette remembers listening to him talk about his grandchildren. He was intrigued by the diversity of their interests as well as by their geographical diversity. He wondered what his own part had been in where they had gone and in what they had become.

“There must surely be an element of self-consciousness in such wonderings, which Montaigne himself must have felt, especially in his earlier essays. I remember Papé’s effort, one morning, to become acquainted with me. I was eighteen that summer. We were riding bicycles together to ‘La Propriété’ on some minor errand. We stopped to rest in the shade of some nectarine trees. The nectarines were ripe, and we each had one. We were surrounded by warm sun, rich smells, the soft hum of flies and other insects, the utterly peaceful countryside, the occasional bicyclist passing by, nodding, saying ‘Sieur/Dame’. He said it was his favorite place on earth. I was a little surprised, but shouldn’t have been, to discover that the oldest great-grandchild, not too much younger than I, has the exact same memory.

“Papé writes about his own grandfather. For reasons he doesn’t go into (or at least I don’t remember) his grandfather and his grandfather’s older brother were both named Peter, Old Peter and Young Peter. The younger one was always responsible for the older. They both married but to women who hated each other. So the two Peters built a house with a wall in the middle and no connecting doors. The house was built on the road, equally distant from the boundaries of the property. The wives kept house separately, and the brothers tended the vineyards together. I was in the house myself, when I was seven. Otherwise I would suspect Papé of telling parables such as: one should be able to accept and deal with the fact when there can be no reconciliation.

“He tells about his childhood. His earliest memory is of sitting above the river behind his house, waving to the boats which carried wine-casks to Bordeaux, hearing the boatmen call out to him. What had they called him? What was his name? Mother told me his name was Jean Jacques in the town records, Jean Marie Josef in the church records, and Mamé called him Albert. What did his mother call him? I try to sort out what I’ve heard about him and what he himself writes. He is, after all, somewhat of a mystery.

“He was gifted. According to what I remember, mostly from overheard conversations only half listened to a long time ago, the teacher in his village school recognized his ability and, with the help of the village priest, arranged to have him sent to a good school near Bordeaux. According to what Papé himself writes, it was a wealthy cousin who helped him. I hope the country-

mouse/ city mouse description of meeting the cousin isn't lost, Papé trying to feel superior even though he was overwhelmed by the cousin's manner and elegance.

"However it was arranged, Papé did go to the school. During our visit, I saw the school, in the remains of an old castle which was one of the stopping places for medieval pilgrims. It is way up on a hill, surrounded by enormous old trees. Papé describes walking there from the railroad station. The part of the castle which held the school burned down while Papé was still alive. But the French government is making an effort to rebuild the original structure, using the old remains. There are thick walls and many pillars, with religious sculptures around the tops. The sculptures on some of the pillars toward the back of the castle are less good and also less religious than the front ones. There are several of Odysseus. There is speculation that apprentice sculptors came in the middle ages to study with a master.

"At least one of Papé's notebooks is concerned principally with what he had read and how he had been taught, with comments on both, all through his schooling. My cousin Annette told me she and her twin had lived with Papé and Mamé at one time, and that he had taught them himself instead of sending them to school in the village. So I asked her how he had set up the school for them, thinking to get the student's point of view on his methods. She said he always started with spelling. But she thinks that was because it was the only way he could tell them apart, since one of them couldn't spell. In looking through the books in Papé's library, I found a book in English, a commentary on Shakespeare, with a childish-looking 'Annette' written in the back. I showed it to her. She didn't remember it at all.

"Papé had a large collection of English books, some of which Mamé gave me, with his name and 1898 written in them. I assume that is the time he was in England. After Bordeaux, he went to Paris and then to England. And then he would have gone to Cairo, though I've forgotten what for, except he had to make a decision between going to Cairo and getting married. With all his traveling, he had managed, even so, to come home long enough and often enough to meet Mamé and become engaged. Mamé remembers him as having been left in charge of her at a Fair while she was still quite young. Probably her father left him in charge. Papé knew and respected her father a great deal. His own father, whose old and hazy picture looks at least something like my memory of Papé, died when Papé was seven or eight. Papé describes his fear and uncertainty at that time, and how much and for how long he missed him. I think he lived with his grandfather (Young Peter) for a while. He also described wonderful visits to his mother's brother, who lived very near Montaigne's castle. He didn't go there often because it was quite a long walk.

"I don't remember his writing much about his mother, but Mamé told me some things about her. She said his mother had a friend who came over

every night to gossip. Mamé said one wouldn't believe how she could gossip. Mother was kinder. She said his mother was a very intelligent woman, and what other outlet was there for her in the little country village. Anyway, the friend who came every night to visit was afraid to go home alone in the dark. So every night, Papé's mother lit a small carrying lamp, walked her friend home and then returned to her own house. This happened every night for years. The neighbors laughed about it among themselves; but they missed the two old ladies, and the light, when the friend died and Papé's mother moved to live with her son.

"I'm quite sure I was in her house, once. I remember standing above the river, at the place from which Papé had watched the boats. But I don't remember seeing a mysterious chest in the little dark hall. Papé describes a chest in the hall that was full of gold.

"He doesn't say much about Mamé either, except that she was very beautiful and that they were both very shy. He believed in marriage and faithfulness. He admits he feels self-conscious writing down his thoughts on this subject, but he does want to go on record about how important it was and continued to be to him. Reading this part made me wonder a little about his friendship and respect for his neighbor, the art critic Elie Faure. One of the books Mamé gave me was the English edition of 'The Dance Over Fire and Water' which M. Faure had given Papé, 'In witness of your friendship,' he wrote in French, calling him Jean Jacques. I was quite a bit older than seven when it first occurred to me to try to figure out who all those children were in that house, all of them welcomed by M. Faure's mother, whose house it was, and where we too were always welcome except when M. Faure himself was there. He must have been fascinating to talk with, or, I suspect from the tone of his books, to listen to. His philosophy was based on change, on instability. And Papé's was based on stability, I think, judging from what he wrote and from what I know of those who seem to have been his favorite authors, Bossuet and Fénelon. Mamé let me have the books by them, too, full of Papé's notes. I know very little about either, except that Fénelon, also from the Dordogne, was a serene and gentle presence in the not so gentle court of Louis XIV. But wasn't Papé bothered by Fénelon's religious views, Papé who took such pride, I thought, in his free-thinking? He describes going to a christening for the new baby of one of Mamé's nephews. I wish I had read that part more carefully.

"It was Mamé's father who insisted Papé choose between going to Cairo or breaking the engagement. And, during our visit, Mamé was still wondering if he had regretted his decision! The next twenty-five years he spent being in charge of progressively larger and more important schools, in Confolens, Loches, and Angoulême.

"An American came to the school in Angoulême, to teach English, to improve his French, and then to marry Papé's youngest daughter. Mamé

and Mother agreed that Papé's not having had the chance to go to Cairo influenced his decision to let Mother leave France. The United States felt only a little less far away from Prats fifty years ago, than Cairo had felt twenty-five years earlier. Paul, the oldest daughter's brother-in-law, whom I met once in a Paris café, described the wedding to me, everyone crying!

"Mother's being able to leave was Papé's decision, at least in the sense that he could, I am sure, have stopped her. He was a kind of tyrant, because he knew he was right, usually, and because he cared very much. But also, that was the defined role of the head of the family. Being the kind of tyrant one must be to run a school wore him down while he was still young, around fifty. He retired to the house at Prats, where he had always spent summer vacations. Mamé was a little worried about what she would do, after all the excitement of the outside world. Papé said they both should take an active part in the life of the community. He became a sort of local elder statesman. And he supervised the farm, 'La Propriété', a job he didn't like much, and read and wrote and grew roses.

Mamé, who was 98 at the time of our visit, said she'd lived so long because she had never had to do anything very hard. After Papé's retirement, both his mother and hers came to live with them. One was blind and the other deaf. His mother (the deaf one) insisted on living alone in the room at the back of the shed, so Papé had to keep going over to check to make sure she was all right. She always felt that people were mocking her, as deaf people do. And, having devoted her life to gossip, she probably knew only too well what people were capable of saying. Papé would take her on walks, sometimes, to see the river when it was especially beautiful, trying to convince her she was lucky to be able to see. After all, the other one ('l'autre') couldn't.

"Mamé, Mother and I would laugh about 'les Vieilles,' as Mamé called them, all of us forgetting she herself was now at least ten years older than either one of them had ever been. It hadn't seemed to occur to Mamé that caring for 'les Vieilles' was other than what she expected to do, and was therefore not hard.

"Mamé never seemed to question. She told us a story, one afternoon, about riding the merry-go-round at the Fair (a few years before she met Papé). The woman in charge of her that time had told Mamé to stay on the merry-go-round until she came back, and then had gone off to meet a friend for tea. Mamé spent nearly the whole afternoon on the merry-go-round. Her mother eventually found out, because various friends, who had gone to the Fair at different times, all happened to mention they had seen Mamé on the merry-go-round. The way Mamé told it, it became a very funny story. We were all laughing so hard, I didn't stop to wonder whether to be reassured or appalled.

"In a way, maybe we all took advantage of her, we were so sure of her.

My cousin Annette's favorite memory of both Papé and Mamé has to do with the mid-day dinner being at exactly the same time every day. Papé was expected to be at the table and also cleaned up from working in the garden. Mamé would call him - 'Albert! Albert!' Sometimes he came, sometimes he didn't, depending, I suppose on what he still had to do. But always there was the call - 'Albert! Albert!', which I can hear now, too.

After Papé died, Léonie came from the next village to live with Mamé. It seemed to be the solution for them both, since Léonie's husband had also recently died. Mamé and Léonie would argue: and Mamé never did learn to like the furniture wax Léonie insisted on using. And Mamé watched the amount of money spent like a hawk, not ever quite accepting the fact of inflation. But they did seem happy enough. And Léonie was able to take our arrival, the arrival of Mother and me, the two Americans, in stride.

"We must have caused a real upheaval in the quiet life of the household. My cousin Annette planned her two-week vacation to coincide with our visit, partly to see her parents, who had transformed the shed, where Papé's mother used to live, into a very comfortable house when they retired, and partly, I am sure, to 'help out'.

"Papé was not the only one unable to tell the twins apart. My brother used to weep in rage and frustration after games of hide-and-seek, not knowing which twin he had found, and always being told it was the other one. I liked one twin very much, and I never quite knew what to think of the other. When I saw one without the other, I never knew ahead of time whether to relax or to be on guard.

"They are still identical. They are still very close to each other. In a curious way, though, now I too am close. The then unbridgeable four-year gap between us is, not gone, but less. Annette still seems wonderful to me, even as she did then. And I still don't know quite what to think of her twin, but maybe I have a better idea about why. Defining my feelings about her is like defining my feelings about myself. To me, I am much more like her than she is like Annette. Our lives on the outside have been very different. She has lived through a war, speaks a different language, has married into an important family with houses and servants. But our husbands are curiously alike, and our lives on the inside have many similarities. We have read similar books, are interested in similar projects and have the same approach to them, almost compulsively over-organized. Several times I found myself saying the same thing at the same time, or would have if my French had been better. My aunt always felt that this twin was the family rebel. In minor ways, I suppose she was. She was always getting into trouble or getting hurt. She would fall or be scolded - and Annette would cry.

"But the major rebellions - becoming a Catholic in a Protestant family, and training for and succeeding in a career, in a family where marriage and children were assumed - were Annette's. Annette is a doctor, the head of

a hospital in Paris, after spending twenty years in Morocco, her specialty kidney disease.

“Annette took her duties of keeping me from being bored very seriously at first. There are many places to visit in the valley of the Dordogne. History in France does not mean 200 years. (Mother still has to remind herself to be impressed, in the United States, with houses built in the 1700s.) There is a wealth of medieval churches and castles on the Dordogne, quite different from the newer, more famous and grand ones on the Loire. Many, like Papé’s old school, were stopping places for crusaders and pilgrims, or fortresses held, now by the English, now by the French, when both were powerful here. There are Roman ruins also, since this is where it is possible, sometimes, to ford the Dordogne on foot. It is not clear how large a Roman settlement there was because, so I’ve been told, whenever anyone finds a fragment, he quietly buries it again so no one will come and tear the place up.

“One ancient village, Sarlat, is now the setting for outdoor summer theater. Annette and I were standing in the square, admiring the narrow streets and the old buildings, when suddenly a roaring crowd descended upon us from all sides at once, ending by depositing Caesar himself right before our eyes. The effect could hardly have been more dramatic. It was, of course, just a rehearsal. And it soon became evident that Shakespeare does not lend himself very well to French translation.

“That day was an extraordinary one. On the way home we stopped at Lascaux to see our ‘ancestor’, the Cro-Magnon Man, there, in statue. Even though his cave paintings are no longer open to the public, since the colors were beginning to fade and it was thought best to close them off, there is a museum by the cave entrance with a few examples. There are also displays of fossils and sea-shells found near the cave, predating the ancestor by a few more million years.

“After that day, Annette and I did not go on any more trips. We were both exhausted by the almost overwhelming sense of the past, both family and historic. Being together made the reality of it all hard to evade. But we didn’t even have the same language in which we could try to talk about it.

“Life at Prats is almost as different from Annette’s life in Paris as it is from my life at home. She had not been to Prats for many years, instead spending her vacations in adventures such as her most recent one, a camping trip to the Sahara desert.

“Annette started sleeping till noon. Sometimes we would try to speak a little English together, since she hopes to come to the United States to study the latest medical research here. Most of the time, though, she stayed with her parents, reading, talking and listening to music. Mamé, Léonie, Mother and I would sew, crochet and talk, sitting in the big bay window in the kitchen. Sometimes there were visitors, neighbors, friends, cousins. We

visited them in return. Annette and her parents did not go with us. The ingrown life of the small community seemed to have led to conflicts which, as an outsider, I would never be able to understand. Mother was more aware of and involved in the community and family tensions, of course, than I was. But she also knew this might be her last visit with Mamé. One day, when Mother and I went alone to say good-bye to an old friend, in a rare open moment the friend sympathized with what Mother must be going through. In the silence that followed, I began to understand what an emotional trial this visit must have been for her.

Mamé died in October that year, quite peacefully I was told, even as Papé had, in the big bed, in the room, in the house where they both had spent most of their lives, and where Mamé had been born, and also where, at the very least, her father and grandfather had been born.

Mamé was very much the way I remembered her from other times, although there must have been more difference than I was aware of, between her being around sixty and her being nearly a hundred. She didn't ride her bicycle any more, for one thing. I think Mother and her sister hid it, one summer. They thought that, even if she wasn't too old to ride it, she ought to be. Mamé complained about not being able to see - and then would point out a bird on the telephone wire across the road. She didn't do fine embroidery any more. But she still fed the chickens, using the same old wooden bowl. I went with her, feeling seven years old again instead of almost forty more. She treated me with respect, because I was, after all, a stranger, or would have been if Mother hadn't been there. But her own children, Mother and her sister, were still her little girls. She would scold them and love them. Once I came into the kitchen and found Mamé with her arms around them both, as if they weren't bigger than she was.

"Annette's oldest brother seems to be the head of the family now, as could be expected, a role he takes on with responsibility but with a certain detachment. He and his wife, both doctors too, still live in the little house where they brought up their four children, in an oyster-fishing village outside of Bordeaux. He has become more and more interested in the psychological aspects of medicine and has written a long pamphlet, almost a book. He gave me a copy and, on the front cover, drew a tiny stick-figure picture of himself sitting at his desk and smoking his pipe. He signed it and added a note hoping I wouldn't read the book. It is pretty technical, so there's not much danger. But I had the curious feeling he was doubting his own ability to understand the subject, rather than mine.

"He must have been about three, the only grandchild still, at the time of Mother's wedding. Now, fifty years later, my brother is the one planning the anniversary party. The family matters very much to him. But I don't often see him and I hardly ever write to or talk with him. And at Prats, I never saw Mother and her sister talking together. Perhaps they did when

I wasn't there. Interestingly, the ones in the family who seem to enjoy talking the most, discovering how much they have in common, are the oldest great-grandchild (who speaks English) and the two children of my American cousins who are the closest to her in age. Perhaps it takes several generations for family members to separate enough to come together easily. So much is expected of families that failures are bound to happen even, or perhaps especially, in the best of them. The oldest great-grandchild and the two Americans have the least conventional lives of any of us, at least so far, but it is still, after all, the family that brought them together.

Papé dedicated his essays to his grandchildren. I'm dedicating this to him, to say thank you. But also, I don't have any grandchildren yet. My brother's children and mine, the oldest ones, are just beginning to be on their own a little. I am sure he is as concerned as I am, wondering how they will meet the greater challenge of growing up, or at least less defined, than what we faced. It's almost as if they are being cast adrift.

"It meant a great deal to me to have had the chance to be at Prats that summer, two years ago, to touch base in a sense, to go through Papé's notes, books and pictures, and to listen to Mamé describe special things. For instance, there was a picture of the field across the road. The field looked as if it were covered with, of all things, sheets. Mamé, after peering at the picture, one of the very old ones and quite faded, began to laugh and said, yes, those really were sheets. And she proceeded to describe the three women who toured the countryside every summer, staying to live where they came, to wash the year's laundry. All year, dirty sheets, those enormous heavy linen ones, woven by 'les grandmères' from the flax they grew and spun themselves (back through the centuries, one felt) were aired out and folded into chests. The three women collected the sheets, put them in a cart and took them to the river to be washed. Then they carted them to the field to dry in the sun. And then they packed them back into the chests for another year.

"The road between the field and the front of the house is still very much a country road, even though it has been paved. Instead of bicycles making their nice noise over the gravel, most of the farmers have little 'deux cheveaux' cars. Tractors have replaced the ox teams. And there are no more gypsies with their wagons, dogs and children, who sometimes used to stop by the gate looking for work. Mamé would call the family into the house, I remember, before she went to the gate with something for them to eat.

"The grocery truck still came by, late in the morning, stopping in front of the gate and sounding its horn. Sometimes Mamé would get confused about which one she was talking to of the four generations she had known of the truck-route family. She really had lived a long time. Mother described watching the first space shot with her on TV. It was hard to realize then that Mamé had grown up before there was electricity or even running water

at Prats.

“The grass inside the gate was doing well. That had been an issue, when I was little. Flowers were everywhere. And there were many birds, mostly swallows. When I went down to the kitchen, one morning, to get the breakfast tray for Mother and me, the bowls of café au lait and the slices of bread with butter and jam, Léonie called to me from outside. One of the baby swallows had fallen out of his nest, in the shed next to the kitchen. He had hopped to the door, where the sun was, and then had made himself at home in one of Léonie’s wooden shoes, which she wore when she went out to the garden. She picked up the little bird and carried him back into the shed. I was needed to hold the ladder for her, so she could climb up and put him back into his nest. Mamé’s canary watched with interest, from his cage by the door, and then he started to sing.

“Perhaps family memories make up for the not-so-good things of family, the responsibilities, lack of privacy, boredom, frustration etc. etc. And I go back to my memory of Papé and the nectarines near ‘La Propriété’. Perhaps we even shared together part of a much larger memory. The valley of the Dordogne was perhaps lived in long before anywhere else by, as the scholars say, cognitive people.”

Chapter 26

The American Grandparents

For her father's eightieth birthday, Barbara decided to write about her memories of his parents.

"Grandpa left no essays dedicated to his grandchildren the way Papé did. And since he died before I was born, I have no personal memories of him at all. I have only an impression of him, partly from one of my cousins, of a grand, authoritative figure, hat, cane, gloves, spats, striding along High Street in a town on the outskirts of Boston. I'm not sure that town even has a street named High Street." ["Not large," her father corrected - he wrote several corrections and comments on small slips of paper with numbered references - "but cocky: no cane or spats: brisk walk (not a stride) (confusion perhaps with your Uncle's father, who did live on High Street and did carry a cane)."]

"The family stories I have heard center around my father as a little boy. He had two nearly-grown sisters and lived in a big house which was, as I remember, always filled with friends and gentlemen bringing flowers, who talked and laughed and sang around a piano." ["Not a big house," her father corrected again, "but rather small and cosy: attached barn was used as a porch."]

"There is another story - of Grandpa weeping because he, a lawyer, lost a case and an innocent man was sentenced to die. His weeping must have been part of a disillusion, one incident in an accumulation. He gave up being a lawyer and, perhaps in a combination of despair and opportunism, the proverbial trademarks of Americans, bought a silver mine in Nevada. In 1907 he took the whole family west for a visit. Trains and Nevada in 1907 must have been different from High Street - poor Grandma!" ["He wept of nervous tension (no indication of type of case or outcome): he went west in order to cure his 'inflammatory rheumatism' (probably arthritis): train travel in 1906 was luxurious in our pullman stateroom."]

"I don't remember Grandma either, although we must have seen each other. I was 5 when she died. There is a picture of her in the music room

of the house on Cape Cod, a very lovely, rather fragile-looking girl. Her father was killed at Antietam before she was born. She grew up, I gather, in her father's grandmother's house. That grandmother is the lady in the brown picture which hangs on the wall by the fireplace, who looks as if she'd be great for Revolutions and Civil Wars but a little much for just family. Grandma's mother must have been the shadowy 'Nanny' Dad and his sisters sometimes spoke of. I think she was also the one who, as a little girl, walked barefoot to church, carrying her shoes so she wouldn't wear them out." ["Nannie was a 'lady' who changed her dress at least three times every day."]

"If only Grandma had kept a diary about the trip to Nevada! The details of keeping clean, finding places to stay, feeding and caring for five people, must have taken all the strength she had. Being one of two children in a very proper, very Bostonian household, surrounded by women, must not have been the best preparation for marriage to a man who was one of six sons even if he was the son chosen to attend Exeter and Harvard." ["Living in Nevada was no physical strain: she was stout and robust. And your grandfather had five brothers and two sisters."]

"The only story I've ever heard about the trip west was that the oldest daughter fell in love with a cowboy. The story wasn't told often and only in hushed voices, so probably even that wasn't fun." ["Her sweetheart was an engineer who ran the assay office at the mine: Eureka, Nevada: 10,000 - 12,000 in the 1880's or 1890's: 1200 in 1906: 600 or 700 when your brother drove through (an old inhabitant or two still remembered Grandpa!). I remember watching a 'shivaree' the night we arrived (it was in honor of a newly married couple, I think): lots of firecrackers, drinking and shouting. The next morning, when I went out of the house, an Indian squaw was sitting on our stoop: I was terrified, but Grandpa reassured me by being kind to the squaw. The following day, we drove 18 miles (3 hours, behind 2 horses) to the mine."]

"Dad returned west about twenty years later, as part of a group founding a school. At least he had an advantage over the others in the group, knowing from experience the world didn't just end at the Mississippi River.

"Grandpa's mine failed, but other mines did not. One of the most influential figures in the town near my parents' school made a fortune in copper, discovered after prospectors for gold had given up. Grandpa lost everything. Perhaps it's a miracle he managed to hang on as long as he did, until his children were no longer dependent on him. Dad even managed to get to France, as Americans have often done. He went to teach English in a French school. Bleak as such schools are, the headmaster, his wife and his youngest daughter (whom Dad eventually married) were, in the French sense of the word, sympathetic. It must have been a while since Dad had been part of a family." ["I was very much part of my own family," was the

abrupt comment here, making Barbara wonder if she had made a mistake, trying to write about his parents.]

“The younger of Dad’s two sisters married into a Boston family that made shoes. That family had built two enormous summer houses on a place called Manomet Point. Probably Grandpa would have built summer houses too, if he had been successful. The North Shore, the South Shore, the Cape, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket have many such houses.

“For a while we too went to Manomet in the summer, to stay in one of the big houses. It was on the top of a rocky cliff covered with sea-grass. Below was the ocean. On one side, it must have been possible to see Plymouth. Everyone came to Manomet, family and friends. There were walks, swimming, tennis, picnics - and storms. The storms came mostly at night and were not fun. While they lasted, we would gather in one room to play games. Eventually the other house was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. I went by the remaining Manomet house once, as an adult. Only one person was there, like the spinster lady, so very moving, at the end of one of Thornton Wilder’s plays.

“When I was six, Dad and his older sister bought a place with two houses on Cape Cod. She had married someone whose family made hats. Quietly, over many summers, the place on the Cape seems to have become the family center. The Manomet-family piano was brought to the Cape, and also the rooster which used to sit on the fireplace mantle at Grandpa and Grandma’s. I remember Dad’s younger sister, who wanted the rooster too, weeping as she put it on the mantle on the Cape, having brought it from her mantle.

“I must have seen Grandma, but I only remember meeting Dad, one early gray morning, at the train station, after her funeral. I ran to meet him and fell down and skinned my knee on the bricks between the train and the station.

“Grandpa died alone, not far from the Great Lakes. It might have interested him to know that one of his great-grandsons is most at home on an island in Lake Superior called Isle Royale where, very long ago, the Indians had copper mines. My husband’s father, not so much younger than Grandpa, was the first of his family to go to Isle Royale, another wanderer.” [“Your grandfather was not a compulsive wanderer: he left Boston to get away from his creditors and to strike it rich by discovering a gold mine near Red Lake (Ontario). He greeted his French daughter-in-law with warm affection in August 1925. He left for Red Lake in December of the same year.” Not mentioned in the written corrections and comments was the fact that the Red Lake mine was destroyed by fire during a winter storm. On foot, Grandpa, who must have been well into his sixties, reached help alive.]

“I think about my two grandfathers, the French one so profoundly at home, finally, in his birthplace, the American one searching through this vast and still wild country right to the end. It’s not fair to compare them,

though. They were both probably responding, each one to his own place and time, with much less choice than they were aware of.”

Part II

Chapter 27

Viet Nam

The tiny, child-like appearing, oriental woman sat down next to Barbara, on the bus about to leave Boston. Barbara was on her way to visit her parents on the Cape. She was deep in her book until the bus ground its gears to get underway. Then she put her book down to look out the window, down at all the traffic.

The other woman had a book too, which she read and then put down also. She had seen Barbara's book (her own was some kind of textbook, Barbara had noticed out of the corner of her eye) and seemed to sense a kindred spirit. Or something. Before Barbara knew what was happening, the woman, who said she was from Viet Nam, had launched into the saga of her need - no, compulsion - to become an American.

At the end of the war in Viet Nam, hearing about so many displaced persons Barbara had begun to wonder if, among them, there would be another Freud, say, who would merge into a new country and influence the ideas of the world.

The woman kept saying: "Do you believe me?" Barbara did.

The woman said both her parents had taught French. They thought she should learn French because it was a beautiful language. But she had wanted to learn English, or rather American, which was so ugly, her parents said. When she was ten she took an important exam and came in third of several thousand. (Barbara had always been told Papé, her own French grandfather, had always placed third in such exams.)

To study English, she needed her father's permission. So, after doing so well in the exam, she approached him, diplomatically, one evening while he was tending his flowers. (Papé tended the flowers he so loved in the evening.) Her father, "do you believe me?" knew when each flower would bloom to the minute. So she came to him, not from the front, or from the side, but from behind, waiting until he was ready, until he turned around. She had her speech prepared, the introduction, the body and the conclusion. May I learn English? Permission was granted.

When the time came that it would make a difference, her father left the French school to go into politics. Much as he loved the French and their culture, he believed Viet Nam should be for the Viet Nameese. As she was talking, Barbara herself was thinking of the Viet Nameese family (a very extended one of about 18) her brother Richard had sponsored in upstate New York, whose children had done so well. Richard had taken Barbara to visit the old grandfather who spoke no English but only French, and who had baked French cookies for them, the same kind they had eaten at Prats as children.

Always the woman had wanted to go to America, because it was a young country and she would have a chance there to become some one important. (Barbara remembered how her cousin Jeanie, as a teen-ager, had wondered how Americans could be younger than any one else.) She hadn't wanted to go to college and had persuaded her father to allow her to visit her uncle in Saigon where perhaps she could find a job with the Americans there.

In Saigon, she had looked and looked for a job. One rainy day, she finally gave up. She was walking back to her uncle's in tears of despair when two high-ranking American officers in a jeep stopped and offered to take her home. She told them finding her uncle's house through all the side streets would be too complicated, "do you believe me? my father finally did", and they said at least she should come with them for a drink. She had agreed, asking for orange juice and a cookie. She was given taxi fare home and also an address and more taxi fare to come the next day to interview for a job. The job was at the airport because she could speak English. Soon she was working for Intelligence. She married an American and moved near Boston and had children. When the children were old enough to be in school, she opened a Viet Nameese restaurant. When her husband left her, she sold the restaurant and went into Real Estate. And now she is studying to become a lawyer, going everyday into Boston. She wants to write, not about public things, but about the private ones. And she wants to travel and write about that, maybe even about France someday...

She got off the bus at Kingston and she was gone, whose life, already so full, perhaps had hardly begun.

Chapter 28

Jobs

At various times Barbara had various jobs, all at the college, jobs she was not very good at. When the jobs became graded, 1 - 12, one of her bosses said she could probably handle a 3. He was right too. She could never have handled being, say, the receptionist in the Personnel office, a 4. The receptionist had to look attractive, be attractive, answer questions head on and by phone, type items that had to be done immediately, all in spite of everything constantly interrupting everything else. And some of the people the receptionist dealt with, looking for work of any kind, were close to desperate, not easy to handle.

Barbara's first job, when she and Jim had moved here, was in the Treasure Room of the college Library. Being alone in the quiet room where no one ever came was hard after the noisy excitement of music school. She was hired simply to be present, though she did whatever other odd jobs could be thought of to keep her busy. Once she was asked to dust some of the less precious books, though they too were behind locked grills. A letter from Charles Dickens fell out of one, which she read and put back where she had found it, assuming someone must know about it. When you're working in a library, you're supposed to work, not read. And one day Robert Frost, unattended, shuffled in and shuffled out after staring through her and the room without finding what he was looking for. She had been admiring the bird in the Audubon book that was currently on display in a locked glass-topped case near the door. In spite of his great age, Frost, from two feet away, was startlingly imposing, adding a new dimension for her to his "nothing gold can stay" poem. Would he have stayed longer if she had thought to recite his poem to him? Among the Frost collection of books and papers, back in the locked stacks behind her desk, was a picture of him with a few students in this room. Perhaps he had come by simply to remember.

The library job paid 95 cents an hour. Although she never did earn more than four dollars an hour at the college, she was the second secretary to be paid two dollars an hour. After working in the library, she moved to the

Math department to help the secretary there type a math book her husband Jim and two others were co-authoring. At that time typewriters did not have half-spaces or removable type-settings. Diagrams and equations had to be (very carefully) planned out ahead and the symbols written in by hand.

While the children were growing up, she didn't work except for one year with the Foreign Study Program and, occasionally, as a sitter in the Art Galleries. By then she had become somewhat more aware of the value, occasionally staggering, of the items around her in the galleries than she had been of the value of the books in the Treasure Room, though new books that came in were referred to as "cadillacs". She did a lot of volunteer work, although that was no longer smiled upon during the '70's. And volunteering at the town library, either at the desk or as a shelf-reader, kept her in touch with old friends who passed through.

Then came the stormy years when Elizabeth both needed Barbara and didn't need her, very, very much. Barbara tried to stay involved enough in projects of her own to avoid going mad with worry. Once, Elizabeth, having left for a summer music camp, returned the next week with pneumonia. Even the three-week job Barbara had agreed to was more of a commitment than she should have taken on. However, typing was excellent occupational therapy and so was Xeroxing. The piles and piles of paper gave the illusion of great accomplishment. One time her job was to enter a collection of reports into a computer for easier editing. She was told speed was more important than accuracy, so she should feel free to work as fast as she could. A fellow secretary would come and drag her away, mesmerized, for coffee breaks.

Some jobs were a little strange. Once she was called in to answer telephones at the medical center during a re-organization there. She found herself sitting on the floor in the middle of a room, holding a telephone and taking messages while all the furniture was being moved out, answering when the phone rang as if nothing at all unusual were going on.

Most of the temporary jobs were for three-week periods. It was interesting to catch brief glimpses of the inner workings of all the offices. How different their public appearances were from their private ones. And how unaware the people in each office were of those in other offices, all engrossed in their own businesses.

The year Elizabeth, at eighteen, decided to go to Europe from January until August, Barbara and Jim often not knowing quite where she was, Barbara took a job that lasted six months in the Bequest Office, part of the department of Alumni Affairs at the college. Then, when Elizabeth, surely blessed with guardian angels, alive and well, was back in her own college, Barbara, finally more awed than horrified by Elizabeth's imagination and courage, signed up for a permanent job in the Benefits Office. Nor did she have to lie about the fact she would be going with Jim on his next sabbatical.

By that time it had become possible to take a year's leave of absence, in the sense that she would be given preference for another job at the college if the same one were no longer available. As it happened, she missed the end-of-the-year deadline by fifteen days, because of her father's death. But by then she had decided to try not working. In England, where they had gone for the second half of Jim's sabbatical, she had discovered, somewhat to her surprise, she could enjoy not working.

The two jobs, Bequests and Benefits, were a curious combination. There were many differences between an office that existed to accumulate money and an office that existed to dispense it. Both offices were desperately in need of secretaries at the times Barbara was hired. The secretary in the Bequests office had a family emergency in December, just when money was being given to the college partly for the tax benefit involved. Nothing at all in Barbara's experience had prepared her, those first days of her job, for the contents of the mail piled up on her desk each morning, the checks, stocks, bonds, Real Estate.... Not possibly could such an outpouring be properly and promptly acknowledged. Not until mid-March did Barbara catch up.

Barbara's boss genuinely believed in what he was doing. He sat in his office all day long, dictating letters into his tape-recorder to the alums, many of whom he knew personally. When they visited, he entertained them at his home. If his wife ever got sick of that, she never said. And the letters Barbara typed from the dictating machine were, in fact, masterpieces. Barbara typed, and typed, and typed.

Some of the more general letters, about meetings or talks, were turned out in a computer room. The person in charge there (only a grade 2; Barbara could hardly believe it) was able to coordinate four different noisy letter-writing machines and at the same time either stuff envelopes or pack boxes with letters for some distant alum's signature. The noise in that room was close to unbearable.

Another of Barbara's jobs, in the Bequests office, was to type out newsletters for the older classes, the ones most likely to bequest, from notes sent into and compiled by her boss. The newsletters were often a forum for deeply felt and movingly expressed, personal musings. Old age, sickness and death are hard to deal with even in luxurious Florida and Arizona condominiums. And another of her jobs was, each week, to cross out in two books the names of alumni who had died. Sometimes her boss went for a walk, after handing her the week's list.

A friend of hers had a theory about why the alums, particularly those from the classes up to '29, felt so deeply about their college. "That's when the stock market crashed, remember? The years they spent here must have been carefree in a way they have never experienced since."

In the Bequests office, Barbara never had to answer the phone. It was always her boss who answered and who settled himself back into his chair

for a long talk, including about whether the snow by the north corner of the gym had melted yet. But in the Benefits office, her boss never answered the phone. A call could go through four different secretaries before reaching him.

Barbara applied for the job in Benefits because it had been listed for a long time. As an older woman, to say nothing of being a faculty wife, she was by no means any one's first choice for a secretary. But somehow no one at all wanted that particular job. Also she had just applied for an administrative job, arranging small concerts for the music department. At first she didn't realize the job had almost certainly been created with a particular person in mind, who discouragingly wasn't her. All jobs did have to be listed, though, and proper hiring procedures gone through.

There was a several months backlog when Barbara arrived in the Benefits office. She caught up only once during that year. She typed up forms, filled in blanks, filed cards, and answered the phone, always referring the calls to others. She was supposed to begin answering more general questions herself as soon as possible, about retirement, medical insurance, workman's compensation: but there was no time to become informed. At first she took pamphlets home to read, on her own time. But something about the format, the language used, turned her off almost before she began. No wonder everyone, including the professors, called in so helplessly. The information really was confusing, and some of it kept changing, some of it changing on a regular basis. Her boss had two loose-leaf notebooks. Once a week new pages would arrive in the mail for her to replace in the notebooks.

What was fun, in Benefits, was being part of a large group of people working together in a big room, people somewhat like the ones she had worked with as a waitress, the glamorous like Peggy ones, the funny like Jorie ones, the sad like Joanna ones, and the really competent like Mattie ones. And when the various bosses happened to be away all at the same time, work stopped and everybody came together to talk. There was always something to talk about, though Barbara never could predict what or remember what afterwards, except there were always pictures of children, again, hard on the one person in the office who had no children and had wanted some.

There was a Christmas party and birthday celebrations and baby showers and even a farewell party for Barbara herself. She was given a handsome shoulder bag and a water-proof headscarf for traveling in England. There seemed to be a warmth and community among them that was missing, or there wasn't time for, or opportunity for, among her own friends outside of the office. Or was the sense of community somehow false? Certainly the two men bosses did what they could to encourage friendliness, team spirit, office morale, those sorts of things. They even organized once-a-week volley-ball games at the gym. The two women bosses seemed to think all

this was a little silly, possibly degrading, certainly wasteful. There were not many women bosses at the college, yet. Most offices were run by men ensconced in a central office with administrative assistants, secretaries, clerks and receptionists radiating from that center.

Barbara sat next to the secretary in charge of medical insurance. Smart and ambitious, that secretary was taking courses at the college, a privilege offered to employees at special rates, not often taken advantage of. She was also tough and occasionally vulgar. When dealing with irate phone callers, she would make signs with her fingers, which did not go over too well in the office. But it seemed to Barbara only such a person could survive that particular job, which involved incredible amounts of paper work and very unhappy clients. Eventually that secretary landed a high paying job over at the hospital. And the person who had been most critical of her took over, hardly lasting a few months. “No, really!”, she told Barbara. “I can’t take the pressure. Life’s too short. My husband will leave me.”

Each month there was a special meeting for new employees at the college to explain to them their benefits and to have them sign various cards, such as who would be their beneficiaries. Barbara, helping to collect signed cards, discovered that, among unmarried couples living together, the male was always the female’s beneficiary but seldom the other way around.

One month it was suddenly decided that Barbara could be in charge of the next meeting because some one was sick and couldn’t be in charge. Standing in front of the new employees, who seemed properly awed by her and all the stuff she was telling them, Barbara even began to feel she knew something. Among the new employees was the daughter of a friend of hers who had just finished college in February and was taking a job in the Psychology Department. Barbara remembered something about faculty children in college being covered by their parents’ insurance until, maybe, age 23?, or was it the June of graduation? “Jan, how old are you? You may still be covered by your parents’ insurance.” Jan’s eyes lit up and her face brightened. “Be sure and check, though, over at the Personnel office.”

Maybe Jan hadn’t heard that part. There had been a crowd. Unfortunately Jan did get very sick and was not covered. Barbara managed to blame, in turn, Jan, the person who was sick and couldn’t run the meeting, and the person who decided Barbara could take over, before beginning to blame herself for having indeed overstepped. She has to watch out for thinking she knows more more than she does. How that insurance problem was resolved, sometime during the year of Jim’s sabbatical, Barbara never did find out. But eventually she came around to the realization that the systems, in spite of their complexities and the high probability of human error, usually did work pretty well, at least for now. She was less sure about the future, and the work of that support staff, more than other support staff work, could be soul-destroying.

Chapter 29

New Jersey

Barbara's mind is not on driving her car. It is on trying to laugh off anger - no, rage. Less than two weeks before they are to leave for Jim's sabbatical, one after another of her carefully orchestrated plans to avoid before-departure chaos are being crossed. And now the car - oh, she hates cars. This infuriating car of theirs had been carefully checked two weeks ago, in preparation for the long drive. New tires were needed, and no she couldn't get them at the garage and she was told she would have to go to the tire place. "Tell them Joe sent you." At the tire place she was told how lucky she was that she had come to them, because one of the tires had been put back on wrong and was about to come off. Afterwards, she had wondered if she should let Joe know this, but she would probably have just made him mad. The next few days she had scanned the papers for obituaries about people whose car tires had come off, which would have been a little her fault because she hadn't called Joe.

And then, the gas tank sprang a leak. She had been wondering about that gas smell, probably from the power lawn-mower which had been acting up all summer she thought, when she allowed herself to think about it at all. But it was Jim's job to worry about the lawn-mower, what to do with it and getting the lawn mowed in their absence, whether to pay that last bill for its repairs, all that. Quite recently she had filled the car's gas tank and already it was more than half empty, so where had Jim been driving?

Of course finally there was a mess on the driveway, which even all the rain they were having couldn't wash away. Yes indeed, she could have blown herself up, driving back to Joe's so he could replace the gas tank.

Well, now the car is as good as new, and maybe even better. She discovers, on a last quick trip to say good-bye to her parents, that the car is going over 40 miles to the gallon. She and Jim have quit edging around talk of a new car. But then, late this morning after returning a blanket to the dry-cleaners which was put into her own pile by mistake (and was the attendant there ever glad to see it!), after that errand which had cut into

time set apart for another job, a mysterious yellow light started flashing on the dash. So she called Joe again. She reminded him who she was. She started telling him about the light, but even before she finished he laughed and said: "Oh, that just means it's time for your car's big check-up, so let's set up a day for you to bring it in." "But, but, but..." she sputtered and finally he said: "Oh - yeah", finally placing her and her car. "Well, drive it down and I'll just turn the light off for you."

Before even letting herself think, behind schedule as she is already and hungry for lunch, in a fury which she hopes she can cool during the drive to get the light fixed, looking ominous (the light, there on the dash, but only a reminder installed by the car's maker and why weren't the owners told or maybe they were in the owner's manual she still hasn't got around to reading from cover to cover but only as specific problems come up), she leaves the house, gets into the car, backs around the driveway, drives out into the street, waits for a stop light, drives the three blocks to the center of town, waits for another stop light - actually she has to wait for that stop light several times since she needs to turn left and there is a lot of traffic - and starts driving through the center of town. At least it has stopped raining, so she can roll down the window.

"Whoa, watch out there..." A voice, a woman's voice, is right by her window. At the same time, Barbara stops for three boys with a bicycle who are j-walking, a little further on. As she starts up again, she glances in the rearview mirror and sees several people who have crossed the street behind her and they are watching - her! One is a policeman, policewoman, rather. Omigod, what has she done? Has she almost killed somebody or what, well they have her license number all right, they'll find her, she had better get all her errands done before she goes back home, will they take away her driver's license?, no way can Jim do all the driving by himself...

At least Joe doesn't charge her for reaching in to turn off the light.

She decides to drive straight home, another way.

She has almost killed someone. She shouldn't be driving. But at least, she has certainly calmed down. Never again will she drive when she is in such a state. Lucky for her the policewoman had sounded so calm, there by her open window, by her ear, who could have yelled "Hey, lady..." She will mention that when she gets the call from the police. She might have done in the j-walkers too, becoming even more wrought up than she had been already.

No call comes. No letter either. Should she turn herself in? That thought doesn't last long.

The following week, after a last grocery shopping, Barbara decides to drive down town again, to try to sort out what really might have happened. And well, what had happened had happened in the block after the third light, which must have been green when she passed it. A new crosswalk

has been painted in. It must have been there last week and she hadn't noticed. Recently, other crosswalks have been painted in, including one by the grocery store. Just this morning she had overheard someone say, about that one : "There really should be an article in the papers. I keep forgetting till I have passed it."

So that's what must have happened. Barbara is weak with relief. Further down the road she turns around and drives back the other way. The other way there is a stick figure painted in front of the crosswalk, to catch a driver's attention, if possible in the presence of a green light. It would be a while before those crosswalks would become more conditional rights of way.

So. Not guilty. But what if she had killed someone, sort of guilty then, maybe? Moral: When you're so mad you could kill, stay home. You just might. And you don't want to. Not really you don't.

How very strange and upsetting. She is trying to get at her medical records, because there is another Barbara Vere. In the past their records have been mixed up. They were also mixed up at the Personnel office. Since she first tried to get at them, a month ago now, the records have been gone over by the doctors involved. After finally putting some pressure on the poor people in the records office, she has discovered the bottleneck is their old friend's psychiatrist, at least in the sense he feels someone should be sitting with her when she looks through her records. The usual person who does this is out for the next two days and Jim and Barbara are leaving for the next year the day after that. What unknown is it that she may not be able to handle alone?

Meanwhile Barbara pays a last visit to her friend who has ms, nonetheless so cheerful. Last week her friend hosted a lovely luncheon before giving away her cello. Euphoria is part of the sickness, so Barbara has heard. She herself feels cheerful enough although she is beginning to wonder if she will ever manage to stuff everything into the storeroom that the renters won't need.

And now a tree is about to fall on the house. It really is. It is on the property next door. Its roots must have loosened in the storm last week, in all the wind and rain. At least the window washer finally got his act together and is coming at 8:00 tomorrow morning.

The windows are glorious. But now she has just lost a part of a filling in her tooth. And something is suddenly wrong with the telephone. No, the phone's okay. Her tooth will get filled tomorrow morning, and she can look through her hospital records this afternoon. And maybe all the stuff will fit in the storeroom after all. Her neighbor just came by, whose friends will be living here next summer, when the winter renters leave. New bed, new

stove, all clean. The neighbor does love the house. Barbara loves the house too. But she is glad they are leaving for a while. All the divorces, illnesses and family crises will be good to escape from, and perhaps they won't be at the new place long enough to get involved.

Home from the hospital. What a relief. She is sure she did not see even close to her whole record, but what she did see was marvelously uninteresting. Mainly she wanted to make sure she and the other Barbara Vere were sorted out. Another time she might want to read everything more carefully. Maybe. She remembers her experience with a student who wanted to see his recommendations when she worked in the Foreign Study program at the college. Being judged is tough. But being the one who must judge, for whatever reason, can be even tougher. So much has yet to be learned about judging others.

The windows are still glorious, well worth the \$5 each. Only a little more packing and cleaning (and lawn mowing) to be done. Tooth and tree, then off they go.

Light years later. The house in New Jersey appears to be going to be right for them beyond her wildest dreams. It is in part of 100 acres given to 100 families (now down to around 80, though she has yet to see evidence of more than perhaps 25) in 1910 by a wealthy local man in support of Henry George who believed land was the only value and alone should be taxed. The group owns it, rather the way the Veres and a group of their friends own a wood lot. The people here meet the first Sunday of each month and a bell rings at 3:00 calling everyone to the meeting. Not every one goes (nor will the Veres) and perhaps that is why the meeting-house has just been painted a shocking pink. A very super highway has been built nearby but just stops. Jim told their landlady's son the story of someone's idea of building a highway with a large ditch at the end for all the cars to drive into, to defeat both cars and highway.

Barbara can hardly believe it has been only two days since they left home. Of course Jim is the one with the get-up-and-go, both the responsibilities and resources, to have made the move possible. He is not without regrets. He will miss the Thursday evenings very much when he sang, as part of a group, at a small restaurant outside of town. Each time he went there to sing, and he has been doing it since February, every Thursday evening, he felt he wouldn't be able to sing well. The last Thursday, the owner brought out some champagne, and Jim sang the champagne aria. Afterwards the whole group went with Jim's singing teacher to a party at the house where son Peter, working for a builder, had put together a handsome stone terrace.

The trip to New Jersey was uneventful. When they arrived at the house, no one was there to meet them and let them in. Jim went off to find a telephone to phone the rental agency. Apparently there had been a misunderstanding. The Veres had been expected Wednesday. Jim had thought they

were not supposed to come until the weekend. Jim, the mathematician, and the landlady who speaks fourteen languages, both may have trouble with such trivial details. Jim also discovered he had brought only one of his best pair of shoes.

In the distance there is the sound of a few trucks on the new super highway. But mostly there are only crows and crickets and water. There is a brook and a swimming pool and also a tennis court with no fence around it. Everything is very dry, although the Veres seem to have brought a little rain. She has watered rhododendrons, a rose of Sharon, and tomatoes. Already the place looks greener than when they arrived.

Elizabeth came in from New York yesterday. Perhaps she will come often. Her cool is astonishing. Barbara walked with her from the car to the train last night. There were a couple of junkies on the stairs so Barbara left her because, when the few others there all got on the train, she would be alone with the junkies. At Hoboken Elizabeth gets off and takes the tube to 9th street and then, alone, walks to 12th street between A and B. Barbara still finds it hard not to ask her to call when she gets home to her apartment.

The gas man comes at 1:00 with something to sign.

How unpleasant job-hunting can be. Barbara made an appointment at the Personnel office of the lab where Jim is studying computer graphics. When the time came, she put on her suit and drove over. Luckily she was early. Parking was impossible. Finally she discovered there were places reserved for people being interviewed for jobs. But she had to go back to the car to write down her license plate number in order to get past the doorman.

The Personnel office was done in blue. Barbara was interviewed by a very attractive black woman. And then she was put in a small, sound-proof, glassed-in, cubicle for a typing test, a language test and a math test. She completed the language test in less than the time allowed and got it all right, but had the feeling she was suspected of having cheated. She was told she would be called if there was an opening for her, and sensed that that was going to be that.

In total contrast to such impersonality was Barbara's visit to her cousin's daughter who lives nearby. The daughter is deeply involved with her mother, on the one hand, and all five of her children on the other. Even as Barbara arrived, two neighbors happened by with two more children. The three friends are lively and full of fun, though unskilled - by which Barbara means, she guesses, none of them can type and are therefore unemployable.

Barbara was truly dumbfounded to discover she herself did not qualify on the typing test at the labs. She asked to take the typing test again but

doubts that she did any better. But she knows she is a good typist: what a puzzle! Also, having spent a year listening to other typing tests, she knows she is not worse than almost every one else. Maybe you have to be perfect at a place like these labs. Or is something else going on?

At least the new house is lovelier than ever each day, in spite of the fact the driveway is in the process of being black-topped. She is sitting with a glass of wine, a letter from her mother and a letter from a friend about the African violet Barbara left on her desk. The two had planned to have lunch together, but the friend had had a medical emergency.

Why does Barbara want to work, she wonders. They don't need what money she can make, so little. She has the chance to enjoy being alone and also to do many different and new things. What on earth would become of her cousin's daughter, the one with five children, if her husband left her or she left him for any of the reasons that seem to be becoming so compelling these days.

Yesterday Jim and Barbara went to Princeton. First they went to the Math building. At the door to the Math building a tall, attractive young man said, "Mrs. Vere!" He had to introduce himself, the kid, now a Princeton freshman, whom she had last seen when he was in fifth grade. They reminisced about many things, including the, for both of them, traumatic time he sang the boy's solo part in "Elijah", except he didn't. He'd been so nervous nothing came out. He seems to have recovered. And he speaks French like a native. What fun to see him. She called his mother when she got home. And then it was fun to hear nice things about her own son as well. She remembers another traumatic time, when a singer got lost. Only two traumas may be a pretty good record considering the number of amateur singers she has worked with, but still....

Then, after going to the Princeton Biology building where Jim had to look up something, they went to her old music school. They listened to some of the rehearsal for the Verdi "Requiem". She hopes to hear several rehearsals and also work on finding new music for women's voices. The school looked lovely and prosperous, with fifteen voice teachers now.

They had lunch with friends from England, in Princeton once again, all four of them, after 26 years. Their friends' youngest of four children is now twenty. The wife is hoping to find a job, although they will be moving to New York City in January. They compared notes about getting settled, the ones from England needing to learn to drive on the "wrong" side of the road again. Barbara wonders how they themselves will do, when they go to Cambridge next spring, with their own turn of learning to drive on the "wrong" side.

The lady next door just drove up to her garage. The black-topping project has helped Barbara get acquainted with the neighbors. She feels very safe here. In Princeton there seemed to be many policemen and the

local paper was full of assaults and vandalism.

She has talked to her dad and mother on the phone several times. Her dad does not sound well. She bought an airplane ticket to visit them during the time Jim goes to Baltimore.

Elizabeth has managed to transfer to the school of education, where she is a junior, as if she had just plugged right along from the beginning without all of her many adventures, traveling in Europe.

At a party Barbara met some one who said his department at the lab needed a person to organize a small library. Would she be interested? So tomorrow she goes back to the labs to interview for the job of organizing a linguistics library.

Well now. She has just had a phone call. It seems she has the job. After a few days alone, essentially settled here, she was beginning to face up to the fact that she is not ready yet to keep herself amused at home alone. She will be paid over \$5 an hour. Working three days a week, she will almost be able to pay the rent. The job, perhaps dull in itself, will be very interesting for her, among people who are doing research in linguistics, math, art, music, in short, communication of all kinds. Now all she must do is get a copy of her marriage certificate, to prove that's why her name is different from the one on her birth certificate.

Saturday they will go to the opera. Elizabeth will come too. Women in operas either die or become nuns. Why are there no heroic old women? Anywhere? Perhaps Margaret Drabble will produce one if she lives long enough. Barbara Pymm has a few real older women, at least, if not heroic ones. Elizabeth is taking a course on women, along with women of all ages, not particularly emphasizing liberation as much as analyzing women's present economic situation.

She did go to the Cape. Dad seemed to be doing better when she left than when she came. Mother is wonderful and more ready not to push Dad around too much and to do things on her own more. Peter came. He is very thin, but that seems to be the style for young people these days. He spoke, maybe enviously, of Elizabeth having "gumption".

The Veres, along with Elizabeth, spent the Saturday of the opera in New York, mostly at the Metropolitan Museum. At closing time they walked through Central Park, full of mothers and children and other people walking, to eat at the Ginger Man. At Lincoln Center, Barbara and Elizabeth sat by the fountain without their shoes while Jim got their fancier shoes from the car. The opera house is elegant indeed. Jim, who went out during the first

intermission, came back saying there was a dancer by the fountain. They drove Elizabeth home, through dark and dingy streets filled with dark and dingy people. "Mom, I know them, they'll protect me..." But Elizabeth knew Barbara was scared and telephoned them when they finally got home after getting lost on the way to the Holland tunnel.

And Monday was her first day on the job. It was a disorganized day. By Wednesday she began to get more of a feeling for what she was going to be doing. A card from Mother decided Barbara to make a phone call. Dad is not well. Peter had come briefly to visit, which pleased them very much.

On Sunday the Veres went to Princeton again, to meet their English friends, the perfect day for a walk behind the Institute. On the suspended bridge over the river (full of floating colored leaves) two students were hugging. After a while the girl cheered and said, "I thought you'd never ask" and then shouted out to the world: "We're engaged!"

After supper at the Nassau tavern, Jim and Barbara found places among the auditors at Zubin Mehta's rehearsal at the music school. The auditors included an Amish woman, some Viet Nameese, and others who may have been trustees. Mehta himself was half an hour late "because my car got lost". Then he added: "It's the 9th inning, the bases are loaded, the Philies are ahead 4 to 3 - what a time to start the 'Requiem'!". He had the students in the palm of his hand, although they didn't begin to sing the way they could until about fifteen minutes before the end. And then...! Only once did Mehta talk about the meaning of the piece. His remarks were low key and usually humorous. "Follow the soprano - when she stops, she counts 5 beats and then comes in again and she could sing the whole 'Requiem' on one breath, no, only Jessye Norman can do that, she sings a whole lieder volume on one breath." During the break he autographed music for the students. The Veres saw the car that had got lost, on their way out, a huge limousine with a chauffeur asleep in it.

Monday was a strange day at work. She tries to understand the research that goes on, but it is way over her head. She must not try to be part of that. But there are women at the labs, her age or slightly younger, who are indeed part of that. Soon there is going to be a big reorganization, so what she is doing may be on the order of building a sand castle, temporary and doomed. At least she is making almost-rent- money and, finally, learning to use the computer. Jim is a tremendous help with that.

Tomorrow night is the TV broadcast of the "Requiem".

What a "Requiem"! The choir, in the traditional red robes (Barbara's own long since in the costume trunk at home) was arranged in banks around everyone else in black and white. The applause, at the end, grew and grew "for", as the announcer said, "the choir".

Thursday the Veres rode an uncomfortable bus into New York. Barbara met her cousin Jeanie who really is fun. They had good talks and walked around the city. Many new buildings with lots of glass make the city seem light and airy. Then she met Jim and an old math friend for dinner on 73rd St., after a long walk along Central Park West and past many music students. The restaurant had been written about in the New York Times and was therefore very crowded. They managed to find their way back to the Port Authority and the bus, which did finally get them back to where they had started. Apparently there is a better bus, which they may try next time. Barbara is beginning to suspect she needs a day off during the week, though how to choose between Princeton and the Big Apple!

Princeton usually wins. Last Tuesday at Princeton the Veres met one of Jim's undergraduates, now a math graduate student. Jim is impressive with his students, both encouraging them and able to keep them calmed down, without demoralizing them, when they blame others for, perhaps, their own failings. The campus, even in the rain (all those orange and black umbrellas!), is at its loveliest in the fall. After spending time in the town library, new to her, Barbara walked back to the math department in the warm wet pink late afternoon.

Another time the Veres had dinner in Princeton in a new faculty apartment building by the lake. The apartment was small, at the very top and at the very end of the building. Some children playing soccer gave them directions, pointing up. Inside, the place looked impressive because of all the books and art. Dinner was served elegantly on a beautiful tablecloth. The first course included caviar and a good wine. Barbara was struck by the careful movements, the sounds, the slow serving and eating, and the two children, one host and one guest, being so very good, who had never met before but who went off and played together without a murmur and who were charming at table, speaking when spoken to, even though surely exhausted by the time the party ended, after midnight. The hostess was from Argentina. The men were Physicists. The talk was of whether the next war would happen through big countries or terrorists. The two other wives, one a psychiatrist and the other a sociologist, help groups of people work together.

Work is fun, though sometimes a bit strange. On the stairway she met the person who had given a lecture on the hierarchy of hand motions. He had also said something about people being inner or outer having to do with their belly buttons being in or out! He confessed to Barbara he was amused to be able to make a living out of such speculations.

A couple of people are now coming in to try to sort out the non-library items as sensibly and sensitively as they can, mostly trying to clear out a small room behind where she works. The stored equipment there turns out to belong to some one in the "Chicago branch". She is going through the

professional journals. There are over seventy, seventeen for which there are records and twenty-seven for which there are records but no journals. She is also xeroxing entries for some one who is in charge of a bibliography on voice research, a young graduate of Juilliard who is doing very well (just bought herself a Steinway), although not in music. Before Juilliard she had gone somewhere else, her parents having told her she could go to any college she wanted, "as long as it was all women and catholic".

The other day, one of Barbara's bosses showed her a Xerox sheet with Jim's publications on it, asking "Is this your husband?" In the world of Math, Jim is one of the gods. She is treated with new respect. Every now and then, someone says how transformed the library is.

Tomorrow is the election. The Veres voted two weeks ago, absentee. Today, her dad has some x-rays. He is not well.

Elizabeth is finally thinking about moving, becoming more aware she is the only white woman in her neighborhood. She walks around there, fast, in a big coat and under a big hat. She comes for weekends, sometimes, and will be coming this weekend. It will be so good to see her. Her cousin's daughter, the one with five children, will be here for dinner Saturday with her husband. Then back to the city for cousin Jeanie's concert in honor of Aaron Copland's 80th birthday.

The election is over. Reagan won. The stock market shot up. But mostly, Barbara received a good letter back from her friend Amy, with two poems, in response to her letter of commiseration. Amy was not happy about Reagan.

The cousins who were here for dinner had lots of funny stories about life with five children. They stayed late to not help fold newspapers for one son's paper route. They were an island of sanity, because there had been no word from Dad and Mother. And a high school friend of Elizabeth's, trying to make his way in New York, was murdered.

The Aaron Copland birthday concert was "awash with sentiment", as one reviewer said the next day.

Jeanie's oldest son hosted the Thanksgiving "family office party": Barbara can't remember who first called it that. A lovely moment was sitting on the stairs talking with one of the next-generation girls. After a while they were found by the three-year-old daughter of the generation after that. And then a couple of others came to sit on the stairs too. Word got around to the picture takers. Jeanie's children all look like her, and so does one of her daughter's children. Barbara's aunt, Dad's sister, played hymns and a dance

tune at the piano, closing with the “Star-spangled Banner”, Alzheimer’s (or whatever is her sad problem) notwithstanding. In the car, driving to the party with Jeanie’s brother, Elizabeth had been intrigued by the way the aunt had kept repeating “I’m lost” and “I’m glad I’m not behind the wheel”.

The next week Barbara had lunch with the family of a student who had lived at the Veres’ house last year. The old grandmother was memorable in her sunny corner. Barbara also met two of the student’s three retarded siblings. Last summer she had met one, and he did remember her and also the horse-and-buggy wedding that had happened to pass when he was visiting.

Barbara, showing Elizabeth the Princeton chapel last week, happened upon a wedding, there under the great colored-glass window, the bride in white, her attendants in red, the men in gray, and organ music and singing.

Barbara’s singer friend Annie wrote that the old organist for the church across the river has died, mentioning the story Barbara had written and given her about him and the “Hallelujah” chorus. He had told his sister he would prefer hell to another winter up in their little house on the hill, because at least in hell he would be warm.

All sorts of excitement at work. The men and women who must push the heavy trucks of mail or equipment want the hallway doors, outside of the library, open, even to the point of bending back the door stop so one door can’t be closed. But the secretaries down the hall are freezing cold. Barbara herself continues to want the doors open because she gets lonesome and the room she is in gets stuffy. The chief of the secretaries came in, looked over the room and said: “None of the ducts are open. Call circulation”. And the chief came back to make sure she had called, after a few more hours of the doors opening and closing. She hadn’t, since she has no phone, but she had dumped the problem onto someone else. Also, the person in charge of computers gets shocks on her terminal when it quits and he comes to fix it. The air in the library becomes almost blue with electricity. He (the computer person) used to be a biologist. He studied fireflies, after reading Dante. Jim suggests she not get too involved in office politics, just do her job. But alas, if her terminal keeps going off, and she has to keep the fire doors open (or closed) she can’t do her job.

Meanwhile there are Christmas parties all over. And at Princeton, while Christmas shopping she came upon the Columbus boy choir caroling. To think she conducted them once! Actually, they are now called the American boy choir, in hopes of more grants said their sponsor, who was serving delicious hot cider out there on the street. The post office should try hot cider. There was certainly a crowd at the post office, entertained only by a small girl and her daddy, who was not pleased with being the center of attention.

The three Veres will drive to the Cape for Christmas, driving her parents

to Peter's for Christmas day.

John Lennon has been shot. All the memorials plus the Beatles' music has brought back Barbara's own memories of her kids, little then, singing "She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah" and "Awfully quiet down there", in their nice conventional home. That time seems far away, suddenly.

Thursday, Jim and Barbara went to New York again. At Hoboken, there was a fire in the subway. Maybe 500 people surfaced in the Hoboken square. Eventually one bus arrived. New York has a bus crisis, new ones having collapsed and old busses from Washington DC not yet arrived. Jim, with Barbara tagging along, managed to get on. In the crowd was someone they knew who didn't manage to get on. Delays notwithstanding, Barbara reached Avery Fischer Hall in time to hear a rehearsal of Berlioz's "Romeo and Juliet", sung by her music school's choir. Their sound was both rich and clear. The music was strange and she wished she had read up on it. The long-awaited New Grove's Dictionary has finally come out.

Afterwards, aiming for the Metropolitan Museum, she decided to find Carnegie Hall first, and the Russian Tea Room where she and Jim would be treating Jeanie to dinner before her performance in the "Messiah". By the time Barbara reached Rockefeller Center, she realized she had somehow missed both Hall and Tea Room. There was a scary cross street. How could Elizabeth love this city! Since she was right there, Barbara decided to try to find the mural of the future, painted in 1931 by Boardman Robinson, a friend of her parents. She had been the model for the baby (the future). Mr. Robinson himself thought of the mural as a failure. She had seen it once with Jim in 1954, in the Rockefeller Center Music Hall lobby.

At the Music Hall there was a large crowd. So she decided to try once again to find Carnegie Hall, stopping at a reception desk at the 5th Avenue Italian Air Line to see if there might be a passport office nearby. She needed to have a new passport, for when they go on to Cambridge. "Two blocks south," she was told. She continued on to Carnegie Hall, found it, then returned to find the passport office. She was beginning to feel tired and a little, somehow, odd. She found the passport office and the information she needed, and a place to sit down. Finally she got up and continued going along 5th Ave, wishing she had a map to see for sure where Bloomingdale's or Macy's or something was, assuming she could sit down in one of those places and have a cup of tea. The sun was out. But it was cold. Exciting. Exhilarating. Exhausting. She saw the lions at 41st street, ah yes, the public library. Yes. A place to sit down.

Closed. Another lady was equally surprised and disappointed. But that lady told her where Bloomingdale's was. She returned uptown and happened

upon Saks. Wow. She did not go above the 3rd floor. Too swank. And no tea. At Central Park she turned right as far as Park Avenue, then wondered if Lexington was the other way. She returned, by way of all the elegant places bordering Central Park, to Lincoln Center. It was getting dark, though not yet 5. There was a library at Lincoln Center, Elizabeth had said once. No tea, though. Too late anyway for tea. She met Jim and Jeanie in front of the Russian Tea Room at 6, for a delicious and lively dinner, as well as tea, and heard the beginning of Jeanie's performance next door at Carnegie Hall. Barbara had revived, but Jim was exhausted and ready to leave before the end to catch the last train to New Jersey.

The Veres are home again, after Christmas. Both Barbara's parents seemed quite well, but tired. Her parents decided not to go to Peter's Christmas day. On the way to Peter's the Veres stopped to see three of Richard's children trying to, wanting to, make their own Christmas in the apartment of the oldest, trying to deal with the family break-up. The fourth telephoned from where she lives in California. Perhaps the Veres shouldn't have stopped. The youngest greeted them at the door, after a while, wearing one of his presents, dark glasses with battery-run lights that flicked on and off. For Peter, Elizabeth produced sparklers, exciting and which miraculously did not set fire to all the Christmas wrappings. And dinner was really good.

Mother's and Dad's Christmas cards were, as usual, from the same old and dear friends, collected, as always, in the lovely bowl from France made by a potter friend of the French family. The model boat on the mantle, made for them by a house guest colleague years ago, was decorated and even had a few little Christmassy wooden passengers. The family rooster, on the mantle, sported some tinsel.

Elizabeth couldn't have been more charming. Brava Elizabeth. She did dishes, saying that kept her hands warm. It was bitterly cold, below zero even on the Cape. They took Mother to a Christmas Eve party. Jeanie's brother telephoned Christmas morning and they all sang/hollered "Merry Christmas" to him from the living room. (He allowed as how they sounded flat.)

When they left, Dad did not get up but stayed in bed through the confusion of breakfast and departure. Elizabeth went in to say good-bye to him, leaning over to hug him, there in the full warm sun shining through the south window.

Barbara has just come in from a walk. There is a little snow, sun and clouds alternating, and cold, but a civilized cold. She followed the footprints of a dog-walker and a dog and met an elderly gentleman, with his dog who

had on a coat, as they returned. It feels very country, here, in spite of the many little houses and the nearby highway, which sounds pleasantly like the ocean.

The Veres were invited to dinner in Princeton, along with Elizabeth, by the friend who had, years ago, given them their kitchen shower and who had remembered it was their anniversary.

At work, Barbara found she was having trouble keeping warm in the library. And she discovered an open hole behind a filing cabinet in the small room back of the library. She pointed it out to the next person who came in. He laughed and said oh yes, pigeons used to fly in that hole until somebody had brought the wire mesh to cover it. That very night, outside the library some pipes froze and burst. Nothing was damaged, but there was a very odd smell. Nobody seemed to know quite what was in the pipes. Barbara, the only one who had to stay in the library for any length of time, was uncertain what to do. Should she refuse to work? Was there danger, even? If a lot of people were involved, something might have been done. But even when hundreds of people died in a factory in India, recently, because of the building's leaking gases, even then it wasn't obvious what to do. In India, if the company had not been there, with jobs, the people would have died anyway, from starvation.

People up and down the halls were sympathetic. A secretary friend came to spray the library with her bottle of air-freshener, which did help. Soon the carpet dried out and the smell disappeared. And soon she would be leaving.

She was asked if she could come in more than her three days a week, but she said no. The person who had asked, asked then what else she was up to. She told him she was beginning to read up on Bach Cantatas in the library of her old music school. She added so far she hadn't been very interested in the cantatas and was beginning to wonder what she was missing. He then told her he played the viola and that he had studied Beethoven's quartets at MIT, adding: "This might surprise you." (That MIT offered such a course, Barbara wondered? That he should be interested in the viola and/or in the Beethoven quartets?) And then he said he had gone to a concert and had seen the lab janitor there. Hmm.

Back in New York she met a friend who had broken her foot skating and was very unhappy, needing to be in a wheelchair. They had lunch at the Metropolitan Museum and talked for a long time before looking for the traveling photography exhibit from the Bibliotheque Nationale. From there they moved on to the impressionist paintings. Some children were sitting on the floor in front of a painting of apple trees in bloom. The room was full of color and light, suddenly so refreshing. When the museum closed, Barbara left her friend off in a taxi and walked along Central Park in the late afternoon, complete with a big red sun, children on sleds sliding down the

little hills, birds in the trees, a feeling of almost spring in the gray/whiteness. The restaurant where she met Elizabeth and Jim, complete with champagne for Jim's birthday, was just right. Then on to the musical "Evita", also good but very loud.

Again in New York, the Veres met their English friends who have moved to the city from Princeton. Jim went on to Rockefeller, where he was to give a talk. The English wife and Barbara joined cousin Jeanie for lunch, Jeanie full of her adventures as always. Eventually Barbara joined Jim, where he was holding court after a very successful talk. A special memory would always be watching the tugboats from a 16th floor office window at sunset. The East River was deep blue and everything else pink.

At work, yesterday a secretary came by to talk about having flunked her typing test too, without being able to see it afterwards. That secretary began discovering the same thing had happened to quite a few. She theorized it might have something to do with minorities needing to be hired, an issue Barbara had been unaware of, working alone and only now becoming more acquainted.

She talked to Jeanie's brother on the phone, yesterday. He had called her dad and mother this morning. They had discouraged him from coming for a visit when he was in Boston. They are not well, either of them.

A magic Valentine's day in New York. "The Masked Ball" at Lincoln Center was the high point. But there were other high points: the exhibit of Steuben glass, buying two perfect woolly hats at Bloomingdale's, and finding a button that perfectly matched for her coat in a store that boasted of "5 million different buttons". An elderly gentleman asked her, after she had found her button: "Is your nice smile for me?" What could she answer but "Of course!" And further down the sidewalk, two separate people asked her where they were, as if she could answer.

It has been a long time since she has written. Once her friend from England said she was going to write down their phone conversations! Oh well, who knows what the reason is for writing a diary, or a sort of diary, whether anyone including oneself ever reads again what gets written.

Jim has gone to give a talk in Madison, Wisconsin. He left in time to stop in Chicago and celebrate his mother's 90th birthday, along with his two brothers. Barbara sent some dried lavender, to smell good, but Jim's mother thought it was tea.

Barbara is meeting more people at the labs. And she has joined the "French Table", of people who have lunch together on Mondays to speak French. She is supposed to write a job description, now, of what she does. There are two committees, one to decide what next for the library and the

other to decide what else the space could better be used for. She hopes to complete the cataloguing in the library. She does care about it and she thinks it is a fascinating collection.

Last Sunday she was invited to tea with the mother of Elizabeth's second-best boyfriend. It reminded her of how Mother and Dad always invited her prospective friends' parents for tea before she could play with them. It was an interesting experience, as well as the chance to see a very nice house. And today they took Elizabeth, after the usual too brief visit, back into New York for lunch at her apartment. They found a parking place easily, almost in front of the building. The neighborhood could be improving, or Barbara could be becoming more tolerant. Barbara and Jim went to get coffee at a little store, to give whoever might be in the apartment time to know they were coming. When they arrived, the bed had clearly just been made and there was some concern that someone might still be in it - "No, we're all here". The place looked good, even with the sink over the bathtub, as Mother had once described her New York apartment in the twenties. "Elizabeth keeps us going..." said her friends.

At work there seems to be much wringing of hands over Barbara's imminent departure - how nice. Two people have been interviewed for her job and the first to be offered it accepted. Barbara hopes she will be able to reach a good stopping place so that she can work out a smooth transition for her successor. She told the person she had worked with most it had been great to have someone like him around to keep the rest of them sane. He answered: "I can't believe I didn't drive you insane!"

On St. Patrick's day, the Veres visited Barbara's childhood friend Anna, who lives in a big house with a big front porch, a block from the ocean. It was fun to see Anna's grandfather's Dante books again (he was the translator) complete with the letter from Theodore Roosevelt kept in one of the volumes. One of Anna's daughters looks like the Anna Barbara knew. Anna's husband made a great fire and great martinis. Anna's own kids did not know she had skipped third grade and had also been praised at school for good posture.

Jim and Barbara went to see a play, for which Elizabeth sold tickets. Earlier this year, they had been to see a play, by Tolstoy, in which Elizabeth had had the lead. Cousin Jeanie came to that one too and was struck by the resemblance between Elizabeth and Barbara's father when he had been that age. (Jeanie is fourteen years older than Barbara.) This time, the Veres couldn't find where the play was being given, but very luckily happened upon Elizabeth on her way there. So they gave her a ride and found a parking place - among some garbage bags. Elizabeth looked lovely selling tickets, dressed in black with something sparkling. The director was someone with whom Elizabeth had studied. Instead of scene changes, the play moved from room to room through a sort of warehouse building, the audience following along. The play ended when a couple of the actors simply

went outside into the real street and got on a real bus. Wine and beer were for sale afterwards, including for the cast. (The ones who had left on the bus came back.) People said how much Elizabeth makes possible.

The Veres did manage to leave New Jersey, but just barely. At 10:30 that morning they pulled out of the driveway, Elizabeth and Barbara packed into their seats along with the rest of all their stuff. They arrived in New York in front of Elizabeth's apartment just as her two roommates were coming out. The roommates helped pry her loose from the car and all three returned to the apartment loaded with her belongings and laughing, goodbye Elizabeth and Jim and Barbara were off again, in the space of minutes.

They arrived on the Cape a little late, through developing rain and then snow. But the warm welcome was worth it all. Jim left the next day for Peter's and then on to their own house in New Hampshire.

Here on the Cape, Barbara's room is covered with all she must sort and pack, her dear room with the old bed and the bunches of blue forget-me-nots on the wallpaper. Her grandfather hung his watch on one of the spools of the bed, so Mother doesn't dare get a new bed with a mattress that doesn't sink in the middle. Peter put a piece of plywood underneath the mattress, which does help.

Dad and Mother tire very easily, Dad probably in need of another transfusion, which makes a big difference. They make her feel so welcome. There are many things happening to upset them, the main one being that Dad's sister has lost all memory. But, incredibly the bulletin from Dad's school came, with the story Barbara wrote for Dad and Mother's 50th anniversary, about her French grandparents. It was better than she had remembered. Perhaps the editor had done a little judicious fixing.

The Cape is lovely, even now at its most bleak, the bamboo plants across the street white and the marsh grass at the town landing completely flat. Jim will come back tomorrow and they will have dinner with friends who are spending a week further down on the Cape.

And now it is Sunday. Tuesday they leave. Barbara hears Jim singing, up through the radiator. All of them are waiting for the paper, supposed to be brought by a neighbor. That system is breaking down, to Dad's annoyance. He has never been a patient man. He doubts Jim and Barbara's ability to get to the airport from Peter's, who will keep the car while they are gone. Planning and family are upsetting him and yet none of all the family, Barbara especially, leave him alone, coming and going at their own convenience, making it hard for Dad and Mother to establish a regular life for themselves among their own friends. But perhaps that too would be hard for them, by now.

Monday. President Reagan was shot.

Elizabeth telephoned. She was doing laundry when she heard about the President. Peter said little about it, when they talked with him too. They themselves were sitting in a car shop, waiting for the car to be checked over for Peter.

Packing is not going well. Will they manage to consolidate before tomorrow at 7:15 AM? It's a bright day and Barbara's room is full of sun. On the ceiling, the mosquitoes she and Anna squashed when they were kids are still there, as are the holes they poked in the wallpaper where it does not go smoothly over the corners. The next time she writes, she will be in England.

Dad is certainly sick but putting up a good front. He was up all night.

Chapter 30

England

There's a willow tree in the patio and everywhere is full of new spring green and flowers. It is hard to tell, yet, how their lives here will be. Cambridge is charming indeed, with all its colleges. Jim's "Maths" building makes her think of Peter's present workplace in Boston, few frills. It is very easy to get totally turned around among the curvy streets. Tonight Jim and Barbara walked miles back to their "flat".

The trip was good. In the airport, there was a chain-flush bathroom, reminding Barbara of the one at Prats when she was little. (Her French grandmother hadn't understood when Barbara begged to be allowed to "le flusher".) The taxi driver referred to Barbara as Jim's "laidy". Almost at once they are to go off to Oxford, to meet friends from home, one at Oxford, the other two on a visit, spending the term in Wales. She feels dizzy, jet-lag no doubt.

Thanks to not having any soap to do mountains of laundry, there's a moment for Barbara to catch her breath. Jim bought a bike yesterday, so he's off doing the necessary errands. This morning she saw their new young neighbor, through the two kitchen windows between their flats, eyeing his English teakettle, looking puzzled and sleepy. Their own teakettle is thoroughly encrusted and the extension cord is ragged. So she is boiling water in a pan on the stove, instinctively using the wrong burners. Yesterday she came close to being hit by a car, on the "other" side of the road. The faucets are also wrong as is the toilet handle.

There was fancy conversation at high table, last night. The conversation, evolving from talking about the links between astronomy and physics, was a discussion about mathematics having arisen from practical considerations, or not. The two contributions that bombed were the one by the host's wife, on the function of personal motivation, and Barbara's own, on the evolution

of language as metaphor. She suspects women still just don't belong here, except in theory. Jim later said math is structured thinking about structure, or rather she did and he agreed, when they talked together. He also said umhum when she asked what he thought of comparing predestination to computer hardware and free will to computer software. But there does seem to be something threatening about any serious conversation, because of the "I'm right, you're wrong" feeling that starts taking over. Maybe it is possible to make an art of such conversation - assuming that art itself is non-threatening....

At the high table evening, first they had sherry and were introduced to every one. Barbara was escorted upstairs to the dining room by the host. He wore a robe so ragged it must have been on purpose. They all stood behind their chairs until a gong sounded and grace was said. Jim, of course, had to escort the host's wife. "Help", he said to the wife, who had the grace to giggle. She also giggled when she realized her husband was the one who would be saying grace, two Latin words.

That very cold morning, the Veres had been to Blenheim castle. Jim had managed to de-comission a cocoa vending machine by inserting 2 2p instead of 2 20p, not knowing the difference yet. In the castle, the most beautiful room was the dining room with its great chairs. The high table dining room here is beautiful also. Dinner was very grand and delicious too. There were two kinds of wine. At one point, the host suggested Barbara help herself to - the gravy. It looked like salad dressing, though, so she put it on her salad. The host put it between his salad and meat. Jim put it on his meat and so did the others on down the line. In fact it was salad dressing. After the final grace (the same two Latin words) and the gong, all returned downstairs for coffee, liqueurs, fruit and nuts. By then Barbara was exhausted. Today they will go to both lunch and dinner.

This has been a week like no other. After unpacking and sleeping like the dead, the Veres took the bus to Oxford. Their friends from home, already arrived from Wales, met them at the bus depot, after a lovely ride through villages and hills full of sheep, along the edge of the Cottswolds. They walked together to an Inn, along the "High", the main street. Pots of daffodils hung from the street lamps. They had tea, each room complete with the ubiquitous English teakettle. Then they dressed up and met their other friend and proceeded on to where they had dinner.

The next morning they were awakened by a very loud gong announcing breakfast. After a good breakfast, complete with mushrooms and tomatoes, came a day of sightseeing and a lunch of fish called plaice. At dinner in a pub, they met their Oxford friend's landlady. Back at the Inn they played bridge while observing both a wedding party and a birthday party.

At the moment Barbara's project is to memorize the windows in Kings' College Chapel. She will also stare at the Rubens painting of the Magi, which looks calmer in the original than in copies. Yesterday they did errands and Jim succeeded in making the computer work, which they had brought to England.

And right now she should try to figure out if the milkman just forgot to leave their milk order or if maybe it is sitting somewhere else out there. She put out two empty bottles and now there are three. Ah. "Your milkman has been," says the cheerful painter of the next apartment, after banging heartily on the back door. Even the milk bottles are strange, smallish, glass, topped with silver foil. It turns out the rocks by the window are to put on the foil bottle tops so the birds won't peck through and drink the cream. The birds in Wales do the same thing. Their friends in Wales said at first they wondered if rocks-on-milk-bottles were some kind of old Welsh custom.

Jim has bought her a bike. She hopes she survives. Yesterday she explored all over, trying to find a nearby place to grocery shop, though going to downtown Cambridge is always interesting.

She had another conversation at a very different high table, if that's what they are all called, with a woman "fellow", a psychologist. They talked about the grace before and after meals. The psychologist claimed that saying it continues as a custom because no one has the energy to change. Barbara said she wondered if the old university's monks felt guilty about needing to eat. The psychologist said no, the monks felt grateful, as people generally do, that they were not starving. Grace as gratitude came even before Christianity. So Barbara said it seemed to her, then, that this might still be true.

It's so beautifully quiet, except for the painters and the gurgle of the refrigerator. Is it going to be very different when people get back from their vacations? The kitchen door is in two parts. The top half opens separately. There are no screens. Time to go get a library card and mingle with the crowds and smell the flowers.

Barbara managed to get a library card, though the whole trip took about four hours. The gardens along the backs were full of people, with lots of punt-traffic on the Cam, all so very peaceful and lovely. The flowering fruit tree by King's College Chapel almost upstaged the chapel itself. On the way home, she stopped there, at the chapel. The sun was shining through the stained glass windows. And a children's choir and orchestra from Germany were rehearsing for a concert, including a piece by the Prince Consort Albert. The place is echoey, but yet the words of the conductor were very distinguishable - "eins, zwei...".

She won a tennis set against Jim. And soon the grass courts directly in front of their flat will be ready to play on.

Barbara has done nothing this lovely summer-like morning except for some laundry which she has hung in the doorway in the breeze. And she has written a few post cards. She has been thinking about the arrangements for their Lake District trip in July with their friends in Wales.

Yesterday, walking home along the edge of a garden, she found children playing. One little boy, with a few daffodils in his hand, crawled out and then back in under a little blue door, through a space just big enough for him.

She has heard there was strong objection over the construction of a chapel for this college, one "fellow" even resigning, believing that a contemporary college had no business having a chapel. She went looking for it, not having noticed it before, a shed-like structure in back of the flats. She was told it was handsome inside. She had met the chaplain the other night, who was very unassuming and quiet.

Barbara worries about Elizabeth, and Peter too. And Dad. For Elizabeth, this is her first time of being really on her own. Barbara's brother Richard will be coming through sooner or later, though she hasn't heard when yet.

After lunch she will walk to the Market place and see also about the Newcomer's Club and buy tickets to Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates" in July, and maybe buy some fresh vegetables.

Yesterday after a noon dinner given by Jim's host, everyone (Barbara, Jim, the host and his wife, their four youngest children, a grandmother and one child's friend who is a civil servant in London) went for a walk to Granchester. The walk was followed by an English tea (scones, cheese, salad, two kinds of cake and jams). The English do seem to eat a lot, though that might be because of visitors. At Saturday's high table, there was soup, a fish course, the main course with three vegetables, and of course the "sweet or cheese". The waitress and the butler had a bet going between them (Barbara overheard) as to how many would have the cheese.

Tomorrow night they will be going to a buffet dinner given by a graduate student who has been giving Jim run-downs of all the "maths" big shots who are away now on vacation. Jim is impressed with the way all the secretaries are included in the departmental afternoon teas.

On the kitchen table are the flowers Jim's host graciously picked to give her yesterday. Jim said they would look nice if she got hit by a car. There had been some joking about her gingerly sort of bike-riding.

The Cam at Granchester gets quite narrow. The people who bought the poet Rupert Brooke's house have agreed to keep it open one day a week, though they don't have to say which day that will be. A path Queen Elizabeth I and her train followed is now a huge wheat field looking more

like a Russian movie set - or, like the "fens in East Anglia". Their host pointed out where the fields had been divided into strips for tenant farmers. There was some disagreement about whether or not the mill in Granchester was, in fact, the one in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale".

They returned by way of the Botanical Gardens (another place she must go for longer) and through a park full of Sunday strollers. Several girls had made themselves crowns of wild daisies. And there were many birds, so many birds, especially when Jim and Barbara were biking home through the evening. Will she hear a nightingale?

Jim just called from the department to say there were letters from Dad and Mother and Elizabeth. Her own letters with this address must not have arrived yet.

A college friend of Barbara's telephoned last night and invited them to come for Easter.

Today was glorious. Whoops, her oxtail soup just boiled over. This morning, while doing laundry and waiting for the dryer to finish, she sat in the sun on the steps of the laundry, listening to the mothers and children talk. The English sounds were soft, the sounds of the women and children. A man's voice would not have fit in.

The house, next to the little blue door, which she sees each day on her way to the market, has masses of tulips in bloom. She begins to understand the emphasis some people at home put on gardens, though the results in their northern climate, even in the best gardens, are nothing like this! One "fellow" laughed when she said she couldn't believe the English were victims of inflation since they could still afford such gardens. Maybe it's true the English would rather starve than give up their gardens.

The daughter of the English friends who were in Princeton and New York came by. She told Barbara about a bike path to the market place - and what a path, pink flowering trees on either side.

How restful it is to spend the morning sitting around writing letters. Barbara asked their host's wife whether she would do graduate work, now that her children are grown. She answered, "I'm not smart enough." How had she managed all those children when they were small, financially too. The wife admitted inflation was hard but was more than made up for, now, by the children, one by one, becoming independent.

Railroad strikes are predicted for next week. Barbara wonders if they'll be able to follow through with their visit to Wales, where Jim has been invited to give a talk. Meanwhile the latest space shuttle landed "immaculately" and "in trails of dust". Here in England, even the Veres, as Americans, are getting credit for the shuttle's success, although Barbara keeps

assuring everyone she had nothing whatever to do with it and that she has all she can do to stay alive just on her bike.

Today Barbara is feeling disoriented, missing the focus of a job. Having a job, the ones she can get, may be worth the, alas, drop in status. She talked a little with the host's wife about how grateful she has been to Jim for putting up with her taking courses and also working as a secretary. The wife seemed to know exactly what Barbara was talking about.

At another high table dinner, Barbara listened to an Indian zoologist talk linguistics and then, after dinner, to an Irish microbiologist discuss Cambridge politics and inter-departmental courses. She fits in better if she doesn't do any talking herself. The fellows were clearly just getting warmed up when the Veres left at 10:30.

Jim is hitting it off here, back in academia. Nice as it was having him more to herself in New Jersey, indeed she must not depend on him for her daily life. And much as she loves academia herself, she hasn't the what it takes to be part of it, by either upbringing or inclination. However, there are worse fates than enjoying academia's side benefits, better, simpler, and perhaps even wiser. Cambridge continues to be gracious and lovely. She has been staring at the final pages of Pepys' diary at Magdalene College. His hand-writing is worse than her own.

The Veres spent Easter with her college friend and her four children. Another college friend came with her husband from London. The three college "girls" used to drink tomato juice and eat cheese and crackers together every weekday evening at 9:30, and talk and talk. Both of the others continue full of their old joie de vivre, though what tough lives both have had. At the beginning of the meal there were colored Easter eggs which they all broke, hitting one against the other around the table, then eating them and drinking vodka. The friend with four children is Russian. The cheesecake for dessert had XB on it, Greek orthodox for "Christ is Arisen".

This morning Barbara went to a coffee for Newcomers and met two Americans, an Art Historian from Seattle and someone from Williamstown. There were three Japanese young mothers whose children were ecstatic at having found friends. Afterwards she and the Seattle person had lunch at "Auntie's Tea Shop", where the facilities are labeled "Uncles" and "Aunties". They'll have tea and see the Fitzwilliam Museum together next Tuesday. On the

way home, she saw with her own eyes some little birds pecking into the silver foil on top of the milk bottles in the milkman's open wagon, drinking the cream, and what was the milkman going to do about that? Tomorrow, Wales.

Home again. Between trains on the way to the Welsh conference center where Jim would give his talk, they were at Shrewsbury long enough to run up to the castle. It being April 23rd, Shakespeare's birthday, Barbara thought about Owen Glendower and Hotspur, and also wondered if she had indeed seen Hadrian's wall. From Shrewsbury to Newtown, a tiny train, which had to stop for a cow, ran on a single pair of tracks, though at Newtown there was a brief stretch of two pairs of tracks where the train from Shrewsbury met the one from coastal Aberystwyth each day. In Newtown not a soul was out, it being a Thursday, still a midweek holiday in Wales, though a small museum about sheep was open. There were several little parks full of forget-me-nots and small statues honoring the social philosopher Robert Owen.

And finally the van from the conference center, which was called Gregynog, showed up. The driver spoke a brand of English the Veres could barely understand. He drove them, along with the day's supply of vegetables, through green hills full of stonewalls and stiles and sheep and newborn lambs. In his sing-song voice, he tried but failed to teach them how to pronounce Gregynog.

Gregynog is a large country estate in central Wales which customarily had been passed down to youngest sons. But the last youngest son didn't want it because of the rats. Just after the turn of the 20th century, Gregynog was sold to the Davies sisters, Gwendolyn and Margaret. One was a musician/huntress and the other an artist. The very wealthy Davies sisters restored the mansion from the ground up and planted geometric gardens. They decided to make a home, there in the middle of Wales, for music and the arts. Their opening concert, in the billiard-turned-music-room, was a performance of Bach's St. Matthew. Gustav Holst was among the attending luminaries. He also came for a performance of his work "The Planets".

A printing press was established and was, for a while, an artistic and even a financial success. The Davies sisters did achieve much, in spite of being very shy. They were also teetotalers, and many a guest went astray searching for liquid refreshment in the non-existent neighborhood.

The Davies sisters, in turn, willed Gregynog to the four universities of Wales: Cardiff, Swansea, Aberystwyth and Bangor. More or less equidistant between them, it is used as a conference center. Jim was invited to speak at the seventeenth annual meeting of mathematicians, lasting from Friday

afternoon, April 24th until Sunday afternoon, April 26th. Because the Veres had no car and train service into central Wales was certainly limited, they arrived on the 23rd and left on the 27th. For four days they became part of another world.

The driver ushered them to their room, on the second floor. But the previous occupant had not yet moved out. So he took them instead to the TV room, only to discover that for some reason the TV had been taken away. He left them there anyway, after showing them where there was a nearby bathroom and also where supper would soon be served.

At supper, everybody else but one was black. The conference, which was just ending (from Swansea) was on underdeveloped countries, primarily Nigeria and the Sudan. After supper the other white person introduced himself. He was a student from Bangor and had been awarded a month-long fellowship to continue work on his project of comparing East German and West German textbooks. He invited Jim and Barbara to join him on a walk. Until dusk, they followed paths through daffodil-filled gardens and then wandered up a dirt road bordered with white and blue flowers.

On their return, Barbara and Jim were informed their room, an enormous room with enormous furniture, was now ready. Out in the hall Barbara asked one of the women conferees where the bathroom was. Together and beginning to giggle, they went to the very end of the very long hall where there were two bathrooms (with pull-chains) color, creed and gender free.

Later Jim and Barbara searched out the bar in the basement, or rather in one of the basements. Though the teetotalling Davies sisters would not have approved, the universities had decided it was easier to have a bar on the premises than to send out search parties.

The following morning, a buzzer rang at 8:00. Breakfast was at 8:30, with quantities of eggs, sausages and toast. At 11:00, coffee was served again, in a paneled library. Between breakfast and coffee, the Bangor student gave them an inside tour, including through three libraries. He had a table in one, overlooking the formal gardens, where, a bit self-consciously but grandly, he settled himself. In one of the other libraries, Jim worked on his talk, which would be the opening one that afternoon. Barbara went through some of the music stored in the billiard/music room, which was equipped with an organ and a piano. Because the weather was turning dark, they did not go out for a walk. Snow was forecast. The mathematicians began to arrive. And then, quite suddenly, with the last vegetable delivery and one more mathematician, Gregynog was snowed in.

Old friends from Princeton, now in Brussels for the year, were assigned to the room, also enormous, across the hall from the Veres.

Barbara went to some of the math talks. Jim's was on electric networks, having to do with random walks. She understood nothing but could feel herself caught up in the excitement in the lecture hall, which occupied the

length of the top floor. There were questions, answers, arguments, silences and more questions. Unreal. No less unreal than Gregynog itself and being snowed in, in the middle of - Wales? Were they really in Wales - that little place on a map? No less unreal than being with an old friend whom she hadn't seen for over twenty years but with whom she still had much in common. No less unreal than looking though music in the music room, music that just was there, now, never used.

Sunday afternoon, the mathematicians began to vanish through snow squalls, which at least were diminishing in frequency. The Bangor student took the Veres for another walk, through gardens where flowers and shrubs were trying to lift themselves up from under great hats of snow.

That night they discovered there was going to be a concert. So they went to it. A large crowd of mostly older people magically appeared, to listen to the soprano daughter of one of them and her music student friends from London. The concert had been planned with the idea of strolls through the gardens during intermission. People seemed pleased just to have got there.

The next morning, at breakfast were several new arrivals who had not received word the next conferences had been cancelled because of the snow. But one conference had not been cancelled. Those conferees, whoever they were, sat together at a separate table and spoke Welsh. Barbara took her time drinking her coffee, staying after others left, just to listen. She had understood the words the mathematicians had spoken but not what they were saying. Now she was listening to a language which was struggling merely to stay alive.

The driver drove the Veres back to Newtown in the van, through the green hills that had turned white. He said those who were speaking Welsh at breakfast were trying to start a Welsh language TV station. (Aha, that could explain why the TV had been taken.)

They passed baby lambs huddled close to their mothers, at least the babies old enough and strong enough to have survived the storm.

Happy Birthday (50) to Barbara: Elizabeth called to wish her that. And Barbara then wrote her a letter about Lilith, whom Elizabeth thought had been made up by feminists. Barbara has also done the laundry and has scraped off their shoes from a good walk last evening, except they ended up in a cow pasture.

Her college friend was here this weekend. On Sunday morning they walked to the oldest son's apartment and had a tour of Pembroke and Peterhouse colleges. All returned for lunch. The son, after his father died, started writing to his grandmother, paying attention to his mother and keeping an eye on his three younger siblings.

Their friends in Wales are going to be coming through tomorrow.

Spring has returned, maybe summer by English standards, after cold and rainy days. The mail was good this morning, Elizabeth sounding on the top of the world. Mother and Dad seem to be settling in to a quiet bridge-and-friends world again, no family to give Dad indigestion, at the moment. How to leave them alone, without making them feel alone, Barbara wonders.

Barbara has the top half of the kitchen door open with the radio playing by it so the birds won't fly in. The delicate leaves and branches of the tree in the courtyard are barely moving in the breeze. Yesterday a gardener worked on the courtyard garden. Lots of mint is growing, some of which tasted good in last night's tea. Gardeners in white coats were working in the garden at St. John's the last time she biked past. Workers seem to wear uniforms, usually blue smocks. The children of St. John's all have bright red jackets and caps. A little boy got caught in a rain spell the other day, while walking home. A friend called from a passing car, but obviously the little boy had been told never to accept a ride. But finally he scampered across the road and into the car.

The trouble with shopping is lack of space in her bike baskets. Also, with two separate sets of house guests, whom she will be showing around till right before dinner, what should she buy that, besides fitting in the baskets, can be cooked instantly? Time to wash dishes, put towels out, and then maybe take a nap.

And now their friends from Wales have left. Their visit was really fun. They arrived mid-afternoon, driving a rented car. After tea, they got gas, parked the car, met Jim and toured Emmanuel, Pembroke, Queens, Clare, the Backs and Trinity, ending up at King's college for Evensong. The choir was very much better than for Good Friday. They collected the car and returned home for sherry, supper, and bridge. Barbara has changed beds and cleaned house in case Richard comes - for meal(s)? overnight(s)? Jim gives a big talk today and will have dinner at Caius college.

And now Richard and his wife have come and gone. Barbara must answer Mother's letter, which arrived while Richard was here. They read it together while drinking coffee after visiting Kings' college chapel by way of a store where Barbara had bought Dad's birthday tie. It was Richard who found Dad's thank-you, up in a corner. The friends from Wales came through again - pretty tight scheduling. They drove together up to Ely. The Ely cathedral there is enormous, but not as elegant as Kings'. They had supper across the street from the cathedral, complete with a bottle of wine and fresh strawberries "the first of the season", and made final arrangements together for the July visit to the Lake country and on to where their friends are in Wales, Bangor.

It's a nice day. Even the birds seem to be taking a siesta. She has decided to do all the sheets in the bathtub. Five of them are drying nicely, spread

over five chairs, on the front terrace. With any luck she can re-make the beds tonight for Peter and his wife. The other three sheets are on hangers over towels on the brick latticework, waiting for the sun to come around to them.

She is slowing down faster than Jim is. Apparently the fact that old ladies are still alive after raising children is a relatively new phenomenon. There must be something old ladies are good for, other than their own pleasure. Maybe she can zero in on what her own pleasure is, at least, which could quite possibly include sitting in the doorway on a summer day watching laundry dry. Not another soul has laundry out. Time to move the socks to the back courtyard, and the towels, and herself. Ah. There is more of a breeze here and the tree has a mocking bird on top. The plant that was left in their flat by the previous tenants is now in bloom, on the kitchen window sill.

She hopes to see the wife of a famous mathematician again, tomorrow at the Newcomers coffee, to find out if the tea late next week, to which she and Jim have been invited, is at 4:00 or 4:30 - and, if possible, to find out how big the tea is going to be, just tea or supper-tea. The Newcomers lunch and sightseeing with the Newcomers from Oxford is also tomorrow.

Yesterday was fun. She talked with several Americans at coffee, all grumbling about how hard housekeeping is here. People object most to hot and cold water being always separate, not to mention in the wrong faucets.

And there was a delicious lunch with the Newcomers from Oxford, followed by the tour. She saw George Washington's coat of arms in Little St. Mary's church, the stars and stripes. In the overgrown graveyard behind the church, they were shown a building material called crunch, or maybe clutch. She learned what "short and long" meant, in architecture, the way bricks are placed. The group tried to see Pembroke's chapel, but the chapel was closed for a recording. She was persuaded to sneak in anyway by someone who, afterwards, showed Barbara a poem she had written. The recording turned out to be by the BBC for next fall, a harpsichord concert with six harpsichords. Then at St. Benet's, they saw all the bells with ropes for change ringing. The poem person got behind again, stopping to talk with the minister. The guide tried to keep the group together by walking very fast and then telling an interesting story while the rest caught up. The story this time was about "tawdry" lace, called that because the lace was made by the nuns of St. Audrey. At Corpus Christi they saw the Marlowe/Fletcher memorial in an as yet undiscovered (by Barbara) courtyard. At Emmanuel they were told about north/south churches as opposed to this east/west one. Also at Emmanuel, they walked through an herb garden.

Barbara is reading "Period Piece" about Cambridge, by Darwin's granddaughter Gwen Raverrat. Marriage was not permitted till around 1878, so the granddaughter's was one of the first Cambridge academic families.

Barbara has written a letter to Elizabeth for this, Elizabeth's birthday. Barbara will walk to the mailbox and mail it, her own celebration. She still can't believe the mailmen get around to all these red mailboxes four times a day. On the way to the nearest mailbox, there is a cherry tree whose fallen blossoms are so deep on the pavement you can pick them up by the handful.

And now she is home again. One of the fellows waved as he passed by on his bike, agreeing the day was "fantastic". It was supposed to be raining, but not yet apparently. She hopes Jim doesn't get soaked at his statistics meeting in London.

And today, about a week later she finally did find this college's mulberry tree, but not yet its oak. The mulberry looks almost as old as Milton's. The mulberry trees were planted by Charles II, she thinks she remembers, for silk in England. Yellow roses are at the corner of their flat, smelling like the roses the headmaster grew at the school in Colorado. The milk here is good - rich and creamy, "too creamy" according to some. And all around are the blackbirds, singing as in the pie.

In France, Mitterand has won the election. Barbara and Jim drank a toast in celebration, partly because he is a friend of the family of Annette's twin. Also, the pope was shot but not killed, like Reagan was shot but not killed. How vulnerable such people are, in spite of all the precautions. And in Ireland another hunger striker has died. Two other strikers are about to die.

A powerful letter just arrived from Elizabeth, written only four days ago, or at least mailed only four days ago, mostly of memories of holidays, full of thought and thoughtfulness.

Barbara has an awful sore throat, so it is nice to do nothing. Right now Jim is being initiated as a fellow of the college and will stay for dinner. Gwen Raverrat's book describes how people didn't have anything to do "then", and so filled their lives with afternoon teas and wines. This time last year the Veres gave three parties, all on gorgeous Saturday afternoons when their apple tree was in bloom, except for the last afternoon. By then, the trees along the borders were in bloom. The parties were all for people they didn't usually entertain. The first was for people Barbara considered her friends, people she really cared about, and it was almost a disaster. Trying to manage welcoming new arrivals while talking with the ones who were alone was hard. The second party was for neighbors. Elizabeth was there. The neighbors had known her when she was little and were charmed once again. The third party, to which Peter and his wife came, was for old friends of theirs other than Jim's colleagues. For some reason that one really worked. Maybe the first didn't work because she didn't know how yet. Or

maybe her own friends don't go to parties much and they were the ones who didn't know how.

Barbara watches evening come, through the window over the sink she must get around to washing. She has had some tea with mint and some peach juice. Her throat is feeling better. Nearby, students are playing cricket, all dressed up in their cricket outfits. The birds are singing still, even though it is nearly nine. She will wait up to ask Jim all about his initiation ... poor Jim, who will be tired and not want to talk but will try to manage anyway.

Oh but she does love the quiet, which she doesn't find dull at all. Maybe successful groups need a common goal, as in Elizabeth's description of developing film one rainy day with other students - work in common.

A good lot of letters arrived today, delivered through the mail slot in the door, falling to the floor.

The Veres went to tea yesterday at the famous mathematician's, who is ninety, along with a couple from Iceland. Being a little buggy still, she wondered if she should go. But everyone else was buggy too. The conversation was partly about the Cambridge "May" events, which are held in June, the boat races and the balls. Whether these events were ever held in May does not seem to be known. The four not-from-England guests were also given a run-down of honorary and/or inherited titles, the knights, dames, ladies etc.

Another impressive letter came from Elizabeth. And Barbara is feeling much better too, though she decided not to go to the Newcomer's coffee this morning. She did laundry instead, hoping the wind would be more drying than the sprinkling rain was dampening.

This afternoon she walked through Sidney Sussex College, discovering a back courtyard with a student playing croquet all by himself among the wisteria and some yellow dangly bushes. On the way home she went to the St. John's vespers. At the end she overheard a student say: "Imagine all these people coming to an Evensong!" Meanwhile, the organist was wildly, spectacularly, improvising on the hymn "Crown Him with many crowns." And another student said: "If I tried anything like that...." The walk home through the backs and the gardens of St. John's was beautiful. The sun had come out. A few students were around, some playing croquet. Several ducks were swimming in the river Cam. She kept pinching herself, so to speak. She really was right there and not in some movie.

The chestnut trees are in bloom now, and iris and some roses. Barbara still hasn't gone to the Clare gardens, which may be closed now through the exam period. Perhaps she can persuade Jim to see the botanical gardens with her, he looks so very tired. It 's a good time for the kids to be coming.

She hopes they don't get tangled up in the various strikes. She should have thought to suggest they get English money before coming, in case there is also a bank strike. Margaret Thatcher has had a hard day.

Saroyan died yesterday. He knew he would and was able to wonder "Now what?". He wrote "My Heart's in the Highlands", the play she was in at Dad's school when she was eight, only a year after it was written, she realizes, reading the obit. The one, in the play, who played the song on his trumpet, had only one arm, the other arm run over by a train. (How could that have happened?) He also played tennis.

Somebody was wondering how come the lawns are so beautiful in Cambridge. Someone else answered that's because they've been cut and rolled for 500 years.

A fellow's wife came for coffee this morning. Barbara learned all kinds of practical stuff, including that she should shop at Marks and Spencer's and that Eden Lilly has a food department with excellent cheeses.

There has been no word from Mother since Richard returned home. She hopes Mom hasn't caught Dad's cold. She seems to get much sicker from colds than do the rest of them.

Now all the roses are blooming, not just some of them.

She could read. She could watch either the Chelsea flower show, on TV, or a show about Broadway, which was dubbed by the Times' critic as "a meeting of non-minds".

Jim is worried about a talk he is giving tomorrow. She doesn't know if he will come back here or not, afterwards. Also she doesn't know whether Peter and his wife will arrive tomorrow and in what shape. She thinks she will buy lots of hamburger for either meat loaf or hamburgers, depending on who wants what and when. She will go to the Kettle's Yard galleries around 2:00 and then shop. Tomorrow she will stick around.

Now it's tomorrow and it is raining. She has been reading. T.S. Eliot says, about maturity, that no one who isn't mature knows what the word means. So maybe she has already missed her chance to be mature. Eliot talks of the "genius of language", rather than of authors. He talks of the capacity of the English language for change while remaining itself and with a future. He says it is "necessary to go to the two dead languages....through their death we have come into our inheritance". He writes of art as "imposing a credible order on ordinary reality...eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation...and then leaving us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed...."

It is no longer raining and she has heard from Peter and his wife who will arrive later today. Figuring out groceries for Sunday and the Bank

Holiday is going to take some doing. She bought some fresh strawberries at the market. No letter yet from Mother, two weeks since her last. Peter may have news.

Last night Barbara went alone to a concert given by students at this college, since Jim needed to work on his talk. She was the only non-student there. It was a mix of talent, for sure, but charming and heartening the way they all worked together, generously patient with each other. There were no dull moments, though the occasional amusing ones. Afterwards the best singer and her lively boyfriend came over to talk with Barbara. The singer said she was majoring in, or rather “reading maths”.

In the end, she decided to go look for Peter and his wife, and found them, backpacks and all, standing in the sun, trying to find the flat. They had sherry together and cheese and crackers, in the back courtyard until it got too cold. Then the two went sound asleep. Jim came home just after she had given up and eaten her Marks and Spencer’s chicken. He had survived his talk, though he said everyone was so busy with exams, they’d probably rather not have had the talk.

Saturday the two travelers slept late. And they have since done much sightseeing around here and much planning for the rest of their trip, maps all over the floor. They’ll be back for the May/June celebrations before going to London to join Peter’s wife’s parents. Barbara and Peter’s wife climbed the Castle Mound, full of Queen Anne’s Lace and buttercups. They watched huge black rain clouds coming up over the fens. In spite of being tired from their trip, both travelers look much improved over last March.

And now Elizabeth is due at any moment. Last night, the Veres heard the B minor Mass at Great Saint Mary’s, directed by a very young, bombastic director, who did seem nevertheless to know the music inside and out. Peter and his wife have gone to rent a tandem bike and will go to Granchester in the rain, armed with sandwiches in case the pub is crowded. Two letters have come, one from Mother and one from Elizabeth.

Three days later, 4:00 PM, Barbara has had two naps. In fact it was too cold for the first nap, so she took a long hot bath and left the water in the tub to heat that side of the house. Peter and his wife have left for Wales and Jim for Bristol, London and Germany. Elizabeth has gone into town. She has been remarkable in her efforts to get settled and find a job.

One night Barbara and Jim saw a great performance of “Figaro”. The next day, Barbara went with Elizabeth, Peter and his wife to Angelys Abbey. Peter had the psychic energy to decide to do that and it was certainly worth the trip. They were sitting on the curb waiting for the red double-decker bus to take them home when a lady came up in her car and gave them all a ride into Cambridge. She pointed out the Hobbes Pavilion restaurant where they had a good dinner and where Elizabeth applied for a job. Jobs are scarce and she may not get this one. And one afternoon, Barbara can no

longer remember which one, they rented a punt and how peaceful it was on the Cam. Elizabeth was holding the pole as they went under a small bridge, and a man on the bridge leaned over pretending to be about to grab it. On Ascension Day, the choir and brass sounded at noon from the top of St. John's, a romantic idea though they could hardly be heard.

Barbara has written invitations for a wine and cheese at their flat a week from Sunday. And she has taken some roses from the patio of the now empty flat across from them. It is a very lovely evening, and she must stop saying that over and over again. Perhaps Jim will call from Germany and Peter from Wales, though she has been thinking more about doing the laundry than about them. Earlier Barbara and Elizabeth walked through the garden at Emmanuel. Baby ducks were running across the lily pads in the shallow pond. Another time, Barbara left Elizabeth sitting by the river behind Kings' while she did some shopping. Also waiting was a little boy and his father. Elizabeth described the boy announcing periodically that he was thirsty and bored: "Daddy, I'm thuhsty and I'm bo'ed."

This is the first real day of summer. The other morning Barbara met one of the fellows with his bicycle, waiting by the stoplight. She hesitated to greet him, who did say that "It won't do to ask how I am - with exams," and off he went. How curious that a man about to retire is still so very caught up in the exams.

The son of her college friend came and invited Elizabeth to a party and also, today, to go on a punt which is where she is now, out on the Cam.

A letter came from from Mother. Dad has fluid in his lungs.

It has been a busy, eventful weekend. Elizabeth, on the Cam, was treated to a peach cake and white wine. Friday, Barbara picked up their friend from Oxford at the bus station, in the rain. They stopped at Kings' for Evensong and were rewarded by the sun coming out. On the way home they found the ball on Clare Bridge that has a quarter of it missing. They passed several cricket games, for which their friend was able to give her the rules. Jim had arrived home long since. Lots of hometown gossip. On Sunday, Jim, Elizabeth and their friend went on the group hike (called a ramble) arranged by the master of the college, down a neolithic flint mine. For lunch they had pigeon (Norfolk) pie. They drove in another visiting American's rattletrap car. Elizabeth, after giving a hilarious description of the trip, said she wasn't sure she approved of "Dad's friends".

The party they gave did work, people coming and going including Peter and his wife who returned a little earlier than they had planned. Elizabeth saved the day by collecting used glasses and washing them in time for new arrivals. Barbara had bought the wine from the college cellars, involving

going there with the butler. He was very pleasant and helpful, and intrigued by her suitcase-wheels arrangement for getting the wine cases back to the flat. Luckily the soup she had made for after the party was stretchable with extra vegetables for additional diners, including a couple of Elizabeth's new friends.

Mother and daughter bought a bright new red jacket for Elizabeth, the same shade as the coat Elizabeth once chose on a visit to Colorado when she was five. No question either then or now which one she wanted.

Jim and Barbara visited math friends in Brighton. The friends have a handsome house on a park, a "crescent". On arrival, Jim and Barbara had sherry in silver cups at the elegant modern office at the University of Sussex, new in the early sixties. They visited the unexpectedly grand (even after the descriptions) Pavilion, walked on the boardwalk and visited the new chapel with its handsome colored glass windows.

And now Peter and his wife have taken the train to Ely and Jim is at the "May's Bumps", a kind of boat race on the Cam where the boats bump each other on purpose. Elizabeth is napping after a party from which she returned at 3 AM. There is music outside from the pavilion which has been installed for the May Ball. Everybody is home again. Peter's wife gave an amusing account of Elizabeth's description of meeting all the men students. Women are still very much in the minority here.

The Queen was shot at, by a fake gun so it turned out, during her birthday parade.

Elizabeth has found a job taking care of a young boy and doing odd jobs for the parents who are from the middle east. Elizabeth took the boy to his violin lesson and sat with the other mothers. She also had to call "Lindsey's mother", to find out what the spelling words were for school. Elizabeth carefully looked the words up in the dictionary, spelling not being her strong point.

Peter and his wife are in London for a few days before going on to France. Barbara and Jim will meet them and his wife's parents for tea at the Ritz, celebrating their second anniversary.

The May Balls have happened in all the colleges. Along with, as Jim keeps saying "three of our two children", they walked together to the buffet supper at their college, over the lawn in the late afternoon sun. Beautiful as the evening was, though, there didn't seem to be much enthusiasm, except among those who were folk dancing in a small courtyard to one side. The loud music went on till midnight and then moved inside. There was lots of security and supervision, like at a high school except for the presence of much to drink.

And now two gents are washing windows, this bright and early morning. It is fun to listen to what they say and how they say it.

Tea at the Ritz in London was grand indeed. They went sightseeing to St. Paul's and then on to the National Theatre Complex where they saw a good production of Dekker's "Shoemaker's Holiday".

Yesterday Barbara went to the last of the term's vesper services at Kings'. She seems to have given up studying the windows there. Every Saturday there has been an organ recital and she hasn't gone to one. But there will be more this summer. Jim has gone to Oxford. She telephoned Mother and Dad. This afternoon there was a charming performance of "Twelfth Night" in the Clare Gardens.

Another beautiful day. Under the roses, budding continuously now, is a row of lavender in bloom. Barbara is sitting in the doorstep. Elizabeth, having planned the rest of her college life, is sleeping in the sun before going to work. Last Saturday the two of them saw a musical called "Salad Days" at Sidney Sussex. Mulled wine was served during the "interval".

Barbara went to the village of Brixworth (or Brixford) with the wife who had told Jim about a singing teacher. The two of them went to put flowers on the grave of the wife's granddaughter. Afterwards they were joined at the pub by friends of the daughter (who has since moved to London). There are, even in this picturesque village, plenty of pressures and sadness. The person Barbara was with was referred to as a "swinging Granny".

The little church by the cemetery was built perhaps as early as the 6th century of rose-pink Roman tiles. The granddaughter had died of leukemia when she was three. Several gates lead to that part of the cemetery because there are sheep and lambs. The people of the town put daffodils on all the graves once a year, including on the childrens' graves together at the back. One child was referred to as "the accident", another "who died on holiday". Barbara went into the church alone, after asking if she could help with what needed to be done. A man was gardening around another grave, singing. It was utterly peaceful there, not yet raining, with the usual many birds.

Barbara doesn't know if there will be 6 or 12 for dinner, not to mention overnight, tomorrow. But she is focusing her crossness on having to return a book without even having begun to read it. Time to get in gear, even for Jim who is beginning to panic at not having done anything this year, he says.

There has been a long stretch with no mail.

More friends from home are here and have borrowed the Veres' bikes to go to Anglesy Abbey. Jim has just been beaten in tennis by one of Elizabeth's friends. The friend and Elizabeth are now having tea in the

back patio. Dinner last night included Barbara's college friend and her son. Around 10:00, Elizabeth and the son left with more friends to go to a fair. They came back full of tales of the terror of the Ferris wheel ride.

Graduation at Cambridge was this weekend. The students of each college, four deep, marched in turn along Trumpington St. to the Senate House, first the royal colleges and then according to the age of the college. The graduates were presented to the vice chancellor, kneeling before him as he clasped both their hands within both his own, talking Latin. Barbara's friend's son described this. The presenter led the graduates, who kept in order by touching one finger to one finger of the next person.

Both she and Jim are sick. They are supposed to go to Hull tomorrow. But Wimbledon has been fun to watch from the sofa.

Jim went to Hull by himself. When he came back they visited Barbara's college friend once more. They walked in the wind through an Agricultural Experimental Station on the outskirts of Harpendon.

The other day, under the Clare bridge, two punt poles got stuck in the mud. Much sidewalk superintending ensued. People sit in the garden there on purpose, just to watch what goes on.

Today some musicians in Lion Yard were especially good, a clarinet quartet who called themselves the toodlepipers. They produced an instant crowd. A little boy dragged his mum over to leave money in the hat. And Barbara visited the Trinity College Library, finally, and found a sample of Newton's handwriting, and an 8th century book in script, and several illuminated books.

Two of Elizabeth's women friends from New York are here. Barbara is reading a collection of short stories while trying to keep a low profile amid the excitement. Elizabeth went to work today, perhaps rather gratefully, exhausted. There was thunder this morning, and rain. But last night she and Jim played tennis. It is light until 10:00. On the way out the door she overheard Elizabeth say: "Men!". Then one of her friends said, quietly, "poor men...."

Tuesday Jim and Barbara go to the Lake District, meeting there their friends in Wales from home. They keep losing the train schedule. They saw a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates" on Midsummer Common yesterday. Jim traded seats with a little girl behind him. The policemen in the operetta were predictably funny but also rather poignant, in light of the riots all over England. These days a policeman's lot is definitely not a happy one.

Barbara loves the way Elizabeth's friends sketch in notebooks little intimate things like the teapot on the table. It will be fun to see their own

friends again. But first she must do much laundry and cleaning so Elizabeth won't have too much leftover stuff to deal with and can have some well-earned days of peace and quiet.

Home again, after staying in a hotel, a mountaineers' hangout that provided huge meals. They saw Beatrix Potter's house and originals of her drawings. They also saw Wordsworth's last house and a Stonehenge-type rock arrangement near Keswick. And they took walks along the lake. The hardest walk was the one they took the moment they arrived, up a "hill" in back of their hotel.

During one sunset they drove around, finding glorious views of the valleys and mountains when the clouds would suddenly clear. And they walked some more, through fields, by brooks and near waterfalls. One day they had lunch at a pub where Barbara met and talked with a musician who would be on TV the next night.

And they drove from the Lake District to Wales, ending with a tour of Conway Castle. The next day they saw a sailboat race leave from near Caernarvan. That was in the morning. In the afternoon they watched the same boats pass Holyhead cliffs. And the next day they drove to Harlech, located in a stunning setting of mountains and sea. Along a mountain road on the way to Harlech, they drove through masses of shepherds, sheepdogs and sheep that were going from one pasture to another.

On their arrival home, Elizabeth greeted them with supper and a very short haircut. Actually it is quite attractive. Barbara is glad she wasn't home to grumble before it happened.

Mother wrote that the weather is awful and the Dad's sister is not well.

Yesterday, Barbara and Elizabeth shopped in town and came home in the rain. Down the long, cobbled Trinity passage, she happened to remember a rainy day in France, coming home with her own mother. They both were wearing wooden sabots.

She has a runny nose and it is cold, July 23. She has just come home in the wind and the rain after a concert at Clare College. The music, the acoustics and the atmosphere there can't be beat. It was even warm inside. It was one of those concerts you can't stop clapping for. She overheard the conductor say to a friend afterwards: "It was good, wasn't it", in that offhand British way.

Another concert in Christi College had been cancelled, so Barbara and three little old ladies were disappointed. But she did see inside the chapel, being prepared for a wedding tomorrow. It is the smallest of the chapels she has seen so far. There will be a big organ concert in Kings' tomorrow. She has picked up supper for herself and Elizabeth from Marks and Spencer's.

Jim will be at high table. In the meantime, she is looking forward to a good read and many hot cups of tea, which tastes so good.

Yesterday there were several festivals, in honor of summer tourists. There was a packed Mozart concert at Clare. Later Elizabeth met Barbara at Kings' for an organ recital. People came and went, passing over where the sun threw colors on the floor from the stained glass windows. At one point the choir boys in their top hats arrived, apparently not having been informed about the recital. The organist was playing a mood piece about a monastery garden, complete with bird sounds. One of the little boys, late, walked alone up the aisle, stopping in his tracks at the bird sounds.

Afterwards Barbara raced to get to a performance of "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" in Christi's garden and even found Milton's mulberry tree during the "interval". Flowers and trees were shining in the clear afternoon. She got to Sainsbury's, for supper items, just before closing time and home again, missing a pops concert at Clare though she could hear the end of it as she biked across the bridge. After supper there was another concert at Kings', featuring Jim's singing teacher.

The newspapers are full of the upcoming royal wedding. Lady Di cried, today, no doubt exhausted by all the commotion. Written on a wall was a sign saying: "Don't do it, Di!"

And there has been a program of madrigal singing on the Cam. The Veres sat on the Backs behind Kings', leaning against the bridge there, peering around willow trees. About 30 singers rode in five punts that were tied together and hung with lanterns. Sheep and ducks accompanied the singers. Three picnic punts floated by with couples in formal dress who were drinking wine. During the "interval", the couples floated by again, this time with a chef tossing fruit out to the audience.

No letter from Mother.

It pleases Barbara that all their shirts are cleaner, from having been hand-washed and bleached by the sun. The bees hum in the lavender as she hangs the shirts over the open windows in the back patio.

She has been watching Charles and Di ride to Waterloo station for their honeymoon. What a wedding. She and Jim joined the students and faculty from all over the world to watch the ceremony on the colored TV at the college.

Also she is baking bread, having not paid attention to the fact that of course today would be a holiday. Elizabeth had a recipe from the dinner she and her New York friends had made, and there were still leftover ingredients.

Yesterday Barbara visited the university library. The tour took about five minutes, through one of the catalogue rooms, with a quick look into

the serials reading room. Security was unbelievable. The tour leader, a girl who works in the library, was aware Barbara was very disappointed and managed to get permission for Barbara to see the manuscripts catalogue. Barbara had to sign in twice. But she didn't really know what to look for or how, when she finally got to where she was sent. It will be good to get home where she still has easy access to all the libraries.

More friends are coming for a visit.

Barbara saw some medieval plays the other evening at Trinity Hall. And today she heard 2 out of 3 possible concerts. Elizabeth came to the first one, too. And she liked it, Italian madrigals. The same group will sing German madrigals tomorrow and English ones on Saturday. The second was an organ concert at Emmanuel, but first she checked the gardens where the ducklings had run over the lily pads; no more ducklings and the lilies were in bloom. After shopping she decided she had had enough music, so she passed up a cello/piano that promised to be very good. Anyway the frozen fish would have melted.

Finally a good letter came from Mother who had only run out of letter paper.

Another letter came from Mother. Dad is in the hospital being monitored for a pacemaker. Has he had the operation by now? Is he back home? Barbara has tried to call and there is either no answer or the line is busy. She will call again around 5:00, their lunchtime. Not a word about Dad's sister.

Elizabeth has baked a handsome loaf of bread. Barbara is about to warm up some coffee and have a piece of fresh bread. Elizabeth's bike has a flat tire. Also she has lost her beloved red jacket.

Oh, a good letter just came from Mother, written before the phone call. Barbara must decide whether to call her or Peter, right now, or Dad tomorrow when he should be home. Jim brought the letter. The porters have apparently caught on to the idea she wants these letters very much.

Elizabeth is sunburned and sore from having sat in the sun during an all-day folk festival. But she is off (on Barbara's bike) to see about getting her flat tire fixed.

And now Barbara has left Elizabeth buying fruit at the market, after a wild shopping afternoon, half-looking for a dress for herself and also a wig for Elizabeth! And they tried out all the perfumes everywhere and looked at themselves in lots of mirrors. Yes, Barbara is getting old. But maybe she will be like Anna's mother and her two friends that long ago day at a beach. Those three looked happier than anyone she has ever seen before or since, in their funny bathing suits and rubber slippers for protection against the rocks and barnacles.

The workmen next door are whistling “Believe me, if all those endearing young charms...” Will the possible British Rail strike ruin Jim and Barbara’s plans for going to the Edinburgh festival?

Today is a steamy, dreamy day. Barbara went to an art exhibit and shopped (always food-shopping). Elizabeth cooked a delicious dinner for her friends and invited Jim and Barbara. But the evening was a little awkward. The usual live wires, Jim included, were out of sorts, it seemed. They all just might be getting tired of each other. It’s mid-August and the end is not far off.

A sad letter came from Mother, just now.

Barbara and Elizabeth have been doing crossword puzzles and playing solitaire, double and single. It is a strange time. For Mother it must be a very hard time. Barbara feels she should be there. But would her presence be worth having another person around for Mother to deal with? A threatened US air strike is over and Barbara has sent off four packages of books. They will be leaving 4 weeks from today. Poor Dad may be getting second-rate care, with the nurses there threatening to go on strike.

Lots and lots of people were at the last high table before the college dining room closes down briefly. Barbara sat between a molecular biologist and an engineer. By sheer luck she happened to hit on the engineer’s passion, the drainage system of the fens, which came about in 1620.

The other day they walked to the new college, Robinson, where the night porter gave them a guided tour of the lecture hall, the dining room and the chapel. In the chapel, the stained glass windows were made by the same person who had made the windows at Coventry. Elizabeth, doing dishes, just now laughed and waved at the new people across the back patio who were also doing dishes.

So Dad is really sick. He has been taken by ambulance to another hospital near Boston. He has a kidney problem. Mother says not to come home. Mother did not go home to France for her family’s crises. That must have been hard.

Tomorrow the Veres go to London and then on to Edinburgh, returning Wednesday.

Cousin Jeanie and her husband are with Mother. But Richard isn’t, so the situation can’t be critical. Death. The mathematician Ehrdish thinks of death as a cure, life as a disease. Mathematicians consider themselves dead when they no longer do mathematics. Pursuing that idea, perhaps Dad’s sister either has not died or has died without being cured.

So here Barbara goes, to the festival in Edinburgh, even though she is not really up for such an undertaking. But she usually does end up enjoying such adventures more than she expects to. She hates to leave Elizabeth alone, just now, too.

It is morning. She is getting over jet lag still. There are seagulls and late summer insects and a few cars beginning to drive by. Richard is up, probably on a run around the millpond.

Barbara looks at herself in her old dressing table's 3-way mirror. She is a sight. The crack in the left mirror got fixed, she sees - sometime after she grew up.

She will write to her friend Anna who will be amused to know that, when Richard wanted to call one of Dad's friends to speak at his Memorial Service, Mother said wait. It was Saturday afternoon and that friend would certainly be at the club, playing bridge. Anna's dad and her own dad always went together, Saturdays, to play bridge at the club. When Richard did call, the friend said that, at the club, they had talked about Dad, which would have been the memorial that would have meant the most to him.

The hospital here is closed now, because of the nurses' strike.

An old friend of Dad's, in his nineties, came to visit yesterday with his daughter. A minister, he used to preach the first and last services at the school in Colorado. He describes the Old Testament as "before God became a Christian".

Today the school's first headmaster's two daughters are coming.

Mother is, as she said to a friend, "weepy" at times. She is trying hard to stay on top of all, the business stuff especially. Death is expensive. Reorganizing can be a mess. A friend of Richard's is coming to appraise the house.

They went to see Dad's sister. In the living-room clock there, Cousin Jeanie happened to find a thank-you-for-Thanksgiving letter from Jeanie's husband's father who died years ago.

It was fun to see the daughters of the headmaster, though both, always so beautiful and self-assured, were on tranquilizers and looking old. Mother is suddenly exhausted.

The school bulletin arrived in the mail, with Dad's (last, so it has turned out) article in it, a short one about school spirit and doing the right thing.

When Dad was buried, Richard broke down somewhat while trying to give a little history of the family plot. There is one place left.

The next-door dog looks for Dad. The next-door little boy came over to trade two flowers for two cookies.

Last week today, Barbara was on the plane, after taking the taxi to Heathrow, paying too much for the last available plane ticket - or at least more than she had been told it would be, but they took a check, thank goodness. The plane left at 5:00 instead of at 1:30. After a pleasant enough

trip next to two teachers, she was met by Richard and Peter. They had coffee together at the airport.

So. She and Jim did go to Edinburgh and it was a memorable experience. The night train arrived there at 8:30 AM. Their dormitory room was ready for them. The first concert was at 11:00, a lieder recital with Herman Prey in Queen's Hall, a beautiful place, complete with a European Steinway. That night, the opera at King's Hall was the "Barber of Seville", elegantly done with a dramatic storm scene. First they had dinner at the oldest pub in town, next to the first golf course, after much sight-seeing. The Scotch version of the English language is not always easy to understand. When they asked one gentleman what the rather pervasive odor in the town was, he answered "the brrroorrreeee", which eventually they figured out for themselves was the brewery.

The next day Jim bought a handsome sweater and at night was a performance of the St. Matthew Passion in a very large hall whose name she has forgotten. Jessye Norman sang, incomparably. That must have been about the time Dad died.

The following morning, a young Scot delivered Elizabeth's message about Dad. The Veres were in their room getting ready to leave. He came up all those stairs and knocked on the door.

Through the train window, they watched Scotland pass by, along the coast. They saw Durham's castle and cathedral, and also York's.

The other night, when the lights went out during a thunderstorm, Mother described the lights going out one night when she was helping Dad to the bathroom. Afterwards they had sat together at the kitchen table with candles, she holding his hand which he said was restful.

Mother remembers her father walking across her room in Colorado, the night he died in France.

Barbara bought some cards yesterday at a nearby shop. They were made in, of all places, the French town where Dad and Mother were married. Mother knew of the company, which also manufactures cigarette papers. Mother is talking about answering all the letters she is receiving.

Peter came today. Elizabeth is back in New York. She has phoned. And Jim wrote from Cambridge that the people, who moved in next door, will buy the bikes and the toaster. Barbara had a call from the people renting the house, who will be leaving by the end of the week. She could go home but should stay here. It might be more important for mother to re-start her new life. Mother's friends may be making less of an effort for her because of Barbara's presence. They are going to a party. How many of those friends were just Dad's? That may be partly why Mother seems to be dreading the party so.

Peter, when he came, could only read a few of the letters Mother is receiving, though he tried to claim he was prepared....

The widow who brought flowers from the Unitarian church, after the service Sunday, said she was asked by a recent widow: "Do you still talk to your husband as if he were there?" The widow's answer, and mother nodded, was "All the time."

Time to chop more lilac bushes. Now that Mom has taught her how, she will chop her hedge at home too.

A letter came from one of Dad's closest recent friends. He said he had been a little afraid of Dad and had appreciated Mother's warmth.

Mother is beginning to look better. She doesn't work quite so frantically and is beginning to write letters and pay bills. The knot in her shoulder is gone and they're beginning to have fun. Maybe Mom really will be able to make a new life as well as continue the old one. At 80, what a time for an identity crisis! Yet, even after all these years, Mom does remain a foreigner. Barbara watched her drag leaves from the lilacs to the brush pile and she looked just like her own mother, like all those women of the Dordogne, the build, color, and style.

Dad did return to the church, or at least tried to, though not quite the Congregational church of his childhood. He continued to object to all the church's social, club-like, activities and continued to talk respectfully about the Catholic Church. He knew how sick he was, though perhaps no one ever does really. He had a notebook in which he thanked everyone, in writing, for everything.

What sort of childhood things will Mother have to fall back on, so very far from home, not just in distance but, like Dad, in time too.

Dad's sister received a letter from an old neighborhood child who has grown up, about Dad. The letter was read to her and she said: "Well, nobody told me my little brother was dead." One of her grandsons is cleaning out and rebuilding the attic and roof at her house. He found several boxes of pictures, one of Dad, aged 3, with a poem she had written on the back, to her little brother. When she was 11, she wrote plays, poems, and sermons in a ledger book. One of her stories was about a little girl who prayed while running, instead of stopping to kneel, because God helps those who help themselves.

Mother is very tired tonight. They played bridge for the first time. All the firsts are hard.

Cousin Jeanie's brother described watching Dad, the end of July, meeting old friends who had come to visit - a scene of fragile people gallantly helping fragile people.

Dad's sister's grandson told Barbara another story. His grandmother didn't quite make it to the bathroom one day. Afterwards she said to him: "I have the feeling something terrible has happened, hasn't it." He tried to reassure her, wondering whether she meant Dad's death or the mess in the bathroom.

Jeanie's brother invited them ("you can't refuse") to the fancy restaurant across the street. Birds swept by the big windows and ducks were settling for the night, there below in the millpond. For once they looked down to the little bridge from the windows, rather than up to the windows from the little bridge.

Jim returns tomorrow. Barbara and Mom did errands, a visitor came, and the little boy next door, whose Mother works till 4:00, is starting to check in with Mother after school. Barbara hopes that works out.

She talked with the Unitarian minister again, about the memorial service. All family is expected to be in the front half of the church. An old friend from Colorado is planning to come and speak. It will be so good to see him again. However she will be glad when all this is over.

Her summer chum, when they were in high school, telephoned last night. They'll have lunch together on Saturday.

She overheard Mother yesterday tell a friend that she had called the hospital the night Dad died. The nurse who answered said her daughter would be calling her in the morning. Mother could only say: "My daughter is in England."

Barbara should have come! - not even for any one else's sake, but she should have come for her own. Maybe.

Chapter 31

Zeus

Eventually, Barbara wrote to/about her father.

Dad, what stories shall I tell about you, from here under my apple tree? I can see you, on the Cape, sitting under your tree, a sycamore-maple, in one of the white-painted wooden chairs, reading, preparing for your fall Latin classes.

And now I am remembering that grim summer you taught me English grammar. The little school I had gone to for six years had, you thought, taught me nothing except such things as the evils of Mr. Coffee Pot and Mrs. Tea Pot. Was that the same summer you also decided to swear a lot, to keep me from becoming even prissier than I already was?

Learning English grammar, I sat with you, under your sycamore, in the other white chair. Once I cried, because I really couldn't understand what you were telling me.

Various relatives would get involved. Mother, reminding me to set the table, would call out: "Barbie - the table!" Cousin Jeanie would follow through with: "Barbie - where's the verb?"

In my whole life you made me cry only three times. That was the second time. Several years before, you had dragged me away from a movie which was being shown at your school. I had wanted to stay, but you had wanted to go and you certainly hadn't wanted to argue publicly about it.

The third time was much later. Jim and I ran out of money when we were visiting you and Mother. You said how could I be so stupid. And then you gave me money, not from your wallet but from your secret stash of bridge winnings.

Perhaps what had triggered my tears, each of those times, was that you were very upset too. And perhaps the reason for your being upset too may have been that you, the great teacher, were suddenly confronted with the fact that you had failed to teach your own daughter 1) correct grammar, 2) your will over hers, and 3) common sense about money.

When you were upset, which was not very often, you would turn red

and smile. I was about eight years old when one of your students asked me: "Why does your father smile when he's mad?" This had to be a question of some importance, since the boys at your school rarely spoke to me. I would have liked to have had an answer. After the long silence, the boy finally said: "He must enjoy it." That interesting possibility had never occurred to me. But I think he was wrong. More likely the smile helped you remain, just barely sometimes, in control.

Dad, out there under your sycamore, did you ever - well, just dream? I must confess that's what I've been doing, just now, watching a worm trying to climb up a leaf that has fallen on the table, and the robins in the grass, and the butterflies (a large striped one and a small white one, flopping past the birch tree), and the mother raccoon with her babies crossing the lawn down by the blueberry bushes. Only two babies - what's happened to the other two? Oh. There they come.

Did you ever lift your head from the Latin books to simply enjoy, say, the air, the light, or even just the five-inch gray shingles, soft behind the black shutters of your old Cape Cod house? Did you ever look up to watch someone pass by on the sidewalk across the street? You must have. And you must have read other books, not just the Latin ones. But you and I are stuck with what I remember, now. I often wonder what Zeus would have been like if he had been born out of Athena's head, not the other way around.

Most of your life was spent organizing and arranging. When Jim and I were married, you organized the sun so it would set in time to light up the mountains outside the big window in front of which the ceremony was held. The relatives used to call you up on the telephone to ask your advice, half mockingly, when they found themselves in awkward, difficult or ridiculous situations. You would be annoyed. You did not take kindly to even a hint of mockery.

Mockery is not fun. And you, of all people, should have been more aware of the mockery inherent in all those off-color stories you adored, mockery of women. But yeah, I guess those stories really were pretty funny.

You yourself were sensitive for the usual reasons, I suppose. As a boy you were smaller and smarter than the other boys your age. Probably you were also spoiled by your two much older sisters and your doting mother. Your dad may have criticized you too much for not being bigger, stronger, braver....

Did you love teaching so much because you were finally in a position to persuade adolescent boys, the kind who may once have tormented you, of the value of your interests, your abilities?

Woe to the student who came to your classes unprepared. Every morning you went to breakfast in the school dining room, book in hand, available for consultation. You seemed to expect the boys would learn to work as hard

and efficiently as you had.

Any waste, especially of time, was anathema to you. After meals at the school there were often announcements. Long drawn-out ones by some of your colleagues infuriated you. Your own, brief and pungent, were examples of clarity and comprehensibility, though perhaps a little hard on a boy who might be sleepy at the end of a meal, not quite up to total attention.

Your students, when they were students, feared you more than they liked or respected you. They mocked your precision, a precision which extended even to your clothes. You had seven suits. Each year you discarded one suit and bought a new one. At that same time you had them all cleaned, once a year. Each day of the week you wore that day's suit. On Saturday, for the half-day classes you wore the school's red and gray blazer, the school's red and gray tie, and gray slacks. Those were the clothes Richard chose for your burial. And then, after your last class on Saturdays, you and my friend Anna's father went to your club in town for lunch and bridge. When Anna's father died, you kept on going alone until you retired to the Cape.

Years after graduation, old students would come back to see you. You would be bored, grateful that Mother could remember who they were and knew what to say to them. They sent their own sons to you, and then their daughters when that time came, almost literally over your dead body.

After your death, a group of parents, several of them alumni, formed a foundation to build a new dormitory, one you had hoped for and in the place where you had hoped it would be. The building carries your name, the name of a teacher, not of a headmaster or a donor. How curious that that should be so unusual.

So you must have been unusual, or at least people's response to you was, not just mine. You tell me why I felt sorrier for you than for my own self, during my own very most terrible moment. I was four. You had to hold me down so my aching ear could be lanced.

One morning, during the course of that ear problem, you drove me to town to the doctor's, except road crews were blocking the county road. We had to turn around and drive home again, and I will never forget with what relief, release, joy, I crawled back into bed, not having to go to the doctor's after all. You went to the phone and lambasted the road commissioner. At least you thought it was the road commissioner. At the end of your tirade, to which I listened with amazement and, the hapless heroine of it all, some satisfaction, the person on the other end answered only "I'll tell Frank". That became a family story.

I did know, then and always, you adored me, though all along I did feel the me you adored didn't have much to do with the me I thought I was.

You gave me jewelry for birthdays and Christmas. I tried to like what you gave me, even though I have never been much of a jewelry person. Jewelry is just too hard to keep track of. One Christmas you gave me a beautiful

gold-chain bracelet with green stones in it. I put it on and forgot to take it off again before I went outside to help build a snow fort. I never saw the bracelet again though I looked - and looked and looked, hating myself, hating it, hating you, glad I'd lost it....

You were never tough with me, though with Richard you really were sometimes. I remember a scene at the dining room table, one summer, painful in the extreme, Richard reduced to tears. I can't even remember what that was all about. You had much higher expectations for him than for me. He was a boy. Even my academic successes were more a source of embarrassment to you than of pride, particularly during those two years when I was a student at your school in seventh and eighth grades. Your wanting me to understand the rudiments of English grammar did not extend to wanting me to be one of your school's best students. You were against my name being read aloud at commencement. It got read anyhow - Barbara and not the William I was supposed to have been.

After I was born, Mother was very sick for several months. You were the one who had to take care of me until Margaret took over for the rest of the day. I quite simply cannot imagine you changing a diaper. You told me I smiled blissfully, every single morning, mess and all.

I do remember another time you took care of me. I must have been three or four. After I woke up from my nap, you combed my hair and parted it on the wrong side. It sure felt funny, though I didn't say anything. How did Mother or Margaret know which way to part it? Maybe they didn't, maybe all three of us were wrong.

That day you took me by the hand, after combing my hair, and we went together to the rooms of the house master of the senior dormitory, where I had never been before, nor had Mother, and where I never went again. You had to take some important papers to the master, and what could you do but bring me along.

The room we went into, at the top of a wide white stairway, was the most beautiful room I had ever seen, low leather chairs, books in shelves which were part of a wall, afternoon sun through windows which were doors, woven curtains, a balcony outside....

We pretended I wasn't there. We didn't stay long.

Pretending I wasn't there was a little harder those two years I was a student at your school. Except for going to classes (where the boys occasionally made jokes and/or innuendoes, the masters trying to be stern, trying not to laugh too) I stayed in my room. My friend Anna had moved away by then and I was alone, though not really lonely because I really did like to read and study. The first Valentine's Day, though, I suddenly missed my friends at the little school I had gone to, very much. Valentine's Day there had always been fun. And the year before, three boys had all given me valentine boxes of candy! I saw only one of those boys ever again. He still had his

cap with the ear-flaps, which he held in his hands as we tried to think of something to say to each other.

Elizabeth's life in seventh and eight grades was very different from mine.

I think you worried about my being alone too much with no distractions - or it may have been you truly believed that girls weren't supposed to be interested in studying. One day, I was studying and Mother was ironing in the kitchen. You came home from one of your classes and, out of the blue, began lecturing her about not having taught me how to iron.

Another time, after washing lunch dishes, I said to you I wished there had been more dishes. I hadn't minded washing the dishes, or maybe it would be more accurate to say I had liked looking out the window. But I admit I did say what I said partly to please you, to show I liked being domestic. You were not pleased. You lectured me about making stupid remarks.

One summer, I had been on a week's visit (my first without you and Mother along too) to my two aunts, your sisters. One had turned my visit into a project. The other had simply added me to her daily routine. She was an occupational therapist in a big state mental hospital. I painted and wove along with the patients, who seemed not too bad, especially since they kept saying how pretty I was. Probably they hadn't seen a child for quite a while. A few did tell me I shouldn't be there, others that they didn't like my aunt. But I was used to that sort of thing, a girl in a boys' school, the daughter of an exacting teacher.

By the time my second aunt drove me home, I was tired. Both you and Mother came running to greet me. I, in a daze, was unresponsive. So I received a blistering lecture from you on being cheerful and responsive, most particularly when greeting people after separations.

I try now to understand what I learned from you, in these continuing ways. Because I was a girl, there were certain chores I must learn to do. But I shouldn't pretend to enjoy them. I must always be cheerful, especially those times when perhaps I wasn't.

Also, I should be accomplished but not intelligent. But wasn't it for my intelligence - or was it only for my ability to figure out, usually, what you wanted to hear - that you loved me?

Mother and I competed for your affection, I'm sure. Elizabeth and I compete for Jim's affection too: but she and I talk about it, at my insistence. Maybe that's not so good either.

In a way, it was probably a good thing I was in England when you died. I hope, finally, by then, you had gained some understanding of what a staunch ally you had, had had for so many years, in Mother, though she could not be with you either when you died. You had had to be moved to another hospital because of a nurses' strike, you, who had always had such faith in the medical world. You had had to be moved to another hospital

too far for Mother to drive to alone at night, her eyes bothered by oncoming headlights. You had telephoned her, begging her to come. I am grateful she did not know she would never hear your voice again or she would have come no matter what.

I am trying to think about your death. How hard this is. I want to learn from it for myself. I think the most important thing one can ever learn is to accept death, if that is possible -not the death of others so much as your own.

When you died, Dad, Jim and I were in Edinburgh, at the festival. The night of your death we were listening to a performance of Bach's "St. Matthew Passion". When Jessye Norman began to sing "Have Mercy, Lord, on me," the aria that comes in the music, after Peter's denial of Christ, I cried. I was thinking of you, knowing you were very sick and perhaps suffering. Early the next morning, the handsome young Scot, in charge of where we were staying, came to our room and said there had been a telephone call from Elizabeth, that you had died.

Mother told me, later, how frightened you had been by the sight of the nurses striking in front of your hospital. No one had believed they really would strike, though they had been threatening to for several years. No one listened to them. So they finally did. They struck. And you had to be moved, first home where Mother was simply unable to care for you (how dreadful for her), then back to the emergency room and then on to another hospital.

And there I was, living it up in Scotland.

"The best defense is a good offense." So I try to think how you might have failed me, instead of the other way around. It is like thinking about how Christ might have failed Peter. Poor old Peter was only trying to save his own skin, not to harm Christ. Eventually Peter died, even more unpleasantly.

You, and Christ too, were men of principle. Is Principle the villain here, as opposed to Compromise? One could go on in this line: Compromises maintain connections, continuations, even life?, while Principles are uncompromising, like death? I don't know.

Something happened, shortly before you died, during the brief time you were home between hospitals. Your neighbor's unpredictable teen-age son returned a ten dollar bill he owed you. He had borrowed it at the beginning of the summer, saying you could dock the amount from his father's wages, who occasionally helped you with yard work. You said that, no, this was between the two of you. Weeks went by. Then Mother brought you his ten dollars. You held it and cried. You felt your faith in even this poor mixed-up kid had been vindicated.

But I try to figure out what bothers me about the whole episode, moving as it was, helping the three of us, Mother, Richard and me, cry together a

little, finally. If that boy had been a girl, I doubt the episode would have happened at all. Girls, women, you felt, you said more than once, could not be trusted. If there was an open letter on a table, a man would not read it and a woman would.

But we had wonderful times, you and I. And I remember you carrying me home, half asleep, one night . You had taken me along when you and Mother went to play bridge with Anna's parents.

Your grammar lessons weren't much fun, but another summer, during the war when we did not go to the Cape, you taught me and one of the faculty wives German. We read "Emil und die Detective", laughing about Polly Hutchen and her bicycle.

Suddenly I am a little surprised I can't remember more about you, about us. I have been surprised before, when people reminisce, that they can't remember more. I am wondering how profoundly people really can get through each other's surfaces.

Were you or were you not the center of my existence? You were away most of one year, doing graduate work at Harvard. Mother took over your French classes. And I can't even remember about all that. I was busy and very very happy in first grade that year.

Another time was different. We were returning to the United States, right before WWII, after a summer with Mother's parents in the south of France. Those departures were always hard. Grandmother, Mamé, never did quite get used to family being so far away. While we waited at the station for the train to Bordeaux, Mamé held your coat, hung over both arms, after hugging and kissing us all, weeping. When the train arrived, we got on, settled ourselves and turned to wave out the window as the train began to move off. And there was Mamé, still holding your coat. At the next station you got off to go back for your coat, saying we would meet at the hotel in Paris.

I was very scared, sure we would get on the wrong train at Libourne, then sure that Richard would be lost forever when he got off the train at another station to buy something from a vendor, instead of just leaning out the window, waiting for the vendor to come to him, and astounded that Mother had been right all along to know that we would all be together again even before Paris - that there were several sections of the train from Bordeaux to Paris and that you would be on one of the later ones, and that all the sections arrived together at Tours where there was a long stop. Well, of course, whose country was it, anyway! Why didn't I have confidence in her? She always deferred to you, as I defer to Jim - as Elizabeth defers to no one. Times have changed.

I still dream of the train station at Tours.

And one year we arrived on a boat in New York harbor late in the afternoon (without sinking) but we wouldn't be able to dock until the next

morning. I woke up during the night to discover you and Mother had gone. Also, it did not look as if Richard were in the bunk above me, there wasn't a big enough dent. So I got up and got dressed, determined to find my family whether they wanted me to or not. I met you and Mother coming back to the cabin, gratifyingly astonished to see me. You explained you had taken Mother to see the skyline lights of New York. You and Mother showed them to me too, then, and we all came back to the cabin together, where Richard was peacefully sleeping. You lifted me up to see.

During crises I would turn to you. The September before I returned to college for my sophomore year, we talked together, under your sycamore, about my not wanting to go back. In those days there was no choice, other than flunking out which I finally managed to do the end of my junior year. (Oh no, it couldn't have been on purpose...) I did cherish that conversation with you, for I felt you had understood.

But what had either of us understood. Flunking out of college, could I somehow have been, after all, still trying to please you, proving you right that women were incapable of grasping principles - though I was wrong, and perhaps you were too, that that's what college taught. What I found so hard about college, at least on the conscious level, was discovering there were no principles, no absolutes.

Maybe I still believe in absolutes. Maybe that is why I married a mathematician, especially a probabilist, whose own father, on long, peaceful, silent fishing trips, just the two of us off an island in the middle of Lake Superior, would claim he was pondering the reality of the absolute.

What women, in your estimation, were for as people, I think, had to do with care and attention giving. No wonder you found the nurses' strike so very frightening when you had become totally vulnerable.

One summer, you and Jim and Peter, the three of you, nearly tore me apart, the time all of you at once demanded my undivided attention, you wanting to finish a conversation we were having, two-year-old Peter needing help to go to the bathroom, and Jim, restless on alien territory, wanting me to get some action on lunch....

You had been going to the Unitarian Church on the Cape. Your Memorial Service was held there.

Richard and I went to talk with the Unitarian minister about the service. Richard did most of the talking. Somehow we had started out talking about the nurses' strike and another person who had died too and about suing. We both told the minister Mother had no interest in suing. She just wanted to forget as quickly as possible.

The night before the talk with the minister, I had been thumbing through the Bible, which I had taken down from the shelf behind the glass doors of the living-room secretary. I discovered it belonged to you, given to you when you were nine by your Aunt Izzie. Mother said Aunt Izzie was the wife of

your father's oldest brother, and she added that the two brothers, who lived across the street from each other, never spoke to each other if they could help it. Aunt Izzie had marked out Ecclesiastes, Chapters 11 and 12, for you. I asked the minister to read those chapters at the service.

The minister edited and prefaced the reading oddly, I thought, saying it expressed "the confidence, the faith in nature and nature's God, in human nature by which he" (meaning you) "lived." It seems to me the bleak passages are at most an appeal for generosity, as the only barely possible optimistic response to predestination.

And I suspect Aunt Izzie picked out those particular passages simply because they referred to "the days of thy youth," though I wish I could ask her about that.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow: and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

Chapter 32

Again The Readers

William is usually the first to arrive. And he usually brings books, pictures, or clippings having something to do with what they are presently reading. First he allows time to turn his car around in Ellen's driveway (the second Ellen) and to park facing out again along the quiet street. Sometimes Carol comes with him, unless she has errands. The first Ellen and Carolyn have moved away with their doctor husbands who have finished their residencies. Barbara tends to arrive next, pulling up in front of William's car, not bothering to turn around just now. They both leave room nearest the house for the latecomers, especially for the one who is bringing Dr. Thomas, either Bob Bishop or Mary and her friend. Mary is Charles' widow....

It had been Charles' idea to ask Dr. and Mrs. Thomas if they would like to join the reading group. Dr. Thomas had had to give up his family medical practice, in the small town near where Charles lived, as he became progressively more crippled with Parkinson's. He is now hardly able to speak. Mrs. Thomas took complete care of him until her own health began to fail. And then happened the day Ellen and Barbara came to pick up the Thomases, the day the readers were going to meet instead at Mary's, to see her new greenhouse. They found Dr. Thomas alone. They couldn't understand what he was struggling to tell them. Had Mrs. Thomas died? ("Where is she - nod your head - in the bedroom? at the church? at the hospital?") Barbara had stayed with him while Ellen went on to Mary's to see if anyone there knew, or could find out, what had happened to Mrs. Thomas. And Dr. Thomas guided Barbara into his old office, a pleasant room in the house, with a desk by the window and chairs to sit on. Dr. Thomas, so frail, sat behind the desk. (Maybe he thought she was a patient...it was a little hard to tell what he was thinking by now.) On the corner of the desk was a book of essays by E. B. White. Barbara picked up the book and read aloud an essay on sailboats. The sun came in softly, at an angle, over the wide old floor boards. Eventually two women came in, who were part of a group working together on a quilt in the library across the street. Mrs. Thomas

had not died. She had gone to the hospital. Possibly she had had a stroke. The two were planning to stay with Dr. Thomas. And Ellen returned to take Barbara back to Mary's, where the others had started reading "The Comedy of Errors".

Mrs. Thomas stayed at the hospital, on, and on, and on. Dr. Thomas went to a nursing home, except he was still brought to the reading group by Bob Bishop or by Mary.

The readers had begun meeting regularly at Ellen's the fall after Barbara had moved back across the river. Ellen's 94-year-old aunt was living with her and couldn't be left alone because she would sometimes wander off into the neighborhood. The aunt was a gifted, brilliant woman, who had been a missionary doctor in China. (Among other stories, she told of one emergency call from an opium den.)

That fall they read the "Odyssey", with Ellen's aunt joining in the discussions. A student from the college was with them also, a philosophy major who had seen a notice about the existence of this epics study group. He did not have time for a full course in the Classics Department. The age-spread among them brought with it a sudden awareness of each one's own assumptions of how literature should be interpreted, and also of how much education itself is influenced by the fashions of the times. The person they had asked to be their reading guide was someone from the college library who had been recommended by a member of the Classics department. That winter the librarian agreed to help with the "Aeneid" too. In spring they decided to take time off from epics to read Greek plays, to profit once again from the librarian's availability, a gifted teacher. He warned them, though, he was not at his best during the month of May. "May is just too much!" And indeed, the peepers in the frog pond on the way to Ellen's were deafening.

The next fall, it was decided they really must return to their epics project. They read "Faust", with the help of a retired German professor from the college, who lived and farmed nearby. Then all winter and the next spring, a retired member of the English department guided them through the "Divine Comedy".

Ellen and Charles bowed out of the "Divine Comedy". Ellen said her mind didn't work that way and Charles didn't say why. Barbara missed them both very much and wondered if the "Divine Comedy" was worth their absence, at first. Maybe the decision to go ahead without them had been a mistake. But many others signed on. They could hardly fit into the English professor's living room. Once in a while the Italian was read aloud, and it was like the sun in fall coming through clouds to shine on turning leaves. That didn't always happen, when the Italian was read, but sometimes.

That year Ellen was on the literature committee of the Arts Association. She said the Association was having problems, the major one being that

nobody wanted to be its next president. So the Arts Association disbanded. The piano, the only possession of the Association - everybody seemed to have forgotten it had been given to the town - was sold to one of the churches and the money contributed to a college scholarship fund for local children.

The only part of the Association that did not disband in '76 was the reading group. But since the machinery for collecting and paying out money to a leader no longer existed, they decided to switch to reading plays out loud, plays by Shakespeare since everyone had copies. Charles had three complete sets. Charles' wife Mary began coming and also one of their neighbors whose husband had recently died. And the Thomases. And, still and always, Ellen, Carol and Barbara.

Ellen's aunt died at age 99, cross at not having reached 100. But the readers continued meeting at Ellen's. It was easiest for Dr. Thomas, the least distance for him to walk from the car. Also, Ellen claimed she would never get around to cleaning her house otherwise. They met once a week, Wednesday afternoons from 2 to 4, a time which became sacred, year around. Bob Bishop joined the group when he moved to the area, having retired from being a school principal out west. One Christmas, his wife gave him a handsomely illustrated edition of the complete Shakespeare plays.

Charles began not feeling well, or at least finally saying so. At first the doctors couldn't find anything wrong. And then, when they finally did, there was nothing to be done. The group began meeting at Charles' house, and he continued reading with them until the week he died. In his memory they gave the library in his town the Shakespeare plays, beginning a tradition.

William began coming, who had been a member of the college Drama department until his retirement. He couldn't get over the fact the group seemed to carry on with no organization. Once in a while people left cans of coffee on Ellen's kitchen shelf or brought cookies. Sometimes William brought flowers. Barbara found it hard to assess how responsible she herself was for keeping the group going. She had been the first to bring coffee and cookies, hoping to set an example. Surely there must be times when Ellen would at least a little rather meet somewhere else. Barbara nearly always chose the next play to read, waiting till the last possible moment, hoping someone else would choose. On the other hand, she always did know what play she wanted to read next. The year she and Jim went away on his sabbatical, Barbara said good-by with misgivings.

That day they met in someone else's house, a house which was always in the process of becoming, filled with chaos - and beautiful, antique in the best sense, furniture. They met there to help eat the pie made from a bumper crop of apples. Afterwards the Thomases, who had had to give up gardening, accepted corn and lettuce and Italian parsley. When they got home Dr. Thomas was unable to get out of the car by himself. "Show-off", kidded his wife as she helped him which he hated but had to put with. Then

he managed to bend over and pick up the bag of corn which Mrs. Thomas had put down on the grass.

When Barbara returned the following September, it was as if she had never been away.

By the time Barbara comes into the house, Ellen, William and Carol are deep in conversation about practically anything - books, travels, nuclear war, flying squirrels.... The rest join in as they arrive, after hanging up their coats (in winter) and helping themselves to coffee. Dr. Thomas has black coffee brought to him. Mary, who sits next to him, helps him keep his place in the reading, now that Mrs. Thomas isn't here anymore. Though he can't talk, sometimes he can read. Sometimes it can be a little unnerving not knowing if he will be able to read, one week to the next, one line to the next, or even one word to the next. Carol, Mary's friend, and William are superb readers.

They seem to migrate to the same places, Carol in the rocker, Bob Bishop in the big chair by the fireplace, Ellen in a smaller chair, William and Barbara and Mary's friend on the sofa, and Dr. Thomas on a straight chair which he can get into and out of easily, with Mary in another straight chair beside him. Each meeting is new. The plays themselves, re-read, grow more rich. Conversations take unexpected turns, and there is laughter. Dr. Thomas can still laugh.

Chapter 33

The Women's Chorus

The year Barbara had disbanded the community chorus across the river, she decided instead to organize a chorus just for women, meeting mornings. At the same time she helped Elizabeth organize a group of her high school friends who were interested in close harmony singing. It was interesting how the girls believed they could sing anything and couldn't. The older women believed they couldn't sing anything and could. What happened to female confidence?

The first year, the Women's Chorus met in the Lutheran church. Dues were collected to help pay for heating the church. The group appeared in public for the first time as part of an ecumenical Good Friday service, hosted that year by the Lutherans. The following Christmas, they sang Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" from the balcony of the new town library. And after Christmas, they moved to one of the new library's meeting rooms where there was also a new piano, given in memory of an English professor's wife, an accomplished musician.

That second year, the chorus learned a mass to sing at the ecumenical Good Friday service, hosted this time by the Catholics. And in mid-April, they went on a spring pilgrimage to a small church in a neighboring village, singing there for a special meeting of the Ladies' Benevolent Society. That same concert was repeated at the library.

The third year they did not sing for the ecumenical service because the Episcopalians, whose turn it was, had their own choir. And anyway they, in the chorus, were beginning to look upon that project as kind of a chore. The Christmas and spring concerts at the library and an April program for the "Ladies' Benevolent" became the annual schedule.

During the years Barbara returned to work, the chorus found another director, collecting dues to pay her and holding a bake sale to buy new music. After Jim's sabbatical and when the women's chorus director moved away, Barbara asked if she could take over again. But she no longer felt equal to preparing for public performances and wondered if they would be

interested in studying works by Bach, learning the soprano and alto parts. Barbara would invite tenors, basses, instrumentalists and soloists to come for a final read-through, probably on a Sunday afternoon.

The chorus was willing to give the idea a try. Barbara chose Bach's "Passion According to St. Matthew" to start off with; if this project did not pan out, she wanted at least to have worked on that.

She ordered vocal scores for those who wanted to own one. Some of the women owned one already. One owned six. Barbara wanted to own the instrumental parts herself. The chorus decided to continue collecting dues, donating the money to the library toward building up the library's new collection of CDs. CDs were just beginning to happen.

Bach was not Barbara's favorite composer, any more than Shakespeare was her favorite author. But there had to be a reason they both were the giants in their fields.

There was plenty to work on in the "St. Matthew", even though most of the singers had sung it before. The plan was to sing the first half of the work the Sunday before Thanksgiving. They would continue with the second half in April. They also learned the alto solos. Jim learned the bass solos, working hard, sounding very good. And old friends from the days of the Barn concerts agreed to sing the soprano and tenor solos, and, with two others making up a quartet, one chorus part in the sections which were written for two choruses.

The November reading was only a qualified success. Something about the library room's acoustics made it so the singers and players could not hear each other very well. So for the April reading, Barbara followed someone's suggestion of having the singers and players sit around the room in a circle. That was much better.

Next Barbara decided to work on the "Christmas Oratorio", which Bach had worked on after the "St. Matthew". Again the first half would happen in November, the second half in April. The same Passion Chorale that had appeared six times, in six progressive keys, in the "St. Matthew" appeared twice in the oratorio, once at the very end in a strange, wild orchestral setting, Satan defeated, Christ triumphant.

Most of the oratorio was made up of adaptations from the secular cantatas he was writing, hoping to be awarded the title of court composer by the Elector of Saxony, who happened also to be the King of Poland. Barbara tried to learn at least something about the history of that period in Germany but finally gave up in confusion.

Texts for Bach's music, the ones not from the Bible, were often criticized. Somewhere Barbara read that the pattern for such texts was set by the Roman poet Seneca. She got permission to sit in on a class at the college which included Seneca. But instead, she got sick. During the month of January she tried to get herself around to accepting the fact she would

not be able to carry through her plans for the Women's Chorus. Then a friend offered to take over until Barbara was able to return. Gratefully, if unhappily, Barbara handed over the orchestra parts.

Chapter 34

STOP

July 4, 1984. Barbara is under her apple tree. At least the tree does still exist. Yellow trucks have been digging a trench across the backyard, replacing old sewers and drains. When the Veres bought the place ten years ago, they had not known the yard and the tree and even the house were on top of town drains and sewers.

Worst of all has been the noise.

The silence this July 4 holiday is unbroken except for a few firecrackers sounding in the distance. The trench has been filled in. Soon the grass will grow. But right now, the yard has a scar running up its middle.

Barbara has a scar too, running up her middle. Early last December she had gone yet once more for a physical check-up, even though no more was wrong than there had been for the last several years. She had gone late in the afternoon of a gloomy day. The nurses had been harried, the doctor preoccupied, whom she didn't know, her own doctor having retired.

The nurse, leaving the room, said the doctor was going to do an aspiration. Barbara refused, antagonizing everyone, but still managed to get the pap test she had come for.

Had she been wrong to refuse the aspiration? "White pain" was the way she had heard the procedure described. Later, someone else told her it wasn't so bad. That person had had five children instead of one, which may have made the difference. Both had then had to have a D & C anyway.

When Barbara left, one of the nurses said something about her coming again. Without thinking, Barbara answered "never!"

Three weeks later, she received a letter from the doctor which said she should contact his office to make an appointment for a D & C. She had begun assuming that she had not heard anything for so long because of a backlog of work in the office. This had happened the last time when, after returning from Jim's sabbatical, she had gone to see her doctor. Then, she had been very much reassured by him, an old friend.

The fear of cancer was there, in the background. She was one of six,

the wives of Jim and his closest friends, the other five of whom all had had cancer. Four were dead. After Helen had died in '71, Barbara "knew" that sooner or later it would be her own turn. But how ridiculous. Husbands can't cause cancer, though Barbara had wondered that before she learned how much cancer there was in her own family, among cousins on both sides. So then she began to wonder why the husbands had all married women who would get cancer, even as later she would wonder why the women who lived in four houses in a row, hers being one of them, all had cancer, three uterine, one ovarian.

And yet, Barbara, now older than any of the other wives had been, had begun to dare hope that cancer would not happen to her own self after all. After reading the doctor's letter, she drank too much sherry and was incredibly sick.

That was not the way to cope. The next morning she called the mental health center. The psychiatrist whom she had seen during the time of Jim's friend's suicide, was available again. And he said he doubted Barbara had cancer. He said, if she did the two of them would win a Nobel prize.

After that appointment, she managed to contact the doctor's office. He wanted to see her once again before the D & C.

No one could find her medical record. Oh dear, could she and the other Barbara Vere still be getting mixed up, even after her having checked her own records herself? She remembers once again the time she'd had to have an ear lanced. While she was being anesthetized, she quietly listened to that doctor making pleasant conversation about the house where she lived - until, just as she was passing out, she realized he was talking about the house where the other Barbara lived. When she came to, it was not easy to explain to them their mistake.

Without her record, arrangements were made for the operation and also for a few lab tests the day before.

Dreading returning to the hospital, Barbara considered getting hypnotized. A friend of hers had been hypnotized to stop smoking. Rather desperately, she decided to write a note to the doctor, that she must talk to an anesthetist before the operation because of a previous bad experience. There seemed to be no other way to communicate within that office efficiency. She left the note on the doctor's desk. After he came in and after he checked her heart, he went over to the desk to write something down. He saw the note. Hallelujah, he sat down to read it.

Much later, on another doctor's desk, among piles of new papers in her record, she caught sight of that same note with all kinds of black and red stamp-marks on it. She had not meant it to be that important.

She did get the chance to talk with the anesthetist. After her lab tests, she was sent to his office, next to the operating rooms. (Those rooms were real....) She told the anesthetist, when he finally showed up, about the

time when, after having had some wisdom teeth pulled, she had been alone coming out of the anesthesia. Somehow she had managed to free herself from the straps around her and had wandered off to where a screen door led to a beautiful garden. Fortunately the door had been locked and a secretary had caught sight of her. There was no garden, only a very busy street. The anesthetist looked at her in a funny way but did explain she would not be alone when she woke up.

After that, she went to the admitting office where she was asked if she were going to have an abortion. Wow. By now, for her, wasn't that close to impossible? So what was she supposed to do? Grimly she called the doctor's office to say if she were pregnant she did want an abortion (didn't she?).

The next morning before seven she walked to the hospital. The moon was going down and the sun was coming up at the same time. The silent, snowy world, empty except for a woman in a red coat up ahead, was full of blue light.

An old friend met her, a hospital volunteer even at that early hour, and took her to a room where she was given a hospital johnny and robe. Another woman and another man were also in the room. The man was a farmer. And though Barbara felt she herself was never told enough, she was appalled at all he was told.

Soon after, a second man came back from the operating room, high as a kite, wanting to know where the porn magazines were.

It was Barbara's turn. While she climbed on to the wheeled stretcher, the nurse held the back of her johnny closed. She was transported to the operating room area where a long, detached, needle was put in the vein of her right hand by a very young man who said he was her anesthetist. And then Barbara became afraid, or could no longer keep fear at bay. Where was the anesthetist she had seen the day before? Oh. There he was. Phew.

She was wheeled into an operating room and switched over to a table. Everything was happening fast. A nurse tied down part of her left side, slapping around some - maybe foam rubber. The young anesthetist secured her right arm, after asking her to take both arms out of her johnny. And then she was asked to think about something pleasant. (!) She felt the anesthesia coming and her head started to move back and forth and someone held down her shoulders. She tried to keep her head still, explaining (how odd, her voice was coming from the left) she was only moving her head back and forth for the effect....

Now her voice, coming from the right, was saying "no - no - no." She was feeling the most profound grief she had ever known, but she didn't know what about. And yet she felt warm and good. And yet she was thrashing around, trying to sit up, having all-over spasms, uncontrollable. Her voice, finally back in the middle, asked the young anesthetist if he had ever seen

anything like this before. He, sounding frightened, said no.

Then the other anesthetist came, to tell her she was disturbing the other patients and might hurt herself. She heard him mutter to the young anesthetist, "she was doing that when she went under."

There were many nurses. No one touched her. She found the fingers of one of the nurses. Hoping she wouldn't crush them, she tried to find and hold on to only one finger. At long last she began to calm down.

Everybody left. There were many other patients: the recovery room was full. Everybody was so busy, moving so fast....

A friend of Barbara's, who was the rabbi's assistant at the hospital, appeared. Her friend's hospital name tag got her in. How good to see her. Barbara cried.

Eventually she was wheeled back to the room where she had started out. All the people in there were different. Jim came, and she got dressed. The nurse said she could go home after the doctor had come to talk with her and Jim.

Over in the next bed, a young woman was being told by her doctor she would have to have a more extensive operation on her breast - they still weren't sure.

Barbara wasn't frightened for herself, not yet. She wasn't thinking about anything but of going home, this was over, wishing the doctor would hurry up.

The doctor came in. He looked for a moment at Jim and at her, silently. Then he began saying something about a malignancy and another operation. So Barbara said the words cancer and hysterectomy.

This was not an easy time for the doctor either. Barbara remembered his own wife had died of cancer - could it have been his grief she had been feeling, when she came out of the anesthesia - or had she heard something she could no longer remember?

The doctor said he would set up an appointment for her with a surgeon who had just moved here, a cancer specialist, in two weeks.

Two weeks later, Jim came with her to see the surgeon. Jim was a great help, men talk to men so much more easily than they do to women. She was able to find out more during that appointment than she was ever able to find out again.

It was an odd appointment though. The surgeon talked about notifying family and a few best friends, as quietly and as gently as possible, though without keeping anything back. Could he possibly have thought they had not told anybody, these last two weeks? She had had to do something about the women's chorus, just for example.

The hardest part of that appointment had been coming in to the Cancer Center, next to the hospital, for the first time. It was a cement-block looking building (of brick, though, not of cement) maybe like the holocaust gas

chambers. Later, another friend with cancer told Barbara she had been asked: "Why do you always think of cancer in terms of the holocaust?", not realizing how many of the victims, together in waiting rooms, are so thin. Barbara would grin, for by that time she could also add, after radiation treatment: "And I've even been tatoored - and, oh wow, by a German!"

After the D & C, Barbara was feeling well, not that she had felt sick before it. And the hysterectomy wasn't scheduled until Washington's birthday. She could still sing in the performance, which the choral society both she and Jim belonged to was giving of the Brahms "Requiem". After an extra performance in another city, the ride home on the bus, the two of them sitting in the dark and listening to quiet conversations around them, became a special memory.

Richard, her mother and both children visited before and after the next operation. How hard all this was for everyone.

Before that operation, several more lab tests and exams had to be done. For one test, a dye had to be injected into a vein. Barbara was very frightened, once again, knowing that people allergic to the dye suffered great pain or even, like a college classmate of hers, died. The attendants all made a point of being as matter-of-fact as possible. She felt she had entered a Disney-world: but would she have preferred black masks?

The attendant couldn't find the vein in her right arm. He couldn't find the vein in her left arm either. When the dye leaked into her left arm, it hurt very much. Finally the attendant used the vein in her right hand.

Otherwise the tests were less bad than she had expected, perhaps because she had become, in such a brief time, a part of that strange world. It really was interesting to see her own insides on TV - looking like the backyard sewer pipes. Also, there was an experiment going on about detecting breast lumps with infrared lights, which she became part of - at that time still without being asked for her consent.

Barbara was supposed to report to the admissions office of the hospital by noon the day before her operation. In the morning she walked to town to do some last errands, mailing bills, returning papers to the safety deposit box.... And she also stopped by a real estate agent who was to begin selling property owned jointly by the Veres and three other couples - a mess to settle if any one of them should die or something.

In the back of her mind, Barbara realized she might die, later, sooner, perhaps even tomorrow. So she had put her life in order as much as she had had time to - and had even thought about joining a Memorial Society, sending in a contribution, but finally deciding that that's what lawyers, churches and funeral homes were for. (So what if they might also be just a little responsible for the complications involved, shame on them.)

At the hospital admissions office, Barbara was asked her religious affiliation. Had they asked her that before? When the children were born, she

had said Congregationalist. Had that been automatically continued? (When the children were born, every minister from all the churches Barbara had helped with music events, came to visit - the nurses had been intrigued.) This time she answered Agnostic. Her rabbi's assistant friend told her later: "Barbara, I want you to know you're at the top of our Chaplains' list, it's alphabetical, and what's more, you're listed as being 33 years old!"

Barbara was taken to her room, numbered 707 like the airplane. Where would she be flying?

It was a private room. Mother had sent money, which had puzzled Barbara. But here she was, using it.

Someone brought in a large pot of red tulips and a small basket of yellow primroses. Barbara asked a nurse if she could visit a friend who had had a hysterectomy (not for cancer) a few days earlier. She found her friend on the same floor, down another hall. The friend looked reassuringly bright and cheerful and said: "Tonight, I'll walk down and see you."

Barbara returned and found her friend Annie, from the Women's chorus. The chorus had been rehearsing that morning. Annie had brought a gift, a tape recorder with tapes made by members of the chorus and a card signed by them all.

A social worker came in to ask Barbara what her interests were, which made Annie giggle. And a man came in to ask if she wanted the TV hooked up. Jim's friend, the one who had given her the ten dollar Phi Beta Kappa initiation fee, wanted to pay for her hospital TV. But it was strange the TV had to be paid for. Barbara remembered Tom had given money for free TV in memory of Helen....

Tom came by with Jim.

Then there was a private moment, so she put on her hospital johnny and robe.

The day before, when she had complained a bit about having to come so early, she had been told she would be given lunch. Around 2:00, she asked about lunch. A delicious one appeared immediately.

And then four doctors, a resident, an intern, and, presumably, two third-year students, appeared separately to ask questions. Barbara tried to cooperate. The second third-year student came in on the run, while the first was still there having just examined her, the only one to touch her. The two of them stared at each other in a peculiar way, and then they left together. Barbara never saw the first one again.

When supper came, Barbara wasn't hungry, having eaten so recently. She was a little surprised she wasn't more nervous. Her room was lovely and fairly quiet, at the end of the hall.

An anesthetist came in to talk with her about anesthesia, though not much interested in what she made a small attempt to say. Oh well, she signed the consent form without reading it.

Her friend down the hall came to talk for a while. After that the surgeon and his assistant nurse came in. They checked the supper tray, worried she hadn't eaten much. Barbara started to explain about the late lunch but gave up, suddenly feeling very tired. Doctors were very hard to explain things to.

The surgeon began telling her more about the operation and the risks involved - finally. She was relieved. Everyone was so cheerful and confident she was beginning to wonder how much they really knew. Left to her own devices, she truly might have chosen not to start on this particular path. But society and family were more than she could stand up to. How much she had been looking forward to time of her own after Christmas....

Next a forthright little nurse came, to get Barbara cleaned up outside and in. Barbara was grateful her friend down the hall had given her some warning about this part. Then came a sleeping pill, and, the next morning, another. She was barely aware of being wheeled off to the operating room and parked at the top of a long line, next to a colorful poster with yellow flowers and/or butterflies on it. A woman came up beside her, saying she was the anesthetist, and Barbara was wheeled into - maybe the same operating room as before....

She felt joy, not grief - joy! She was - here!

She heard a gurgle. Later, much later, she figured out the gurgle came from a tube in her own nose. Her head was laying on its side.

After a while she was being moved. She was in her room. The gurgle was still there. Her friend, the rabbi's assistant, was wiping her forehead with something cool. And Jim, close by, was saying in her ear: "If I'd known it would be like this, I would never have insisted...."

Something very long was taken from her nose. The gurgle stopped. The forthright nurse piled blankets on her stomach and taught her how to cough.

Three doctors came by, the resident, the intern and the second third-year student. It was tomorrow morning. The woman anesthetist appeared and Barbara asked: "Was there a picture of yellow flowers or butterflies?" "Uh - yes."

But which? Flowers or butterflies? The anesthetist had gone.

Flowers and then more flowers came. Also cards.

A nurse came and asked, in a funny way, if Barbara would mind moving to another room. Barbara said yes. The very thought of moving all the cards and flowers was more than she could bear. Later she apologized to another nurse - who said not to apologize, certainly not! Strange.

Barbara got up. And when the forthright nurse came back on duty, Barbara walked, holding on to the nurse and, on the other side, to the stand with the intravenous feeding bottle. In the room across the hall she saw a row of pots of orange flowers, all alike. A priest was reading aloud from a black book, no doubt the Bible, to someone Barbara couldn't see.

Someone else moved into the room next to hers - a man who must be very sick. She could hear him, and the nurses taking care of him. People kept coming to take care of her too, shots (why didn't they hurt?), blood pressures (sometimes checking the blood pressure machine itself, there on the wall, was something wrong?), changing IV bottles...one dripped too slowly. It got fixed: too fast now? Helplessly, she watched it drip into her. But, unless she coughed, she felt okay.

That night, when the man in the room next to hers became quiet, the person across the hall began breathing with a rattle. She had read about - death rattles. Wasn't anybody coming to help?

It must be tomorrow morning again. Barbara heard people talking. The person across the hall had died. A nurse closed Barbara's door. Barbara decided to listen to some of the tapes the women's chorus had given her.

She had been instructed how to move her bed up and down, so she could sit up or lie down. Now she was taught how to get in and out of bed by herself. And today she took a shower, wearing a kind of apron. After her shower she went for a walk all by herself, still hooked up, holding on to, the IV stand.

She passed two doctors along the way. They were deep in conversation about how stupidly rooms were assigned.

Coming out of the room next to hers, where the man was so sick, was a woman she had known for a long time, though not well. The sick man must be her husband: they were community VIPs. Oh wow, they must have been the ones supposed to be in her room....

So how had she been assigned to it? Perhaps someone really was trying to make all this as pleasant as possible for her, which she did appreciate, though just now she'd rather have been assigned to a guilt-free closet.

Reaching her room, Barbara saw the nurse had made the bed and had left it flat. The surgeon was there, waiting for her, and so was Jim. Quickly she got on the bed, as quickly as she could which wasn't very, and tried to lie down without taking the time to put the bed in the sitting position first, holding on to the trapeze arrangement above the bed. Her hand slipped. She fell. In great pain, she said Jesus Christ. (Later, she would wonder why not shit? It would be interesting to compare which people said which at such moments.)

Jim shrank back into a corner. The surgeon, galvanized into action, though there wasn't much he could do, tied the trapeze way back, forbidding her to use it ever again, and, grabbing some tape and scissors, he taped the suction drains, dangling from her sides, more securely. Gradually the pain eased away. The surgeon gave her a lecture on always having the bed in the sitting position before getting into or out of it. She knew that but hadn't dared make him wait.

People began coming to visit, bringing more flowers. More cards came.

It was fun, but overwhelming too. One morning the surgeon made an odd comment about the overwhelming part. When she was strong enough to walk nearly to the elevators, she passed a ward where one patient was surrounded not only with flowers and cards but with balloons, herself barely visible in the bed. And yet. How good to see each person who came visiting. Some brought books, though she didn't feel much like reading except for "The House at Pooh Corner", which made her cry at the end. Later, during the long recovery, she read the books which had been brought to her at the hospital, meeting William Trevor and Robertson Davies for the first time.

Best by far, at the hospital, was the tape-recorder with the tapes. And other members of the women's chorus came by with more tapes - everything from Plain Chants to Benny Goodman, and even a tape of beach sounds. Barbara surrounded herself with, lost herself in, sound. The immediacy of ear-phones was a new experience. Jim kept the tape-recorder fed with batteries.

Days and hours merged. Her friend down the hall went home. The man next door was so sick....

Monday night, the sick man got off to a particularly bad start. So Barbara decided to ask for a sleeping pill. None had been arranged for, but the nurse said she would see about one. Then Barbara changed her mind because the sick man was quieting down after all. But the nurse looked so put out, Barbara changed her mind again, taking the pill, a big red one.

The next morning she couldn't wake up. She heard the junior doctors come in and then leave. By the time someone came with her breakfast, Barbara was able to say something - and then heard the breakfast person say to a nurse out in the hall "she's talking to herself."

The surgeon came. Barbara, beginning to wake up a little more, said something about the sleeping pill. She couldn't tell if the surgeon believed her. How to be believed....

The surgeon came back later, when Jim was there. And Barbara felt like herself again. The surgeon said she could go home tomorrow and her prognosis was very favorable. Barbara heard him say she had a 95 percent chance of cure and, if she agreed to radiation, she could add another 6 or 7 percent to that. Barbara tried not to giggle. She wasn't sure she wanted to be all that cured. (Jim said, when they were alone again, she hadn't heard right, so maybe she was still under the influence of the sleeping pill.)

That night, since she wanted to be fresh for going home, she decided to ask for a sleeping pill again and to take it very early this time. She was given a small blue one.

She slept well, but woke up at 4:00, feeling an edge of depression she couldn't fight off, even with the tape-recorder. A nurse came in and gave her a pat. They smiled at each other. Barbara decided to get up, even

though it was still so early, to sort out her flowers. She threw out most of them and put the plants together to take home. She would plant those outdoors later on. And she put the remaining flowers together into a large bouquet. She would ask Jim to take the bouquet to the emeritus professor from the math department, who had had a stroke and had not been able to speak for nearly a year. He was in the hospital again. They had shared a few visitors, the women dressed up in hats and gloves.

Barbara, thinking about him, locked in silence, remembered her anesthesia experience when her voice came first from one side and then the other. Under light anesthesia, would he be able to talk, from the other side of his brain maybe?

Barbara kept aside a beautiful two-tone red and white rose in a bud vase, which had been brought yesterday, to give to the man next door, who died two weeks later. One week later, the friend who had given Barbara the rose was herself in the hospital for a lung cancer operation. When Barbara heard about that, she felt more upset than she had about her own self, or had she only forgotten. Sometimes it really does seem easier to be upset about someone else.

That last morning in the hospital, Barbara, trying not to be tired and depressed, was on her way out the door of her room for her usual walk down the hall, when someone she liked very much appeared for a visit. Rather desperately, Barbara explained about the importance of her walk and said she would walk her friend back to the elevators. Her friend seemed startled, but as Barbara hoped, walked back to the elevators and went away on one. Barbara returned to her room, hardly able to wait to lie down and put on her ear-phones. She would listen to the plain chants - so beautiful and serene, with, in the background, the bells of an abbey.

But the social worker was waiting in Barbara's room. Trying to control her sudden rage, Barbara spilled out thoughts and feelings (except for her anger at the social worker) whatever came to mind. By the time the social worker left, Barbara was exhausted. No time to lie down. Jim and lunch arrived together.

One of the nurses said good bye and that was all. No one accompanied her to the lobby - what a change from when she had had her babies. She waited in the lobby while Jim went to get the car, their new car. It would be her first ride in it.

And then - fresh air! That wonderful first breath of fresh air! Barbara would never ever forget that. Outside, the weather was gray, wet and slushy. But Barbara gulped the fresh air like someone who had been drowning. No window in the hospital opened, none that she had seen at least.

At home, people came by, leaving food, too much, special dishes Jim didn't like. And people telephoned, usually when Barbara had just settled herself on the sofa, or maybe it just seemed that way. She could have stayed

in bed with the phone right next to her, but she didn't want to stay in bed. Finally she asked her friends to let her call them - and then she didn't call sometimes, which hurt them. They had been so kind. But suddenly she was desperate to be alone. (But people can feel very differently about that.)

Life did settle down. Jim food-shopped, she cooked - just about the right amount of exercise. A cleaning service, paid for out of her mother's check, came for three weeks, once a week.

Four weeks after the operation, Barbara returned to the Cancer Center for a check-up. She had no idea what that would involve. Was there anything left to check? There was, though she was startled to realize how very different she had become, and how very sore.

The surgeon seemed glad she had decided to go ahead with radiation therapy, which would begin the week after next. Barbara had decided no such thing. She was just continuing along the path of least resistance, though she was careful this time to make sure Jim would not blame himself. The truth was, she felt radiation was going to prove to be a serious mistake, perhaps for irrational reasons....

The radiologist came in during the appointment. She was introduced, laid out as she was on the examination table. He had a bad cold.

When she got home, after that first appointment, Barbara was in pain which got worse. The next morning she called the surgeon's nurse. The nurse, who surprisingly called her by her first name, this must be new, said the pain was because of yesterday's manipulations and to come for a prescription for a pain-killer. Jim picked up the prescription and had it filled. It worked like a charm. But Barbara couldn't sleep that night. She called the nurse once more to ask if she could also have a prescription for the little blue sleeping pills she had had in the hospital.

This time Barbara walked to the Cancer Center to pick up the prescription herself, in the morning; and then, in the afternoon, she walked to have it filled. (The pills cost 25 cents apiece, instead of the dollar two they cost in the hospital.) How wonderful to be within walking distance of both hospital and drug store.

Barbara didn't need the sleeping pills after all, until the night before her first appointment with the radiologist. And the morning of her appointment, she felt the way she had felt that last morning in the hospital, truly depressed. She did have reason to be depressed, but might it not be because of the pill? Both times?

The radiologist and his business-like assistant did try to make her feel comfortable. Eventually she was taken into a room with a machine which zeroed in on the place on her stomach where she would be radiated tomorrow. She was marked up with a magenta crayon - lines, crosses, dots, circles....

She had actually just seen such magenta markings - but where? Then she remembered. The magenta markings had been on William's hand, William,

that so special man who, a couple of summers ago, had joined the Shakespeare play-reading group. She herself had begun going back to the reading group. And - what luck - she was told her daily radiation appointments would be at 1:00. She would easily be able to continue going to the reading group, which met Wednesdays from 2:00 to 4:00.

But did William have cancer too - of the hand? But there's no such thing, or is there?

Shaken, by just about everything (how much she wished all this were not happening), as she was about to leave Barbara was told they would see her tomorrow at 3:00.

3:00?

"But you said 1:00."

"No, 3:00." And another nurse came by and said Barbara would have to take the time that was available. "But you said 1:00..."

That night Barbara took another sleeping pill and, early the next morning, had a dream. In the dream, she had come back to her much-loved house after a short absence, where she lived alone and which was to the left of and just behind a movie theater. But, during her absence, the house had been taken over by many young people, mostly young men. She went for help to a policeman, who was standing at the corner of the theater where there were more young people waiting in line to see the movie. The policeman said all of the people were supposed to be there. Barbara, grief-stricken, decided she might as well see the movie too, trying to make the best of the situation. But she couldn't because, somehow, she was the movie.

The next day Barbara was really depressed. Boy, no more of those pills. And she didn't want radiation treatments.

She was having a few minor problems and decided maybe she had better call the nurse at the risk of being a pest. The nurse immediately set up an appointment for her, that very morning! Oh, oh.

There was a mob at the Cancer Center. Everyone, staff and patients alike, seemed tense and tired. After waiting, Barbara found herself laid out once again on the examination table. The surgeon walked in asking if she would mind if one of his students came. Without thinking, Barbara said yes, she would mind - and, in a flash she knew her dream had not been a dream but a memory of what really had happened during her operation. (Later she wasn't so sure....) The surgeon, surprised if not dumbfounded, quickly shook his head at the student who had started to come in the door. Both the surgeon and his nurse were silent, instead of carrying on with their usual patter, as he examined her.

There was nothing wrong. Barbara said, in a small voice, getting up to get dressed, feeling miserable, perhaps she had no right to refuse having a student present, since this was a teaching hospital. Both the surgeon and his nurse said yes yes, of course she had the right.

She had brought a sandwich, and she stayed in the hospital lobby reading, until time for her three o'clock appointment. She wasn't sure she had the strength, yet, to walk back and forth to the hospital twice. A friend saw her in the lobby and stayed to talk. The friend encouraged Barbara to try again to get her appointment time changed.

At 2:45 Barbara went down to the second sub-basement, as instructed. There was a strange smell. But not soul was around. She went back up to the main office and asked if she could have a one o'clock appointment. The secretary said to talk with the people downstairs. "But no one is there." "Oh - well, they're the ones who can help you."

Barbara returned to the second sub-basement. Two women, one in a wheelchair, the other on a stretcher, were waiting now. The person who had brought the woman in a wheelchair, wheeled the woman next to Barbara. Barbara did not feel like talking, very much. It would be a while before she learned to accept that now she was one of - them.

The two technicians came. Barbara went up to the one she had been introduced to yesterday and begged to have her appointment changed to 1:00 because of a once-a-week meeting that meant a great deal to her. The technician said, well, she would see. Then Barbara asked if it would be all right for her to go outside for half an hour, since there were others here ahead of her. Barbara took her book and went to sit on a bench outdoors. It was colder than she had expected.

When she returned downstairs, she was told that 1:00 would be fine, beginning tomorrow - Wednesday! Barbara was close to overwhelmed with gratitude and walked with great confidence into the room with the machine called a Betatron. The room was huge. The machine too. Her confidence evaporated. The table she climbed onto was small indeed, beneath the Betatron. The technicians left, after arranging Barbara and the machine. She would be watched on TV.

After a few interminable minutes, during which she tried to think of a song to sing to herself, and all she could think of was happy birthday - that must be a very basic tune, she must think about that sometime - the technicians came back, did something, went away, came back, asked her to turn over on her stomach, ouch....

That was all. She left, feeling peculiar, but not bad.

The next day she arrived at 1:00. And there was William! Never had she been so glad to see any one. Barbara thanked the technician again, for making it possible for her to come at 1:00. The technician said: "Well, we do feel the cancer support group is very important." Barbara must have looked blank for a minute before saying: "But the group I meant wasn't - well, it's a reading group." The technician looked at Barbara and then at William, saying: "You mean, you two are both in that group? That must be some group!" Smiling, she took Barbara into the Betatron Room, which

did not look quite so big, today.

William said he was more than halfway through his five weeks of treatments (not for cancer of the hand, needless to say). Barbara asked him if he preferred the rest of the readers didn't know about this. She and William talked about how strange it was to have people look at you as if you were already a ghost. William said: "I've just been going along with what was suggested, telling family and a few close friends...." He had been given the exact same speech she had. Well, why not.

The days passed. There was a lot of talk around about positive attitude. One day a technician praised Barbara for her positive attitude. From under the Betatron, lying on her stomach, her bottom spread out and held open with tape (of course for good reasons), Barbara growled her attitude couldn't be less positive. She just hoped her will power would hold out.

Finally the month of April ended. Spring came. Barbara watched the arrival of birds and flowers on her daily walks back and forth to the Betatron, grateful she didn't have to drive there each day, especially not as far as some of the people did. The air down in the second sub-basement was very bad. She asked, didn't the technicians mind it? They said they got used to it. And the air there now was nothing compared to what it was like in summer, they said.

The medicine Barbara began taking toward the end of the treatments made her feel pretty good - sleepy, but good. She dug up the garden and painted the back porch.

At the end, the radiologist, talking with Barbara in his office, began sounding as if he wanted to continue her treatments longer. Feeling cornered, after having made it to the end, just about, she had thought, suddenly almost in tears, she said she really and truly had had enough, and she got up to leave. He let her go.

And then she couldn't believe she actually missed the daily walks, just at first, which had become routine, insidiously.

She had an appointment to see the surgeon again. Before he came in, she asked his nurse when she could ask questions. There seemed to be no opportunity. "Try right at the beginning," the nurse advised. But that turned out not to be good either, a work interruption.

The next appointment was with both the surgeon and the radiologist, four weeks after the radiation treatments had ended. Barbara asked the nurse this time - after the nurse had made clear it was going to be a quick appointment - to tell the doctors she would like to talk with them both because she did have questions. And, after the doctors were through with her, they agreed to return after she was dressed.

She hadn't meant for her very first question to the radiologist to be about the two thousand dollar bill which was being challenged by the insurance company. That little item must have been more at the top of her mind than

she had realized. But she had already asked everybody she could think of about it, at the hospital business office, at the insurance company, at another part of the business office. The radiologist was not in the least interested. Barbara then apologized for having quit treatments in such a hurry, but well, the guy who had invented the Betatron, whom Jim had known when he was a graduate student at Illinois, had recently died of cancer, they all needed to be more careful (what was she saying, in her fear and confusion?). The radiologist walked out, saying he had a patient waiting (but wasn't she a patient?) leaving the surgeon looking uncomfortable.

Her question for the surgeon was, would he be willing to recommend a dietitian? A friend of hers in England, who had cancer, had managed to avoid having a hysterectomy entirely, by following vitamin therapy. And another friend had, ten years earlier, decided against recommended radiation and chemotherapy in favor of large doses of vitamins. The surgeon said she seemed to be very well, and she should just eat a variety of foods.

She was wasting his time too.

She asked him, then, what would he think of her going to the social worker for advice, could that be part of what the social worker was for. He said yes, that might be a very good idea.

She needed, very much, someone to teach her how to deal with these doctors' appointments which apparently were going to continue. For how long? Entering this windowless little room, which had no connection with anything else in her life, was like entering a vacuum.

Meanwhile, Barbara was beginning to feel really well. She finished digging up and planting the garden. In June she began playing tennis again.

Also, the insurance company finally did come through with the extra two thousand dollars for radiation, after more effort on her part. And then another mysterious check, for two hundred and five dollars, appeared. For a while Barbara thought she really should go back once again to consult with those poor people at the hospital business office, but then she decided instead just to deposit the check, doubtless less expensive than their having to sort out that problem too.

Chapter 35

Cancer Continuing

October. Barbara saw Mr. Lord in the bookstore yesterday. The last time she had seen him had been in May: then he was out walking, looking old and frail. She had stopped to talk with him. It turned out he too was recovering from radiation therapy. A few weeks ago, at the grocery store Barbara had seen his wife who said he seemed very well, now. Then his wife looked away, saying something about Indian Summer.

This is Indian Summer. Barbara brushes the leaves off the chair under her apple tree before sitting down with a cup of coffee. This morning she has played tennis, done a laundry, hung it out to dry, made the beds (Jim has moved to the other room because he's having trouble sleeping), straightened the cover on the sofa (she had woken up in the night, found the king-sized bed desolate and had gone to spend the rest of the night on the sofa) and met a friend for lunch.

All the leaves are off the apple tree. Only a few withered crabapples are still hanging. A few days ago she had filled a jar with asters, dandelions and colored leaves for the table under the tree, still very pretty. A robin down by the bright red blueberry bushes doesn't seem to be quite ready to go south yet. Several blackbirds play in some leaves.

Barbara has not raked any leaves yet. And she must get on with the job of digging up the garden. The last time Peter was here, he brought his new cultivator. He dug, apologizing for the noise. Where he dug is like fine flour.

Barbara hears shouts and cheers and whistles. There must be a game - soccer, football, lacrosse, something - going on. Tomorrow is the big football game against Harvard. Twenty-nine years ago, before the Harvard game, she had miscarried twins. Each year she remembers. Silly . Maybe the miscarriage and the way it came about (moving a small washing-machine to where she could do diapers) is a metaphor for her life: her accomplishing unimportant things at the cost of important ones. But she certainly doesn't want to think about that. So she goes to dig in the garden until she is tired.

If the twins had been born, there would not have been Peter - and no part of the garden would be like lovely fine flour.

She can hear the band begin to practice for the game tomorrow, on a field several blocks away. When the children were small, she and her friends and all their children would go to watch the band practice.

From the garden, Barbara returns to her chair under the tree. Next door Mrs. James is saying goodbye to a visitor, her gravely but friendly voice making Barbara smile. Barbara loves listening to the neighbors' voices. Next door on the other side, two old friends, who have lived across the street from each other for over forty years, often come out to chat, one from Boston and the other from Ohio, their accents still very distinctive.

The friend with whom Barbara had lunch is close to retirement. "What will I do?" she had asked Barbara. "Home all day, what will I do? You at least have your music."

Barbara has her music and tennis and swimming and the readers and friends to have lunch with. But her time alone she cherishes. Here outside.

The band has finished practicing. Even the birds are suddenly quiet. Two infinitesimal red bugs chase each other across the table. A squirrel scampers across the lawn with a butternut in his mouth. It must be a last year's nut because the butternut tree was cut down by the town sewer-and-drain men.

That reminds Barbara. Not much has been done about redefining where the town has its easements. She must see that that all gets settled before she - well, before she dies.

Hmm. She doesn't feel very dying. She doesn't even feel sick. Is she pretending she is sick, or is she pretending she is well?

In a book at the medical school library, Barbara had read that six months is about how long it takes someone who has had a hysterectomy to crack up. But it is Jim who is talking with a psychiatrist, right this very minute, about his sleeping problems. He has always had trouble sleeping. But, during the summer, he began not sleeping even after taking pills. The doctor at the sleep lab suggested he read when he woke up, rather than toss and turn. Jim, nearly sixty, is trying to decide whether or not to take early retirement.

Their friends who had gone to psychiatrists mostly have divorced, long since, and are re-settled. Might the danger of a divorce have been why she had quit going to psychiatrists? Had she staked her sanity and her life on their, Jim's and her, marriage?

Is she really about to lose her life and sanity? The doctors seemed surprised she had got through radiation so well - physically? mentally? What, after all, do they think of her? The other day, before seeing the social worker who had left a message she would be ten minutes late, Barbara had gone into the hospital gift shop instead of waiting around by the office. After ten minutes she returned to find a hushed group of social workers consulting

in a circle - about her! Her social worker had been only five minutes late, with Barbara nowhere to be found.

She has the feeling they don't trust her. Does she trust them, all of them at the hospital? She ought to. She has never felt as well in her life as she feels right now. Somebody must be doing something right. There have been misunderstandings which could certainly be as much her fault as theirs. She might write a letter to her doctor, to try to straighten out at least some of what she feels have been misunderstandings....

Barbara gets up to go inside and start supper. Jim comes home from the psychiatrist. He seems upset. She makes martinis for them both and goes to sit with him at the table, to read newspapers together. Over newspapers, Jim says the psychiatrist does not think he needs to come again. Nothing is physically wrong. Some people just are depressed. And it is all right to continue taking sleeping pills.

Barbara can't quite make out what else may have happened or been talked about. Over newspapers, and after enough martini, she apologizes for being so hard to talk to. Jim apologizes too, for finding it so hard to talk to her.

She is touched by his apology, but also a little frightened. Part of his problem, perhaps more than a part, may be that she has cancer, especially if she gets sick again.

They eat supper and watch the news on TV. Jim goes swimming at the college pool and up to the office for a while and home again. They watch more TV. Jim sleeps badly, getting up early. She gets up too, to make breakfast and a bag lunch. While he drinks his coffee, Jim makes some financial calculations, comparing early retirement with teaching half-time and with teaching full-time. Barbara says he should make sure that, if he doesn't teach full-time, he will still receive his benefits, Blue Cross/Blue Shield especially. And he leaves for the office.

Back to normal. In marriage, maybe two people are too much part of each other, lost in the boring details of mutual daily life, locked into the tensions of separate survival. But when they are with friends, she can share his generosity and humor. There are always surprises.

Chapter 36

A Letter Unread

Barbara really did write the letter to her surgeon, trusting him, making herself (even more) vulnerable. She sent it to his office the week before her next appointment. He said he had received it but had not read it and did not seem to know what had become of it. She asked if she should write another one. He said no.

Mid-December. Having a letter not read is awful. Having a letter lost is also awful.

The sun has just become visible, like a moon, behind clouds. Now it is gone again. The snow is melting, so maybe there won't be a White Christmas for Peter. Elizabeth will stay in New York this year, hoping to avoid Christmas.

Barbara is digressing. Her interest in the outdoors is an evasion, at least partly, certainly right now, a way of delaying getting down to what has brought her here, to the dining-room table, pencil in hand, to write.

Since that strange and excruciatingly painful talk last week with the surgeon, she feels she has had two insights. He said something about being a guide. The problem may be that she cannot tell the difference between being guided and being manipulated.

Patients benefit from doctors. Doctors know best. That is what they are paid for. And wasn't she fortunate, the surgeon said, to have chosen him and to have him paid for. Yes. Though she had not chosen him.

And she has wanted to thank the people who indeed had paid for her care, by way of all their insurance policies. She knows, having worked in the college personnel office one year, that some people cannot afford a house or a car because of their medical insurance payments. She doubts they would appreciate her gratitude. How glad she is all that is so impersonal.

The surgeon said their problem might be a clash of personalities. It is hardly his problem. Just hers.

The next time her life is at stake, she would like to be the decision-maker. Without guidance. This means, not agreeing or disagreeing with the surgeon's decision but deciding herself on the basis of a pool of information, hers and his.

He won't give her access to his. She does realize there is the problem of her lack of background, which is why she wants to start deciding now, while there is time, and while she is feeling well.

She suspects her own information is not being registered by the surgeon. The letter she worked so hard on and sent to him the week before her appointment, trying to clarify misunderstandings, asking specific questions, all on just 3/4 of a page...where is that letter?

The sun is out, is warm enough for her to open the door to the back porch where there is a pool of water from melting, dripping snow.

The surgeon told her she wasn't really interested in "pointed", "black and white" information but in the "gray" around her questions. She is poor at talking (which is why she had written).

She had felt herself being - guided. And she had felt her own self responding by doing everything in her power not to antagonize, but to please, to defuse, to evade, and finally to escape. He allowed her to really escape, without having to go through the routine of making the next appointment. Or maybe he had forgotten to scribble out the little note for her to present to the secretary. Or maybe the system for setting up appointments had changed. She has trouble keeping up with the mechanics of how things are done at the hospital.

Three days after their talk, the cold she had been coming down with went into her ears. One ear opened and started to drain. She had to call someone. The surgeon had said, at the beginning, to always call him. Still? But his nurse instructed her to go to the walk-in clinic. A shy young doctor gave her a prescription for penicillin, asking if she were allergic to it.

Down at the pharmacy, the computer read out that she was allergic to penicillin. She didn't remember that. Should she call someone at the hospital to go through her record? But whom should she call of a late Friday, December-bleak afternoon? Who goes through records for that kind of information, which could even be a major undertaking.

She decided to go ahead and take the penicillin. The pharmacist sold it to her, which perhaps he should not have. And she had no bad reaction. Now that her ears don't hurt anymore, she finds it rather peaceful not to be able to hear very well. But she has read up on penicillin and has found out that it can have disastrous effects, including on bone marrow.

One of the subjects she had tried to discuss with the surgeon was the effect on bone marrow of radiation. The surgeon said there had been extensive statistical studies, and the chances of her getting bone marrow cancer were equal to a truck plowing into his office.

Either he or the book she had read, a study from Johns Hopkins, published this last June, is wrong. She was truly surprised at how thin the statistics were, in fact, on the subject. And the only mention of the effect of radiation on those pre-disposed, as she may be, was that it is a subject on which there should certainly be some (as opposed to more) study. (Is she being the “some”?)

Bone marrow cancer may be a less grim way to die than endometrial cancer. But bone marrow cancer is more of a sure thing. How are such choices determined? She doesn't want the surgeon to be the one to make them for her, at least, partly, she guesses, because by now she doesn't trust people in a research/teaching hospital to have the patient's interest at heart, over truth or students. She is more interested in herself than even in truth, may she be forgiven. She knows, from the mouth of one who did the research, that childhood leukemia is nearly a thing of the past now, thanks to the children who lived an extra six months to be studied.

“Why be so gloomy?” the surgeon said. Barbara wasn't being gloomy: she was simply trying to collect information she might need in the future while she was well.

The truth is, with her children grown, her mother still independent, she can hardly bear that so much of this, her own precious TIME, has had to be spent on cancer.

She has been talking this week with old people and with people who have been sick a lot, trying to discover how they cope with the medical world. There are a variety of ways, rebellion, despair, cop out, acceptance.... The rebels are impressive, very strong, but isolated. The acceptors do seem at peace. One said: “I don't expect too much of any one any more - and I like everybody much better.”

Barbara supposes if some people aren't - guided - they will refuse life-saving care. She told the surgeon she felt as if she were the lead in a play, written in a language she didn't understand. Neither she nor the surgeon wrote the play, of course, but she does accuse him of making it even more incomprehensible than it is. Before having had radiation, she would have liked to have known that, according to some experts, endometrial cancer is the most resistant to radiation. Yet “all cancers are the same”, pronounced the person at the hospital in charge of calculating dosages, during a chance conversation one day. Other experts say endometrial cancers tend to be over-treated. Well, she is having trouble believing she is writing about real things, her place in the surgeon's world being such a new, different, bad experience for her, with zero connection to the rest of her life.

When she arrived at the Cancer Center for that last appointment, greeted by the receptionist who called everyone “dear” without looking up, there was one other patient, a young woman, in the waiting room. After the woman was called, another patient, a young man, came out of his appointment, stag-

gering. The receptionist asked if he wanted a wheelchair-dear. He answered, barely able to: "Not until I'm dead."

After Barbara's own appointment was over and she was putting on her coat, the young woman came out. She too could hardly walk and had been crying. The receptionist didn't say anything this time. Oh yes, Barbara does too have sympathy for the care-givers, those who day in and day out have to do with cancer patients. Why ever did they choose to?

At the end of that ill-fated appointment, Barbara said she trusted him, the surgeon, less now than she had at the beginning of the appointment. The sky didn't fall. The earth didn't swallow her up, even though she had, after all, annoyed him. For her, at least, perhaps that was a breakthrough.

End of January. Barbara was not charged by the hospital for all the extra time the surgeon had given her. She has not heard when her next appointment will be. Has she misunderstood that the secretary will notify her this time? Already she is beginning to dread returning.

She has read a book on medical decision-making, using mathematical tree diagrams. And she has learned a new term, one she has been looking for: "patient utility". She has learned how small a part patient utility plays, the wishes of the patient, in the decision-making process. There are two reasons, one being lack of time.

The other is, patients do tend to change their minds, especially about preferring present time to future time. Several times, from doctors, she has heard the story of the woman who refused an operation, choosing present time, to her regret. Barbara does have to admit that actually being inside a situation can be less bad than either the anticipation or the being outside of it. Post-operation had not even almost been as bad as she had anticipated, though to be sure she had anticipated death, madness and/or great pain. So she is beginning to understand a little better, now, the problem of patient utility. She remembers her sister-in-law often saying "I'm not the doctor".... How much of her own problem is sheer paranoia (as in WHERE is her letter??) Paranoia aside, cancer patients really are grist for the statistics mills, all except for the ones who are, either from choice or bad (?) luck, outside the medical system. They do become public property to some extent. She is not complaining, not about that - at least she is trying to learn not to complain.

To get to the bottom of her fears of bone marrow cancer, she has been trying to find out who, if anyone else in her family besides her aunt, has had that cancer. Already she has found out that, in the American family, besides her aunt, two of her father's cousins died, one of bone marrow cancer too and the other of endometrial cancer. In France, two of her mother's cousins

have had cancer. But Barbara has decided not to try to find out what kind or if there are others who are not talked about. All of them over there are pretty close-mouthed. It was only by chance she discovered both her twin cousins had had hysterectomies. She is surprised at how much, not exactly better but easier she feels, knowing what she knows now. Perhaps her reactions - even over-reactions - could have stemmed from half-heard, half-comprehended discussions, surely emotionally charged, from many years ago.

Barbara first began to write (on her own and not for school assignments) the spring the Veres were in California, on one of Jim's sabbaticals, when Elizabeth was five and in kindergarten. She had wanted to write about the people and the life she had loved as a child, now that there was a little time and nothing else particular to do. After that California spring, she continued writing, off and on, until the summer Helen died. Then she started to write all the time, desperately, writing her way out of getting cancer, she thought maybe, in case cancer was caused by psychological patterns that might come clear to her if she wrote them down. She continues to write now, so that those earlier efforts may not have been in vain, her efforts to re-create her one life, her all.

Knowing there has been so much cancer in her family has made her feel less responsible. She is not responsible for her genes. Curiously, though, just now the bone marrow cancers and the genital cancers are suspected of being caused by viruses. She is less sure she is not responsible for viruses. What's more, except for her cousin Jeanie with the cancerous mole, way back when Jeanie was a teenager, all the ones who had cancer were the quiet ones in otherwise ebullient families. Are the quiet ones truly quietly seething? In her writing, even when she means to write in love, could something else be going on?

Interestingly, something in her continues to resist having much to do with other people with cancer. Once in a while, though, she has lunch with two others who have it. The last time they met, one was gray, the other yellow. Barbara pulled herself together enough to encourage them to meet again sooner than usual, because the yellow one (Annie, from the women's chorus, the one who had brought Barbara the tape recorder in the hospital) really needed to talk. The gray one said she was told by her skin doctor not to worry about a small mole. She had insisted. Later the doctor, genuinely upset, called her, saying she had been right, the mole was malignant, to add to the rest of her cancer woes.

In an attempt not to feel defeated, Barbara decides to end this part of her writing with the questions she wanted answers for in the letter she wrote before her last appointment. And then perhaps she will try to write down the questions for her next appointment. And then she will try not to think about all this any more till the inevitable then.

1. After the operation there were two infections on the main scar. What soreness continues is to the left of that larger scar, which began hurting when she slipped off the trapeze in the hospital. 2. When will bowels become normal. 3. Her concern about radiation has always been, not about a recurrence of cancer, but recurrence versus radiation-abetted bone-marrow-cancer, to which she may be genetically predisposed.

The important questions for her next appointment are: 1. Should she have the itchy moles over a rib checked? 2. May she call in for test results? 3. Is there a particular anesthetic she should try to avoid? 4. Would he suggest yet another sleeping pill she might ask for if necessary. Benedryl was hard to wake up from. And she now tends to connect the two times she almost couldn't keep depression at bay with the two times she took Halcyon.

February 22. Last year, Washington's birthday came on a Wednesday, the day of her operation. She has been notified about her next appointment. Also, she did go for a follow-up check with a skin doctor and asked that doctor if her record had any indication of an allergy to penicillin. He found the information easily, showing it to her. According to her record, it was sulfa she was allergic to. But she took sulfa not long ago, with no problem at all....might her records still be getting mixed up with the other Barbara Vere, even though that Barbara has died? How hard should she try to get across to the surgeon that she is not allergic to sulfa.

This afternoon the readers are going to be reading Eliot's "Wasteland". Tomorrow she is going into Boston with a friend, on a bus tour to see the Impressionist paintings at the Boston Museum.

Chapter 37

That's That

Barbara met her friend Mr. Lord in the hall of the Cancer Center on her way to her next doctor's appointment. He was walking slowly, supported by his wife. It was long past Indian Summer. Barbara stopped to talk with him. They shook hands and reminisced about their walk the previous spring. "And the cancer hasn't got you?" he said. "Nope, not yet." She gestured with her hand on her head: "Knock on wood." He knocked on his wood too, his eyes twinkling. Mrs. Lord smiled with them, but she did look tired.

Barbara left her appointment envelope with the thank-you-dear receptionist, sat near a young girl who couldn't have been more than fifteen, all alone, and read magazines, trying to tune out the musak, until she was called, only fifteen minutes late. The young girl, still waiting, was by then pretty nearly off the wall.

The surgeon's nurse complimented Barbara on her new haircut, weighed her and took her blood pressure and said the doctor would be in in just a minute. Barbara managed to get in the fact that she wasn't allergic to sulfa and could that be taken out of her record.

The nurse went out and came back with the surgeon who, as usual, shook hands, making her hand feel no longer a part of her. After the examination he said he would be back. As she sat waiting for him to come back, she wondered why she could never remember to bring a book with her. She had read all the pamphlets - several times. What would he say. What would she say.

For the past several weeks Barbara has been retyping old stories she had written, as a way of keeping her mind off this impending appointment. But one story, called "Apology", applied to her present situation. She felt she should apologize to the surgeon, although she didn't know what for.

So, when the surgeon came back, saying all was well, Barbara apologized...for what she had said and the way she had behaved at the last appointment.

The surgeon accepted her apology. He added that one is supposed to talk things out, though, or pay the consequences.

Barbara said thank you.

Then he said he hoped she would have a good spring and would continue to do as well as she was doing because that would make him happy.

As she left to get her coat, behind the closing door Barbara overheard the surgeon say to his nurse: "That's That."

Before going home, Barbara stopped in to visit Mrs. Thomas, one of the readers, who, after four days in the hospital, was better, physically at least, than last week. She had had cancer for eight years. She may even have thought she was cured, after last year's gallant fight and recovery. She had been paralyzed from the waist down and then had been able to walk again.

"For eight years it has been this way," she said, fighting tears which came anyway. "Getting worse, getting better, getting worse again. It's all so expensive. When I'm home, having to find someone to stay with me around the clock.... The children do what they can, taking turns. This could go on, and on, and on...."

Barbara took off her coat, brought a chair by the bed and stayed to listen. Was this helping Mrs. Thomas or simply exhausting her, who was a little spacey, from drugs maybe. After a while she asked Barbara how she herself was now, a year after her "vasectomy". Barbara answered so far she was fine and had just been for a check-up.

And they began talking about the readers, finally breaking out of Mrs. Thomas' cycle of depressing thoughts. Mrs. Thomas had majored in English political history in college. She had actually read, her very own self, the Magna Carta.

Eventually Barbara left, replacing the chair, hoping she would have the courage to return, hoping that Mrs. Thomas might sleep now.

Barbara went home and had a glass of red wine, at 11:00 AM, and took a nap.

Chapter 38

Fallout

June 9. Barbara had promised herself to think about cancer as little as possible during this first four-whole-months period between doctor's appointments. And she had managed to avoid active thinking, but there had been plenty of passive thinking. Annie and Mrs. Thomas had both died. Someone else had died, too, of Barbara's own kind of cancer, whom she had known slightly over many years. One morning on the tennis courts, a player described visiting that person two days before her death. "It was horrible. Bleeding, under the covers. She'd said: 'Get me out of this....' "

Also, Amy, Barbara's old backyard friend from long ago had come East to visit her mother and had stayed overnight. Amy's husband, and then her son, had both recently died of cancer.

Dearest Amy. She and Barbara drank wine under the apple tree on a magically beautiful day, trying to recapture a measure of their old light-heartedness....

Barbara decided that, when the computer notice arrived from the cancer center, about a month beforehand, this time she would try confronting the reality by re-reading what she had written from the beginning of - this particular adventure. She was trying to think of it as one more adventure. Death too. An adventure.

At first, when the notice came, she didn't feel like re-reading what she had written, not for a while. But now she has finally re-read the first section. She is surprised at how - well, good, in the sense of accurately conveying her impressions, it is - and also how much she has managed to forget!

She has finished reading Paul Starr's book "The Social Transformation of American Medicine". Now she is reading Illich's "Limits to Medicine". She had almost decided she was now the property of society and should do what society expected, even if that would end up meaning becoming a cancer guinea pig. But she is beginning to wonder if instead she shouldn't use her own self as an example of refusing to spend any more of society's money.

June 17th. Richard will be coming with his oldest son after the July 4th weekend. Since Barbara's appointment was scheduled for 9:00 Friday, she called the Cancer Center to change the appointment. The secretary was not happy. The surgeon was on vacation. If Barbara changed her appointment, she would have to wait a week or more for another. It was not absolutely clear to Barbara whether that week meant a life-or-death difference to her or an inconvenience to them.

She changed her appointment. Richard and his son would have enough to deal with, this first time they had seen each other in two years, without not being able to evade the fact of her cancer because of an appointment.

It is nice here under the apple tree. Before a thunderstorm, the sun is shining. She must somehow get around to talking with the neighbor about that dead elm which could fall on the Veres' house.

Jim is about to begin a new job, half-time administering the college's adult liberal arts program. He will continue teaching and being vice-chairman of the math department. Last night, he did not sleep - for the first time in quite a while. He might want to start sleeping alone again.

June 18th. Barbara's strategy for dealing with the upcoming appointment is to assume the news will be bad and try to prepare herself. Perhaps that is why having an extra week is so welcome.

June 21st. Summer is two hours old. She has finished breakfast and will be playing tennis in half an hour. There are matters she does dwell on, without having the quiet time to write them down. She is in the middle of a good book on women writers by Blanche Gelfant, who feels that relying on one's own authority is the supreme achievement.

June 29th. Barbara has now read some of the books that were missing from the medical school library last year. She wishes the books had been there last year. The books said things about patients' helplessness and fear of being abandoned. If her surgeon was aware of those problems, he had played into both - ignoring her letter and suggesting she might want to switch doctors. She of course had no choice about doctors - unless she wanted to travel to Boston or New York, the way one of her friends does.

A book Barbara read at the medical school said cancer survivors were those who were fighters, denied the truth of their situation, and were able to express their anger. It talked a lot about "control", that the ultimate problem for cancer patients is that they have no control. Trying to learn about cancer is an attempt at control, according to the book.

Two robins are after the same worm. The worm gets away, even after being thoroughly stretched.

A butterfly lands on a small green crabapple, one of the millions. The tree men are supposed to come and trim.

Yesterday, only three readers showed up. Instead of reading, Barbara, Ellen and William talked for two solid hours. Mostly they talked about trust. They decided trust was a matter of expectation. Barbara doesn't know what to expect from the surgeon.

Something is smelling very sweet. Time to pick peas. The corn is not quite three feet high yet.



Barbara is startled, occasionally, to realize the effect her cancer is having on the people around her. No one discusses it with her unless she herself brings it up - but she can tell when others have been talking about her from a kind of renewed interest they seem to have in her. And, as she was playing tennis one day, she said to her opponent who was getting very red in the face that the two of them must have the same sort of metabolism. That was quickly denied.

The couple across the street are getting a divorce. Barbara's cancer was a reminder to the wife of her own mortality: if she really wanted a life of her own she had better get with it, so she had decided.

People Barbara hasn't seen for a while look startled to see her.

Jim seems at least less unhappy, maybe even happy. His new job, new people, totally new situations may serve him well.

July 6. This early afternoon is almost too hot to do anything at all. If a cure for cancer were found, what would happen to the economy? The economy did survive polio and TB cures. But cancer somehow seems bigger business.

No more cancer reading. She will just barge through next week as best she can.

July 16. After all, it's impossible to ignore cancer this week. The President has just been diagnosed as having colon cancer. News programs, special reports and the papers are full of it.

Chapter 39

“All is Straw”

July 20th. Barbara wonders what to do.

The problem is, something was found, at her checkup, and a piece of tissue was taken for biopsy. In the usual best of all possible worlds, the surgeon said it was probably nothing. The results might be in this week, but his nurse would be on vacation. The nurse would call the week after. And he almost forgot to say they would be making the regular appointment for her in four months.

Barbara will be on the Cape, the week the nurse will call, to bring her mother back for the month of August.

Barbara looks up to the sky. The tree has been pruned, which was a mistake. The sun is beating down through its clipped top. Too hot.

Should she have had more radiation? Yesterday she asked the nurse when intestinal problems would end and was told perhaps never.

What next for treatment? In one of the latest cancer magazines, Barbara had read that progesterone had about a 25 percent cure rate. Somewhere else, she read it only delayed the inevitable. She doesn't trust herself enough to even consider refusing to return, which seems to be her only option.

Should she go to a psychiatrist again? For perspective? Psychiatrists go on vacation in August.

Psychiatrists are stressful too, and time-consuming. Also a little boring. A psychiatrist might be a good idea in any case, for support in the future.

Easiest is to go along with whatever gets suggested. Path of least resistance once again.

In the waiting room of the Cancer Center this time, except for one clearly nervous man (“You're new, this is your first time, isn't it dear.”) everyone looked upbeat. A hairless child walked for her chemotherapy without batting an eye. An older woman with a wig told her companion: “You see? It's cheerful here. It isn't so bad.”

Barbara waited an hour, but she had a good book - which she took into the office with her for the waits there.

Afterwards she forgot her umbrella and had to return for it. The waiting room was full. The “dear” receptionist, looking frazzled, said, when Barbara asked if her umbrella had brought there to the desk, “Well, I wouldn’t know.” Barbara found it where she had left it, under a chair.

A psychiatrist would help make things easier for the family. Barbara guesses if she were alone she might go along with treatments more easily. A long drawn-out death is so hard on everyone. She has yet to see a family manage cancer well. Maybe she should go to the psychiatrist who had taken out all the books she has been reading in the medical school library.

While she had been waiting for her appointment, a young doctor had come up to the receptionist asking for her record. So she had told the nurse that it would be okay for him to come in. “Are you sure you don’t mind?” “Of course I mind, wouldn’t you? But still, he can come in.”

She had asked the surgeon if a cancer cell from one place turned into, for instance, a lung cell when it metastasized. He’d gone into a long speech about baloney, salami and cheese, each of which could be moved around but never themselves changed. So Barbara guessed the answer to her question must be no. And then the surgeon went into an extraordinary tale about people on an island founded by Aquinas. The people, when asked what umbilical cords were for, answered that God knew and, because he had created man in his own image, man would know too. All Barbara could remember about Aquinas was his “All is Straw” at the end of his “Summa”, relative to his beatific vision.

What she has decided to do, finally, is call the surgeon’s secretary and ask if the nurse would write her a note when she returns, instead of calling, because she, Barbara, will be away.

July 21st. Barbara just read an article on “Cancer Surgery and the Life After It”, including about seeking psychiatric help. The psychiatrist who had been reading the medical school books was quoted in the article.

She has thought of another problem cancer people have. The sickening patient seems to lose track of how she/he comes across to others. Should she give up the Women’s Chorus - just as she is getting the Cantata readings in gear? Thank goodness for the readers. They can take anything, Barbara truly believes. Chalk up another for Shakespeare, whose words, the poetry, grow richer even as their meanings become more elusive, or maybe that’s the source of the author’s power.

On the chance she really does have a case against further treatment, a psychiatrist might stiffen her backbone.

She cherishes her privacy: but in fact the chances are good she has less privacy than she realizes. After all, the surgeon’s student, and no doubt others like him whom she is not aware of, know all about her. Or at least their side of it.

Right now Jim is climbing a mountain with the faculty and students

involved in his new job. Barbara was a little afraid of spending the day alone. The article she just read says also: "waiting for a final diagnosis can be a long and distressing period." She is aware of a backlog of tears. But, after all, it has been a lovely morning.

July 24. Barbara has telephoned the psychiatrist she had seen to begin with. He was willing to see her right away. He looked exhausted. He said he would not be on vacation in August. What had tipped the scales was that Barbara suddenly realized that either arranging for a substitute conductor for the cantatas or calling at least the August one off would become a real production if she couldn't arrange for one or the other by this very weekend when everyone would be together for this month's final run-through. So many people were involved, instrumentalists and the tenors and basses as well as the women.

The psychiatrist telephoned Pathology and found out the results would be in Tuesday afternoon. He said he would arrange for the surgeon to telephone her Wednesday. She had had to wait for the psychiatrist almost an hour, but she had her wonderful book. She was becoming a veteran of waiting. He tried to accomplish two things at once, to reassure her medicine was making great strides and also that terrible things do happen to others and, eventually, to oneself.

She has just telephoned the surgeon's secretary, who said Barbara didn't need to cancel any of her own activities to wait for the phone call from the surgeon and that the lab reports weren't in yet. Barbara said as a matter of fact she happened to know they were ready yesterday. So the secretary said she would go to Pathology and get them and put them on the surgeon's desk.

The sky is bright blue, the air is cool and the birds sing. If this is dying, why not! No, this is living. But from all the frustrations with the medical world, each time it seems she really does die a little. She wants to die only once, please.

5:00 PM. The surgeon finally called. He said he had not had time to go down to Pathology to read her slides. And Barbara didn't tell him they were right there on his desk.

So, bad news, no doubt. Thank God she has done all that reading. Also thank God he called. He said he wanted to see her in the morning. She said she had a cantata rehearsal. Silence. Finally he said to come at 12:15. She is making life hard for him.

Time to think about priorities. The cantata readings. Her mother. She will get a substitute conductor. She will try to get Peter to stay with her mother - maybe. All that is going to be so hard. She must - no, make that will - accept treatment....

Suddenly she is very tired. She hopes she can get through the next few days gracefully.

It is going to be very very hard.

Chapter 40

And On....

It is the last week of September. Does she or doesn't she finally feel better. Will she or will she not be able to sit under the apple tree, right now, for more than a few minutes. She had not succeeded in eliciting sympathy from the surgeon for her continuing low fever and nausea. Rage, but relief too.

How good to be out here once again. A squirrel jumps up on the table, not expecting any one to be there, scaring them both.

Why is she writing again. Had her French grandfather enjoyed writing? When Barbara and her mother had returned to France together in the spring of 1983, Barbara had taken her grandfather's notebooks to the town clerk's office, in the next village, to use the xerox machine there to make copies. Back in the United States, her mother had translated the notebooks into English for the American descendants.

Now there was something else for the descendants, too. Last winter, when Barbara had visited her mother on the Cape she had helped empty drawers where, among other items, nine large linen sheets were stored. Mother had embroidered them during the course of the year of her engagement to Dad. At the time, Mother had not considered that, in the United States, in New York City, there would be no washerwomen to take the sheets down to the river. At first Mother had taken the sheets to a Chinese laundry, the one where two cute little Chinese babies played in the window. But the cost had been exorbitant. Then for a while she had tried washing them herself and lugging them to the roof of the apartment house to dry, staggering under their wet weight. Finally she had put away her beautiful embroidered sheets.

On the Cape, Barbara had rescued the sheets from mice, though they had not made much headway nibbling through the heavy linen. And, during the two weeks before going into the hospital a second time, to keep busy she had cut out the handsomely embroidered monograms, each a different design, while Mother watched. Barbara took the monograms into town to be framed. And a few days before Mother returned to the Cape, the monograms

were ready and how beautiful they were, one for each descendant, Barbara and her two, Richard and his five. Mother was overwhelmed, unable to believe she herself had designed and accomplished such beautiful work. Also she said: "Does that make me an ancestor, now?" Mother wrote to her sister immediately, who had made sheets too, though she had used hers all along until a washing machine, unable to cope with such heavy material, was installed at Prats.

Here under her magic apple tree, Barbara is beginning to feel better, not tired at all. And next week she will be taking over the Bach Group again, with Cantata 198. The last rehearsal and final run-through the end of July had gone well, of Cantata 78. Someone said how each Cantata they were working on seemed to be the best.

Immediately after that last rehearsal, Barbara had walked up to the Cancer Center, going directly to the surgeon's office, as he had asked her to do, without stopping to check in at the reception desk. She found a note on his door asking her to wait for him inside.

When he came, he told her she had had a recurrence of the cancer. There were several options open to her, none of them very good, with the possible exception of further surgery. She could have what little else was left after her first operation removed, followed by radiation treatment with implants.

By the time the surgeon had finished what he had to say, Barbara knew only that, since she had not had lunch yet after a long morning, she was very hungry. They left the office together.

She would have to, and did, telephone her brother, her kids and her mother. The operation would be soon, to avoid starting drugs. And she called up her conductor friend to see if she would take over the Bach Group again. She would. What a relief!

One of several friends with cancer called to tell Barbara that she too had had a recurrence but she wasn't telling anybody but wanted Barbara to know she was not alone. Barbara had trouble thinking of an appropriate answer.

Before telling her mother, Barbara asked her cousin to be there with her. The news was indeed quite a blow. Mother decided not to come for her scheduled visit, at first. But by evening she wanted to come after all. Barbara and Jim decided to drive down to the Cape to get her and her car immediately after the final Cantata run-through.

It was not easy having her mother with them, mostly because of her mother's deafness. Jim and her mother seemed to manage well enough when Barbara was in the hospital. But after she came home, Mother complained Jim never talked loud enough, and Jim cringed when Mother talked too loud. Barbara retreated to the sofa, whether she felt like it or not. Finally she lectured them both, saying that they must pay attention to each other and quit complaining to her. After all, they had managed when she wasn't

there.

Yet everyone, friends and family had to agree Mother was extraordinary. During the two weeks before Barbara went into the hospital, never knowing exactly when, Mother learned how to run the household by herself.

Communications with the hospital were pretty bad, which puzzled Barbara and infuriated Jim. Finally she concluded they were so bad because the surgeon's nurse, who was probably in charge of co-ordinating his schedule, was on vacation during the time Barbara had insisted on finding out about her test results.

Part of the difficulty of not knowing when what was going to happen was that a number of Barbara's friends were pressuring her to get second opinions. But she knew from her own reading how serious a recurrence of her kind was. She had not known, though, that an operation was even possible.

Mother's greatest joy seemed to be going out to the, by now, poor old weedy garden, picking herbs and vegetables. Elizabeth came, several times. Peter came for his birthday, but he at least could stick to his plans of going to the island, the end of summer. Jim could not.

Barbara entered the hospital August 13. She walked there. In the admissions office, she said she preferred a single room, but if one was not available she would prefer not to be moved if one did become available while she was there. The young man admitting her asked if he should make that a policy for the future as well. Barbara answered yes, as her heart sank. These were the little moments in which one learned about, could not evade, confronting what was ahead, continuing and worsening sickness.

Barbara was escorted to a 4-bed ward on the 8th floor. One other woman was there, a French Canadian, who said hello, which turned out to be one of the few English words she knew. Barbara was given a bed by a window. Soon two more women were in the other two beds. Nobody seemed very sick, and the woman next to Barbara was disgusted she was there at all.

A couple of people from radiology, one of whom Barbara had met last year, came to talk with her. Barbara was warned she would have only an hour's care a day during the time she had the implants, how many implants and for how long would be determined.

After that the anesthetist came and said Barbara could go to sleep tonight and not have to wake up at all till after the operation. And she was given permission to go outside the hospital that evening. That possibility had never occurred to her. So she walked home for about an hour and then came back. She was given four tiny white pills, handed over by a nurse who looked a little nervous....

Someone was trying to put a pillow under her head. Jim said goodbye, he would see her tomorrow.

Tomorrow, the resident doctor, who was a woman about Peter's age, said something about what a day Barbara had had yesterday. Slowly Barbara

discovered the operation, which had begun at 9:00, had not ended till 5:00. Jim said later he had been told there were technical difficulties. He and Barbara's mother had expected to hear something by 2:00 at the latest and had not had a good afternoon. Barbara was told something about many transfusions and that the radiation she had received last year had done more damage than expected. But she would not have to have implants.

Liquid from many bottles through many pathways was dripping into her arm. She could eat ice chips.

The anesthetist came to talk with her. He said she had been awake in the recovery room, which she couldn't remember. She had been under lamps. Gradually, after he left, she did begin to remember - lots of green, lots of light, talk of blankets, talk of - leukemia! Panic. But eventually she found out, from another anesthetist who came to see her the following week, that there could have been talk in the recovery room about leukemia. The day before Barbara's operation, a friend of the anesthetist had had a splenectomy because of leukemia.

That first day after the operation, Mother came to visit. The visit must have been very hard for her. Mother hated hospitals....

The French Canadian woman suddenly became much sicker and was operated on "again", they said, wheeled away and wheeled back quite soon, it seemed to Barbara, though perhaps her sense of time was askew. The one who was disgusted at being in the hospital was allowed to go home, and a quiet cheery older woman, who had had a breast removed, took her place.

Barbara spoke to the French Canadian's son, who was a priest, saying she could speak French and would try to help. How sick and frightened the woman was. But she also seemed accustomed to attention, as if that were her right. During the night the woman called out for help almost without pause. Finally Barbara sang some French songs, feeling foolish. But the songs did help. The next day, though, the woman nearly went off her head. Barbara, able to get up now, went next to her, held her hand and sang the songs again. The woman began to sing too. Her son came often and stayed long. What patience he had. Finally the woman went to sleep, or was drugged, just as the evening supper trays came. The cheery lady in the bed next to Barbara tried to persuade the son to eat his mother's supper. He took only coffee, as he kept watch.

Barbara was beginning to feel very sick. A sympathetic nurse began grumbling about the incredible quantities of antibiotics being dripped into Barbara.

Barbara knew there were empty rooms down the hall, now, and begged, finally, to be transferred to one of them. A nurse wheeled her, bed and all, to a tiny room full of air-conditioning noise. But it had its own bathroom, with no one near to worry about waking up. What small things bliss can be made of. She worked out a system of how to managed all the items dripping

into her and dripping out of her....

After a long while, the overworked nurse brought in her belongings, asking her to identify her clothes. Barbara could hardly believe that only three days ago she had actually worn those clothes. Along with her books, by mistake the nurse also brought along a Gideon Bible. The next day Barbara returned the Bible - to the cheery lady who had by then moved into Barbara's place by the window. She was deeply religious. Perhaps bringing back the Bible would be a good omen, they both hoped, since this was the day the cheery lady and her husband were to hear from her doctor whether or not she would need further treatment. (At the end of the day, she, along with her husband who had waited all afternoon, still had had no word.)

The next night, Sunday, something strange and terrifying happened. Barbara woke up to find herself screaming "no, no, no...." A nurse came running, no one Barbara had seen before. When Barbara realized where she was, she was able to calm herself down. Had she woken other people along the hall?

7 o'clock Monday morning finally came. Like a giant machine, the hospital changed gears from weekend to weekday business. Barbara, now on a clear liquid diet, decided to distract herself from the night before by trying to solve the problem of having tea brought to her instead of coffee. Getting tea or coffee seemed to be a matter of chance, with the odds in favor of coffee. Ordinarily she liked coffee, but not now for some reason.

Later that morning, a friend who worked at the hospital came by with a small jar of roses just picked from her garden. Outside it was raining, and the roses were still wet.

The next night, Barbara could hardly believe it, she woke up screaming again - not "no, no" this time, just screaming. Not in terror either, this time, just screaming. What was happening to her? Brain damage? After a while she went out in the hall to ask a nurse for some hot water to go with a tea bag she had succeeded in having put on her supper tray, even though her cup had coffee in it.

In the course of her research on the tea problem, she had learned there was always hot water "on the floor". The nurse didn't know if Barbara was supposed to have hot water, but the intern working with the surgeon happened to be at the desk and authorized it. Barbara filled with hot water the cup she had kept from the supper tray (she had dumped the coffee into her sink). She took it back to her room, dangled the tea bag in it and successfully threw the tea bag into the waste basket. Then she settled down to try to assess her present situation, trying to comfort herself with the lovely tea which was good indeed. Brain damage? She had been anesthetized for so long....

She mustn't panic.

The next morning, the surgeon himself came. He had come to see her before, off and on, looking exhausted. He looked better now. She told him she had probably better talk with the psychiatrist. After all, she couldn't just continue waking everybody up every night. The surgeon agreed and said he would get in touch with him.

That day, everything seemed a bit strange in the hospital. There seemed to be many doctors around. They talked and she could hear them, her room being close to the desk, separated only by a broom-closet. "Well," said one, "at least there seems to be a little life around here, now." More ominously, two doctors passed her door discussing, incredibly, "Vere and Bates", commiserating not with them but with their doctor, it seemed. Barbara knew Mrs. Bates, who had died of endometrial cancer, not recently but years ago. Her husband had long since remarried. Mrs. Bates had been a Christian Scientist and had not gone to the hospital at all until the very end, no doubt against her will even then. Had the doctors outside Barbara's room been talking about her? Well, at least they could have called the two of them Mrs. instead of just their last names.

Now that Barbara was in a private room, Mother came every afternoon at 2:00 and stayed until 4:00, bringing her knitting, trying to persuade Barbara to take a nap. That was very pleasant. Mother had done that when she had been sick as a little girl, even as her mother's mother had sat with her when she had been a little girl in France.

That night, again Barbara woke up screaming. No, she hadn't been dreaming, any more than the two other nights. Nor, except possibly the first time, had there been any emotion. This time she might even have felt - pleased? She had had an impression of being part of some kind of ceremony, a green-jungle ceremony but a little separate from it, above it maybe. Her role, she definitely had one, was to provide the sound-effects. It began to come to her that, the operation, good lord, had she somehow been there? She began thinking back. She had been puzzled why, after the operation, whenever she started going to sleep she would get very cold. She had managed to get and to hang on to an extra blanket. She would turn up the thermostat in her room. And she would put on her sweater. Right before really going to sleep, she would find herself coughing, choking even. She would have to crank up her bed and drink some ginger ale which she learned to have handy at the corner of the table. This would wake her up. But, since she had become strong enough to raise herself without having to crank up the bed, she was now able to continue going to sleep, ever since - yes, ever since Sunday night, which was the night of her first scream.

You got cold during anesthesia. You got a tube put down your throat. And Barbara guessed, no, suddenly, once again, she knew, though she would doubt again, she was reliving the operation.

The psychiatrist came the next morning. Barbara asked him and the

intern to please ask people not to talk outside her door. That request made them think she had been hallucinating. She began to wonder about that too, herself, until she read in the papers a couple of weeks later that Mrs. Bates, the second one, had died.

The psychiatrist prescribed some pills. By the end of the week Barbara could only walk in a shuffle and came very close to falling down, alone in the shower.

She was assured the nightmares would stop when she got home.

Ah but one lovely result of all this was that she was being served tea all the time, now. Then she was put on a different diet, including delicious soups. Then she was on a regular diet.

She continued to wake up screaming.

Then she went home, nearly two weeks after she had come. Her screaming did stop after the first night at home, when Jim, who was still up, came to her. Before the scream, she had had the impression of being wheeled on a tall bed by people who seemed very tired and grateful she wasn't making a fuss, which she would have liked to do except for being aware of their feelings. In the hospital, Barbara had seen a man being wheeled into his room after an operation and being moved from a high stretcher-on-wheels to a high, cranked up, bed. So Barbara knew this would be her last scream. She believed the re-living of her operation was now over.

A few days after she came home, Barbara went to see the psychiatrist, barely able to stagger into his office. He agreed she could stop taking the medication. She saw him again right after her first post-hospital physical check-up. They made arrangements to meet the next week, setting the day and time. Then the night before that, he called to ask her where she had been. It turned out either he or she had put down the wrong time, a time when she couldn't have come but she didn't add that. He had to be somewhere else at the time she thought they had arranged for. She said, then, after thanking him for having come to the hospital, she would really just as soon not come again. He agreed to that but made another appointment in the middle of November, saying she could call him any time.

Chapter 41

Going Along

Once again Barbara's life is running smoothly. More than that, it is as if her projects were coming into their own. Enough people are committed to the Bach Cantata readings now that those readings will surely continue. And the Shakespeare group, after - has it really been ten years? - is just about used to the author's language. Themes and ideas, lost before, come into focus more easily.

She is out under her tree again, on this cool, blue October day. October. Already. She feels as if the cancer recurrence episode has been a bad dream and that no time should have passed during that dream. It should still be August.

She takes long walks near where she lives. There are many memories, especially ones connected with the walk by the nursery school. When Elizabeth went there, Barbara had a bike with a bike-seat for Elizabeth to ride on. Across from the school there is a small stream with a little bridge over it where, one spring morning, she and Elizabeth had stopped to watch a big dog who was standing in the water intently looking down at something.

Barbara can go swimming again, at the college pool. She and another friend had wondered together, out loud, at the pleasure of coming into the gym, seeing the same people, getting warmed through to the bone in the sauna, swimming, then going home so refreshed.

Why should her next brief doctor's appointment so haunt her, though she knows now she will continue going for check-ups, going along with whatever is recommended, right to the bitter end. This is the expected way to proceed in the culture of which she is a part. Anyway she tends to do what is expected of her, if only because that usually takes less of her, now more than ever, so precious time and energy.

Last week, Barbara went to a talk on Shakespeare's ghost writers. The talk was given by a woman, who had been on the faculty at Yale and was now on the faculty at Harvard. A distinguished retired professor came to the talk too, smoking a pipe as professors always did in his day. Most people

near him moved away. Then the young professor who had inherited his office entered the room and stopped to talk with him. The young professor invited him to come and see his old office, sometime, newly re-decorated and with a handsome picture on the wall over the fireplace of the retired professor himself. Visibly affected, the retired professor almost got up at once. And he said how good "a log or two" in the fireplace there felt when the northeast wind blew.

A very young woman in a short skirt came and sat down next to the retired professor to share his ash tray. He looked uncomfortable. There were many more women than men at the lecture. Times had changed.

The point of the lecture was that the mystery surrounding Shakespeare's authorship may have been part and parcel of the design of the plays, part of the questions dealt with in the plays about identity itself.

At her last doctor's appointment, Barbara was told the next one would be in four weeks. The notice came in the mail with the appointment scheduled at the same time as the Women's Chorus rehearsal. The surgeon had no other time: The following week he would be going on vacation.

Barbara considered canceling the appointment. But just then the telephone rang. Her appointment had been changed from Tuesday to Friday. At first the secretary said: "I tried to get you yesterday - gosh I hope I haven't given that appointment to someone else." During the secretary's ensuing computer search, Barbara said what a job the secretary's must be. The secretary responded by telling Barbara some of what the surgeon was up to. Barbara suddenly wasn't sure she wanted her life in the hands of someone all that busy. No wonder he could look so tired. Then Barbara tried to explain to the secretary how important it was to her to have her appointments any time but Tuesday mornings - or Wednesday afternoons. But she could hear someone else talking to the secretary at the same time.

But she did get her Friday appointment!

She has come out to the apple tree. Last weekend, Peter rolled five of the largest elm tree stumps over here, for foot rests and sitting places. The elm trees belonging to the neighbors had been cut down at last. Barbara is reading the autobiography of Catherine Drinker Bowen. There are descriptions of Catherine's brother Henry, the one responsible for making available the Cantata scores Barbara is using. Other than her own autobiography, Catherine wrote biographies of famous men. She admits this may have resulted from having been brought up in a family of four older gifted brothers, a family not particularly interested in female thoughts or conversation. So Barbara, brought up in a boys' school, begins to wonder if that's why she is so interested in Shakespeare and Bach, the masters of their fields, wanting to master them.

She doubts she will master either. She had at least hoped to learn to distinguish the Cantatas by date. She had had the idea of working on the first and last of the Cantatas, according to the Drinker catalogue. But recent research has shown that the first one was in fact written by somebody else, and the last one was written in mid-career. How curious that even those steeped in Bach had themselves made such mistakes.

The words of the cantatas tend to be bleak, obsessed with death. Perhaps today's obsession with not-death is a kind of backlash. Barbara is trying to think of life and death as a continuum. A friend of hers says you have to have faith in the existence of future life for that. Sometimes Barbara even has trouble with faith in the existence of present life, but for its pleasure and pain. Did Bach really have faith, not to mention enough of it to get him through his own death, possibly the consequence of a really dumb eye operation?

Barbara's mother appears to have become re-invigorated, from the tone of her last letter. Barbara's cancer recurrence may have been just what was needed to restore Mother's self-confidence. Perhaps, too, Mother's friends are rallying around. And maybe she is using her hearing aid more, after Barbara's lecture, though Barbara is a little ashamed about that now.

Barbara's long-scheduled appointment with the psychiatrist comes just before her next appointment with the surgeon. She has looked up the pills he prescribed in a drug book. They are for psychotics who vocalize. Wow. Luckily, she didn't experience anywhere near all the possible side effects from them. She had also better go read up some more on anesthesia, to see if she can find references to anything like her experiences. In the local newspaper, there was an article on people who had experienced near-death which described feelings that had sounded a little like the feelings she had had, waking up one of the screaming nights.

In her next encounters with doctors, though, she mustn't expect too much of herself. If she really is psychotic - hysterical, schizophrenic - there's truly not much they can do for her except feed her pills.

She really does want to avoid pills.

Plus she wants to avoid schedule conflicts with the surgeon.

Barbara did find a book in the medical school library which included a couple of chapters on the psychological effects of anesthesia. And it really was possible she was one of those who wake up under anesthesia. The emotional load of a patient adds to possible problems. Time also matters, having enough to prepare oneself, which Barbara had sensed intuitively. Also, long operations. Nothing is well understood. There should be more anesthesia, rather than less.

This morning she was reading sitting at the breakfast table. She happened to look up and out. The sun was breaking through early morning fog, mist rising from the yard, water drops on the apple tree sparkling. Time to go play tennis. She feels good while she is playing. Afterwards, though, her stomach hurts.

She has gone to visit her friend Kate, whom she hadn't seen for too long, who had left a large pumpkin from her garden on Barbara's doorstep for Hallowe'en. When Barbara called to say thank you, Kate said to come on out for a walk before the start of hunting season. And the walk had been magic, up and around the hill above Kate's house. Friends are so very important. But if you have more than a very few, it is hard to keep up with them.

Feeling well is taking some of the heat off the dread of her appointment with the psychiatrist. She found a letter in the back of the most recent Anesthesiology journal, saying that awareness during operations and difficulties afterwards are on the increase. It described what she herself has experienced and pointed out that doctors had better start paying attention.

Bach continues to write about death as a freeing. In this month's cantata, #80, there is a tenor/alto duet, near the end, with violin and English horn, bittersweet, ending with descending wildly chromatic harmonies which suddenly resolve into a major chord.

There are silly, fun, unpredictable problems to solve in connection with the Bach group. Last week, for the first time in ten years the police checked on the parking meters outside the library where the chorus meets. After the rehearsal was over, the members went away - and then came back, carrying parking tickets. Feeling rather like a mother hen, Barbara went to meet and talk with the police chief, giving him the tickets. She persuaded him and "Henry", with whom the chief talked over an intercom, to continue giving the chorus immunity on Tuesday mornings.

Coping with doctors and with hospitals is so hard. It must be for everyone, not just for her. This morning the psychiatrist called, saying he couldn't meet with her today. So, over the phone, she talked to him about what she had been reading, about awareness during anesthesia. He said they should get together next week, he with her record. This might be something that should be in her record.

She should concentrate not on being stood up by the psychiatrist but on what a great chance this may be to come to her own rescue. Can she manage that?

In another medical journal, she read that people who have nightmares after anesthesia may very well be the lucky ones, that awareness is quite common and most people don't talk about it because they are afraid of being thought insane.

And now Christmas is coming. The Cantata reading went so well! There won't be another until the end of January, because of Christmas. They have decided to work on a few carols to sing at the local nursing home. They had not intended to give nursing home concerts again, as they had done at one time, but one of their members is at the nursing home now. They are not sure it will be a good idea to sing for her, but they have decided to try.

They did try. And the chorus member was waiting when they arrived at the nursing home. The singers stood around her in her wheelchair, as if she were still one of them. And at the end she requested "Masters In this Hall", reminded by the similarity of the chorus of another carol. She was so glad to have been with them again, and they were so glad to have been with her.

Chapter 42

Kate

Barbara saw too little of Kate any more, Kate who had helped so much with starting the Arts Association across the river. Barbara was only vaguely aware that Kate had since divorced and was now living with an older woman friend, taking care of that friend who, thanks to Kate, no longer had to move into a senior citizens community. Then, last summer, when Kate heard about Barbara's recurrence of cancer, she asked Barbara to come for lunch. Barbara learned that Kate's mother had died of cancer. It was difficult for Kate to talk about it. And then she asked Barbara to come for lunch again, this time bringing their friend Annie. Annie, who sang with the Bach Group, had had cancer for three years. Kate wanted to try to get back in touch with her too.

For this lunch, a date was set far ahead, in October. Annie and Barbara came together, to the small, cozy old brick house in the country surrounded by flaming maples and blue sky. On the way, Annie told Barbara about having known Kate a long time. They were both artists and had had some differences of opinion which involved Annie's mother too, who had attended the same arts school which Kate had gone to. One of quite a number of tragedies in Annie's life was that she had not been allowed to go to art school herself.

Barbara was beginning to get acquainted with Annie's mother, a very difficult person, now in a nearby nursing home. Barbara would stop in to say hello after visiting one of her own friends there.

The lunch that day was magical and included Kate's older friend who seemed to be growing younger and stronger again thanks to Kate's support and care. They all planned to get together again in May at Barbara's when her apple tree was in bloom.

But Annie died in the middle of March. One evening Barbara had called Annie to say she would come to see her tomorrow but would call again right before coming to make sure Annie really was up to a visit. And they kept on talking, over the phone, about doctors, about looking funny, about how

Annie's husband was actually learning to cook after all, about one of her sons coming to be with her. Barbara asked Annie if she hurt and Annie answered that, when she did, she took a pill the doctor had given her and now she felt great. But, she added, she was afraid of what was coming.

The next morning, Annie's husband called to tell Barbara not to come, Annie had died during the night.

The day after Annie's death, Barbara stopped by to see Annie's mother as usual, after visiting her own friend. She brought Annie's mother a pussy willow and a sprig of heather. She stuck them in the dirt with the tired-looking poinsettia by the bed. Annie's mother said: "I don't know what's to become of me. I'm among strangers." This is what she had said to Annie, the last time she had seen her: "If you die, what will become of me?"

There was a male nurse on duty, which, after all, seemed to be what Annie's mother was really worried about just then, being taken care of by him. Her hands, when Barbara touched them, were ice cold. The two of them ended up talking about him, the male nurse, in his presence even, for he was helping the woman in the next bed. Meanwhile an elderly gentleman in a wheelchair was directing an orchestra just outside in the hall. Annie's mother said, begging: "I don't belong here: no, I don't, do I?" She continued: "Please, I don't want visitors...."

The next week, with misgivings Barbara dropped by again. Annie's mother said her son was coming for Annie's memorial service which would be the last Saturday of the month. Then he would be taking her back to California. How was she going to survive the trip - but she couldn't stay here. Barbara wondered about the trip a little herself, although she also felt that, if there was ever a survivor, Annie's mother was it.

Annie had been deeply religious. So Barbara decided to try mentioning God or something. Quickly she was answered by: "No, no, it's Jesus you must pray to - you must pray to Jesus, you know that don't you?" Of course. That's just what Annie would have said! Suddenly, for a minute Barbara saw Annie in her mother, could hear her voice, and missed her very much. And Annie would not just happen to come by, any more, while Barbara was there, maybe bringing a soft blouse for her mother to make her more comfortable and pretty. But the blouse, or whatever Annie brought, would always be wrong. Barbara and Annie, if they left together, would try to laugh about that.

Barbara said: "Well, no I really don't know, but that is just what Annie would say, trying to make me understand. I'm glad you are here - to remind me of her...." Barbara wasn't sure what she was trying to say, on the verge of tears, but she could imagine she had actually got through, that for a minute they might have become close, she and Annie's mother, missing Annie. She wished so much Annie and her mother could have managed at least something like this....

Barbara wanted to give something to Annie's mother, to take back with her to California. She bought a small lavender hand towel and trimmed it with some of the lace Barbara's own mother had made. Annie's mother usually wore lavender. Also, Annie had once given Barbara six lace bobbins she had inherited from her Swiss grandfather who, a wood carver, had perhaps made them himself. Those six bobbins, so hard to come by, had been enough for Barbara to add to the ones she had already, to make a new lace pattern.

Annie's mother wouldn't even unfold the tissue paper to look at the towel. "There won't be room, I'm sure you understand." "Yes, I understand," said Barbara, not understanding at all, all at once feeling the two of them were in a kind of power struggle neither one of them quite understood.

Barbara had also brought one of the bobbins in her pocket to show Annie's mother. "No, no - I can't take anything with me."

Quickly Barbara said: "This is mine, I just wanted you to see it - and I wanted to know your father's name - did he make it?"

Annie's mother looked at the bobbin and then took it and held it.

"Annie gave me six of them," Barbara said.

"Why that's not enough to do anything with. Oh I don't think he made them - well, maybe." And then she pronounced a huge long German name which Barbara didn't dare ask for again. She took back the bobbin and listened once again to how nervous the poor old woman was about her trip to California. Barbara said something about trust and faith and then giggled, saying: "Look who's talking!" and said goodbye and left.

Barbara thought about giving the little towel to Annie's daughter, who had been hoping for a big wedding in August. What would happen about that wedding now? Annie had barely got herself through Thanksgiving and Christmas. No, Annie's daughter had enough to deal with. Barbara put the towel away in a closet, still in the unopened tissue.

Kate telephoned the morning before Annie's memorial service. "Barbara, I have to talk with you."

Barbara wasn't sure. She had a lot on her mind. The Bach group had been asked to sing. Barbara had also been asked to sing with the choir, which she had at one time directed, in which Annie had sung too. Plus, since she too had cancer, people would no doubt be looking at her, up there in plain sight with the choir, as if she would be next. Great. The only time Barbara had for herself was this time right now. She needed this time, but Kate needed it too, apparently. Oh well. "I'll be right there. See you."

On the way out the door, she turned around and got the hand towel from the closet. Maybe it could be for Kate.

Barbara drove to the little brick house, and then after all left the towel in the car before going to knock at the door. Kate came, looking not at all in disarray. And once again, Barbara was struck by how well and happy

Kate's friend was.

As the conversation deepened, Barbara slowly began to realize Kate had called to reach out to her, to help her. She was touched, even as she thought ruefully of her precious time gone down the drain. They talked very honestly about themselves and each other, their mothers, their daughters: Kate, Barbara, and Annie. Kate knew Annie's mother and had not gone to visit her. "She drove everyone up the wall." "But, you know, I can't help but admire her - a real single-minded survivor, and that is important." "Is it? Are you sure?"

Kate walked out to the car with Barbara when she really did have to leave, admittedly refreshed. Dear Kate. They were talking about Annie's mother again. Barbara decided to try to tell Kate about the moment last week when she thought she might have got through to Annie's mother, talking about praying to Jesus. At that very incredible moment the sun broke through the clouds and Kate, smiling, began to shine too as she said: "Yes, pray to Jesus."

"Kate, I have a present for you, if you want it - it's already been turned down once by Annie's mother - " And Barbara started to cry. She really had been hurt by that rejection. How many times had Annie been hurt too, far more deeply. Kate started crying too, as Barbara tried to explain about lace being a pattern of tangled threads.

Kate opened the tissue and held the towel tenderly. It really was quite lovely. The lace was a continuing pattern of three diamond shapes within a varied mesh.

Barbara drove away. She looked through the rear-view mirror and saw Kate standing there still, holding the towel, looking after her. What an odd experience, even odder than the time Kate with her prayer group had perhaps, or surely, helped her before....

Barbara saw Kate after the memorial service and told her she was a healing person and that Barbara believed in Kate, at least, even if she didn't believe in all Kate believed in.

Chapter 43

Lace

Yes, Barbara does know how to make lace. Her mother taught her when she was nine years old, when she was recovering from measles. From France to Colorado, Mother had brought the lace-loom - made for her by her father when she herself was a girl - along with some bobbins, a few patterns, and a large supply of linen thread. Barbara learned the three patterns Mother had brought with her and made enough of one to trim the scarf on her dresser before putting it all away.

Barbara's grandmother had seen peasants making lace, one Sunday afternoon when the family was out for a walk. In that place, at that time (1910), everyone went on Sunday afternoon walks, formally dressed, little girls with hair curled with a curling iron (heated on a stove) and wearing hats with long ribbons and shoes that were too tight....

Barbara's grandmother had decided making lace looked like fun, quite different from the other needlework she was so good at. Somehow, she learned how and even managed to teach her younger daughter, who was not at all interested in needlework though she too subscribed to the magazine "Modes et Travaux" till the day she died. And many summers later, in the shed at Prats, Barbara and her mother came upon a box full of looms and bobbins. Barbara's grandmother, by then 98, had forgotten all about them. She watched with astonishment as Barbara and her mother washed away layers of sticky dust from the bobbins, outside on the kitchen steps.

When the Arts Association was starting up in the town across the river, it occurred to Barbara that making lace would be a good stunt to publicize a craft show being organized. She collected the old equipment from her mother and started making lace again.

Making lace sounds much more romantic than it really is. The laces Barbara could make were all simple trims. The linen thread she used, still from the supply her mother had brought, was heavy. But Barbara's lace making did serve its purpose. And Elizabeth learned to make one of the patterns to help with the exhausting hours involved in the lace making

demonstration. Barbara would ever after be in awe of crafts people who spend their days at fairs with smiles on their faces.

Some people wanted to learn how to make lace themselves. And, a gift from heaven, one person appeared who was a teacher.

Barbara decided to write an article about the teacher, about the teacher giving a lesson to one of the more persistent would-be lace makers. She persuaded a photographer friend of hers to take pictures for the article. Incredibly, the article was accepted and published right away by a magazine with a wide circulation. Barbara and the photographer, feeling they had hit the jackpot, split the fee. The lace maker learned what she needed to know. And the teacher received an order from someone in Connecticut for four heirloom handkerchieves, enough to keep her busy and solvent for the rest of her life.

One housebound lady who wanted badly to learn lace making was unable to go where the teacher lived. She had been accumulating lace making books and supplies for years but had never been able to figure out how to use them. Eventually Barbara found herself offering to come over at 2:30 next Thursday afternoon. There was a poetry reading at 4:00, so she would have a reason to leave after an hour. And maybe she could follow up with a few more Thursdays....

On Thursday, Barbara arrived through the snow at the kitchen door, after coming through a closed porch where she had begun to take off her boots. "No, no, no, come in!" said the lady who had been waiting right behind the door. "Your boots will stay warmer in here." The lady lived with her son and daughter-in-law. The kitchen, even though very clean and neat, looked used and comfortable, with a handy spot in it for boots and coats. The lady led the way from the kitchen through a dining room to a hall and up some stairs where there were lovely signed sketches of family members on the wall, and on into a sitting room. They walked directly to a small work table where the lady had collected what she thought she might need to start making lace. Barbara had brought one lace pattern, the one she herself had learned first, attached around a tube, originally a tube for cotton thread. By some miracle the tube slipped just perfectly over a "ham" which the lady had bought to fit into a basket. And she had already wound thread around some bobbins with a winder she used for weaving. So they could start right in!

But it turned out the winder wound thread the wrong way around, backwards. How odd. And the lady's pattern books, which she showed Barbara, all from England, described the basic lace braid backwards as well. Plus, the work in the books went from left to right, instead of from right to left. How very odd.

The professional teacher, who was from Sweden, made lace the way Barbara did (but better). So how did the English get turned around? They

also drove on the left side of the road: was there a connection?

Barbara warned the lady that her own was a pretty slap-dash way of making lace. But it was all she knew. Maybe after the lady learned what Barbara could teach, then the lady could continue on her own, teaching herself the way the books said, unlearning what she needed to of what Barbara taught her.

And so they began, tying the threads to pins and teaching and learning the crossing and twisting of the pairs of bobbins. It was a good thing Barbara had to leave for the poetry reading. Knowing when to stop was hard, and lace making did take concentration, at least at first. The lady was tired, but almost desperately eager. Barbara said she would be back next Thursday. Meanwhile, perhaps the lady had learned enough to continue the pattern.

The next Thursday, the lady telephoned Barbara, asking her to come to the front door because the kitchen floor had just been washed. Even though there had been a lot of new snow, the path to the front door was swept clean. Barbara managed to stomp most of the snow off her boots which she took off as soon as she stepped into the door and then carried up the stairs.

The lady had spent most of the week making and unmaking lace, hopelessly confused. The main thing really was to make lace under supervision, over and over again. This is what they did, both exhausted at the end of an hour when Barbara went off to another poetry reading.

The next Thursday, Barbara went through the kitchen door again. The weather was better, so she hadn't had to wear boots. On the way upstairs, they stopped in a sun room to see azaleas and some new orchids that had just bloomed. Next week there would be an exotic kind of lily.

Upstairs again, Barbara discovered the lady had very nearly managed to make lace, all by herself. Barbara had brought her own loom, this time, with a new pattern on it, which she set up while the lady worked on the old pattern, needing only occasional help. Barbara considered winding her bobbins the "right" way this time, because, wound the "wrong" way, the slip-knots on the bobbins tended to come undone. But the lady's bobbin winder, a real time saver, was there, a fact of life. So instead Barbara figured out a way to make the slip-knots in reverse. But then she couldn't tell or show the lady what she had just done. It was like it had been when she had tried to teach her left-handed son how to tie his shoes. At that time, luckily a slightly older little girl in the neighborhood, who was also left-handed, had come to the rescue.

After the new lace pattern was set up, the lady took a pencil and paper and wrote down exactly what Barbara was doing, every move. And by the next Thursday, the lady was making both lace patterns, the first with assurance and some speed.

The following Thursday, Barbara brought samples of some of the laces her mother was making. This time on the way upstairs, they detoured

into the living room to see three handsome hooked rugs which the lady had made. The week after, they decided to set up a much more complex pattern. Barbara took the pattern that was on her own loom off, and together she and the lady spent most of the afternoon setting up the new pattern and the bobbins for it. Even though spring was on its way, great fat snowflakes started falling outside the upstairs window. But inside they didn't even have to turn on the light. The afternoons were getting longer. Barbara started working on the new pattern, the lady writing down every move, pages. Barbara found the process of making each detail conscious very tiring. But the lady knew now that that was what she had to do. When she said later what a great teacher Barbara was, Barbara could only answer the pupil had known how to learn.

And now, Barbara said the only thing left she could teach was a variation of one part of the elaborate pattern, so that the next time should probably be the last, and anyhow she had to start digging up the garden. As it turned out, the lady had plans too, to visit her sister in Texas. They met one more time, agreeing to have a review when the lady returned from Texas in May. Just before Barbara left, refusing an offer of tea because it was time to start getting supper for Jim, they went into the lady's workroom where, among great supplies of materials mostly for weaving, there were several shelves full of different tiny cups and saucers. Each one had belonged to someone who had been important, her sisters, her mother, her aunts, her grandmothers, her great-grandmothers....

Barbara wandered home through the long shadows of the late but still warm afternoon, thinking that, even if she wasn't all that enthused about lace, it certainly did lead to special situations. And she really was interested in lace lore and in the origin of the patterns. Some of the patterns were identical to folk dance patterns, and to patterns for bell-ringing. One time she had been startled to find the first lace she had learned in a Flemish painting of the 1300's. Had it been brought to France by the crusaders? Somewhere she read that, in the fifteenth century, all the little communities in Italy had their own languages and their own lace patterns. Could that possibly mean there might be an intelligence not based on language but on - well, handcrafts? The lace maker who had been taught by the professional for the magazine article had some trouble talking, was thought perhaps to be marginally retarded. But she had picked up on the fundamentals of lace making with surprising, perhaps intuitive, ease. And she had created a panel for the window in her front door way beyond anything she had been taught. She had invited Barbara to come over and see.

In May, the review with the lady turned out to be a tea party for Barbara, with cucumber sandwiches and angel food cake and even a present wrapped in white tissue. The present was - a bobbin-winder which could wind in both directions!

Chapter 44

Spring

The weather has been warm and lovely all week. She told Jim about her pleasure in hanging out the laundry the first time this spring with birds singing and all. But he will never hang out laundry, or if he does it will be to get it done. Communication, so important for women, according to marriage manuals and articles, cannot be forced.

Over Easter, old old friends came to visit. At the end of dinner, they began talking about living wills. The friends have a mutual agreement to intervene for each other. Barbara said you don't know till the time comes what it is like, you can't decide ahead of time. And Jim agreed! She had thought they disagreed. He said: "I signed the living will for your sake, not mine."

So maybe she will refuse after all to go along with Jim allowing her to decide between - what - his life and his money? The nerve of him, putting her in that position. And she'll tell him so, when she has thought this out a little better. And wasn't she nice not to have put him in that position vis a vis herself! Here she had been thinking she was the selfish one!

She has been reading the book "Primal Scream", still stewing over why she had screamed in the hospital. The theory is, according to the book, you scream because you were deserted in childhood. Unlikely. She has been thinking about her childhood - and about Margaret! She hasn't thought about dear old Margaret for years, the maid who came when Barbara was born. Barbara loved her.

Some weekends Margaret went home to her daughter's. Richard and Barbara were not allowed to see if she had returned, Monday mornings, until they heard her footsteps at 7:00, coming up the cellar stairs. And then both of them would race into her arms.

Margaret was grateful to have the room and the little bathroom down in the basement. Barbara's mother even paid her, eight dollars a week. In 1931, during the depths of the depression, not everyone paid people, desperate for work even if only in exchange for room and board.

Margaret's husband was sick. Barbara remembers seeing him once, tall and thin, very white - almost blue. He lived with the daughter, in town, in a tiny yellow house on a bumpy street, bumpy because there were still car tracks from when there used to be trolleys.

Margaret was tireless. The only time Barbara ever saw her overwhelmed (and only momentarily) was when she bumped her head on the sofa frame, emerging from having reached for something underneath it. Later a small knob came up through the top of her pulled-back-into-a-knot gray hair. Her patience was - no, she was herself patience. Not pretend. Barbara was with her always.

Or almost always. Barbara remembers playing on the cellar stairs with a cardboard doll with felt clothes of all nations that could be stuck on and pulled off, being very bored, waiting for Mother and Richard to come home from town. Eventually Barbara went to town with them, to a nursery school connected with the grade school where her mother taught French and where Richard went. The nursery school was too noisy, too much going on. One morning the children were cooking jelly over a stove and Barbara fell in and burned herself and was glad to have to stay home with Margaret again for a while.

Margaret left when Barbara was five. Barbara couldn't imagine life without Margaret. But that was the year she started real school near where she lived, and she loved that. It was also the year her dad was away. She doesn't remember missing him, not even watching him shave in the morning, which was fun.

Barbara wonders if what she has gone through the past couple of years is more than what people were meant to go through. But she would have died without the fuss of operations, at least the first one. Dying might not have been much fun either. But you're supposed to die. You're not supposed to have operations.

Right now is fun, thinking about Margaret. And watching the first seeds grow that she has planted in little peat pots. Today is her aunt's 97th birthday. Mom drove to her aunt's nursing home with her cousin's widow the day before Easter and came home feeling depressed about getting old herself. Mother told Barbara about sitting, the next morning, Easter, at the kitchen table, feeling sad, looking out the window. And then she saw the next door neighbors and their three little girls come out together in bathrobes to look for Easter eggs and felt better.

How still it is, "Daffodils...that take the winds of March in beauty". The readers have just finished reading "The Winter's Tale." In this north country, the daffodils take the winds of April in beauty. Nor does rosemary (remembrance) winter here. Barbara has kept hers in the house. Rue (grace) does winter even here and is beginning to grow again in the garden, along with two mints, the parsley, and the chives. Also asparagus and even some

spinach. The peas aren't up yet, though, which she put in last week.

Barbara has kind of a headache, maybe from all the driving she has done the last couple of days, taking Mom home to the Cape after a two-week visit. On the Cape, spring was idyllic, cool and very windy, forsythia streaming.

Elizabeth called the other night, to say she was in the top tap-dance group, "dancing with the stars, Mom." Barbara does worry about - how hard Elizabeth dances, hurting her knees sometimes. But they are Elizabeth's knees and Elizabeth should be free to decide for herself what she does with them....

During Mother's visit, Barbara realized how totally at Mom's disposal she still is. It seems to be ingrained. If Mother had to live with them, Barbara would have to learn to deal with her better. And truly Mother is not unreasonable.

Mom had great opportunities, this visit, for what seems to be her favorite sport of righteous indignation - about the ongoing divestment excitement on campus, President Reagan's decision to bomb Libya, and the women students marching around campus to protest discrimination after one of them had got a black eye, walking alone one night, ("Really!"). Jim made a couple of noble attempts to discuss such issues with her but gave up after a while. And after maybe a week of being met with silence, Mother admitted that great emotional and opinionated political discussions was her style and the style of the French family, sometimes to the point where they could hardly talk to each other anymore.

On the way back from the Cape, Barbara bought a McDonald's cheese-burger and some orange juice for a picnic by the skating pond, right by the cemetery where her dad was buried, before going to visit her aunt in the nursing home two miles away. It was raining a little. Dad's name on the large stone, where everybody's name is who is in that plot, was finally darkening, becoming more clear. But his initials on his own small stone were not clear. She got down by the stone to check if there was mud left over from winter or had the stone cutter really done a lousy job.

Back in the car, starting to eat, she smelled something. Her hands were dirty - why of course they were. She got out of the car to clean them on the wet grass. That was when she realized her finger nails on one hand were hurting. She looked more carefully and saw she had scraped the tops of her nails off! She couldn't believe she had done that.

At the nursing home, her aunt was in bed, eyes closed. Barbara decided to stay anyway. After a while, she sang to her aunt. After another while, her aunt turned her head toward Barbara and opened her eyes. They were as bright as ever and Barbara's heart did leap up. She was so glad her aunt was still alive.

Her aunt began to mouth the words of the songs Barbara was singing to her. And then she sang too. Just for a moment, once, an expression of grief came over her face. Barbara was humming the melody of the dance her aunt and Dad used to play as a piano duet. (Mom had told Barbara her aunt had paid for her little brother's piano lessons.) Barbara switched to another song. Finally she ended with "Good Night, Ladies". It was the song that had ended a skit her aunt had directed for her town's Womens Club, sung by a group of high school girls whom she had called "The Sockettes". Her aunt seemed at peace when Barbara left.

April 23. Shakespeare's birthday. The readers are meeting today. Ellen says one of the new members (he's only been reading with them for a couple of years) is bringing candles and his wife is baking a cake.

On a long spring-windy walk yesterday, she and a friend passed the house of another friend who called out to them to come over and see the miniature daffodils she had planted last year, by a sunny rock. And there they were, the daffodils, and also the three ladies well into their fifties suddenly talking and giggling together like schoolgirls, in the pleasure of the moment.

Elizabeth has had a major career breakthrough. She is in a production of "Murderer - the Hope of Women" by Oskar Kokoschka, who turns out to be a famous painter of whom Barbara has never heard. Elizabeth is being paid and the production will take place in Vienna the last two weeks of May. Elizabeth thinks she got the part because the person originally chosen was afraid to go to Vienna because of terrorists. Oh. Anyway, Elizabeth sounds very happy and is learning a lot, she says. Barbara can only imagine. She is now reading Kokoschka's "A Sea Ringed with Visions", trying to get a better idea of what he is about.

She is sitting in her big chair, looking at the bookshelf across from her with the children's old books and her own childhood books. What a lot of time has passed for her. She will be 55 a week from today.

She put the poinsettia outdoors, too early? She has done much digging and planting because her next door neighbor says he has put out his roses. In the woods between their two houses are lilies of the valley. May is about the only time Barbara sees her neighbor's wife, when they talk while picking bunches of the fragrant flowers. The neighbors have lived in that house for nearly fifty years, or at least he has.

And now, two weeks later, the apple tree is on the verge of blooming - thousands and thousands of buds. The bees can hardly wait.

Again, thinking about her childhood, Barbara realizes she knew the maids better than the family. As the youngest, she was often left with them. In France, she remembers Berthe laughing, the time she took Barbara to her little house in the center of the village, with no running water

but a fascinating pump arrangement in the kitchen, when Barbara asked where her piano was.

Someone just called to ask if she could bring a lace veil over for Barbara to identify. Barbara wishes people wouldn't call her about lace. She really doesn't know much about it. Someone must know, though maybe not. Lace lore is confusing if not contradictory. The person is coming tomorrow, if it rains and Barbara can't play tennis.

Such a wind. Barbara is reading Hordin's biography of Kokoschka. There is going to be a storm and much colder weather. She feels jittery. She has agreed to substitute-direct her old church choir this Sunday. She went to meet the new minister, to coordinate the music and the service. The minister said he was going to speak on aging. Barbara was surprised he wasn't going to mention the Russian nuclear plant disaster that had just happened. (Should Elizabeth really be going to Vienna, but the whole world could be becoming polluted.) For a while, when the disaster first became known, Barbara could have imagined that a worldwide response of pity and terror had also occurred. If so, the response hadn't lasted. There is blame, now, and suspicion, and whining. Back to normal.

There's so much wind the tall pines are cracking against each other.

Barbara has called the person who wants her lace identified. The person will come Monday, day after tomorrow, saying she had called several times and had even come by. Pretty determined.

What a glorious day! Barbara is sitting under the apple tree, remembering the time she and a neighbor ate lunch here and talked about how things are never as nice as you expect them to be. Just then a light breeze had come up and had covered them both with apple blossoms. The blossoms are falling on her now, even without a breeze.

Yesterday someone left flowering branches on the front step. Was it that same neighbor, or maybe Kate? Suddenly Barbara knows exactly who left them. It was the tall man who bought the Veres' house across the river. The branches are from the plum trees behind the barn. Barbara had seen him at the store the other day, and she had asked if the plum trees were in bloom yet.

On the way to a doctor's appointment last week, Barbara saw a dog hit by a car - hit, not run over. The dog flew up into the air. It was trying to join a father and a little girl across the street at a yard sale. Barbara held the girl's hand while the father went to check. She thought she heard the dog yelp. When the father came back he picked up the little girl and said

the dog was dead. There was such pain in his eyes. Barbara went on, to her appointment.

A million gray and black birds are feeding in the grass and dust-bathing. (So that's what happened to the grass seed Barbara planted a couple of weeks ago.) Noisy birds. Yesterday, a gray kitten with white socks, new in the neighborhood, came to visit her under the tree.

An old friend's husband has had Alzheimer's for maybe ten years now. Barbara often meets them out walking. Someone told her a few days ago there was a grass-roots movement in the community to "help". But the wife doesn't want help. Her husband, she says, is company.

Elizabeth is on the way home from Vienna, perhaps right now flying over Prats. On the phone last night, she sounded very tired and very happy.

Need is what Barbara has been thinking about - the need to receive, the need to give, and that the two tend not to coincide. Often the best gift is the chance to give to, even when it is that which the givee doesn't want. And one must learn, oh yes, to somehow arrange one's own needs to match what can be given.

The difference between the needs of the old, sick and poor, and the needs of the young is that the young are so beautiful. Barbara remembers Peter in his white, red-trimmed jacket, bright-eyed, laughing. And one summer, Elizabeth, sitting on some books on a chair by the kitchen table quietly eating cereal, was simply breathtaking.

The other morning, walking to town, she met the only person whose name was written on the cards of the volumes of Aquinas' "Summa", English edition, in the library. She was looking for the quote about "all is straw", without success. The man she met was a philosopher, from Scotland - the one who had been most vocal against establishing a summer school at the college, years ago, because "the sidewalks need a rest - the trees need a rest...." He had never heard of the quote, but he believed if Aquinas had said such a thing he had meant it, and not the way the Catholic Encyclopedia explained it either. There were insoluble contradictions in Aquinas' work, he said. Aquinas very well might have been just giving up.

Someone is having trouble putting up a ladder against a house up behind the trees. Soon it will be too hot out here. Right now may be the best she will ever be. Except for no longer having a cast-iron stomach, she feels very very well, all the time. She worries about the kids, Jim, her mother, and even Richard. But at the same time, here she is enjoying being where and what she is, which is where and what she wants to be. She'd had a friend, when she was little, who had wanted to be a horse, had put toy blocks in her hands and had clopped around on all fours, but Barbara doesn't remember

ever wanting to be anything other than what she was, except maybe smarter and thinner sometimes. And now, not to have cancer.

Peter and Elizabeth will both be here tomorrow, and friends are coming Sunday for supper. It will all be work, but she feels like it, would rather than not. Or would she rather sit out here this way forever? She'd get bored, and her bottom would get sore. Her mother is okay still, and Richard has moved to a beautiful house not too far from her, and Jim is sleeping pretty well, usually without pills now.

Chapter 45

September Song

Barbara has hardly had time to collect her thoughts once since the middle of July. And it has taken four days to unwind enough to begin writing again. But what a special summer. Even her mother's August visit was fun. Among the other stories Mother told was one about having seen with her own eyes Napoleon III's wife Eugenie, in Paris - a little lady in black about to leave the city for a vacation.

Mother's aches and pains seemed to vanish during the course of the visit. Richard offered to come and take her home on Labor Day, a few days earlier than Barbara could have gone herself. It was good to have an unexpected few days alone. Jim and Peter were together on the Lake Superior island. Jim came back last night, tired but very very relaxed and happy. He said Peter, who will return Sunday, was fine too.

Richard will bring his Seattle son here next week, conflicting with her next doctor's appointment as happened once before. But this time she has told Richard to come a day earlier than he wanted, rather than trying to change the appointment.

Richard seems settled in his handsome house, approached from a high hill above a great expanse of ocean. He does manage to land on his feet. He has been saying the past few years that soon there would be, at home, only himself, his wife, his son and the cat. In the house with him now are himself, his wife, his son, his wife's mother, his wife's two daughters plus one boy-friend, and a dog. (So, what's happened to the cat?)

She made a new friend, this summer. They met at a party and, during the course of a conversation, agreed they wanted to get together after each of a series of seminars to talk about what had been said. The new friend gave Barbara the book "Second Life" to read, an honest and moving account of a cancer experience. The new friend recently had been on a biking trip through Cambodia, a few weeks before the bombings there began, biking along paths through forests where mysterious temples were hidden.

Also, this summer, Barbara got the chance to talk with Toni Morrison,

all by herself for maybe five minutes, about disguises in writing.

Barbara is thinking about two other stories Mother told, during one of the teas or luncheons. Mother described Jim cleaning a fish the Vere family had caught once, which had been so delicious. (It was Elizabeth who had caught the fish, to the envy of everyone else aboard the chartered fishing boat, the only fish caught that day.) The other story was about Richard coming to the rescue on the Cape when Mother had lost the hearing in her good ear. In each case it had been Barbara - Barbara who had cleaned the fish and Barbara who had come to the rescue. On a very deep level, for Mother men matter most.

And for Barbara too? Does she wish any of her doctors were a woman? The men are certainly what she is used to.

The other day someone was talking about the power involved with women who do all the home jobs. Sure that's power. But there was also an article in the paper about men who make a point of not knowing how to do those jobs. That's more power.

Yet another blue fall day. Yesterday, Barbara walked to some talks about aging. College freshmen, in their new clothes, were arriving on campus, along with upperclassmen, in their old clothes. Next to the road, on the way to the auditorium where the talks were to be held, were volley ball games. Also, four black girls were jumping rope, two ropes going in separate directions at a time. They upstaged the volley ball games.

The first talk was given by a seventy-six-year-old well-known politician about the importance of political lobbies. He spoke of the present and especially the future danger of the "privatization of health care".

The second was a panel discussion, mostly about the importance of living wills. There were issues on that subject of which Barbara had been unaware, including the issue of the continuing legal changes.

After the talks she walked out with someone who worked with old people. Barbara asked how it was for them, as they were dying. The person answered, usually they would say it was in the hands of God. The person agreed the issues got more complex the more you thought about them.

Barbara "should" be at the football game, but it is raining. She could be taking a nap, on the sofa near the fire.

Outside the friendly neighborhood woodchuck is eating an apple, not minding the rain. Now he seems to be listening to the airplane overhead which is circling the football stadium with an advertisement trailing behind.

What was so grim, hearing about bad news for a cancer acquaintance, was that it could so easily have been bad news for Barbara herself. When it's you that's sick, you can sometimes put it aside. When it's someone else that's sick, you don't put it aside so much. Last week, the thought that she herself might have to return to the hospital was so bad - and now someone else really is having to return.

The rain is letting up, so she'll go saw some wood. A chipmunk lives in the woodpile. He brings crabapples to the top of a small stump where he eats what he wants of each one. Sometimes she catches a glimpse of him as he scampers away.

She is not going to be able to stay outside long. It is beginning to rain again, but how warm and pleasant and quiet.

For all her own good news, and she doesn't have another appointment for six whole months now, it has been a roller-coaster week of emotions. At the last football game, one of her cancer friends came to sit next to her. Barbara missed the whole second half (just as well, since the home team was soundly beaten), listening to tales of woe. Her friend said she could feel herself getting depressed, like really. At the end, the friend apologized for having given Barbara's ear a callous.

Chapter 46

Tailspin

William has not come to read for three weeks. He fell and hurt his back. He was told nothing was wrong. But he could not get out of bed. Then yesterday, Carol told everyone that in fact after all he had three broken ribs and damage to his spine.

Somehow they began talking about rituals and the fact that Shakespeare never had an actual wedding in his plays. The readers seemed to agree that rituals were important. People began telling of ceremonies they had held after the death of pets, one about the “mouse cemetery” in the back yard. Bob Bishop began telling about the death of a much loved dog, buried beside a stone wall. He said to his two children, as he patted the earth on top of the grave, he didn’t want anyone to be able to dig the dog up. And one of the children climbed up on the stone wall and jumped down on the grave. The other child did that too. And then for about an hour the children took turns getting up on the stone wall and jumping down on the grave, while Bob and his wife watched in amazement from the front porch. Finally the children came over to say that no one would ever ever be able to dig the dog up now.

Once again Barbara wonders why she so much resists thinking about death. If there is life after death, she is afraid she will be homesick for life before death. She remembers being homesick those first awful weeks in college, almost a paralysis. Uncontrollable tears one lunch, across from someone named Molly who was crying too. Molly had a boy friend, whom she went home to marry after freshman year.

Maybe one can get used to the idea of separation from the world. But what about separation from - oneself? Barbara thinks of the cancer person who said “get me out of this”. Maybe you’re ready, when the time comes for death, and shouldn’t try to prepare yourself ahead for it - the way you are ready to have a baby be born when that time comes. Actually, she had been assured she would be ready, but she hadn’t been, not really.

Maybe there is a little something like madness in - overall thinking. It is

almost as if maybe you have to choose which world to live in, either one takes all you've got. A hospice friend of hers has a lot of trouble remembering things, even what they have just talked about. It might truly be best to stick with the world you've got most of just now, the here and now, and deal with the other later. Who knows, you might not ever have to. Yet the fact you can think about it at all here and now makes it (maybe only) part of the here and now....

This month's Bach Cantata's tenor solo is about the human soul being God's paradise, not the other way around. Then the following duet, very complicated with an instrumental chorale in it, is about God as a mother, people as seeking children, a hen and her chicks.

Her mother went to a funeral of an old friend and was shocked and disheartened at how few people were there.

A friend of Barbara's is compiling her cancer experiences and interviewing everyone she can get hold of and visiting the hostel and sitting in on hospice meetings. Barbara finds she is keeping away from her, for whom everything seems to be always wrong, which helps keep Barbara from going overboard in that direction herself, she hopes.

Recently Barbara telephoned her old back yard friend Amy in Montana, celebrating Wole Soyinka's Nobel Prize. "Ake", given to her by Amy, was the book that got her through the summer a year ago, the many hours of waiting for various doctors. Barbara asked Amy, busy with her horses, Indians and mountains, if she had started to write poetry again. Amy answered she had almost forgotten about that.

Barbara's friend in the the nursing home can still remember Barbara's name and that Barbara comes to visit her. How long can her friend hold out?

Geese are flying overhead. The apple tree must be on their itinerary. They fly over it every year, coming and going.

Tomorrow is the Harvard game. Thirty-one years ago, her twins were born. How much has happened, since then. But the leaves are the same old loveliness and so is the fall air. So many of the people who welcomed the Veres are gone, either really or just moved away. The Veres have welcomed many new ones. Will the Veres be remembered too? Once, Barbara and Mrs. Thomas had talked about how one lives on in the memory of others. Barbara finds she tends to remember Mrs. Thomas a lot. Some religions believe that's how people are kept alive, immortal.

Some people even believe they are recycled.

Her nursing home friend died on Hallowe'en, with a party going on across the hall. Her friend would have liked that.

It has been a bad week, but she has taken hold, so she keeps telling herself anyway as she chops down the front hedge to where she can manage it, except for one bush at the edge of the property which is going to grow

as it wishes, over the forget-me-nots usually inundated by weeds.

Jim, exhausted, deeply unhappy, had a bike accident . Possibly, he is lucky to be alive.

Chapter 47

The Toastmasters

In a continuing effort to learn how to communicate with doctors, Barbara joined a Toastmasters club, after seeing the ad in the newspaper. Before the group broke up, she gave four speeches, writing out the first three. For the fourth speech, supposed to “show what you mean”, she showed, without writing out the speech, how she directed a chorus.

Here are her first three speeches.

1. The “icebreaker” speech.

What a chance to pull my life together in five minutes. I was born in Colorado. For me, Colorado is a huge, rectangular school bus, orange and with a black bonnet, rattling over washboard roads, dust rising through the floorboards. Out the window in winter snow blows across the mountain tops to the west and, in spring after rainstorms, double and sometimes triple rainbows arch over the eastern prairie.

Summers we spent with my mother’s family in France, in the valley of the Dordogne river. For me, France is the creaky little iron gate which opens into the park of a nearby chateau where my cousins and my brother and I are allowed to play. There are swings. A knotted rope, hung from the highest branch of that tree, can lift you with a life of its own almost higher than you want to go. Sometimes the chateau grandchildren visit and we have games of hide and seek, or, in French, hide hide (“cache cache”).

My dad’s family came from near Boston. After the beginning of the second world war, we spent summers on Cape Cod, where Dad and one of his sisters bought a property with two houses on it. In the east, I was a waitress, went to college, married a college professor and became the mother of two children. For me, the east is the evolving women’s liberation movement, which I have watched from the sidelines, feeling grateful but also vaguely guilty that my own life has not demanded the kind of strength and courage needed by those who were directly involved. Yet I continue to suspect that the relationship between women and men is only secondary to the crucial relationship between any individual and the entire human race. What is

in the best interest of the entire human race, namely the survival of the species is not always in the best interest of the survival of the individual. Just maybe the only truly liberated people are those who, provided with food and shelter, are beyond the age of childbearing and child-rearing. Or are they simply disconnected?

Anyway, I was born in Colorado and I am not dead yet in the east.

2. The “be in earnest” speech.

I’d love to be an astronaut. Imagine seeing the earth from up there, astonishing enough in mere photographs.

A navy pilot named Dax might even have qualified as an astronaut, not being too tall. Dax, on the chance you haven’t heard of him, is one of those involved in the continuing discussions about the right to die. He is a burn victim. Movies of him are shown to medical ethics classes, some taken at the time of his treatments and some more recently. He was here in person last year.

The space program is limited because it is both experimental and expensive. So were Dax’s treatments, no longer quite so dreadful thanks in part to what was learned through him. He may or may not have wanted to be an astronaut, but he absolutely did not want those life-saving treatments.

Most of us believe death should be avoided, quite literally at all costs. I myself go so far as to imagine that those who are still alive, though brain dead, are in a pleasant state of equilibrium, possibly a mental equivalent to the physical weightlessness experienced by astronauts, not unpleasant, at least if they don’t get space sick.

I don’t know about space sickness, but seasickness, which is supposed to be similar, is awful. I know, from my own experience of sailing back and forth across the Atlantic to visit my French grandparents. My brother telling me the boat was going to sink didn’t help, either, though it’s possible, fun as I was to tease, he might have been even more worried. But how were we to know, or our parents guess we really needed to know, how small the chances were that the boat was going to sink? We knew all about the Titanic.

So, along with the problems of expense and experimentation, lack of information can be a puzzling and multi-leveled third medical ethics problem.

Human beings seek to obtain pleasure and to avoid pain. It could be imagined Dax and those like him have been denied both. The open question for him was and continues to be: is the individual the best judge of what is in his own best interest?

When Dax was here, I happened to see his caretaker across the hall, during the maybe five minutes the caretaker had to himself. He seemed to me like a trapped animal that had momentarily been sprung. Dax himself will never be truly sprung. Of course most of us get helpless and we all die sooner or later. But sooner is different. The sooners are “them”. The later, the “we” who must (if anyone) be the caretakers, can only imagine what it’s

like to be a sooner. And now that, despite the odds, I seem after all to be rejoining the ranks of the laterers, imagining is the very last thing I want to take the time to do. My kids are grown. I don't need to work. Life without responsibilities is a heady experience.

And I am not alone. The present balance between sooners and laterers can mostly be described as the laterers separating themselves from the sooners, except for those who make a career of caretaking. But, especially if Aids takes off the way it is expected to, there won't be enough professionals, to say nothing of enough money to pay for them.

A few remarkable community groups are being formed, like hospice and meals on wheels. Some believe that, if a fraction of what we in this community are about to spend on our new hospital could be given to those organizations instead, they would make a far greater impact. On the other hand my own experience with community groups has given me a profound respect for institutions.

I'm not supposed to thank you for having given me this incentive to collect my thoughts on these matters. Part of me hopes that I may never have the incentive to organize them any further. But the other part of me would like to play Martin Luther, nail 95 theses to the hospital door. For Luther, money, so desperately needed in Germany, was the bottom line, who instead had to send it to Rome to build St. Peter's.

However, St. Peter's still stands. So maybe we ought to be insisting on great art for the lobby of the new hospital. Why not send today's Michelangelo equivalent up in the next space shuttle, with a commission to paint a portrait of the earth for the new lobby ceiling - of the living earth, Gaia. Some believe we are all parts of Gaia, even as our own separate atoms are parts of ourselves.

3. The "organize your speech" speech.

What I propose for the Healthcare System is: the establishment of five large research medical centers, one in each corner of the United States and one in the middle. Patients would volunteer and be selected according to what was being studied. They would be paid to participate and receive training, so they would be as fully informed as possible and less likely to quit when the going got rough. They would be human guinea pigs only in the sense that astronauts are. The work would be financed the way the space program is.

We would all have to give up our deeply held hope/illusion that medicine can do more than patch and become more accepting of our fate. We, our lives and our deaths, are, after all and whether we like it or not, part of nature. We should be concentrating on living whatever life we've got instead of so much on avoiding losing it.

There could be mid-level big city hospitals that would manage non-research but expensive types of care, to be paid for, like Buicks, by those

who can afford them. I very much doubt we can afford to continue assuming we all have the right to whatever is able to keep us alive at whatever cost. The way things are going, eventually I bet my chances of getting open heart surgery will become greater than my chances of getting a bed pan.

On the local level there could be community run clinics and hospitals for broken bones, tonsils, appendices, eye and ear-nose-and-throat sorts of things. These are what should be paid for by government and community funds, along with home health services, including nutrition information and no-smoking and other support groups. And already there are community centers and libraries, places where everyone is encouraged to make the most of wherever they are in the continuum of their lives. Even quadraplegics can sing.

However, our denial of sickness and death is so strong in those of us who can get away with it, that the denial may be an instinctive part of us, perhaps even connected with survival. Maybe what doctors are really being paid for is to take over responsibilities which should be ours, because of this instinctive inability to deal with sickness and death. They have been trained to deal with the sickness and death, at least of others.

How does one get heard, though? How does a nobody get heard? Well, Dax is a nobody and he gets heard, the burn victim. It is a little scary how much clout being a victim can have. Even just the statement "I have cancer" can be quite an aggressive one. I may have more power than I realize if I can learn how to harness it. If, alas, I even want to.

Chapter 48

The Summer of '87

In April Barbara's 85-year-old mother came for a removal of a malignant breast tumor, local anesthetic only. The smell of the anesthetic reminded Mother of the first world war in France, when her father's school had been turned into a hospital.

Barbara decided she had better arrange for a mammogram for herself. Something was found in her right breast so she was sent to see her mother's doctor. Needless to say, Barbara was stunned when he asked her if her mother had had breast cancer. How to explain to him he had just last week operated on that very mother. But, incredibly, Barbara turned out to be okay.

The only time Barbara and her mother came close to discussing cancer was when her mother thanked Barbara for taking care of her. And Barbara drew a face on a piece of paper with only eyes, tears going down into a puddle. By that time Barbara had laryngitis from talking so loud - was Mother the kind of deaf hearing-aids don't help? "Now don't start that," said Mother. But then she added a turned-down mouth to the picture.

Then Barbara began playing too much tennis. She has had to stop playing because of the pain and has an appointment with the surgeon scheduled for next Tuesday afternoon. She is trying to believe she is feeling better, at least sometimes, at least mornings. At first, she had felt better afternoons. She doesn't dare cough or sneeze. Elizabeth, on a visit, happened by when Barbara was doubled over. "Mom, you have to, you've got to, you must, call the doctor!"

There is another flap about bills. She was charged eighty dollars for her last five-minute appointment, instead of the usual twenty-eight for fifteen minutes. Yesterday she received a letter from the business office that they would deduct thirty dollars and thanked her for calling this to their attention.

At the Tuesday appointment, Barbara, using all her new toastmaster's skills, found out more than she wanted to know about scar tissue, internal bleeding, adhesions.... But no recurrence.

And now she has been doing lots of cancer reading again. How to prepare. What next for herself. What next for Mother. On this dreamy afternoon, how can there be such problems. Birds are talking cosily or singing, a neighbor's screen door opens and closes. The laundry is hanging in the sun. She remembers washing socks, when she was little, in a dish pan, then hanging them on a low line with help from her mother. She and Elizabeth have done that too. How is Elizabeth, really, and how is Peter. Not to worry. They are both grown and - most of all - in need of separation.

She played tennis again, for the first time, this morning on the courts across the river in the field now filled with wild flowers.

Yesterday, here under the tree, was a frog. She tried to scare him away, flapping a large leaf at him, but he stood his ground, puffing himself up, he really did, just like the frog in Aesop's fables. After a while he deflated himself and hopped into the tall grass by the tree trunk. She's going to have to watch her barefoot step.

It's a hot July Sunday noon. A bee is collecting from brushy flowers on stalks in the needing-to-be-mown lawn. Each stalk bends when the bee lands, like the birches in Robert Frost's poem. There are tiny orange orchid-like flowers growing around her, along with the usual daisies, buttercups and also the burdock she is cultivating. She plans to plant the burdock around the garden as a raccoon-woodchuck deterrent. It should work. On the other hand, if it did work, someone else would have thought of it already. Meanwhile, she is beginning to feel sleeping-beauty-like, surrounded by the purple burrs.

How quiet it is. Even the birds are taking a siesta: "sigh-esta", as Jim's dad would say when he'd go off to his little cabin up the hill above the island house, after noon dinners.

Evening. A strange time. Jim is away in New York at a meeting. She went to bed early but is up again. There is a half moon, a green sky, and a few birds still.

A male voice, loud enough to hear, just said: "I give up!"

She must put her mind on Shakespeare, music and friends and not let this precious month be destroyed. She must get a cembalo part written out and also transpose an English horn part for a clarinet. It might be worth it to learn how to transpose on the computer.

Next Sunday she will go to get her mother. Mother is scared, ready to come.

This visit of her mother's was not as good as the last one. Is she still all right? Barbara feels something is going on she is not onto.

So now, all that is left to deal with is her own next (last?) doctor's appointment. At least she does feel well, finally, finally. Jim has been so wonderful through it all. Barbara thinks of younger women who must go through more or less the same operation(s) she has gone through, without partners yet, perhaps, certainly without tried and true ones, with no hope for families of their own.

She still hasn't finished the cembalo part of this month's cantata and now wonders if she will even be able to work it out. She'll try again - right now.

There. She has done the first page and has even dared to play it on the piano. She is learning a lot including more respect for Bach than ever.

How sweet the air is out here. She closes her eyes and rests for a while, listening to the summer hums of this late afternoon before going in to get dressed for a birthday dinner. Five of them celebrate each other's birthdays, eating out at fancy restaurants. They have been doing this for ten years at least, even before the Veres could easily afford to. She opens her eyes and stares at a bug bag in the birch tree. She has been throwing stones at it, trying to dislodge it. So far, no luck. Oh. A flicka, looking for worms, has almost got himself stuck, beak full length into the ground.

Jim's mentor and his wife were in town yesterday. They said, at lunch, they had lived too long. Jim's mentor said he had not done any mathematics and it was "curious, in spite of what you say" - to Barbara - "one doesn't do those things that civilization is supposed to be about", meaning involvement with, art, music and literature. Barbara reminded him he did play the recorder. She does suppose, though, that is why she chooses to work with groups; she needs their incentive in case hers gives out.

The mentor's wife spoke of learning how to live with the various animals their children wanted, learning how to live along with them. Barbara is wondering if that's what has been in the back of her mind as she tries to learn how to live with her own new self. In the newspaper was a story of a four-year-old girl who was the only one to survive a horrible airplane crash. The girl has to have an operation. Maybe the operation will be like nothing compared to being the only survivor of an airplane crash.

Also yesterday was a letter from the husband of Barbara's summer chum and high school pen pal, the one with breast cancer. Her chum has died. Enclosed was a last letter, to be sent after her death.

Maybe it will rain tomorrow and Barbara will have to stay inside and get that cembalo part done.

The surgeon saw Barbara but not in the cancer center, because there was no room. He used someone else's office, with a real window in it. He looked exhausted. His assistant said they had both been on vacation. Hard to believe. He shook hands, several times in fact.

Jim is talking about his next sabbatical. It really is time to think of getting the Bach Group organized so it can continue without her, the way the reading group does, without depending on her friend who really doesn't want to take over. So much to do. And her little finger is arthritic from too much tennis.

On the other hand, a large bequest has been made to the town library to support the Bach Study Group.

The public schools open tomorrow. Who - bird, squirrel chipmunk - has been scattering red berries on her table?

Chapter 49

Fall

There is now a bread maker across the river who makes bread the way it is made in France. Barbara has just had a slice with jelly on it, remembering the “goutées” that were given to the children at Prats, remembering her aunt coming out of the kitchen with a tray full of “tartines”, calling the children together in the garden. On this classical New England fall day, blue, orange, yellow (“if you like orange and yellow” said someone who doesn’t), it is hard to feel discouraged.

Barbara has paid the incorrect bill at the hospital, worn down. Somehow she is reminded of the story told about the old man who had been the organist at the church across the river almost until he died. Someone, according to the story, saw him sitting in his jeep, one day in mid mud-season, and called out: “You stuck?” “Nope, but I would be if I tried to get out of here.”

The wind is blowing - glorious. Maybe there is a deeper truth than freedom, or winning.

William said last week he would not be coming back to the readers group because his eyes were giving him too much trouble. Carol’s Parkinson’s is getting worse, though she has signed up for a trip to Africa in January. Dr. Thomas, with his Parkinson’s, is still alive in his nursing home.

Barbara visited the sister of the old organist in another nursing home. She has had a leg amputated. Her hair is cut and curled. Barbara had not recognized her at first and could have imagined the hair cut had been harder to deal with than the leg amputation. But the sister did seem happy, enjoying her fellow patients, a rare happening for some reason (when your friends are old, aren’t they still your friends?), making a life for herself where she is now. Impressive. Barbara had not been sure the sister would remember her and introduced herself as a friend of mutual friends. The sister answered: “and a friend of ours, too.”

And now William has come back to read after all, moving to a chair under direct light.

Barbara has been thinking about her French twin cousins who recently celebrated their 60th birthday, exactly six months before Richard's. Mom remembers the telegram sent to her in America: "deux belles filles", undecipherable to the school's secretary who had received the telegram but who knew whom it had to be for.

The week before Thanksgiving - strange hectic time. Barbara even forgot to bring cookies for the Readers and it was her turn.

Mother is here for her check-up appointment tomorrow. Elizabeth will be coming Monday. No word from Peter. At least Jim's long, long cold is about over. His voice is coming back.

Last Sunday, on the way to collect Mother on the Cape, Barbara stopped by her dad's grave. In a foot of snow, she almost got stuck. Afterwards she stopped at the McDonald's whose efficiency had broken down. Altogether it was not a pleasant adventure.

Richard has two demanding jobs, only one of which pays - quite a lot, it seems to Barbara - but probably not what he is used to. He does hang in there.

Her friend with ms continues to be cheerful. At the last football game, to publicize fund-raising for ms, balloons were sent up by the marching band at half time. The band had been almost invisible under all the balloons. It is said ms cheer is chemical. It should be bottled. Or can one learn to become like Bach who, at the time of his death (according to the perhaps apocryphal story) transformed one of his pieces for the organ from one about deepest need into one about coming before God's throne.

Mother will have to have her other breast operated on. Barbara is now almost certain that that should have been done last summer and Mother refused. This time the doctor enlisted Barbara's help to persuade. Even so, Barbara might not have, except she remembered reading that surgery really should be done, if only to avoid messiness.

Dear Peter has planned and continues planning to host Thanksgiving.

Time to tangle with the hospital again. Friday, Barbara called the office after Mother had decided to go ahead with the recommended operation. The secretary who answered said the real secretary would be back after lunch and would call. At 4:15 the real secretary still had not called, so Barbara tried again. The real secretary said she had not received the message. She, the real secretary, will call back tomorrow morning, after she has done whatever it is that needs to be done first.

Tomorrow morning Barbara waits and waits, in spite of many errands to be done. Waiting, she and Mother clean house, even vacuuming rugs in the basement. Finally the call comes. The operation can be done, at the earliest, December 6th.

There is an article in a book review about needing to get free of mothers in order to live one's own life. No doubt that's true now for Peter and Elizabeth. But not for her, who not only must but also wants to tend Mother.

Jim's sore throat has returned.

Two days later. It is hard not to get rattled. At least Jim has had his throat looked into, literally. He is "fine", but perhaps should have some surgery and thank goodness someone has urged him to get a second opinion. Elizabeth, home, is seeing a doctor too, right now. She has decided against having the test for AIDs because none of her friends are and anyway she would get an ulcer if she even thought about it, quote.

Jim has announced they will be going to Illinois for two terms next year. At least that will be better than going to two different places, from her own point of view.

And now, two hours later, it is raining, so Barbara has left a mother-type message at the clinic for Elizabeth, who is still there, that Barbara will pick her up in the car. Mom is writing letters and cards to friends about what's ahead for her.

The only important question right now is whether Barbara should make both a blueberry and an apple pie for Thanksgiving. With all the extra people around needing to be fed, both here and at Peter's, both are probably in order. Yesterday at the grocery store, someone said crossly: "Oh I wish it were EASTER!"

Driving to Peter's on Thanksgiving was not bad. Jim drove, both ways. The day was gloomy, but there were flowers in Peter's new house and the dinner was delicious and it was so good to see all of those who were there. How hard those kids had worked!

Elizabeth has been bumped from her flight back to the city and can stay another day. Also, she is witness to the fact that Jim said they'd be away for two terms next year, which he now denies. So maybe they will be back next winter after all.

And now each day is a logistical challenge. Elizabeth is still home because of the bad weather. Mother, whose breast now bleeds regularly, is resigned to her operation. Her color was bad this morning. But she seems

to be having a good time, enjoying Elizabeth very much. Elizabeth is being good, but maybe she too is enjoying. Mother doesn't talk about the operation except once she said "Let's not overdo the fear". At least Barbara is grateful she herself is not going to have an operation. Really? That's a close one, all right.

Mother has been talking a little about the war - war number two - about the time she had not been able to bring herself to go to a dinner party to meet someone, because France had fallen to the Germans. Barbara remembers that time. Richard had been put in charge of her, the next bright and clear June morning. He took her for a walk around the duck pond and was nicer than usual.

And Mother remembered being out of touch with her family for long periods, receiving only occasional telegrams, through the Red Cross, by way of a friend who had connections in North Africa. Finally, toward the end of the war, letters began to get through. Barbara remembers those letters, brought by the tall mailman. He would lean on the door-frame to talk, so pleased with himself for having brought a letter, Mother unable to be rude and run off with it.

The operation is over. Mom is depressed. Barbara tries to keep her talking. They sit together by the fire.

Mother tells about driving up here last summer with Richard and his younger son. Richard pointed out a sign which was both in English and in French, because of the nearness to Canada. And his son, suddenly a little worried, asked: "Dad, are we still in America?"

Mother describes meeting Barbara's dad. He and Mom's father came into a room where she and girl-friend of hers, who spoke English, had prepared tea. Her mother, who usually did that, was in Paris with Mom's sister who had just had her first baby. The French government sent English teachers, usually from England, to Mom's father's school where he was the director. But this one's accent was not one with which he was familiar. Proudly, the new teacher announced he had graduated from Harvard. Alas, no one had heard of Harvard.

This has been a good morning. Barbara washed and combed Mother's still beautiful long hair. They talked and talked. Mother is genuinely better. Another story Mother told was about meeting the other faculty at the school where Dad taught before going west. In the dining room of the lady who had started the school, there were original impressionist paintings. After dinner, Mother stayed behind to see if they really were originals. The lady,

missing her, returned and said: “Little French girl, what are you looking at?” They became friends.

Tomorrow they will find out if cancer is the problem in the second breast as well.

They have found out. Breast cancer treatments seem to have changed, certainly for older women. Barbara tried to get Mother’s surgeon to tell more. He only said Mother could go home as soon as she wanted to. So Barbara will drive her home tomorrow, feeling it is too soon, though any now might be too soon. Someone has left a special little cake on the doorstep.

It will be good to sit in a car tomorrow. Richard has invited them for breakfast before she comes back home. Then oh boy, here comes Christmas.



Barbara’s mother, sounding down, wants everyone to come to the Cape for Christmas. Wow.

On another trip to the medical school library, Barbara did not find quite the information she was looking for, but lots of other information. Especially there was a lot on breast-cancer-patient care, mostly about the caregivers. Barbara wonders how to tell whether Mom’s depression is real or whether (new research) it is part of her sickness and could easily be helped.

Barbara would like to meet someone who has had her own kind of operation and has survived the longest. At least she doesn’t have to confront her operation every day, the way Mom does. And a friend who has had a tracheotomy is now having further operations just so she can appear in public again. That operation has affected everyone, at least a little. Barbara’s operation only affects two people regularly - a lot.

She has found Elizabeth’s skis and ski-boots and has decided to go skiing in the back yard, even though it is already dark. There is a full moon and the pines make shadows. She has never been moonlight skiing. Here goes.



They are about to leave, the day before Christmas. No storm, a blue and white day, sky and snow. Perhaps this will all work out. Even Elizabeth sounded enthusiastic, over the phone last night. She is driving up from NYC with a cousin.

Home again. There was a genuine closeness with the four Veres (Peter came) , Mother and Richard’s oldest - and with Richard too, when he showed up a couple of times. And now it is New Year’s Day, 1988. Elizabeth leaves Monday and Jim leaves Tuesday for several days of math meetings in Atlanta. Then it will be time to clean house, muddy tracks, nut shells, bits of candy cane....

Part III

Chapter 50

Choices

Barbara is sitting in the car in the supermarket parking lot, too dressed up for a party to feel comfortable to go in with Jim who is buying beer and pretzels for Poker at their house tomorrow. They have just driven Elizabeth to the airport after a short and somewhat reassuring visit. Elizabeth is almost 30, Barbara almost 60. They talked about Elizabeth being on the way up and Barbara on the way down. Barbara's mother, almost 90, is hardly down at all according to Peter who had spent the weekend with her.

Elizabeth wants children and listens carefully to all reports and details of pregnancies, births and babies of "older" women.

They had arrived early at the airport and had left Elizabeth off. Long since, they have all decided to avoid the awkwardness of hanging around till the last minute at airports and bus depots. Barbara and Jim weren't due at the party yet, so Jim decided to do his shopping at the store in the mall below the airport.

A plane appears over the hill, lights flashing, leaving. It must be Elizabeth's. Barbara watches the plane until it circles out of sight over the car. She listens to its motor.

The plane reappears. Barbara can no longer hear it, but the light flashes against the darkening evening sky.

Elizabeth, not an enthusiastic flier, is no doubt deep in a book or magazine, pretending she isn't where she is. Of course, it does seem a little incredible that she is indeed where that light is, going back to being an actress in New York.

A family of four appears, shopping cart full of bags, presided over by the youngest member of the family, not yet a year old, sitting in the seat of the cart, heading for the car parked in front of Barbara. That youngest, knitted cap slightly askew, is round-eyed, taking in all the activity and lights around him. The mother, rather heavy, tiredly opens all the car doors and also the rear of the car. The older child goes in one of the open doors. The father unloads the packages into the rear, except for a loaf of bread which

has fallen out of a bag. The mother puts the loaf in along the top of the bags and shuts the rear while the father lifts the baby out of the shopping car seat and, after closing the car's back doors, gets into the car on the driver's side with him. The mother pushes the cart near where shopping carts are supposed to be left, but not all the way. She has a long evening ahead of her still, supper, dishes, baths, bed.... No wonder she's not paying more attention to the cart or to much else.

Pay attention, pay attention, Barbara almost says out loud, even as she acknowledges to herself she had not paid attention. One survives those busy years only as well as one can.

Or perhaps one does pay more attention than one really knows. The father, picking up the baby who had smiled and lifted up his arms in spite of having his serious observations interrupted, had been gentle. The mother's gestures, though heavy, had been gentle also.

The family's car's lights go on. The car backs, turns, and then heads out of the parking lot into a sea of traffic and is gone.

The airplane lights are still visible, not so much flashing now at this distance as twinkling, like a star. It doesn't disappear over the horizon, just vanishes among a few other stars that are beginning to twinkle also.

Chapter 51

Fall and Winter in Illinois

Elizabeth may not be well. Barbara hopes both her mother and daughter can hang on till next week when she will collect them both.

And now, there's a steam shovel - oh no! - gearing up beyond the Veres' back yard, next door, no fair, on her finally, finally quiet afternoon. She has gone to check. Looks like the beginning of a long project, a house addition she bets (good time to be off on a sabbatical). Well, she could go swimming, and she should pile up some wood that has been delivered.

Barbara is feeling pressed. But sitting outside on this hot day, with a breeze though, makes it all better. The car is having to be fixed once again. At least she has to be grateful it happened before she went to the Cape rather than during. Jim will pick up heavy groceries on his bike, and she will go on foot to pick up essentials in case Peter and his friend come in time for supper or at all. The younger generation tends not to need or want to pin itself down.

The lawn mower is on the fritz again. So she will start Peter Gay's new book on Freud, a good one to have around for stray leisure moments, a time with lots of interruptions. Big decision, will she rent an air-conditioned car to collect Elizabeth and her mother?

She has decided to end her regular tennis games, to simplify life during her mother's and Elizabeth's visits and for getting ready for the sabbatical. She has had to pile wood twice because she separated the lines of wood too much and the inside line was beginning to lean toward the outside one. All could have crashed. Now the phone is ringing. The portable phone seems not to be working. She won't answer. So there.

This time Grandma and Elizabeth did not get on too well. Elizabeth left on the bus this morning, confessing, on the drive to the bus station, to physical problems. Elizabeth walks a tightrope of conflicts: friends, art, establishing herself professionally.... At the bus station, she cried and could hardly leave. Peter will meet her in Boston.

Grandma's hip hurts. Arthritis still? Bone cancer? Even Peter has been sick since coming back from the island. He says he is better now. Jim's physical check-up is scheduled for the day Barbara drives her mother back to the Cape, in the air-conditioned car.

She herself feels fine, though she has completely given up her usual life. She even feels she has succeeded in enjoying this other life of day-to-day living, centered around meals, laundry and visiting. She does sneak in a little reading and came across something about Mrs. Freud feeling guilty about taking time to read even only after she went to bed. Those women really and truly weren't supposed to do anything other than take care of their families. Doing anything else was even believed to be bad for them: certainly abnormal. Freud's sisters, old ladies, died in concentration camps, one of starvation and the other three in gas chambers.

The Japanese in this country are being given reparations for their treatment during that war. A Japanese friend of Barbara's says that the reparations are too little and too late. That friend had been in a detention camp for Japanese only 50 miles from where Barbara had grown up. Barbara hadn't known anything at all about that until the subject happened to come up, one of the mornings when they got together for coffee. So Barbara asked her mother, who said she may have heard something about it, she couldn't quite remember.

Home again. Loud music and hammering from the house in the back yard makes Barbara almost glad they'll be away this fall.

Richard's airline has been sold and he is out of a job again. He is trying to get another. "Over 60, ya have to hustle," he says.

Medical stuff for Jim on the dining room table looks ominous. Barbara wonders if Elizabeth has received the copy of her medical record she needed. Should Barbara call her to say that record writers often tell more about themselves than about the patient?

So much to do before leaving! Barbara - just sit for a moment and listen to the late summer all around.

When she was on the Cape, she thought the walls of the newly painted dining-room looked bare. She found two pictures in one of the upstairs

closets, costume sketches for a French play given at the Colorado school, which had been in her parents' Colorado bedroom. She decided to hang them on the bare walls. But this was wrong, she sensed all of a sudden. Because of two new small nail-holes? Heavy associations? A little of both? She prays: Help me not to interfere, but not to evade responsibilities either.

When her mother had had her check-up, Barbara had gone in with her. Mother was grateful. Barbara was surprised. So maybe she should have been going with her all along.

Jim is having his colon test right now. He did seem a little nervous as he went off on his bike, breakfastless.

For herself, in respect to a colon test, recently she was surprised to read the small percentage (5) who get colon cancer from radiation. That could be just about balanced by what else could go wrong during such a test for her. Her bleeding problems during the second operation and from current "friable" tissues are assumed to be from radiation burns.

At least Elizabeth called, very happy with the women's clinic in NYC, recommended by a friend of Barbara's. Another prayer: Please let me let her manage this by herself as she is trying to do, so well. Barbara will not soon forget the morning at the bus station, and hooray for Peter who had been wonderful with Elizabeth in Boston, easing her transition back into her own world.

For once it is quiet in the back yard, out here in the half mist that feels like fall. It was raining earlier, which may explain why the workers have not come.

This year there are not many crabapples, but they are bright red and very pretty. Tonight there is the birthday dinner that had to be postponed. Jim is fine, it turns out, and feels like celebrating though the test was not a whole lot of fun. Two weeks until they leave. She just might get everything done. She has not started packing, though she must. On purpose she has left a pile on their bed. So she will have to get to that before night.

September 12, on sabbatical. Barbara finally heard from the surgeon. "You'll be pleased to note that the papanicolaou smear obtained at the time of your last visit...was normal, that is no evidence of cancer in the tissues described. Enclosed please find a copy of a summary of my involvement with your case...."

The Summary Note was as follows: "... is a 57 year old white female, gravida III who was treated for an endometrial carcinoma discovered in January of 1984. She had undergone extra fascial hysterectomy with bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy and excision of the vaginal cuff and a pelvic node sampling. The histopathology demonstrated an implant on the right fallopian tube, all of the nodes were negative. There was, however, superficial

myometrial invasion. Cell washings were normal. She was given postoperative whole pelvic radiation which she tolerated quite well. In July of 1985, an abnormal papanicolaou smear was noted. Biopsy was obtained which revealed recurrent adenocarcinoma at the vaginal apex. She underwent a resection of the upper vagina in August of 1985. Her course has remained uncomplicated with recurrence or adverse sequella to the radiation. There is a marked vaginal foreshortening and scarring at the vaginal apex. The remainder of the examination is normal. There have not been any physiologic difficulties with the bowels or the bladder. A review of symptoms at the time of her last visit dated 8/30/88 was negative, that is no new systemic complaints. Her exam failed to reveal any evidence of malignant disease, recurrence or of adverse sequella to its treatment. Her past medical and surgical history would reveal a laryngotomy and a past history of hysteria with paranoid episodes. There is also a history of fibrocystic breast disease which had been followed with comparative mammography and physical examination....”

September 20, finally Barbara managed to write back to the surgeon’s nurse. “Thank (the surgeon) for sending along the summary note. When you have the chance would you check my record and fill me in on the details about the laryngotomy - which I cannot remember at all....”

And somewhere she read a definition of hysteria as the “failure of doctor/patient communication”. Officially now, though, she must doubt she makes sense to others. At least it’s good to really know that.

No answer.

In the new “Journal of the Voice”, Barbara read an article about the latest research on larynxes. The researchers actually produced a “chest voice” sound out of a human larynx outside of a body. Well - of course. Come to think of it, wouldn’t that have to be? Why hadn’t she thought of that? So maybe it really could be that she had screamed, in the hospital after the second operation, because her larynx had screamed for a physiological reason, not a psychological one, because of the entubation process. How simple, how comforting. Not that she hadn’t had every reason to scream, but those tranquilizers do work. One doesn’t actually feel that afraid, at the time. Barbara hadn’t, at least, which was why the screaming had been so very disconcerting.

After six weeks of waiting to hear from the surgeon’s nurse, she telephoned the office. The secretary who answered gave a new name. Quite a turnover, there.

Barbara told about the letter she had written. She asked the secretary to find out from the surgeon’s nurse if the laryngotomy had perhaps been done at the time of the second operation. The secretary said the nurse couldn’t call back until after 4:00. Barbara had been invited to tea that afternoon, which she didn’t want to miss since she was just beginning to make friends

in this new place. "Can she tell you, and I can call you tomorrow morning?" "I'll call you, let me take your number." "Okay."

At the end of tomorrow morning, Barbara called back. The secretary seemed to have forgotten. "Do you want to make an appointment?" "No, I'm in Illinois." "Oh, that's right, you gave me your number. Can you give it to me again? And I'll send down for your record - it takes about 24 hours - no, here it is. And I'll have (the surgeon's nurse) call you."

Barbara decided to ask: "(The surgeon) said to contact his office. That does mean his nurse, doesn't it?" "No, it means me." "Oh. Well, by any chance can you just look in my record and tell me..." "No. But I'll have (the surgeon's nurse) give you a call. She isn't in yet. They had a very bad day yesterday..." "Oh dear." Refraining from adding so-what-else-is-new, Barbara said, "Well, tell them to cheer up - the hiking out here is great, just as (the surgeon) said it would be." Now why would that cheer them up - but "I'll do that... I'm writing that down," said the secretary, with almost startling enthusiasm.

Almost at the end of the afternoon, even Barbara's time, the secretary telephoned. The nurse had only called in, not come in, and had said to leave the record with the surgeon and let him take care of it.

"I'll call you tomorrow," the secretary said. "No, we're going to Chicago - you know this is important to me, to my psyche." (No, did she really say that?) "I wouldn't have called, if it hadn't been important to me. I - oh I give up!" "No, no - when will you be back?" "Monday." "I'll call you then." "Okay, but why don't I call you, I really do get sick of hanging around waiting for these calls..." "Don't hang around. I'll get hold of you, sooner or later." "Okay. Thanks."

Monday. No call.

So why is it so important to know about whether or not she has had a laryngotomy. She doesn't trust her own gut feeling that she hasn't. She needs factual confirmation. Suppose the answer is no, she hasn't had one. Will that confirm the hysteria/paranoia bit in ways she hadn't worked out yet, connected with screaming in the hospital, even though the "Voice" journal article has provided reassurance about that? Maybe not enough. But if the answer is yes, tomorrow she will want to know why a laryngotomy was necessary and the next day why wasn't she, or at least Jim, told (if not asked).

Why, she asks herself yet again, does she have so much trouble connecting with the surgeon? Surgeons have a lot of trouble connecting with the patients they have mutilated (mutilated?) she read recently. The surgeon's name was not in the old directory of medical specialists: but the new directory has just come out and he is in that one. There are not many of his kind of specialist, even in the big cities, so the hospital must be very lucky to have him, which may also explain in part why he is getting fifty-seven

dollars for his 5-minute check-ups now, up thirty dollars in less than three years. No, maybe that's because the nurse doesn't do blood pressures and temps any more, some one else comes in first, and then the nurse and then the surgeon. He may be down to 2 minutes, now.

She could switch and go to someone in Boston. But she has met someone who had a fancy operation and, when she had to go to another hospital, she nearly died because no one had any idea what the original (in every sense) surgeon had done. In that way, Barbara too may have become a particular surgeon's creation.

Phone call. Barbara had stayed home longer than she had said she would, which seemed to have thrown the secretary a bit. So why had the secretary called at all then - perhaps for her own record? Anyway, no sign of a laryngotomy in Barbara's record - and none in the surgeon's record which he looked up himself, which he keeps separately, wise move since her main record has been lost at least twice to Barbara's own knowledge....

"(The surgeon) thinks there's been a a misprint for myringotomy, middle ear - otomy means ear." Silence. Good girl, Barbara. (Actually, why doesn't "otomy" mean ear?) Then, "Yes, I did have ear problems." "But Volume I of your record - your record is in 2 volumes - seems to have been placed in storage and it will take about 24 hours to get it out...." "I'm so sorry you have to go through all this - will the surgeon write me a new summary note, then? - I've gone through the record myself once, trying to sort myself out from the other Barbara Vere, in fact in connection with that ear operation, though it was hard to recognize my own self sometimes, the other is dead now...." "This is you?" the secretary interrupted, quoting the numbers for Barbara's birthday, barely giving Barbara time to answer yes before saying she was terribly busy and had to go.

Barbara spent the next day reading up on operations some more - how good to have new libraries to explore. The entubation process was developed to avoid spasms of the larynx which can choke unconscious patients. The gas mask is raised from the face for the entubation and, Barbara bets, maybe sometimes the patient is awake still on some level, or becomes so. Another book, published in 1986, was about the psychological experience of having surgery. Because of the muscle relaxants used, anesthetists don't always know whether a patient is unconscious. The patient is, of course, paralyzed, helpless. When a patient, who experiences nightmares and screaming, is immediately told he may have been awake, he laughs with relief. No more nightmares or screaming either. Experiences of previous surgery can re-emerge as well. Barbara had had her tonsils out when she was four. Fear. Desolation. She had behaved badly....

Well, right now she is not in the mood to write all this out. She misses her other activities at home, swimming, tennis, the various groups, very much. The paper advertises a lecture on lace - is she that desperate? Soon

she will pull out of this slump though, the worst is over. A doctor friend says Barbara would probably not be able to speak if she had had a laryngotomy. No, there must be partial ones. After all, Bob Bishop has had something like that and he can still talk. Someone else explained the difference between laryngotomy and laryngectomy. “-ectomy means take out. -otomy means, um, mess around. -ot does have to do with the ear, but ‘ototomy’? No.”

After another two weeks, Barbara calls the surgeon’s office about what might have been found in Volume 2. A different secretary answers. The regular one is on vacation. “I’m taking all the calls, no one is over there.” “Well, never mind, I’ll try again next week.” Barbara has been reading Glasser’s Control Theory book. Why can’t she master the art of simply waiting. It’s just that she would like to end this particular episode.

Not five minutes later the surgeon’s nurse called. She sounded friendly. “I’ve just spent the last hour plowing through your whole record and there’s nothing at all about a laryngotomy.” “Oh, great! Thanks. And, you know (the surgeon) doesn’t really have to write a new summary. If I need one, I have a copy of the old summary and I can just tell....” “How are you feeling?” “Fine, really fine.”

Barbara forgot to ask about the fibrocystic breast disease bit, but never mind. She did mention the whole record should maybe be in one place, for example for the DES study she was, or at least had been, part of - so much for the promise to keep participants informed on that one.

What terrible power doctors and patients too have over each other!

Chapter 52

The Hikers

Saturdays. At 2:00PM. No matter what the weather. The hikers gather in front of the drug store. The name of the drug store has changed over the years. And so have the hikers' names, since 1909 when they first gathered. Then, they were mostly from the university's French department, men, homesick in this vast Illinois plain, searching for a few trees, water, hills.....

Twenty years later the group evolved into mostly classicists, and now into mostly mathematicians. Women are included now, not just on the designated "ladies' day" (when it was hoped there would be rain so the ladies wouldn't want to come again).

At one time even the University President would defer to "The Hike". If someone could not attend a Saturday function because of "The Hike? - oh, yes, well..."

Formerly there was also a softball game. But there are no longer enough hikers for softball. Today's principal enthusiast, about to celebrate his fiftieth year of hiking, is an old man. Perhaps the hike continues just for him. And he has not been well. The Saturday he returned from being really sick, determinedly he chose, of two possible hikes, the longest and hardest. And after eating, the hikers talked around the open fire longer than usual, cherishing this time, re-living other times....

At the drug store, all who show up climb into however many cars are needed for the drive, often as much as an hour long, to the one of about twelve sites agreed upon during a consultation in the parking lot. The sites have become established over the years, with permission of the site-owners. Those too change.

On arrival, all climb out and head for the car which is carrying the food. Pies are brought out and divided, into one more pieces than there are people. And those last pieces are also divided into one more piece than there are people. Eventually all gets eaten. The pies are supplied by the one who lost whatever was last week's principal bet. Mathematicians bet a lot. During the hikes there is a lot of betting.

Thus fortified, they carry supplies to a camp-site, near a "sitting log". Then off they go, hiking. There really are good places to hike to. Even when drought has diminished the rivers, some water remains and great stumps of trees line the banks from flood times. Fall foliage is bright against sharp cliffs, the bushes are full of currants, and there are fields of prairie grasses in all their varieties and muted colors. Flocks of gleaning blackbirds swoop up and down adjacent cornfields.

Around 5:00, the hikers re-assemble at the camp-site. In winter it is already dark and flashlights are needed before the fire has started. The hikers spread out to gather wood.

The fire is the special concern of the principal enthusiast, who starts it and then fills a large coffee-kettle with water and coffee which he settles on the fire to boil. The coffee must boil over three times.

Supplies are in canvas duffles. Newspapers are spread over a smooth place not too far from the fire and the duffles are upended over the newspapers - cups, pans, food and all. If it is raining, the camp-site is under a bridge, high over a river bank. There are a surprising number of such bridges, rusty, no longer safe, most of them, for cars or wagons, only somewhat leaky and handsome still.

There is a bag of apples. They are eaten first. Then comes the coffee, when it is ready, with doughnuts and/or cake, dessert first. The principal enthusiast opens a can of evaporated milk with his pocketknife. Newcomers learn how to balance the coffee-kettle against a stick or a foot, for pouring without spilling.

A package of bacon is put into one of the two large black frying pans, the one with rings welded onto the handle for a fork to fit into so the cook won't get burned or drop the fork into the dirt. The long fork is securely attached to an old broom handle which has the initials of the principal enthusiast cut into it. The bacon is usually cooked by the current "commissar", the one in charge of supplies and who is reimbursed at four dollars per person. The bacon is eaten with bread and cheese, everyone helping oneself.

The main course is known as "Hikers' Delight". Onions are hand-sliced, during long conversations, and poured into the frying pan with the bacon fat. Peppers are added and the whole browned slowly over the fire. There is no hurry. The conversations or companionable silences are interspersed with advice, discussion, bets, of course, and arguments about whether the Hikers' Delight is done yet. Finally the juice is poured out over the fire which blazes up. A visiting Hindu mathematician said, "That's what we do in our country - pour the oil into the fire to honor the gods."

After the juice is poured out, a package of cheese is sliced over the onions and peppers. And that mixture is heated over the fire until the cheese has melted. It is eaten - on bread, in cups, with fingers.... The meal ends with sausages and/or steak, cooked over the fire, then cut into small pieces,

the cooking pan passed around. And finally big pieces of wood are put on the fire. In winter when there is snow the fire can be especially big, sometimes built around a standing hollow log which burns inside and out before collapsing.

One Saturday in early fall, the hikers went to a mining quarry. Some went swimming in the quarry lake. The water was low because of the drought. Smooth, gray, slippery mud lined the lake's edge. One of the younger women covered herself with the mud. "It felt great!", she said afterwards, and around the fire they talked about the healing properties of mud. The next Saturday they returned to the quarry once again, breaking the usual rule of never returning to the same place twice in a row. The young woman had brought along some friends. And they all covered themselves with mud and made mud slides along the bank into the water. Those who were hiking along the top of the quarry caught sight of them, small, clay-covered figures there at the bottom, crawling with difficulty up from the water to the top of their slide. They looked pre-historic, like creatures emerging from the deep.

At the end of the evening, the fire is put out with all the water that is left from what had been carried to the site in numerous plastic gallon-jugs. And the hikers walk to the cars by flashlight. There is always starlight too, except when it rains - and then sometimes there is lightning, lots of lightning from all directions. Best of all is a full moon. One Saturday, geese flew across the full moon.

Chapter 53

The Pantry

Jim was traveling for the month of January, so Barbara decided to visit her mother on Cape Cod rather than stay in Illinois. And, while she was there, she decided to straighten out the pantry. “No!” said Cousin Jeanie. “You didn’t!”. This, though, was not about cleaning the pantry but about Barbara’s painting the little old ice box in there too, now used for storing soaps and polishes. Peter and his cousin had been talking, for several years now, about rubbing the ice box down to its natural wood. Barbara remembers staring at it, yellow then, when she was four years old and had been put down for a nap in a borrowed crib in the back hall of an aunt’s house and too big for either nap or crib, in her opinion. “Only one coat,” Barbara answered, defensively, adding: “At least that will be easier than two, if anyone really does get around to rubbing it down.” Mostly Barbara had washed the dust and spider webs from the ice box and thrown out the old bottles and cans. That one coat of white paint she bought spruced it up considerably, quite enough for its dark pantry corner.

She cleared the floor of the pantry, too, so that the trap door to the dirt basement could be opened more easily for meter readers or whoever needed to turn water or electricity off or on, and also so the pantry’s second door, into the dining room, could be opened, though probably that wouldn’t last long. And she painted the floor with left-over paint found in an upstairs closet. The original paint had worn through to the linoleum with big blue squares, which also used to cover the kitchen floor. She remembers playing hop-scotch on the kitchen floor.

Coming to the Cape, Barbara had in mind, besides seeing how her 86-year-old mother really was getting along, that she would shovel snow and help out with the transition period between tenants in the Barn House, which her mother rented. But it didn’t snow and the tenants decided not to leave until March. Plus her mother was managing very well, thank you, so they ended up just having a good time.

Twice a week Mother played bridge, talking too loudly and also some-

times swearing the way Barbara's father used to, he, however, more privately. English swear words didn't mean much to Barbara's French mother, who had had to learn the words to be able to disapprove when students said them, at the school where she and Dad lived and taught. Once in a while a clever boy would learn the French equivalents and be rewarded with a real reaction.

Mother's friends are used to her, and she is a very good player. In one of her groups, all four are good players. Once Barbara watched them play ten fierce rubbers from 11:00 to 3:30, with a very brief time-out for lunch. The youngest, only 82, works three days a week as a hostess in a restaurant near where she lives.

About the pantry, ever since Dad retired and they had come to live on the Cape all year around, the pantry has overflowed with dishes from the combined households. And then were added the dishes from the Barn House, when new tenants brought their own. In the pantry, you removed a dish at your peril.

The aunt, the one with the ice box, with whom Dad had bought the property and who, with her husband, had lived in the Barn House, liked to talk about the dishes, about the people to whom each dish had belonged. When the aunt talked, she tended to drop her esses. Playing bridge, she would say "two heart." Cousin Jeanie, when she was playing too, instead of "pass" would answer "pa". In talking about the dishes, Barbara's aunt would say, holding up a cruet, "This is George" (her husband). The sauce dish was George Mother. The finger bowls were Nanny. Sometimes Barbara wondered if Mom, needing a dish, ever felt overwhelmed by her in-laws.

Mother had brought her own hand-painted pottery from France, a wedding gift from a potter friend of her father's. In the pantry, that pottery tended to be back and under, possibly out of harm's way, being saved for Barbara and Richard. Once Barbara had seen a television program about the danger of lead-poisoning from such pottery. But Barbara's French grandmother had eaten off her own set from the time she was married till she died at 98. Mother's sister, eating off that set and then off her own, is in her nineties now herself.

So one morning, after a long and chatty breakfast Barbara wandered into the pantry and took all the dishes off of one shelf and stacked them on the kitchen table. She washed the shelf. And Mother came around and was interested, yes very definitely interested. Mom reached into one of the baskets on the floor and handed Barbara a left-over roll of wall-paper to use for shelf-paper on the clean shelf. The possibility of left-over paint being in one of the upstairs closets was mentioned. In a drawer there happened to be some paintbrushes...

Cleaning out the whole pantry took quite a while. Barbara and her mother even managed to cull a few dishes to take to a consignment store.

But the store wasn't open. And by the time they got home, they thought they might take the pitcher back to the house. And then, well, the cruets too. They ended up bringing everything back.

Barbara packed a dozen or so fragile water glasses into a carton which fitted nicely on the top shelf. And she managed to store a few other god-knows-when items up there too before she wasn't allowed to stand on a chair anymore. She put all Mother's dishes in front, to be seen and used. Luckily she finished long enough before she had to leave to respond to Mom's howls when she couldn't find something. Barbara decided to put those things back where they had been before, and where Mom's hands reached automatically. She also tried to move the cookie jar into the cupboard over the kitchen sink, but Peter objected to that almost the minute he came by. "Everybody knows the pantry is where Grandmas keep cookies..."

Richard was impressed, the day he came to take Barbara to see the seals on a beach about a mile north of where he lives. Barbara felt guilty when she and Richard went off. Mom admitted she felt jealous, even though she understood they would have to walk to see the seals, which she can't do too well anymore. She gave them her binoculars. So Richard and Barbara watched the seals through Mom's binoculars, watched while the biggest seal finally succeeded in pushing the others off the rock where they were sunning, that cold but brilliant January day. Because of the incoming tide, the rock was getting crowded. Further out, a large fish leapt and splashed. A flock of geese nestled in a rocky cove, out of the wind.

Lunch that day, when Richard and Barbara came home, was turkey pieces, left over and frozen from Thanksgiving, in a sauce made with onions and mushrooms, one of Mom's specialties. Barbara asked Richard if he remembered Thanksgivings at the Colorado school, when children were allowed to eat in the school dining room too, instead of having to stay home. Together they remembered - everyone being formally dressed, Mother in a long gray chiffon gown patterned with white flowers. The dining room tables would be arranged in a U, the headmaster's table at the top of the U closest to the windows. Then came Dad's table, then Anna's father's table and so on around the room. When the time came, waiters - this was before WW II when the students began taking turns serving themselves - the waiters, in their white coats, black bow ties, black pants and shoes, marched into the dining room one after another through the swinging doors held open by the chef and a helper, carrying turkeys to each table, to the headmaster, to Dad, to Anna's father....

And then Dad and Mother would ceremoniously trade places because he couldn't carve and she could. In France, at least at that time, the meat was carved in the kitchen by the wife before it was brought to the dining room. Deftly, swiftly, long chiffon sleeves flowing, Mother would serve her whole table faster than anybody else. So then Mother, remembering too,

told Richard and Barbara that the headmaster couldn't carve very well and his wife would be pretty mad at her for showing everybody up.

Barbara's other achievement, during her visit, was repairing an old hassock. Not only were its springs going every which way, but the needlepoint top, made by Dad's mother, was disintegrating. Barbara and her mother went to the library to get a book Mom remembered seeing on "tying springs". The subdued activity in the library came to a halt when Mom shouted out what they were looking for. She wasn't wearing her hearing aid so the librarian had to shout back. Another librarian, perhaps more used to this, came by to help. And a, if not the, book was found. Barbara read it and thought about setting to work.

Mom just happened to have not one but two needlepoint covers she had made for the two straight chairs in the living room. Mom had not caught on until after she had finished making them that Dad did not want the chair-covers he had grown up with changed.

Barbara set to work. Cousin Jeanie said, "I'd just send it out." In fact, Jeanie's brother's family had done just that for a sofa (George Mother). They'd had it re-built and re-upholstered, beautifully, as a thank you to Dad and Mother for being so welcoming. But there was a crack in the frame which didn't get fixed. That was why it had always been draped over and now the crack is back to catching on people's trouser legs and stockings. Sometimes there just are no perfect solutions.

The hassock probably could have been fixed perfectly. But a professional might have found the needlepoint cover not quite large enough. Anyhow, Barbara suspected Mom felt Barbara's working on the hassock would perhaps be acceptable, handled by a blood relative. Barbara did feel a pang as she removed and then threw out her American grandmother's needlepoint. She and Mom threw it and the rest of the scraps into a rubbish can near a beach where they'd go to look at the water birds every afternoon, through Mom's binoculars. The can at home was full again from the pantry. A cop actually followed them out of the beach parking lot that day, suddenly appearing from a little side road in the marshes. But he went straight on when they turned left.

The biggest and hardest part of fixing the hassock was taking out all the little nails and tacks. Then all at once Barbara remembered: she had watched Uncle George fix that very hassock. "It doesn't matter how many nails there are," he had said. She could hear him. She could see him too, licking his reddish mustache. Someone before him had put in plenty of nails and tacks, not all of which he had taken out. So Barbara decided not to take them all out either, and left plenty of her own.

Chapter 54

Home Again

Bliss - tennis, swimming, music, reading and enough busy work interspersed to keep her feet on the ground. Barbara worries about the difficult lives of mother and daughter, even while realizing her own contributions of “help” sometimes turn out to be counterproductive. She has not been writing very much. Doing is usually the easiest and most fun. There are times when writing is easy and fun too, though. Probably a kind of rhythm of different ways of being and doing works best.

It's 1990. In January Barbara recreated the Barn Days for Jim's 65th birthday, inviting the people that had been most involved. Together everyone gave him a puzzle of the Barn, with pieces cut in the shape of music stands or wine glasses or of whatever they chose, their initials in gold on the back. Some of the old music was performed and there were slides shown of some of the concerts. A few tapes were played.

Now Richard and Barbara are full of plans for taking Mother to the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Colorado school. But news has come of the death of one of the faculty wives there - rather spectacularly, in a helicopter on the way to the hospital, after years of being sick. Another wife has gone into a nursing home. The wife of a third has been paralyzed and speechless for over a year now, as well as the blind she has been for a long time. So there will be three husbands at the anniversary, and Mother.

Jim is just back from a family reunion in honor of his oldest brother's 70th birthday. His cousin called to make sure Jim had returned safely, telling Barbara he was “ a prince of a fellow”. Jim had had a little trouble figuring out whose children belonged to whom until, at the end, they all got into their own cars to drive home.

Ah, here under her tree she will no longer need to put flowers in the center of her table. Something has taken root in the moss there and is growing. Prospective journeys, like the one to Colorado in two weeks, start her organizing. She does feel threatened by journeys, so does she really think the plane will crash? Richard was made flight captain last week.

She has bought a beautiful blouse to go with a skirt, for Peter's wedding in August. She has bought the airline tickets for the wedding, and also tickets to Elizabeth's New York play in July.

An eye check-up resulted in the discovery she has abnormal cells on the white part of her left eye. She has been given an appointment in August to see if the cells are cancerous. Jim has always said if you think of bad things first, then they won't happen. But even at her very most paranoid, Barbara has never ever thought of cancer of the eye....

At the end of the lawn by the blueberry bushes is a mother squirrel teaching her baby how to look for food. Barbara doesn't think she has ever seen such a tiny squirrel before.

She is reading the new biography of Simone de Beauvoir. Sartre has just returned to a Paris occupied by the Germans. He is interested in active resistance, but he has been advised to let those who know how be the ones to do the resisting. Simone is interested in personal survival through "trauma and disorientation".

Barbara has just heard the surgeon is moving away.

The eye doctor said the place in her eye is "at 4 o'clock". Not to her it isn't. To her it's at 8 o'clock.

Chapter 55

Reunion

At 6:15 on a Friday morning in June, Richard, Barbara and their mother leave the Cape house and, at 7:00, fly from Hyannis to Boston on one of Richard's company's planes. Everybody knows him, at both airports, joking with, teasing him. Mother is impressed. And so is Barbara.

In Boston there are only a few steps to climb and not much walking after that. They needn't have worried at all about how Mother was going to manage, not yet at least. Other people are waiting for the plane to Denver, going to the reunion also. More arrive, huffing and puffing from airline connections much further away, just in time for boarding. Richard is traveling for free, Captain Richard. He is given a seat halfway down the aisle but soon is moved up to first class. The stewardess calls him by name and soon calls Mother by name too.

In Denver there is the perfect amount of time to change planes easily. And on they go, along the mountains, to Colorado Springs. Barbara tells Richard she has dreamt about those mountains and even of returning like this. Richard answers he has too.

The plane lands and taxis to the airport's north gate. They leave the plane and walk through a tunnel, suddenly emerging into crowds of people. In the welcoming confusion, Barbara steps back to take some pictures. Over to one side, someone has a movie camera.

Another plane needs to be met at another gate and someone must go. But initial greetings have deepened, in the return to where all was broken off fifteen years ago. Someone does move away to try to plan what next. A few leave. Others wonder where they have gone. Barbara tries to keep track of her mother as people begin to move to the baggage claim area, down a long corridor with floor-to-ceiling windows. Outside are the mountains. She had forgotten, how could she have, how they really are from so near.

Barbara would like to find a few post cards but there is no chance. They will be driven by Marjory, the one who moved in when Mr. Richardson's wife died earlier this spring. It turns out Mother knows Marjory. Barbara

has not asked how Mom feels about all this. And Mr. Richardson will drive Mr. Marston, the one who is now being met, the one to whom Barbara had once tried to apologize. He is coming in a wheelchair, with a nurse. Mr. Marston's wife is not coming, still alive but blind, paralyzed and speechless.

A message is brought to the baggage claim area that Mr. Marston seems very tired, so everyone should leave now and see him later. Barbara obediently leaves with Marjory, signaling to Richard to collect Mother, now seated close to an old friend and very deep in conversation. Outside, from the parking lot Barbara looks back and sees Mr. Marston, in his wheelchair behind the floor-to-ceiling windows, looking out at the mountains.

Barbara asks Marjory, who smokes whenever she can, about when she moved to Colorado and about her college and about her research. Opportunities to smoke are getting harder to come by. Another faculty son and daughter have returned with their father to this 60th anniversary of the founding of the school, and that daughter smokes too, whenever she can. That son, who arrived early, rented a car and they have gone.

Finally Richard succeeds in bringing Mother to Marjory's car. Mother has, of course, disobeyed seen Mr. Marston. And off they go, along broad new highways, out to the school. They think they see familiar landmarks but then are lost again. Suddenly the school appears, from an unexpected direction.

The road up to the main school building, where they are supposed to register, has been blocked off. So Marjory drives behind the dormitory up on the hill and parks. Richard goes to do the registering, without having to walk up a hill in case the altitude affects him.

Suddenly it is quiet and still. A light wind rustles in the cottonwoods. How much the trees have grown, making the sound Barbara hasn't heard, not for years. Over there is the "new" garage, fifty years later, a little different but not much.

A dressed-up couple appear and greet Mother effusively, saying they had just seen Richard who told them where she was. The man had taken care of the school horses for a while. When her mother calls the wife by name, Barbara realizes she has confused this man with another man who also took care of the horses.

Several cigarettes later (Marjory is worried about her dog who has been left in the house and by now needs to go out), Richard returns. They will be staying in the dormitory named for Dad.

Well - the dormitory is, after all, just a dormitory. So what did they expect? The furniture is built to last. Three girls bring towels, sheets, little soaps and a handful of chocolate kisses. They show where the bathroom is and leave. Barbara makes the beds, helping Richard with his because the bottom fitted sheet is too small and it takes both of them to bend the mattress and then flatten it and the sheet does not tear, phew. Outside the

windows are full of moth millers. They laugh, having forgotten how there would be piles of dead moth millers to clean up every fall when they got home from summers on the Cape.

They rest and read the schedule of events for the next two days which was given to Richard when he registered. It begins with an art show at 5:00 in the barn which has just been re-done as a gallery.

They are hungry. Breakfast was served on the plane. They have had no lunch. Barbara brought a box of raisins, knowing they would not have ready access to any but scheduled food. They eat raisins and kisses.

Mother shows Barbara a note someone gave her at the airport, about when friends of hers from town will come to see her tomorrow. An effort has been made for that. How good.

They stop in briefly at the house where they used to live. The little girl there takes Barbara to her room, which used to be Barbara's. Barbara points out the rabbit, still there among the plaster swirls on the ceiling, a little surprised the girl hadn't found it herself. Then, back at the dormitory, they dress for the art show.

Someone brings a golf cart to the door of the dormitory. Richard has gone for a short walk, so Barbara gets the lesson in how to drive it. Not a moment too soon, Richard returns to be taught instead. He and Mother climb aboard. Gratefully, Barbara walks.

They go in and Mother is surrounded. Barbara takes pictures and then walks around the transformed old/new building. The barn's first transformation had been into classrooms, a lab, a wood-working shop and, upstairs, an art studio and a gym which doubled as a theater. All is now open, mostly, and a new stairway, open also, rises in the center of the building. From the balcony, Barbara takes another picture of Mother, still surrounded. Mr. Marston has just arrived with his nurse. Barbara goes to hug him and meet her. The nurse, lovely, seems equal to handling this unique and brilliant man on his own terms.

Dinner is to be served under a tent near the main building. The golf cart had to be commandeered to bring more food and drink to the unexpectedly well-attended art show. Richard goes off to try to find it, but meanwhile Mother decides she can walk to the tent. So the nurse and Mr. Marston wait for Richard instead.

Richard says, when Barbara sees him next, he had forgotten how gorgeous this country and this place are. Later, while she is on the way to the dessert tent to load up for their table, she walks beyond, out toward the prairie. The evening sky is a deep dark blue. The sun, which has set, glows still behind the mountains. To the south are heaps of clouds. Returning to collect desserts, she meets someone she remembers, much nicer than she remembers. He even gives her his business card.

Then back to the dormitory and, ah yes, to sleep. Barbara can no longer

deny she has caught Jim's cold. Damn. Please don't catch it too, Mom. From the other bed Barbara hears "Stop coughing!" She hasn't heard that, said quite that way, for some time. She giggles to herself and holds very still, the way she had done when she'd had measles - and stops coughing.

At breakfast the next morning, those at the door of the school dining room the minute it opens are all from the East. Those from the West arrive just before the door closes. Cereals, eggs, sausages and bacon are there along with quantities of fruit.

Breakfast is leisurely, in the enlarged dining room, near an open balcony overlooking the new student/faculty center to be dedicated before a barbecue lunch on the football field. People come and go. There is a table piled high with handsome poster-sized photographs that have been taken during the course of the sixty years of the school's existence.

Mr. Marston arrives, pushed in his chair by his nurse, up the hill. Barbara had thought of offering the golf cart the night before...

Then Mr. Richardson, without Marjory, arrives along with several early graduates. At 10:00 they adjourn together to the (new) theater to see photographs made from glass slides by the first headmaster of the school. A historian gives a talk on the early days, with input from an official panel of three early graduates accompanied by ad libs from Mother, Mr. Marston and Mr. Richardson. The first headmaster's oldest daughter, now 75, has come with her husband who had also taught at the school. He is very frail.

They move on to the dedication of the faculty/student center. Barbara is stunned to find a friend from her old high school, who turns out to be the sister-in-law of the donor. They sit on the steps of the center, just as they had sat on the steps at their high school, talking. The center, not quite finished yet, was designed as a tribute to the now famous architect who designed some of the other buildings at the school.

Then Barbara walks to the barbecue at the football field with the first headmaster's daughter. There isn't time for all they have to say to each other, even while standing in line together for food. The sun beats down. Barbara is grateful to be part of the small group of the oldest, at a table in the shade of a lean-to tent.

As the barbecue winds down, the first headmaster's daughter leaves to preside at the showing of a movie of the early days. Someone comes by in a golf cart to collect Mother to meet her old friends from town, after allowing time for a group picture of the entire gathering. The headmaster's daughter's frail husband, left behind, looks lost. Richard takes him to his room in the dormitory to rest.

Barbara leaves to join Mother and finds her waiting alone. Together they look in another room and find the others, also waiting. They all go outside into the flower-filled patio. Barbara puts some chairs under a tree.

The quiet, happy reunion in the patio is followed by a "high tea" in the

living room. There is not enough hot water. Teas don't happen much any more; people have forgotten how. But the teas had been important occasions at the school. The first headmaster's daughter pours, as her mother had before her.

Walking back to the dormitory, for a rest before the cocktail party at the present headmaster's, Barbara meets a young woman who turns out to be a math teacher as well as the faculty advisor for the dorm, and also very glad to meet the daughter of the one for whom the dormitory is named. She gives Barbara a tour of the faculty apartment and the other half of the building. Even though Barbara is ready to drop, she is impressed and awed by both the place and the person.

Returning to her part of the dormitory, Barbara finds the husband patiently waiting in Richard's room but ready to go home. Soon his wife with their son and granddaughter appear with Mother and Richard. Barbara takes a picture.

After much needed rests, they put on fancy clothes. Barbara starts to walk to the party while Richard waits for Mother with the golf cart. Suddenly the sky goes black, so Barbara leaves the umbrella on the golf cart and walks ahead, almost running. Huge clouds roll over each other and there is wind. She meets someone else also walking fast who says there is a tornado watch!

Everyone at the party is elegant. Barbara had forgotten about this. Perhaps, growing up, she had taken that sense of elegance for granted, not having really known anything else until she found herself the only one of her friends, in the train to college, riding coach and on scholarship. She talks briefly to very many people and then at more length to three. The wife of her old Public Speaking teacher has become a dedicated bird-watcher. The husband of close friends of her parents, whose wife has died, is on the verge of tears so Mother doesn't dare talk much with him. And Barbara's high school friend confesses she is dying of cancer.

A rainbow, a double rainbow, appears outside of the big south window.

It is time to go to the banquet. The organizer tells Barbara that, if a tornado had come and blown away the tent, after all that planning, who knows what she would have done!

The first headmaster's daughter, back again from taking her husband home, is in charge of seating arrangements and asks Richard and Barbara if they'd mind not sitting with their mother, who is guided to the head table along with the other early faculty and an early graduate. At the next most head table, two headmasters, some trustees, and those who have given the arts center and the faculty/student center are seated, joined eventually by the third headmaster's daughter. That daughter started out at the table with Richard and Barbara. The chair where she wanted to sit had one leg up on the edge of the dance platform, so she went around to where

a pocketbook had been left, which Richard moved for her. That was a mistake. Two brothers and their wives belonged to the pocketbook and the wives, when they returned, wouldn't speak to anyone else the entire meal. A classmate of Richard's comes and also the business card graduate who cheerfully sits in the chair with the leg up on the dance platform, after trying a little to fix it. The other faculty son and daughter are at the next table, with the parents and children of the donors of the faculty/student center.

The food is delicious and the tables simply yet festively decorated. After dessert a band begins to play. The first headmaster's daughter leads the way to the dance floor with the early graduate. Others follow. Barbara goes to look for her mother but gets caught up in the crowd, everyone wonderfully laughing and dancing in twos and threes. "I do have to find Mom...." "Will she be crying?" "I doubt that! But ... she's not at her table...."

Barbara returns to her own table and then spots Mother out on the dance floor with one grad, being cut in on by another who dances her up to Barbara. Mother does want to get back to her room. As Richard and the other faculty daughter dance by, the other daughter says her brother has taken their father back to his room. Richard says he'll be along in a minute. Barbara says they will be by the golf cart.

Many people are by the golf cart, everyone talking. Then Barbara catches sight of Mr. Marston, being half carried by Marjory and another woman who, finding Barbara, says quietly "We have to get him back to his room...." Barbara says, "Help him get on the golf cart, I'll go find Richard - tell Mom if necessary...." Barbara runs to find Richard and also the nurse, who had been asked to dance. Instantly the nurse is back on duty. Mother, so busy with yet more people, is unaware Richard has left with Mr. Marston before he and the golf cart are back.

The next morning at breakfast, Mr. Marston tells Barbara Marjory had dragged him out on the dance floor, he unable to defend himself.

After breakfast, Barbara goes to the school library to see if it is open. They all want to see the exhibits there, of faculty and graduate work. It isn't. On the way back, Barbara meets Mr. Richardson and gives him a hug. And she tells him the other family has decided to keep the rented car an extra day, so they won't be needing a ride to the airport tomorrow after all. "But I cancelled a dentist appointment...." They join the others at breakfast and he says to Mother: "We still need you to keep us in line." Luckily Mother has no idea what he is talking about. Barbara wonders if she herself really does either. Who knows what the daily lives of the gods of her childhood were like....

A graduate tracks down a key to the library. And, after seeing the exhibit, they go to a service in the school chapel. Barbara happened to have heard that the school's recent business manager had died two days before

the reunion. And a student had died in a car crash two weeks before that. But right now the past seems to have taken over from the present, though perhaps not so much for those who, here, have a foot in both. The school hymn is sung, but it may not be the school hymn any more. Only the old grads sing it lustily.

And then lunch. Someone Barbara had known from in town comes to see her at lunch. But with all the people, there is no way the two of them can just talk. Barbara knows she has had four children, is divorced and has returned and re-settled here alone. There across the table, she doesn't seem different at all. At the end of lunch, Barbara gets up and waves a hail and farewell to her, quickly and quietly reminds Richard not to forget to bring Mom back to the dorm in the golf cart and then walks back to the dorm herself and goes to sleep. Twenty minutes later, Richard and Mother arrive. Barbara joins them and introduces them to the math teacher in charge of the dormitory who happens to come by and offers to give them a tour of the dorm too.

Barbara goes back to sleep. Bliss! When Mother and Richard return from their tour, as impressed as Barbara had been, they too lie down.

Barbara tells them she'll be back in an hour. And she's off, having waited for this moment (if it ever came) all weekend, for a kind of pilgrimage, walking her old walks. So far, all she managed (other than behind the dessert tent the first night) was a brief walk beyond the patio garden while Mother was reminiscing with her friends from town. A shock of recognition had gone through her when her feet found rough places in the ground, all that was left of where there had once been a path, a line of broad stones, instead of grass. Later she had met the other brother and sister returning from a walk there, and the three of them compared notes about those places, laughing, bursting into the school hymn, William Blake's "And did those feet..."

First Barbara walks by the garage where Mother and Dad had kept their car, then on to the stables and the corral. She remembers the colt, whom she had thought loved her but who had stepped on her foot. She goes on up the road on the hill, now paved, where she and Anna had whizzed down with their bikes. The prairie is green and full of flowers from more rain than usual. Barbara has never seen it so green. The gatehouse at the top of the hill is gone. That road too is paved, and there's traffic where there had hardly ever been a car. But the prairie to the east looks the same, the irrigation ditch winding its old way toward the reservoir.

She returns down the hill, past old and new houses. The place feels crowded. Barbara goes around to the garage where she and Anna had climbed the roof. More houses. Trees. Barbara is struck again by how big the trees are now, and how all the houses are surrounded with walls or fences.

She walks up the hill behind one of the dormitories and then behind a

house where they had lived for two years, and then behind the chapel. After she passes the chapel, built since she lived at the school, which she has never seen from behind, she suddenly realizes this is where she'd buried her rag doll when she was 7. She'd done something bad - she can't remember what - and had had to stay in her room. She was so mad, she hit a rag doll against the door and the stuffing started coming out. Ashamed, she buried it when she got the chance, hoping no one would notice. No one did.

She goes the rest of the way around the campus and returns to the dorm room. The pilgrimage has taken exactly an hour and Mother is through resting. Barbara lies down again before getting ready to go out to dinner in town. They and the other family have been invited by a friend who lives at the foot of the mountains. Mother says she is going to walk up and down the path outside.

When Mother returns, it is time to leave for dinner. Mom had met the first headmaster's daughter who had come around to say goodbye and to thank Richard for being so thoughtful about her husband yesterday. How good that she and Mother finally had a chance to be together, just the two of them. Mother, only 12 years older, had nevertheless been a faculty wife when the daughter had been a girl, still. Those had been important years for them both, keeping them close for a lifetime.

Richard drives the rented car to the dinner. On the way, the "children" wonder if their old school is still there. The other brother says not. Richard says, oh they wouldn't have torn it down, why would they have torn it down? And he finds it, tucked behind a mall where there used to be prairie. He turns off the highway and even drives into the schoolyard and around the school. Now it is a senior citizens center and there is a cookout going on. It's all still there, with its two sets of front steps, arches underneath, one set going up to the little kids' door and the other to the big kids' door. The top of the back steps and down a few is where they would stand to salute the flag.

The dinner is the first to be given by the hostess since the death of her husband. Barbara has the chance to talk with someone who is himself dying of a melanoma, huge on the top of his bald head. A big man, he dwarfs the corner of the careful garden where they sit, part of this small though elegant house in a gated community. He's more at home with his horse out on the prairie and soon, in their imaginations, that is where the two of them go.

The next morning they are about to leave for breakfast on the way to the airport when the other daughter accidentally locks the keys in the car! That family had been staying in the school infirmary along with Mr. Marston and his nurse. So the father goes back inside. Mother, having said her goodbyes, sits on the golf cart. They joke about driving the golf cart to the airport. Mom does a crossword puzzle rather than go in to say goodbye all over again. Barbara's box of raisins gets finished while Richard tries to reach the door

lock with a coat hanger, succeeding but to no avail against the power lock. A taxi is called to pick up another key from the car rental place. Barbara goes in to talk some more with Mr. Marston. She sings "My Heart's in the Highlands" to him, as much of it as she can remember, from the Saroyan play he had directed, in which she had been the little girl. He asks her if she knows Richard and Barbara. "I - am Barbara." "Oh - yes - of course."

The taxi arrives with a key that doesn't work. Just as the taxi leaves, Barbara makes a snap decision to take Mother in it to the airport. And they have breakfast there, and Barbara buys and writes postcards and mails them.

They are in the plane and the plane is about to take off when in come the others, the best reunion of all. The others had finally taken another taxi, and the car rental people promised to send on the luggage still locked in the car. Richard's new shoes and pilot's clothes are in the car too, but he has old ones he can use. He will have to. The poor daughter is humiliated but laughs and holds her head high. How had Barbara happened not yet to have put her own and Mother's bags in that car!

The plane, going south circles over the school. Mother won't look because the plane is bouncing a lot. The others are on the wrong side. First Barbara sees the two blue reservoirs, one small and one big, with their network of irrigation ditches. Then nearby she spots the deep green trees and fields, oasis-like in the prairie, surrounding the school's adobe-rose rectangular buildings. The plane finishes its circle and heads north along the mountains.

Chapter 56

The Wedding

Elizabeth tried on her bridesmaid's dress last night. Will she survive four days of celebration? Barbara sewed her into her size four gown by way of her bra.

And, in time for a big hail and farewell to Jim, about to finish being head of the liberal studies graduate program at the college, Barbara has managed to recover from a cold.

Barbara sent pictures from the Colorado reunion to Anna and then she wrote again to let her know Mr. Marston had died, adding she had just returned from Peter's wedding. Anna answered, wanting wedding details please.

"So here's your letter, with details. Just remember, you asked for it! Your interest is just what I needed to sit me down and relive, a little, a very wonderful wedding indeed. Enclosed is the newspaper announcement and picture. How about that wedding trip" (to France - Anna and her parents had visited Prats when Anna was three). "Mother's sister is still alive at age 92.

"I'll start with elaborating on 'unreal'. Pinehurst NC is a golfer's paradise, which is I guess why I assumed you, as a golfer, had heard of it. One of the wedding guests was a golfer, and the bride's father arranged for him to play on the world-famous 'Course 2'. Afterwards, I asked the guest how it had been. And he said: 'It was a religious experience.' The next day he and the bride's father went off to play on another newer course and, when I asked him how that had been, he said: 'Even better'. The area was bought up to become a winter resort for northerners by a relative of the Tufts family (founders of the college near Boston) around the turn of the century. I talked to a Tufts grandson, who described driving from NC to NH in 1912, a trip that took 14 days, cars and roads being what they were in 1912.

“Some early visitors from Scotland had started playing a game in the pastures with little white balls, scaring the cows, and that’s how golf began in Pinehurst. Then came horses, polo, hunting, trap shooting (with Annie Oakley as guest instructor - there are pictures in the local library of all this), airplanes (Amelia Earhart instructing) and, oh yes, tennis (courts all over the place) and swimming. Elizabeth spent most of her time in one pool or another. It was very good for both my kids to see that where they grew up is hardly unreal at all, compared to Pinehurst.

“Most of the wedding guests were close friends of the bride and groom. The bride arrived at the Boston airport bearing grapes, cheese and bread to share with everyone in the wedding party waiting for the plane. In Pinehurst, the Magnolia Inn, where most people stayed, is a lovely old place covered with flowers, inside and out. The rehearsal dinner, at the bride’s request, was informal, around a pool and near tennis courts (of course) at a club where more incoming out-of-town guests could find us. The wedding dinner itself was formal (at the same club, for which the bride’s father had been a prime mover. He had bull-dozed the land with his own bull-dozer).

“There was dancing after the dinner. Everybody danced. I’ve never seen anything like it. And Elizabeth came into her own. At one point, the others just stopped to watch her, and even the help came to watch. The next morning there was a brunch at the Magnolia Inn and when Elizabeth came in everyone clapped. She’s having a tough time, still trying to make it as an actress in NYC, so the recognition must have felt good. But we all had the chance to be our best, during those magic few days. Part of it was certainly Pinehurst itself, set up for such an event. Part of it was that most of the guests knew each other. Mostly, though, still and always, it does come down to organization. The bride’s mother is not at all well. It was the bride and her twin sister who did it all, backed by their parents’ financing and prestige.

“One of the interesting conversations I had was with a friend of the family who still lives in that area, an environmental lawyer deeply involved with an endangered species, the red-cockaded woodpeckers. The birds were blown away from the coast during Hurricane Hugo and re-settled at Fort Bragg, of all places. The lawyer says the birds don’t mind the guns, but they hate the tanks and keeping the tanks away from them is turning out to be quite a job. But the law is on the side of the woodpeckers, so there’s hope!”

Chapter 57

Troubles

The surgeon's nurse called this afternoon. Barbara had already made an appointment with the head of the department, whom she had met way back. Communication is bad indeed. Barbara told the surgeon's nurse she was just barging ahead, trying at least to make clear what she wanted, since she can't figure out what they want. Then she added: "I bet you're trying to figure out what your role is too." "Yes," answered the nurse.

And Barbara's eye operation is in ten days.

Maybe she should try to get this year's medical chronology put down, it's all so confusing. The eye doctor retired in July. He saw her the end of May and set up a "pre-cancerous condition" appointment for mid-August. She had a check-up in early June with the breast surgeon, who suggested (after confirming the other surgeon was leaving) a general doctor. She called a recommended nurse practitioner's secretary to set up an appointment for a physical just before the eye surgery, as instructed. The 2:15 appointment turned out to be a 1:45 appointment, so Barbara arrived too late for her physical, but she did learn she would have to continue to be seen by an oncologist. So much, then, for her dreams of having only one doctor. Also she is not convinced the time confusion was her own mistake....

Barbara told her tennis friends she couldn't sub again next week because she was having eye surgery. It helped her accept that this is really happening, though the news was a shock to the others.

Last time she happened to be near the library, she went in to look up the word "grace" in the OED, even though she didn't have her glasses with her. The word comes from "gratias". Its earliest use was in the 1200's, the grace of the sovereign and, listed only next, or of the Lord, the giving of something undeserved with the assumption of gratitude owed in return. Maybe the trick is to feel gratitude, not to owe it. Maybe Mr. Marston had grace. He felt gratitude for being alive at all, at the reunion, sick though he must have been. He asked about Mother's impatience with being deaf, made sad by her impatience.

Yesterday, the third Thursday of the month, a group of singers went as usual to sing around the kitchen table of the person who's had a stroke, in the big old house across the river. It was fun.

Barbara did not have her eye operation. She doesn't remember the chain of events, exactly. After she was in the chair, the attending student accidentally stepped on the adjustment pedal on his side, jerking the chair. She didn't have the nerve to ask if they would move the pedal so the student wouldn't accidentally step on it a second time. He did step on it a second time. She couldn't believe it and was scared. She finally asked the doctor, "I assume you would have this procedure done if you were in my place?" Silence! Barbara did sign the consent form, and the doctor asked her if she was satisfied. No of course not. She would have to know far more than she could be told in five minutes to sign it honestly. Pulling herself together, Barbara asked if it would be safe to wait another six months before going through with this operation and the doctor said yes! She will have to go back to be checked on a regular basis, but she would have had to do that anyway. And it's not as though she isn't cliff-hanging to begin with....

A friend asked: "Will you really be able to sleep nights?" Well, not last night. She can blame that on Jim, though, who, with a talk to give today, was not sleeping. It is curious how he is full of aches and pains and nothing, presumably, is really wrong, while she herself feels okay most of the time.

November 5, no doubt the last lovely day this year. Barbara could go to a concert, but it is just too nice a day. She has done some raking and will mail invitations to a party for Peter and his bride the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Elizabeth is deeply unhappy, but Barbara has got to trust her to take hold. If Elizabeth can take hold now, she'll know she can in the future.

If the news from the doctor is bad, will Barbara be able to say, right out, "wait"? Her eye experience will have helped in that respect, her eye visibly better. She will have to do what is recommended, unless decisions finally can become her own responsibility. She does need to have an "in" at the hospital for when her family can no longer cope with her if there's a final illness and also in order to be connected with a hospice. The chances of her being given the opportunity to make her own decisions may be pretty slim, because of her labels of hysteria and paranoia.

She is deep in "The Band Played On", about Aids. Breast cancer people are learning from aids people how to be political. She guesses she knows what that means....

She really must go in. She hates to leave, but it will be dark soon. So long, Mr. Squirrel, scrabbling over there in the leaves.

The Monday after Thanksgiving, Barbara's mother had to have a mastectomy. However the general upheaval of Thanksgiving may have helped, including the Saturday party for Peter and his bride. Richard and his second son came. Holiday action alternated between the bridge table and the ping pong table.

Barbara has discovered that being in the waiting room is easier than being in the operating room, but not much. The day of her mother's operation, some surgeons came in person to say to waiting families how well things had gone and that there had been no surprises. But, after the third or fourth time those statements began to lose their - their charm? - for her at least. Finally Barbara was called to a phone. On the phone was a discussion going on with someone else about whether breast patients with drains should be sent home the same day or not, which she finally interrupted since the doctor clearly had no idea she was on the line.

Before continuing to wait for her mother to return from the recovery room, Barbara went to get some coffee and a sweet roll.

At noon Barbara checked again to see if her mother was about to return, and then again later. Then she was told her mother would be back soon now but that Barbara did have time to pick up a sandwich at the cafeteria. On the way back from the cafeteria, Barbara just happened to meet her mother in the hallway, who was pretty cheerful but kept telling Barbara to go away, she didn't want to be a bother and that she, Mom, would let people know when to call her. And then Mom went back to sleep.

Finally Mother woke up and was even willing to let Barbara stay on with her. After a while, Barbara went to try to find Mom's teeth, her "uppers" The lowers had been left in. Barbara did wonder a little if Mom's one upper tooth should have been left unsupported. Then poor old Mother did look less poor and less old with her teeth back in. She threw up and wet the bed and the floor ("stress", said the nurse, adding she was glad she wouldn't be having to do the laundry). And then both the doctor and his assistant came by, the assistant volunteering that there was no spread to the lungs, and that no drains were needed. Mother could go home as soon as she was able to get dressed. Going home would help avoid disorientation.

Coming home right away was good. Mother even came to the table at suppertime for a little broth. Some depression did happen later. There was a huge scar. Mother said only that she felt like a little girl again, even if only on one side....

Ten days later, Mother was told she could go home to the Cape. Barbara went with her for a week and now, five days before Christmas, Mother claims

she is better than she had been before the operation. She is healing well, surrounded by young neighbors who seem very fond of her. Someone at the senior citizen center will call her between 9 and 9:30 every morning and will call a neighbor or Barbara if Mother doesn't answer. Barbara did fail to convince her mother to even just consider a new hearing aid, new glasses, or even to get her clock-radio fixed. But what a shocker it must have been for her to enter a hospital world, even if only for a day, from her quiet life on the Cape!

Barbara herself has still not heard from her new doctor. She decided to call and discovered her record was still (five weeks later) in the new doctor's office. And not having heard even yet, two weeks later, she called again. Her record had been returned to the records room but would be called back. And finally the doctor himself telephoned, calling himself by his first name. He said the pap smear had got lost and Barbara would have to come in for another, at the hospital's expense.

Anyhow, she is looking forward to a quiet Christmas with no responsibilities but the ones she chooses for herself, while everyone else is spinning.

Her friend Ellen has sold her house and is renting an apartment until the new retirement community is completed enough to be moved into, early next fall. The day the readers met at Ellen's house for the last time, Barbara was the only who knew it was the last time. So everybody left, unaware that all the meetings would be at Barbara's from now on, not just the next one.

It is Christmas Eve and she has lit a candle in the kitchen window and turned on the lights of the Christmas tree. The angel on top is bending so low Barbara hopes she doesn't fall off. Barbara bought a new third king at the Christmas Tree Shop on the Cape. One of the Veres' dogs ate the old one, part of a creche set she had picked up at a rummage sale across the river. They've been using kings from Christmas cards for the third king, till now. The dog had also eaten the creche baby and a cow. She replaced the baby with a Swedish extra she bought at a store, now gone, called Shopping International. The kids contributed the animals. A group of wooden musician figures from Grandma Vere, plus a few stray angels with or without wings, complete the conglomeration.

It has occurred to Barbara the trouble with Christmas is that she has never known, really, what to do with it. Jim only wishes it would hurry up and get over with.

Christmas is over. Barbara put the decorations away yesterday, except for the yellow bird-light which lasted most of her childhood. It spends the rest of each year on top of the books on the roll-top desk. It has been fun to

see and touch the familiar figures again that have become the chosen ones - the little rabbit on red skis, a present when she was a secretary in the math department, the eye of god, made out of yarn and popsicle sticks by Peter when he was a cub scout (his den mother was Greek), the felt figures made by Peggy who lived next door across the river, the worry doll given her by the person who can always find four-leaf clovers....

At the Christmas tennis tournament, there was a baby, seemingly belonging to no one. He crawled along the stands and established himself in front of Barbara, his back to the players. An empty tennis ball can had attracted his attention. It amused him for surely an hour. He took the lid off, put his foot inside and then his hand, chuckling, talking to himself. He found a paper booklet in the can and started talking to it. Maybe a baby thinks people are talking to books, not reading from them. He smiled at Barbara when she smiled at him and imitated her when she jiggled her fingers. He returned to his own affairs when Barbara checked back into the tennis game. He had a slight cold, which fascinated him. Once in a while his nose needed wiping. First he'd examine his shirtsleeve, with great interest, almost forgetting what he might have had in mind when he had started his investigation. Then, nose cleaned by means of the sleeve, he went on pretending with his hands to be washing his whole face, then his head, his hair, his neck, chuckling, laughing out loud.

Barbara is reading a book on communication, thought by the author to be, finally, impossible. The metaphor used is one of porcupines in winter, needing to keep warm, needing also to avoid impaling each other or being impaled.

It is January 16, 1991 and the country is not yet at war. Yesterday the Bach group was edgy, before becoming caught up in Cantata 138. Afterwards someone told Barbara she had hit the nail on the head when, trying to get the cello and bassoon players to hold their quarter notes the full length of time, she said something about now being so important, don't let now end too soon.

At her own repeat check-up, Barbara had to tell the doctor she wouldn't be here in two weeks when test results might be in, but on the Cape with her mother who was going to have some teeth fixed, messed up during her operation.

At 4:50 Eastern time, air war started. The TV reporter sounded choked up. There were background noises of sirens in Dharam and in Riyadh. Barbara called Elizabeth. As they talked, someone in Elizabeth's street started to play a recording of a Sousa march, loud through an open window. It is not this country's finest hour.

And now it is a gray February day, though finally the sun is trying to come through in pale streaks. Barbara walks to town just to mail a letter. She meets others, seemingly at loose ends also, maybe with the idea of browsing through clothing stores, trying to lift spirits. Barbara has decided to switch to her mother's eye doctor, the one who was available when Mom did finally agree to get her eyes checked. She is giving up on the hospital eye department.

Ah! The new eye doctor was great. Barbara now needs to call up the clinic at the hospital to cancel whatever they have set up for her, if anything, and also to have the pictures that were taken of her eye transferred. The new doctor did not say she did not have cancer ("I've learned...") but wrote out "xerosis", not included in the insurance form. An eye book says xerosis is rare, caused by malnutrition or, hear hear, the result of massive gut resections!

Mother called yesterday, saying she would not object if Barbara came for a visit. Her dead tooth broke and she has set up appointments with the dentist for next Monday and Tuesday. Barbara went. Mother was very low. There were tears. But then, with the new tooth on her partial, her morale improved. Barbara had planned to stay a couple of extra days. But, while they were eating lunch by the TV, they heard a big snow was on the way. Half an hour later, Barbara found herself in her car driving home, sent on her way before the snow came, no ifs ands or buts.

And there's peace again. But also there has been a plane crash in Colorado, in the gully where they used to play Cowboys and Indians on horseback. Dad used to worry about the planes flying directly over the school...

A woodpecker has come and this time she calls the neighbors so they can watch him too, banging away, wood chips flying in all directions.

It is St. Patrick's Day. "When Irish eyes are smiling..." was a song they sang, one year, for the Spring Festival in Colorado Springs. The children from little schools all over the prairie would come into town on buses and give fifteen-minute programs for each other that went on all day. Another year Richard was "the boy", while the rest sang "Daisy, daisy, give me your answer, do". He pushed a bicycle built for two across the stage with Ina Mae following. And when Barbara was 8, she got to be "the Dutch girl" and Walter Mac "the Dutch boy", while the rest sang "In the land of the wooden shoes..." and while Barbara and Walter Mac danced. What a curious undertaking for all those little schools. "In an old Dutch garden by an old Dutch mill", they sang also, the other children dressed as tulips in all colors of crepe-paper. Barbara had been thrilled. Mother always came to see their school's production and maybe two or three others before

gratefully going home. Mother would have liked to take Barbara home with her. The place was a big noisy barn of a place and the children were not that carefully supervised. But Mother did seem to understand Barbara's - ecstasy, even - allowing her to stay. Now Barbara can't quite imagine what the magic had been. But even the time for bag lunches (they were asked not to bring their dinner pails) was kind of a show in itself - all those children, so many her own age. Was that it? - a realization that she was part of so very many? - each one in his own place in his own school which had its own place among all the schools, each with the serious purpose of putting on a show? She doesn't remember any misbehavior at all, even from some of the pretty crazy boys in her school. They were allowed to go to the bathrooms (near the dressing rooms) two by two, without being supervised, and even the boys got back.

Once a week Barbara continues to visit her friend with ms, who wrote a diary, about twenty years ago, describing a trip to England with her husband and three children. Barbara is reading it aloud to her and it gives them both much pleasure.

Yesterday, the readers talked about diaries they had inherited from their parents. One said the only big fight she ever remembers her parents having was when her mother read her father's diary and discovered he hadn't even mentioned the death of one of her parents. "She slammed around the house - I'd never seen anything like it!" That story came up when someone else said: "They never wrote anything in their diaries - good, clean diaries - mostly about the weather."

Jim is in NYC overnight, seeing the show Elizabeth is in before she moves to Los Angeles, May 1.

Two days have passed. There is a good review in the NY Times, which could move Elizabeth into a serious acting career. In the review, she was considered "first-rate". The rest of the article was about the composer, who had used some of Elizabeth's ideas which must have been hard for her, except she is the first to say he is the one who got it all together.

Many days have passed. Barbara's pen is right where it was when she left it, eons ago it now seems. This has been a difficult time. She was not sufficiently aware of just how unhappy Mother has been, probably for much longer than just last December. Mother should not be living alone. Barbara is thinking about encouraging her to move into the new retirement community here, scheduled to open late this summer, where they themselves are on the priority list - so many unwelcome decisions. Tomorrow Barbara and Richard will talk to a lawyer. Meanwhile Jim has accepted an offer to go to Princeton in the fall.

Barbara is watching a crow annoy a woodchuck, pecking at the woodchuck's tail, backing off, then returning into position to peck again. Finally the woodchuck goes off up the hill, where all the daffodils are which Barbara

had forgotten she had planted.

Mother gave Barbara four hundred dollars at the end of this heavy month. Barbara thought it might be for the chair she re-caned, which Mother both wanted her to do and didn't want her to do. Maybe the money was for Barbara to spend on getting the chair caned properly. Mother's comment, after Barbara had at least succeeded in making the chair safe to sit on, though not matching the others, was: "I don't understand why you can't follow directions". The comment was all the more painful because Barbara doesn't understand why she can't follow directions either. She had found the caning materials in one of the upstairs closets where she was putting things from the other closet - which she was emptying in case someone would be needed to live in. Once again, Mother has decided to stay on the Cape. Both Mother and Barbara seem to revert to a previous life when they are together, not good for either one of them. Barbara did get Mother to agree to see her doctor since she was in so much pain - and she went! The doctor gave her a prescription for pain pills and a clip to get an X-ray. Barbara mentioned that her own friend with breast cancer had found out her similar pain was "only" arthritis.

Elizabeth is in limbo in L.A. until June when she moves to an apartment. Peter is too busy with too many houses. Barbara keeps on learning that the best she can do with the best of intentions is not that good: her special people seem beyond her reach now. Maybe it's okay just to wish she were better for them: and maybe, she can only hope, it's better for them that she's not....

Barbara has had yet another hassle about a fifty dollar overcharge at the hospital from Mother's operation. Trying once again to explain the problem to someone over the phone, she realized the person she was talking to was talking to someone else. For a moment she saw red - and then hung up - and then sent a check herself for the fifty dollars, giving up, giving up. She prays: please don't screw up and send Mother the bill yet again.

It is the morning of college graduation, quiet here in the backyard on this perfect day - a crow, a child, a fly, an opening/closing door.... The rest of the world is several blocks away, listening to Elizabeth Dole whose speech will be in tomorrow's paper.

The Veres are planning a trip to Jim's island in Lake Superior, with friends. What complications! She can't believe some people do this for fun. Her assigned chore is to decide which route to take and where to stay overnight and to make reservations.

At the last singing session around the kitchen table of the lady who has had a stroke, those who came were also regaled with stories about artificial

respiration - of lambs, gold fish and even of an iguana. The son, of the one who told about the iguana, had come home from college with the iguana, which escaped. The son caught it by its tail, which it promptly shed. It climbed a tree. The son followed. By that time the poor iguana was almost dead from cold and fright. So the son (about to go to medical school) gave it artificial respiration and put it in the bathtub along with its electrically warmed rock and some lettuce. The iguana is fine now, and its tail was fed to the chickens.

Barbara has begun typing Mother's translation of what they have of Barbara's French grandfather's writing. She also found some of his lecture notes from St. Cloud, written in 1892. Perhaps they were given to Dad: They are redolent, still, of Dad's tobacco smell. Barbara will send them to Annette's sister for the French family files.

Once, by the fire, over cheese and sherry, Barbara asked Mother if she really believed her father knew her as a person. Mother had just said Barbara would never know how much Dad had cared for her, and that was how Barbara decided to answer. And Barbara nearly dropped her sherry glass when, at last, Mother answered "no".

Barbara wonders if she is the only one who has seen all of her grandfather's notebooks. What could have happened to them? Could she have dreamt of their existence? But he keeps saying, in the still existing notebooks, he hopes to get around to writing about this and that - which he did.

Tomorrow Jim goes for a glaucoma check. He takes three different kinds of drops twice a day. Also he has lost the money he collected for a hail and farewell dinner in honor of a colleague tomorrow night. And he has lost his white jacket which he was planning to wear to Peter's sister-in-law's wedding on Saturday.

Chapter 58

Loss

It's about to rain again, but here Barbara is nevertheless, outdoors under her tree. It's loaded with crabapples. She can't even see out around the loaded branches. Already she has made three batches of jelly and had started a fourth when she decided to come out instead, in spite of the gray skies. Anyhow, she is not that good at getting the jelly to gel. She has picked many crabapples mostly to ease the tree. She can't believe how many there still are.

What to write, after the whole and exhausting month of July.

July has been over for a week. She has sort of come back to her old routines, including spending time in the garden, at least in the part the woodchuck didn't get into. The electric fence helped some, but the lettuce was apparently worth a few shocks. And yet - the lettuce roots are still there and putting forth once again. The beans and squash are flourishing, there among the weeds. And she almost missed the potatoes, only happening to pull some up along with the clover from the edge of the garden.

In July the Veres went to the island with another couple, close friends. The endless discussions about what to do next and how to do it nearly drove Jim up the wall. But those friends really are special and Barbara had indeed forgotten how very beautiful the island is. For the first time they went on most of the guided tours. Wild flowers were in bloom, the orange lilies and blue iris around the swamps and roses and thimble berries in the sun, plus the varieties of orchids.

Then came two weeks of trying to do the right things for family and friends. There were more special, though fun, dinners than Barbara felt like producing. And somehow the decision was made that Barbara would not go to Princeton with Jim this fall.

Hum. So how will her schedule be this fall? Early dinners? Late afternoon tennis games? Early to bed and early to rise? Will she be able to say to friends there are certain times she really doesn't want to be disturbed? Two days ago she did manage to come out under her tree, but she was so

tired she lay down on the grass and went to sleep. Maybe, this fall, she will just go to sleep....

Richard's airplane company is closing down its branch on the Cape and he'll be commuting to Cleveland after learning to fly yet another kind of plane. He said Mother became very quiet when he told her. He is interested in changing her assets to a life trust, to avoid losing so much in taxes. Mother hates to spend money. Richard and Barbara got few special things when they were little, and those few, like Barbara's dollhouse, came from friends. She wonders for a moment where that green tricycle came from with the front wheel that wobbled. They did get bikes, one each, too big at first, too small at the end. Richard rode his bike to his summer restaurant job, filling the tires at the station next door and then filling them again to come home, at the station across the street from his job.

Well, at 89 Mother still does take care of herself. The person in the rented barn-house calls morning and evening. Mom still loves to read. How lucky that she is the deaf sister and the older one, who so loves music and spends long hours listening, is the blind one.

There has been a hurricane. Richard telephoned to say Mother refused to leave the Cape to stay with them. She also refused to stay with neighbors. Richard and his son ended up coming to the Cape for breakfast, the next day, since where he lives all electricity and water had been shut off and the phones were out too. Mother has gas for cooking. On the phone Barbara also talked with Richard's son who sounded very small, after the hurricane. Peter lost trees. Here there was only much-needed rain. The modest dikes Barbara had persuaded the town to build so water would run into the sewer out in the street instead of into their yard, did their job well.

Finally Richard is worried about Mother too. Barbara is beginning to have a feeling she is not going to have the fall to herself after all.

Out of the blue Mother gave her ten thousand dollars - to avoid federal taxes. Barbara gave the kids two thousand each and the rest inspired the Veres to buy a new car. But perhaps Jim shouldn't drive alone, even in a new car. She has given him a gadget to put over his ear that will buzz if he nods off. Or rather when he nods off. Once, when she too nodded off, they ended up in a cornfield.

Yesterday Barbara spent time in the music library. It is between terms at the college and she has that lovely place to herself. And Jim is in Princeton. His first class went very well. But there was a sad, sad letter from Mother, who hurts, so what to do....

It has been decided that Mother will come October 2. Barbara will go to get her, or Peter will bring her. Barbara has the feeling Mother is mad

at Richard. She will be mad at Barbara next, no doubt. It has to be tough to be old and so vulnerable, not knowing or maybe refusing to believe how vulnerable.

Sunday. Barbara would say she herself is depressed. And it is not pleasant. She talked to Richard who said, "Let's just go with the six weeks when I'm away and then see. Let's say Mom will just be coming for a visit...."

Elizabeth called, from California. She couldn't get through to her dad, who has been having trouble with his phone. She had just been to Disney World and wanted to tell him she missed him, when she went on the "It's a small world" ride once again. Ruefully Barbara remembers but doesn't point out that it was she who had taken little Elizabeth on that ride, at the World's Fair in New York City. But how lovely that Elizabeth is still so enchanted with it, as Barbara had been too.

There was an article recently on "Granny dumping", which apparently happens often enough now to merit such an article. The old are being failed and/or there are more of them to notice.

There is also a certain amount of social pressure not to "get stuck". In fact, Jim couldn't believe Barbara was even considering taking care of Mother herself. And even if she does, Mother won't be happy. Not really. Looking at the problem square on, Barbara does understand that the main advantage of Mother's coming here is that it would be less expensive....

Barbara feels she lives three different lives - her own, Jim's (when he's home) and Mother's (when she is here). Barbara will just have to find out if she can live some of her own life with Mother around, the way she can with Jim. She reminds herself she really might not, shouldn't be in fact, alive today and both Jim and Mother would have had to manage some other way without her. Can she, well, be alive and still claim her own time?

Barbara has been sawing winter kindling on a clear, but not so cool again, evening with the full moon coming up. Should Barbara go down to the Cape to stay with Mother there? Mother finally admitted to Richard she felt she was failing and no she did not want to go to the doctor, who told her a month ago she was fine. Mother is so isolated, except for her two bridge groups. She drove to her game as usual yesterday and then today she was barely able to get up, so she told Richard. Barbara will call her to give the telephone number where she herself will be playing bridge tonight, oh help. Barbara was the last possible substitute, she was told. At least she does like the players.

And now Jim is home for the weekend, very tired. But the band is practicing for the football game and there is a gold light in the treetops this cool late afternoon. Time to make an apple pie for a potluck dinner. And today Jim looks a lot better than he did when he got home. Richard says he can bring Mother on Thursday. Then Saturday he leaves for Texas. Meanwhile Barbara has decided nothing matters compared to the fact she

herself feels so well.

There was another newspaper article, this one about dumping babies. The difference between babies and the old, other than babies are cuter, is that the old, some of them, have money. They are not suddenly in the world, naked and helpless. There's a Broadway play about the interplay of the power of the caretaker versus the power of the caretaken's money.

What are families for, if not to help each other? Are families being sold a bill of nursing home goods, so that families no longer do help each other? Barbara's friends say they don't want their children to have to make decisions for them, the way they are having to for their own parents. Barbara wonders if she really could bring herself to sign her own self into a retirement home when the "right" time (whenever that is) came to give up her own home. Her American cousins took care of their mother, between them, for quite a while before they gave up. Is it better to give up at the beginning? Barbara did not take care of Jim's mother....

Barbara has bought a bathtub rail and is thinking of having Mother stay in a warmer, if smaller, room.

Mother is definitely not well. She did get up for lunch but staggered back to bed. It is a lovely warm and windy fall day. Mother is always too cold and Barbara too hot. Barbara has made a doctor's appointment for tomorrow. Mother may not be able to get there. No one comes for house calls anymore. How odd, at this time and in this place, to be so helpless. Mother may be dying. Barbara could imagine that's what Mother believes. She says she wants to go to a nursing home. Cousin Jeanie telephoned last night and Mother said to say Hi but she did not want to talk.

Mother might even be trying to die. Can you really do that? The world seems to have narrowed down to the two of them.

Well now, this evening Mother is much better. The lovely evening reminds Barbara of the spring she had measles, feeling secure and loved as she watched the changing light out her window. She hopes Mom is feeling that way now, with the changing light out her window as she rests before getting up for news and cribbage.

At difficult times you just continue doing the next thing: helping Mother shower, the interview at the nursing home, lunch, and then the doctor. Last night, Mother looked lovely, perhaps like her father's mother. "Was she pretty?" Barbara had asked, about the father's mother, repeating several times. Mother answered: "I - don't know - I never thought about her that way...." And Mother, teary, said, when she lay down to sleep: "What would I have done without you." The loneliness and aloneness of the old has really hit Barbara, though Mother has often said being alone is not so awful and it can even be good when you are well.

They watch the Clarence Thomas hearings on TV. Sexual harassment is simply not an issue for Mother. Mom's world is as she sees it. Mother knows she is right. "She scares me," said one friend of Barbara's.

The doctor's visit was pretty miserable and included a spin-X-ray and three separate people trying to take her blood, only the last successfully. The doctor did have ideas for helping her feel more like herself - and that there indeed was the possibility of more cancer. But he thought the nursing home would be a mistake. "You're not sick enough."

They are considering the smaller of two retirement communities. Barbara prays: Please let me do this well and stay well myself and keep everybody happy. Her own life is on hold, not unpleasant except for a brief moment yesterday when she looked out at her apple tree. She does go to the garden. She has marked with stones where the dill and garlic seem to have established themselves, hoping she won't dig them up by mistake next spring. She is also learning to do without her "fix" of a lot of exercise, but that isn't easy.

It turns out that Mother has very low potassium, perhaps the entire explanation for her miseries and the result of another medication she is taking. Low potassium is easy to fix, though one can indeed die from it. The doctor referred to the potassium he was prescribing as "vin ordinaire". And he apologized for the blood-taking hassle. Mother laughed and was charmed. And Mother has agreed to play bridge tomorrow. Suddenly Barbara and her mother are having a very good time. The readers will come here tomorrow. They'll try that. And maybe soon Barbara will go for a quick swim.

Barbara returned from her first swim in a while to find men coming out of the driveway in their truck. They said they would be returning to work on the sewer. They had come and had even walked into the house. Mother was trying to pretend they weren't there.

The sewer men ended by digging up much of the myrtle Barbara had brought from the Cape. However they also dug up lots of burdock and are going to plant grass in an area where she had been thinking about doing that very thing. The sewer men said it was a good thing the sewer had not blown up.

Meanwhile Barbara's voice level has risen. People look startled. On the other hand she must remember Mom does hear when, for instance, Barbara is on the phone. It may be a question of Mom's processing what she hears, who has lived alone in her own head for so long.

Mother is eating very well now. Still, she is thin, except for her middle. Could she possibly have Barbara's kind of cancer? Mother has never ever had a pap test, Barbara discovers. But being big in the middle runs in Mom's family.

Barbara forgot to buy artichokes for supper last night. She does usually announce what she is planning. And Mother asked about that. She does care, even while protesting she isn't hungry. "Very little...", she says, before every single meal. Grandma Vere had been like that. Thinking of themselves as not being hungry may be usual among the old.

Barbara is beginning to wonder what to do when there will be three cars in the driveway built for one. It pleased Mother so, when Barbara said how good it was to have Mom's car here. Richard had driven her up in it, flying back to Boston. Keeping that car seems to be helping Mom deal with the being-a-burden-to-the-children bit. That might matter enough to cause the Veres to sell their dear old red one.

And now a gold-red sunset is almost over. Barbara thought of waking Mother to see it. It has been a good day, and they had delicious artichokes for supper tonight. First they had sherry and cheese and crackers, and worked on today's crossword puzzle. Some of these times are turning out to be precious indeed.

The doctor has called again. He is concerned. The blood tests indicate Mom's kidneys are not functioning properly. The doctor wants to see her and talk with her face to face.

After all, the doctor's visit was reassuring. He is somewhat absent-minded but serious and also surprisingly funny. He told Mother the French are supposed to have liver problems, which made her laugh, remembering her parents and grandparents, all with liver problems. She does have a kidney problem, but he will leave her alone since she does not complain. For the second time, he brought up the subject of having a living will. And he suggested someone to call about possible alternatives to a nursing home.

Barbara stares at the four books she bought to read this fall, still on the bookshelf across from her chair. She may get to them yet. Mom is reconsidering the retirement community, has made up her mind even, a little teary from Jim's offer to make up the difference if her interest income doesn't quite cover the costs. Barbara had talked with Jim about keeping Mother's "capital intact", which seems to matter a lot to her. Could that be because of Richard? Is something going on between them that Barbara doesn't understand?

Barbara went to visit another place where she couldn't believe a couple of friends had settled their mothers. She herself wouldn't have liked to be there. She met one of the mothers, along with her daughter there. They don't get along, but they are almost shockingly alike, even as Barbara and her mother may be too. Whole phrases Barbara's friend uses came pouring out of her mother's mouth. Someone once said: "The things I hated most in my father are the same that I value in myself..."

Will Mom really get herself to the retirement community? It is attractive and the people there seem pleasant. Barbara met someone there whose great

grandson is coming to visit her from Paris. She is 97.

Barbara is trying to get Mother's stuff organized. But is she beginning to sense - resentment, fear of desertion for example? Mother seemed to like the place even better when they visited again. Will Barbara be able to maintain an identity as an ally, living separately, perhaps more easily?

Barbara has just called Cousin Jeanie. Mother is reading about the James family and is wondering why they were all so hooked on Europe. So Barbara quoted to her an excerpt Jeanie had found in her diary and had sent to Barbara. The diary was written when Jeanie was in France the summer before she went to college. The French family had just returned from having tea at the neighbors where the conversation had been about Americans being so much younger than Europeans. Jeanie had written: "I don't think we're younger than any one else." Barbara had to call. Jeanie offered to send Barbara her whole diary.

They continue to play bridge. And Mother lashes out, though surely more than she realizes, at Barbara's stupidity. That's hard on Barbara's friends, but they do keep coming, bless them. Tonight Barbara and Mother relived the latest game. Barbara had had the feeling something was not right, since Mom did not want to play their usual cribbage. Barbara was so eager to get back to her book, she accepted with gratitude the chance. Then there were sighs and Mom announced she was going to bed. Barbara asked didn't she want her usual hot milk? Mother said she had forgotten and yes. While they were drinking the hot milk. Barbara played solitaire. And then suddenly here it came again, Mother bawling her out about leading a king when she shouldn't have. Barbara promised she would never again lead a king when she was Mom's partner and by the way it did bother her friends when Mother bawled her out in front of them. Cards are terribly, puzzlingly, important to Mother. She gets very involved, even just in Solitaire. Wouldn't it be something to lose their closeness over a king lead!

Barbara is a bit depressed or maybe just tired. She is not sure how things will turn out. One day at a time, as they say. Tomorrow there will be the Sunday paper. Dare she try to set up another bridge game?

Just now Mother reminds Barbara of Elizabeth who, as a baby, would simply go to sleep whenever Barbara left her, no matter when that was. She would just turn off. Or is something really wrong? For the first time Mother drank only one glass of sherry, with no half-glass dividend, and ate no dinner except for four canned peach slices. She doesn't look well.

A little while ago, Mother started taking less zantac. Maybe she'd better go back to two a day. And another storm is coming up the coast. Richard's wife, who has had the roof fixed from the last storm, is very ready for him to come home from Texas.

Barbara is about to go to bed but is staring at the braided rug by her chair, made by Mom. There is another one to her right and several more,

braided and hooked, around the house - and around Mother's house and Peter's house and probably Richard's.... Suddenly Barbara is staggered by the empty hours Mother has had to fill over the years, especially over the last ten. And there are all the little squares she has made to use up the yarn brought to the Cape by Dad's older sister from her occupational therapy work at the Massachusetts State Hospital. Mother is coming to the end of the yarn and brought what was left here. She also brought a cut-work doily to work on. Barbara has worked on it too - you can certainly tell where.

Something new. This morning, Barbara cleaned up BMs from the kitchen floor. Mother seemed unaware. She is not well today. The emotion has to be part of it, choosing what Richard should bring for her for the retirement community from the Cape. She probably should no longer be left alone. If she doesn't go to the retirement community after all, Barbara must get regular help.

Elizabeth is sick, in Hollywood.

Richard may be more overwhelmed than Barbara is herself. His going alone to Texas has been changed to his wife and son going with him. After they return they will move into the Cape house. It's going to be hard for him to bring those parts of his life together. He may have been using the parts as refuges from each other.

So far Barbara has managed to cook good meals that the three of them are willing to eat, now that Jim is home, after the late afternoon gatherings he has with his colleagues. It's hard for him to be home at a specific time. Mother needs to know when things are going to happen. He eats fast and then sleeps over news. "Why am I so tired?" he asked, the week after he got home.

There has been no word from Mother's sister or from any of the French family. When Richard comes, they will telephone Annette's twin. Richard and Annette's twin are good friends, so maybe they are the ones who will do the talking. The red car has been sold.

Barbara is worn out from Richard and his youngest son's visit. The son is getting tall and handsome. It is a cold and blowy night. The football game this afternoon was fun.

They are zeroing in on the retirement community: lots of paper work, lots of sorting out what will be needed. Richard brought Mother's silver which will go to the oldest granddaughter when she marries, next summer, Mom's own wedding present from her parents.

Elizabeth is very sick.

The bright spot has been typing cousin Jeanie's diary from the visit to France in 1934.

Good news from Elizabeth, finally. And Barbara has looked over the next Cantata, for Advent. Bach and Shakespeare too, can transcend whatever else is going on.

But is Jim sick too, with all his December doctors' appointments? Will she herself be reminded of her January cancer appointment - and will she follow up if not, after this whole blissful year without a single one?

Mother was charming and funny, playing bridge today but is now truly exhausted. Barbara does feel they may have done the hard part of meshing their lives and how dumb it would be to lose that. Anna, Barbara's old childhood friend, telephoned and is coming for lunch next Tuesday....

Anna's visit was wonderful. She has six grandchildren! She brought wedding pictures of her youngest daughter. Mother told the story about Richard seeing a big package in the post office for Anna's mother, right before Anna was born. Mother had already carefully explained to him where babies come from. But when Anna's mother arrived at the post office too, Richard ran up to her in great excitement, saying her baby had come in the big package.

Mother talked today about returning to the Cape. Does she truly not realize Richard has moved in? She had said she would not be returning there. Mother feels she is being avoided. The other day, when Barbara went around a corner (to put something on the table) she was accused of leaving when Mother came. Come to think of it, with Grandma Vere, Barbara does remember being guilty as charged, on a few occasions.

Barbara bought a 1992 calendar yesterday. For the month of May there is a magical photograph of a dilapidated old house surrounded by a shaggy lawn filled with bright yellow dandelions. The caption says "perfection isn't everything".

The rose Barbara rescued from under the woodpile is in full bloom and looking very pleased with itself.

Barbara thinks she will move in with Mom, at the retirement community, just at first, to help her get settled. It all just might work. She must call a few people to tell them Mom's new phone number.

But Mom doesn't want Barbara to call the cousins. "They won't care...." "But Mom, they do...." What can have happened between everybody? But maybe it's a fact Mom wants (needs?) too much from everybody now. Alas, Mother does want to stay here but can't accept that's what she wants - and Barbara mustn't let her.... Barbara prays: Let me get through the next two days, even though I know one should go for only one day at a time.

Barbara has gone to shop for things like tea towels and a few dishes. It was impossible to find a double boiler. All business at Kmart stopped, to consider that fact. And now it's time to shop for food. Mother is trying

not to face the move. She may have believed Barbara wouldn't be able to go through with it. The trouble, for Mother, is that it just really might work as well as being not outrageously expensive. Yesterday, Mother told someone that Barbara and the potassium medicine had unfortunately made her better. Once more Barbara prays: Let me not be too bossy tomorrow, but bossy enough to get it all done.

Barbara is alone. Mother is all moved and all settled except for the TV, the telephone and signing the contract. The very hardest thing of all will be that Mother is going to have to learn to talk quietly. One lady left the noon dinner yesterday because of Mom's too loud voice. This morning, desperately Barbara told Mom just that, the hardest was going to be learning to quiet her loud talking, the result of her own poor hearing. "There are at least two who are deafer than I am, poor things...." "But Mom, that's their problem, not yours", Barbara answered as if she believed it.

At long last Barbara has gone on a wonderful walk, with two friends. They walked all around the skating pond and past the hill for skiing and sledding. It was snowing. In town, when they got there, lights were on and the merchants were dressed in stove pipe hats and Victorian clothes, a Christmas promotion but nevertheless magic.

And now, after taking care of the trash, she is going to the music department to listen the next cantata they'll be working on. She can hardly wait.

"Remember, depression is chemical," said a friend. Barbara had only said she was suddenly very tired. And all is not yet settled. Mother's telephone was "busy" (ie., not on its cradle Barbara soon found out), so no one could get through to her. This was to be the first day Barbara wasn't going to go over at all. Mother looked very tired, but she was okay. There was also a letter from Mom's sister who is now so blind it was hard to recognize her writing. Her sister had not realized before all the changes Mother was making. She described retirement homes around Prats, after saying the way older people are taken care of now has changed.

Barbara has also gone to talk to a trust officer at the bank, who thinks the two documents for the Cape house need to be looked into and at once. He agrees that Mom should have a living trust. Richard still talks as if his affairs will be in order by March, as he said last March, and the March before that. How incompetent Barbara feels right now, unable to fill either Mother's or her own needs and adding to Richard's problems which he certainly doesn't need. It's time for her to cry herself to sleep, sniff.

But now today is better. She has set up an appointment for Richard, Mother and herself next Thursday afternoon, about setting up a trust fund.

A friend of Barbara's took a poinsettia to Mother, who at least used to hate them. Mother telephoned to tell Barbara, sounding very pleased though she is making rather a point of not participating in Christmas this year.

There's a winter storm watch for tonight, but the rest of the week should be better and warmer. The sun is shining brightly, bringing the temperature up to 5 above. Elizabeth sent a California Christmas card picture of herself in front of a snow scene being glued onto a billboard, including the workman with his brushes and glue bucket.

Barbara had a good talk with Richard last night. Maybe what she is doing, she who has no financial power of her own, is - bringing those in her life who do have that power together and in the presence of someone, ie. a lawyer, who has professional experience, plus the personal wisdom (he, the lawyer, is about to retire) which he might use, if not for his old clients, for an 89-year-old mother. Barbara hopes to follow the conference with a pleasant family dinner and bridge. And then, oh dear, comes Christmas....

The sun, when it comes, fills the backyard with light, this quiet winter afternoon. There have been several phone calls, one from France, from Annette. Barbara often has trouble believing she herself is half French, but the words somehow did come, and the numbers for Mother's phone and also the letters - even the French word for y - for Mom's address. Mother's sister needed to know if Mother wanted her subscription renewed for their beloved magazine "Modes et Travaux", now full of too many short skirts for the sisters' tastes. But Barbara said yes anyhow.

Then Richard called. They will be coming Christmas Eve instead of Christmas day, because his wife must have a CAT scan, maybe cancer.

Mother is not at all well. But everything is ready for Christmas (Eve, now) dinner, but for the turkey. Barbara is hoping to be confusion-proof. She looks once again at the books she was going to read. She wonders if her head will ever again be able to absorb such books, or maybe even want to.

Mother has fallen two more times, each time getting up by herself. Mother is depressed, by Christmas and all the business concerns. The lawyer has been very helpful and didn't seem to think there was a rush for all the decision-making after all.

And now the Christmas season is almost over. Richard was very quiet. Barbara has given up trying to understand all that is going on in his life. Mostly she hopes only to make the end of Mother's life as pleasant as possible. And the rest of Jim's too. They are going to Boston for a spree, this next weekend.

Mother seems better, though her color is not good. Richard's wife is also okay. Cousin Jeanie is coming through to see Mom. Barbara has to keep

remembering for herself that she, Barbara, is just a much younger cousin: Jeanie may be far more important to her than the other way around.

This last Sunday of the old year, there is an ice storm. Mom is not better and Barbara is trying not to get a cold, taking lots of vitamin C. After she spent the morning with Mother, Barbara was sent home. The trip to Boston was canceled, but that was just as well because of the ice storm.

Well, it is easier to take care of Mother in her apartment, set up for it, than it was at home. Barbara looks out at the remains of the ice storm from the window of Mom's apartment, arranged so that one frail person really can cope in it, in the process of transposing some music for the oboe player. Jeanie was amused at Barbara's embarrassment about Mom's too loud voice not to mention the numerous, enthusiastic sneezes which do drive other people nuts, having been there/done that with her own mother. There are more messes to clean up, is Mom dying, is this the way it is, just messy? Mom is not in any particular pain. Maybe this is just a bug....

Mom is in the hospital. Lots of waiting. The room she ended up in is tiny. What's wrong? Annette wants to know too. Richard's French is better and he can talk with Annette tomorrow when he comes, especially since they may know more then. Barbara has washed out mom's nighties.

How good it is to be home. Her Christmas present CD is playing. She thinks (is she kidding?) she may be able to take hold again, if everything can just stay on hold for a little while. She has put Mom's "blue box", with precious papers and other important items, downstairs in the closet under all the shoes, along with the silver. She told Peter this, not writing it down. Mom may get physically well again, but how she will ever get her morale back in gear. There is some concern about gallstones rather than a cancer recurrence. So why doesn't Mother hurt more? - or maybe she does.

Mother is shuffling off responsibilities, right down to having her hearing aid only sort of around. Barbara told the doctor that, if he really needed to get through to her, the headset (which always works, unlike the hearing aid) and its amplifier are on Mother's bedside table.

Among Mom's papers, Barbara found pictures of her grandmother, then about her own age, who helplessly took care of her mother who had gangrene in her heel because of diabetes. That happened in the middle of World War II. Grandfather wrote, in letters sent through the Red Cross and/or through his friend in Africa, how thin the grandmother was becoming. Barbara found the letters in lovely old folders Mom had brought from France, written on silky paper with patterns. Is the acceptance of death better than the fight, the pretending to be doing something to get better? Barbara prays: let none of us expect too much of ourselves.

She hopes she can learn not to apologize for Mother, who is how she is and she does make sense and, for now, retreating into her own world may be what she has to do. Everyone needs to retreat sometimes. Barbara finds

she is beginning to resent the calls from kind friends. However is she going to get through this time?

It's gray and foggy out. Little birds in the honeysuckle are sliding and slithering onto the icy snow below.

So, no ultra-sound for Mother today. Someone goofed and forgot to cancel Mom's breakfast, 8 hours of no food being necessary. Mother and Barbara found out about that at 5:00 PM, after a whole day of waiting. Early in the morning, six young doctors had filed in to say the ultra-sound was about to happen. Mom's veins are getting painful and fragile. There was blood on the floor and the IV had not yet been put in again when Barbara arrived.

A colonoscopy is scheduled for Thursday (poor Mom). So far nothing has been found. The doctor, whom Barbara met in the hall, said he couldn't send Mom home while she still had diarrhea. Mother certainly is worried too about what next. Cousin Jeanie wrote two good notes to Mom about her cozy apartment. Barbara also reminded Mom that next week she might be able to re-join the readers. Mother had forgotten about that, which she enjoys very much. And the readers enjoy her.

And now the doctor has said he will do no more tests, his own judgment as well. Barbara had said she feared further tests might trigger something new, if only from the stress. He agreed.

There was an amusing call from Elizabeth who has signed on for herself and her car as Hollywood extras. 900 others were there for try-outs. Mother will return to the retirement community tomorrow, unless the swelling in her arm from the IVs gets worse. Barbara called the French family with an update.

Mom is sick again and truly cannot live alone. Barbara has come to stay with her and has been working on some of Mother's little woven squares. They got to talking about the Indians who came from Santa Fe to demonstrate weaving at the Colorado school. Barbara asked Mom who the blondish lady was who had come with them. Mom answered: "A friend of the wife of that writer - what was his name? - DH Lawrence. She was deaf." And then Barbara remembered the deafness too.

Mother sent Barbara home to get Jim's supper. Jim says his own life is falling apart and in fact it was a good thing Barbara came home right then to help him find all he was looking for and she got back to Mom's apartment just in time for the next cleanup. And Peter telephoned and Mother threw up at the same time, poor Peter, poor Mom, poor everybody.

Barbara met a friend at the supermarket who takes supper to her dad every night. He lives alone, ever since his wife died several years ago. "He's so grouchy!" She is the only one he ever sees. "I'd take him to live with us but everyone says don't...."

Mom is a sick, tired, old woman, far, far from home. Barbara has decided

to throw advice and expertise out the window. This is what she is going to do. Mom's asleep. 1) She will call the business manager of the retirement community. 2) She will call the home health nurse. 3) She will call Jim and have him help take Mom to their house when she wakes up. Barbara hopes he won't be too hard to find and that he can do some food shopping. This is his birthday.

And they're home. Mother seems better, though she had a fever this morning. Barbara must telephone the cousins and notify the French family. There is still stuff at the apartment which Barbara will try to take care of tomorrow. And then Monday they go back to the doctor. Maybe Mom will be taken off her high blood pressure pills. Peter and his wife are coming. They'll have take-out stew, which Peter's wife likes so much, and hot applesauce, which Mom likes, and, before supper, salmon and capers on thin bread, a Christmas present from the young Veres to the old.

And now, it seems finally to have sunk in with Mother, suddenly, that she has no options. She must stay with the Veres and "be a burden". The visiting nurse saw she was depressed and asked how Mom liked her doctor. "Fine," she answered.

All they can do is go along from day to day, hour by hour, second by second. Jim and Barbara's lives are the usual chaos and will Mother learn to cope with that, she has no choice. Time, time! Has Mother got time? Mother does miss her 5 o'clock sherry and the doctor has not given the go-ahead on that yet.

Barbara has set up an appointment with the lawyer for early next month, a few immediate decisions needing to be made for tax purposes. Richard telephoned from Cleveland, saying he can't get home just now because of the fog in Boston. He likes the job but hates the commuting.

Mom is beginning to write letters again. And a letter came to Barbara from a long-lost friend, the granddaughter of the artist friend of her parents who had spent two weeks at Prats. Peter has brought the sketch the artist had done of the house at Prats, which hangs now where Mother can see it, across from her bed.

It's this house which is the hero, this very house they are in now. The sun is pouring in and the sky is blue. Yesterday there were fat snowflakes and a good fire in the wood stove. Barbara and her mother make lace together, and Barbara is trying again to find a place to sell it. Mother is looking well, beautiful even.

Mother died this morning. Barbara, home again, is finishing Mom's piece of toast - after taking care of, oh yes, the last cleanup. Mother was

mad at Barbara for taking her to the hospital. But Barbara really couldn't hold on to her when she had a kind of spasm.

It was called a massive heart attack. During a quiet moment Barbara ran to call 911, at first thinking she would call Jim but changing her mind when she got to the phone. Mom had come to the breakfast table. Barbara was warming the milk for café au lait. She heard an odd sound and looked around to see that Mom's head was back. At first Barbara thought Mom - just had her head back.

The 911 people came quickly - barely time for the two of them, Barbara and her mother, to watch the birds at the feeder - and moved Mom efficiently. Morphine was given, though Mother said she was in no pain, only having trouble breathing. Barbara spoke French at the end, maybe making only her own self feel better. Perhaps Mom heard, smiling, maybe just from the morphine. Mom had written, once, she hoped when she died she would once again hear the cathedral bells of her childhood, near Loches where her father had been before moving to a larger school.

"Take your time", the emergency workers said, along with "Call the funeral home." And then everyone disappeared. Jim was not in his office. The taxi she called went through a red light and nearly ran into a truck, the driver having been up all night....

Richard said an old friend of Mother's had happened to phone him soon after Barbara had called. And he, all alone, had loved her chattering away to him.

This afternoon, she must go to the funeral home with Mother's clothes. You don't wear the same clothes you had on to get into an ambulance. Right now, Barbara has put on Mother's engagement ring and also her grandmother's which is still lovely even with some of the pearls missing. And she must return the blanket left by the 911 people that is still here on a chair.

In charge of the cemetery where Dad's family is, is a person named Irving, who is a woman, who says it is very muddy there. The ground there has thawed, though not here yet in late March. It is hard to keep a grip on the details. Richard is talking to everyone, including Mother's sister, one of whose sons is with her, luckily. "Elle pleure," Annette had told Barbara.

A friend has come by with letter paper and stamps but no envelopes - strange but very dear.

There has been a death. Here there is - no Mother. An absence....Mom's 90th birthday flowers are still around. Barbara begins to replace things to where they were before, but not too fast. Mom's yarn squares stay by the fireplace.

Elizabeth has called. She is coming.

So what does Barbara do with all these rings, all these wedding and engagement rings? She decides to give them to the grandchildren, one each.

Elizabeth has called again. Thank you Elizabeth! And Barbara will give the great grandson the yarn square Mom has just finished and will make little afghans from the rest of the squares for future great grandchildren. There are many squares.

As Barbara and Elizabeth were sitting, talking, on the bed in Mother's room, Barbara reached over to open a drawer, lifting out the notebooks she had transported to and from the retirement community. She had thought they were Dad's. But they were Mother's. Mother had written. In fact she had written quite a lot. They began reading. Elizabeth began to cry.

Barbara had asked Mom, once, what had happened to the translation she had done of her father's notebooks. Mom had sort of shrugged and Barbara had not pursued. The translation was in the drawer too.

She made copies for Richard to take to France, where he went after the burial. He has returned. There will be a Memorial Service on the Cape, May 2, Dad's birthday. And another in Colorado: Richard will go. Dear Richard. He can go anywhere for free on his airline. But the truth is, he would go anyway, even as she would not.

There has been more snow, but today is warm and Barbara has opened a window to hear the birds. But she will have to shut the window again because it's not that warm. She still has a lot to do, and settling the estate will take a long time.

There are many things that were so very precious to their owners and, after all, are not to Barbara. Well, she was going to give Mom's silver pin box to - but she just can't. The things Barbara remembers from when she was little still do a job on her - the pin box and Mom's bone crochet hooks in different sizes. She has put Dad's Phi Beta Kappa key (which he gave her when she graduated, finding out she hadn't bought one of her own) back on his watch, which Mother had kept. Both must belong to Barbara really now.

What an extraordinary pleasure to read Mom's notebooks! Where some of the writing had faded, Barbara followed Mom's writing with a pen so clearer Xerox copies could be made. She remembers how Mom tried to teach her to write when Barbara's own writing became steadily more spidery and illegible. Mother's writing is clear, strong and beautiful to look at. She designed it herself, she said, and indeed Barbara has seen nothing like it anywhere else.

Elizabeth has sent some of her own writing. Mother's writing is about one person in many different places. Elizabeth's is more about many different reactions to fewer places, a trying hard to hold it all together. Maybe Barbara is somewhere in the middle.

Among the papers was a letter from Mother's sister, written after their mother's death. The description was quite like what had happened to Mother. Barbara's grandmother was buried in her nightgown, instead of being dressed up. If only Barbara had known....

Chapter 59

Houses

Once Barbara wrote about her mother, then still alive:

“Mother, I can’t write about you,” she said out loud. Then, getting up from her chair under the apple tree and stretching, she thinks: “In ways I will never understand, you’re too - me, though what else have I been writing about?”

She goes over to rake pine needles, putting some of them over the strawberries. Doing that doesn’t really matter, which is why she hasn’t done it yet: the strawberries aren’t very good.

It is a late afternoon in November. The fall has been exceptionally warm and pleasant. She remembers another such day long ago, when she and her mother walked beside the house in Colorado, November 8th. She remembers the exact date. They found violets in the border garden. Remembering the violets makes Barbara think of the myrtle plants (violet-like) she had brought from the Cape several years ago and had planted on the hill outside the kitchen window. She walks over to see how they are doing. Last spring they were doing so well that she had transplanted some of the runners. As a child she had made fragile myrtle-chains from the million blossoms. Today the shiny dark-green leaves, visible once again now that the summer overgrowth has died down, are everywhere. They really have taken hold.

Barbara returns to her chair. This will surely be the last day before she must give up coming to sit here. She must fold away the chair and lean the table against the tree for the winter. The darkening day is soft from the morning’s rain and sweet smelling. Silence. For a short while, the pine needles over the strawberries and along the property border turn red-orange, reflecting the color of the sunset. They turn brown when the sun goes down. Only the white birch stands out still. It is five o’clock - no more daylight saving time. Dad liked the early darkness. Time to go in.

Try again. Mother. How hard it must be for you to grow old so far from where you were born. And I know as well as you do that now you don’t belong where you were born, either. Our trip to France two years ago

convinced me of that. They barely remember to tell you, anymore, when friends and relatives are sick or dead. At least that's how it seems. But it was your decision to leave, some sixty years ago, to change roots. You didn't know any better. Then, how could you know the way old people in their minds return to their childhood? Trying to change roots, as drastically as you did, may not even be possible, though people try.

I think of you on the Cape, in the middle of all that New England family furniture. Richard and I bought you a new living-room lamp for your eightieth birthday, your first birthday alone after Dad's death. But the lamp doesn't make the old horsehair sofa any more comfortable to curl up in and read. I could even imagine you feel you have, or we have, been disloyal to the other lamp. That old lamp didn't work unless it was turned on just so and, when least expected, it would slide down its pole.

At least your bed is comfortable. Every morning, you bring your cup of café au lait back to bed with you. You listen to the news, watch the next-door neighbors leave for school and work, and try not to feel alone. In France two years ago, I would bring your café au lait upstairs to the big high-ceilinged bedroom, with its two huge, multi-pillowed beds and the two massive "armoires", all unchanged since the childhood days of your own mother at the very least. On the Cape, there is barely enough room, in your tiny bedroom on the ground floor, for your bed, table and dresser.

You have changed the picture on the wall by the table. Instead of the New England family are, together in one frame, separate pictures of you, me, Dad and Richard. I suppose we too are New England family, but at least we're you and yours.

I visited you in mid-June, soon after last summer's first heat wave. You had not arranged for the storm windows to be taken down until the day before I arrived. During the heat wave, you must have sweltered. But the security of the storm windows must have mattered more to you than fresh air. In France, walls of stone and heavy shutters, closed and bolted every night, are barricades.

For the first time we began to talk directly, not just around, the subject of your moving near me. I told you about a new retirement community connected with a nursing home, across from the college golf course. You already know one of the people who have decided to live there. You would be close to me, but independent: your life would not be disrupted when Jim and I go away.

We should have, but didn't, talk about what if I died. Was I protecting you or myself? Of course the real question is why am I still alive. When I have to think about long-range plans, I am never quite sure if I am pretending to be sick or pretending to be well.

The retirement home offers the assurance and sociability of one good community meal a day, the security of a call system and, in summer, air-conditioning. Alas, though, New Hampshire winters are long. It is expensive, but you can afford it. You have carefully invested Dad's savings. And you have always lived frugally. Now you are even investing some of your own social security.

When you almost decided to move, setting the date, August 1, we talked about your bringing only the furniture that you and Dad had bought, with the money Dad's father's oldest brother gave you, when you were first married. You were planning to turn the Cape property over to me and to Richard. Perhaps Richard would take over the responsibility for it in return for the use of it. Possibly he would make some arrangement with Peter, sharing responsibility and use. They are the two most interested. Richard's oldest daughter loves it but, allergic to the mold, starts sneezing the moment she comes in the door. But we'd keep the house available for you in case the retirement community didn't work: you can buy out of the community as well as buy in.

One other item we did not discuss was your increasing deafness. You even refused to discuss that with Dad. Living in a community, you might not be able to turn your TV way up. And your contemporaries there might not have the patience your younger friends on the Cape have. That weekend of shouting and being shouted at was almost more than I myself could bear. You have given up on hearing aids without even trying them. Well, I understand they really are awful. Yet you've managed to get used to bifocals, which some people find even harder.

And Mother, what then changed your idea of turning the property over to Richard and me to the idea of your renting it? Getting a place ready to rent is a horrendous project. The first I heard of that was when I telephoned Peter July 4th, when he and his wife were visiting you. He had just come down from vacuuming the upstairs, possibly for the first time ever. The upstairs has always been just swept. When I was growing up that was my job. For every day I swept, a penny would be added to my dime-a-week allowance. For every day I didn't, a penny would be subtracted. Peter must have vacuumed up fifty years at least of beach sand from between the wide floorboards.

"Mom," he said over the phone, "you are planning to come down, aren't you? Could you possibly come any earlier?" While Peter and I were talking, you and Peter's wife were sitting at the kitchen table. Suddenly you said to her: "I'm not moving. I'm not going to move after all."

I bought a new tennis racket. And when I went into the store a couple of weeks later to buy some new tennis balls, the store manager, recognizing me, grinned and said: "So, I hear I've released a monster!"

I guess what had really got to me was the thought of cleaning out the

pantry. There were all those dishes, three households-full. Plus Dad's father had a habit of buying dishes without consulting anyone, dishes including a complete set still being regretted, very grand, big, odd-shaped, with a funny silvery-green pattern. Also there are the dishes from the Barn House, where Dad's older sister and her husband had lived. The young couple who rent the Barn House now have their own dishes. And then there are the dishes you brought from out west. You couldn't leave them because Dad had bought many of them for you. Come to think of it, so had Richard. Do you suppose dish-buying is hereditary, included in the male genes of our new England family?

You have your own dishes, some of which have you've given to Richard and me already. A potter friend of your father's made lovely sets for your mother, your sister and you, with painted figures taken from Italian Renaissance literature, a la Jean Calot. During the first world war, an American saw that pottery and wanted the maker to supply a store in New York. The maker had said no, he liked being a small operation.

Once more, what changed your mind about moving? Cousin Jeanie said you told her you hadn't been feeling well. You must be feeling better now. You certainly look well. I find it hard to believe you are in your eighties. Children tend to be like that, so I have heard, unable to recognize when their parents begin to fail. Well, the reason you finally gave me for changing your mind was that you'd decided it was up to you to keep the family place going. I guess I was really hoping you could get out from under instead.

My American cousins are trying to decide what to do with their mother's house, where she and her husband moved when they were married, built and furnished for them by her husband's parents. She, at ninety-five, has been in a nursing home for three years. I suppose her great age is a tribute to her power of positive thinking. Unfortunately her mind has become a complete blank, which might be where positive thinking can lead.

How important is my aunt's house and all its old furniture, even just in theory if not in fact? I do like knowing it's all still there. And I sometimes drive by the house on my way to visit her. I also enjoy pretending she knows who I am when I kneel in front of her wheelchair to sing the old songs. She does remember the songs. Afterwards I go to visit her little brother's grave, Dad's. There's certainly more to her than there is to him, but I don't think I wish they would change places.

In my aunt's house, not just the furniture but the beds are hard too. Only one set of dishes, though. I happened to be visiting her shortly before she went into the nursing home. We walked together through the downstairs of the house. As we passed the corner cupboard in the dining room, we talked about the red glasses there, which all of us had so loved as children. She reached into the cupboard and gave me the three that were left, right then and there. In a fit of family feeling, I gave two of the glasses away, one to

the daughter of her oldest grandson and one to the daughter of her son, I being the daughter of her brother.

Mother, by any chance did I, with my essay about Dad's parents, lay this family burden on you myself? I was trying to fit Dad's family into a kind of abstract and theoretical American History frame ... what have I done!

The urge to place one's self and one's people in some kind of abstract and theoretical historical frame is very strong, though. You've begun doing a little writing yourself, and so has Elizabeth. You write about your grandmother, going to sleep nose-down on her Bible. Elizabeth writes about an old woman, a neighbor, overdosing on heroin. Why did they seek oblivion, through the Bible or through drugs, the one in the loveliest countryside in the world, the other in a city so full of possibilities?

I've been reading a Mothers/Daughters book written by someone I know. I know her mother too - who whispered in my ear "that book is not really true...."

Chapter 60

Sadness

Barbara has reached a kind of hiatus, now. She will concentrate on finishing her grandfather's work and then begin the big project of putting together her mother's writings. There is a rich yellow light all around, and robins and chickadees. It has been six months since Mom's death.

And now Laura. Barbara watches with horror what is happening to Laura. Laura's house has been sold, the one she rents, and she must be out by the end of the month. The landlord, whom Barbara knows, has been wanting to sell for over a year but has not wanted to disrupt Laura. Laura is very sick.

Barbara is about to go to a meeting at the new large retirement community, where the Veres have signed up although Jim is talking more and more about leaving here entirely when he retires.

This morning after ten, Barbara and another person came to help Laura pack. Laura was still asleep, not at all on top of things. How has she taken care of herself till now, and how will she manage in an unfamiliar place? The movers come Monday morning, day after tomorrow. Barbara has promised to be there....

Laura did get moved on Monday. Barbara was more surprised than angry to find herself in charge of the movers and the situation in general. That afternoon Barbara went with Laura to her support group, where the facilitator was pretty hard on Laura, talking about denial, reminding her to check when her doctor's appointment was.

The Veres are going to San Diego this spring. Barbara will miss much, but she will also avoid much. She ought to think of organizing the house for rental. They might as well rent, since they tend to let someone live in the house anyway. It will be good to be closer to Elizabeth, still in Los Angeles....

Barbara is throwing out and sorting. Jim left for work, this morning, with two plastic bags full of red pencils and black pens, brought home in shirt pockets over the years. She took pots and pans she didn't need to a homeless shelter on her way to the dump with more stuff. But, after all, that's what she does love about staying put in one house, the clutter that attaches itself to a family, complete with the memories of how it all got there in the first place. Laura's son will come to take away the extra furniture that ended up at Barbara's, even though Barbara had said at the support group she didn't want it, which was then discussed.

Jim is about to go to Minnesota where he is going to be honored for his contributions to adult education....

The house is now ready to show to renters. And Laura seems better, now that she is settling in to her new apartment, right around the corner from where she used to live. Barbara has even had a check-up which was not too traumatic. She also has had an eye check and the spot there seems to be getting smaller. Or maybe measurements that small can be inaccurate. Now she can return to typing Mom's autobiography.....

What a wonderful morning of typing Mom's description of her own grandmother, the rages, the yelling at the chickens and at her husband and pounding the laundry down at the river! (Could those rages be part of Barbara too - somewhere?)

It is going to be very cold tonight. Elizabeth seems to have hit a new low. At least Jim is covering himself with glory with his new course, tired as he is, hard as he is working.

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. Jim is ready, more than ready, for a break. Barbara noticed tonight his hair has become grayer, suddenly.

Slowly things are clearing from the house, all those extras. And still there is more.

Last evening in the lovely big room with windows overlooking the College Green and the lit Christmas tree, there was ballroom dancing and then hand-bell ringing. Little kids, tired at the end of a long day, became surprised, then enchanted by the soft bell sounds.

At the support group tomorrow, Barbara hopes she can get help confronting Laura with the fact she needs more help than Barbara can give. Much as she cares about Laura, Barbara has other responsibilities. Time to play to tennis - slam bang, like her great -grandmother chasing chickens and pounding laundry.

The Veres were in North Carolina, celebrating Christmas with the family of Peter's wife when they read in the New York Times that the person, who had been chairman of the department of Mathematics and then President of

the college, had died. Jim spoke at the memorial service, so well, referring to the work the two of them did together. "He was an optimist and a problem-solver: I create problems and am a pessimist". That is all over and Jim is at meetings in San Antonio.

Barbara has finished typing Mom's writings.

Rather incredibly, the card she wrote to the author May Sarton for her friend who has ms has been answered!

Barbara is considering looking at want ads. Maybe finding a cleaning service would be an incentive to gear up again for the rest of organizing the house for going away. And how about buying a new stove instead of (sigh) trying yet again to clean up the old one....

Laura's car turned out to be six months overdue for inspection. In the support group the conversation was about how to be a friend without either imposing or being taken advantage of. That opened out into mother/daughter relationships. There is now a mother and her daughter in the group, both much younger than Barbara and her mother were, this time last year. Barbara is finally beginning to see that in fundamental ways such family and community obligations/reponsibilites are not only workable/bearable but finally pleasurable too. People often don't fathom the depth and variety either of human need or of human pleasure.

And now it is Valentine's Day, bright, clear, cold and sunny. Barbara has just come back from a concert, sung beautifully by someone who was diagnosed with brain cancer at least ten years ago. The singer sang four Bach arias, only one of which Barbara recognized. The Bach Group had even worked on the Cantata from which one of the others was taken.... Aha. It turns out there are four versions of that Cantata, and the alto aria was included in only the first version, not in the version the Bach Group had studied.

She must telephone Richard to see if he is still planning to come Thursday to do Mom's income tax together. And she is about to read Beckett's "Not I", which Elizabeth is involved with. Barbara got it from the college library, the first time in eons she had been in those stacks, where once she had practically lived. She went first to the English department library, as lovely as ever with tea being served, at least sort of served. You pay and serve yourself now. It was very quiet and pleasant. Students and faculty, men and women, were there, a far cry from an earlier time when a professor came into the room for the, then, more formal tea. Seeing only one young, new instructor, the professor said: "Oh, no one is here yet," and left.

Richard is not coming Thursday, sounding totally exhausted. This is a howling winter day. On her way home from visiting her ms friend, Barbara passed Frisbee players in the snow, celebrating school vacation in the

schoolyard. After pouring herself a glass of sherry, Barbara 1) left a message about "Not I" on Elizabeth's answering machine 2) checked in with Peter and 3) called Richard - whose wife needed to talk. When the snow ends, Barbara will take her newspaper over to Laura, whose own subscription has been stopped because of a run-in with the paperboy - or because, Barbara suspects, Laura has forgotten to pay her bill.

Ah. Barbara and Richard have had their last visit with the lawyers - Richard finally got here. He admitted he limits himself, now, to thinking only pleasant thoughts.

Stuff for the church rummage sale is on the dining-room table and stuff for the dump is assembled too but less so, all to be taken care of tomorrow, Mom's 91st birthday. Everything is such an effort. But the new cantata they are working on is easy enough so they may be able to do a fairly good job with it. The cellists are a bit cross, though: for once all they have is the chorale melody and for the first time they are the ones who have to sit around and count measures.

Yesterday, an Indian read and told stories at the college. He looked much like the magician-Indian who once came to Barbara's grade school. He too held the audience, but with a deep full voice and not by puffing himself up. Probably most of the college's Indian population was present, plus many Blacks and also people from the hills around, an audience unthinkable here when the Veres first arrived, nearly forty years ago.

Another person from the support group died yesterday. Part of Barbara wishes chemotherapy would be banned forever. But how can she, when there is one person in the group who has done and continues to do well. But does the suffering and eventual death of all the others make the one's, after all, only qualified life, worthwhile, including the staggering expenses? Sometimes it feels as if it is the patients who are against, not for, the health care system, heavily counter-balanced by the lawyers, the insurers and fear.

Last night there was a program on TV about the spy planes flying over Russia in the 50's. Someone did try to keep track of the fliers who were shot down. Some of the children have forced a kind of expose - of their fathers who had been shot down, left to be captured, etc. Barbara remembers Richard arriving at her dorm, her first year in college, in dark glasses, just to be with her after a plane had been shot down over the Baltic, his friends with whom he had flown in Morocco.

What is left of the snow looks dirty, awful. On purpose, today, she drove through towns instead of up on the cleaner super highway, just to remind herself how really awful things could look. So finally, maybe, she is beginning to look forward to going away. The worst of getting ready is over. She wonders, a little but not much, if those packed-away things will ever again see the light of day.

Chapter 61

Piano Music

Once, on a visit to Colorado, Barbara had pulled an album of piano music from the cupboard, asking her mother if she could have it. By the time of that visit, Mother no longer played. Playing was too painful, though indeed it might have been good for those swollen, arthritic fingers. Barbara had put the album, along with several others, in the bottom of her suitcase, not realizing how heavy they were going to be....

Barbara doesn't play very often but not because of arthritis. In fact she doesn't play at all. She doesn't have time. Well, she doesn't take time? She isn't interested? You have to feel like it. Anyhow, for whatever reason tonight she does feel like it. She has been alone for three weeks. Jim has been visiting, lecturing at, different colleges on the way to San Diego where he will be teaching for the spring term and where she will join him, day after tomorrow.

For the first time in years, she is playing. And the first album she pulled from the music pile was her brother's, with no cover any more, which Mom had kept. He had never taken it with him. At first she had thought it was forgotten music of her own, there under her mother's Debussy. Mom's maiden name was written across the top right-hand corner of that pale green still-on cover only slightly faded after - well Mother was married sixty-seven years ago.

Barbara begins leafing through the pages of her brother's music. The heavy, dark, large, thick, angular hand-writing all but obscures the very notes which are being commented on, page after page after page. Oh yes indeed, she remembers that writing. She too had taken lessons from the teacher. Her own album has the same writing but not nearly so much of it or so heavy. And she can just about feel the teacher there beside her, again, folded into the wooden chair he would sit on, listening. Feb., May, the dates are there, Sep., another May, another May, assignments for the next lesson. Richard must have taken lessons for years.

Barbara begins to play, stops, giggles, then begins once again. Gosh.

Richard had really been good, she begins to remember. How old had he been anyhow, playing some of these pieces, eleven? twelve? He had started lessons with Mother. So had Barbara. Schubert's Marche Militaire (French edition): Barbara never did manage to learn to play it as fast as Richard could play it. They would play it together, Mother and Richard, faster and faster and faster, all the repeats too, beginning to laugh, at the end collapsing into laughter.

For her, playing the piano had never been quite that much fun. She had been too serious, maybe, also a little afraid of being serious or of not being taken seriously or of not being worth taking seriously, or something. Maybe she still is, too serious and all the rest of it.

She stops playing to stare again at those heavy, dark markings. How - angry they look. And she remembers now: Richard had finally quit taking lessons. He had started playing jazz, Fats Waller, Mary Lou Williams, teaching himself to improvise. No more Bach for him, he said.

Barbara had wanted to quit too, when she heard Richard was quitting, because she wanted to play outdoors with her friends, it was spring, she remembers that too now, instead of staying inside after school to practice.

That summer Mother made arrangements for Richard to take lessons from someone else, on the condition he practice three hours a day, jazz, improvisation, Gershwin. Later, Richard managed to put his whole own self through college, what with the GI bill and playing in nightclubs.

Dark, heavy marks, darker, heavier toward the end. The piano teacher had taught Barbara only for a year or two. Probably the marks in her own music were less dark because she was a girl. In fact she was probably the teacher's only girl student ever. One Christmas vacation when she was home from college, she too was invited to his small apartment for tea with the grown-ups. He was a wonderful host, joking about making tea in the bathtub. He was more bent than ever by then, from a rare disease that would cripple and paralyze him. Toward the end of his life, Mother, never at her best with the sick, may, even so, have been the only one who continued to visit him. After he died, Mother gave Barbara the handsome dark-blue-print drapes from his apartment which Barbara made into a slip-cover for their sofa. That material, still on the sofa, must itself be at least sixty years old, as handsome as ever in spite of a few patches.

Once Mother said the teacher mentioned Barbara might have at least as much of a feel for music as Richard had. One should never compare siblings, though, musically or otherwise. Barbara remembers the time she told her mother she was a better sight-reader than her sister and was astonished at Mom's instant, delighted reaction, but just as instantly followed by a promise Barbara must never ever even suggest that possibility to her sister.

Mom's kind of denial of her own worth with respect to her sister made Barbara wonder about her mother's self-assurance, which in fact could be

terrifying. Even now Barbara cringes, remembering playing duets, “un, deux, trois”. Mother played the piano and lost her temper only in French. Barbara would fight tears, watching the written notes begin to blur, feeling her fingers, so little next to Mother’s, begin a life of their own on the suddenly slippery keyboard.

Barbara closes her brother’s music and opens the Debussy, playing a few measures. An odd combination of images emerges of listening to Mother play, both in this country and, mostly, in France at that piano against the wall, the tile floor, the smell of fruit, the other sounds coming through the open unscreened windows and doors.

After Mother’s death, Barbara’s own house returned to the way it had been before. Most of Mom’s clothes went to a rummage sale except for what Barbara kept for herself and tried to get used to wearing, before giving up and taking even those to the next rummage sale. Richard gave her the few items she asked for from the house on the Cape, including the music. He doesn’t play the piano any more. Surely he will when he retires.

Where did this insistence on learning to play the piano come from, the lessons for her brother and for herself, ditto for the French cousins, all unquestioned to the point where Barbara’s own children had lessons too. For Mother and her sister, there may have been something of pride that lessons could be afforded. For both of them, playing the piano was important their whole lives. Well, Barbara’s grandmother did know all the plots of operas and had sung some of the songs herself. Opera companies would travel to the larger towns. One of the ladies selling fish in the marketplace, Barbara was told, would be called upon regularly to sing in the choruses.

Barbara reaches for her Bach chorale book, which, yes, she does play whenever she is waiting - for her husband to come home late afternoons, for a visit from grown children, for someone coming by. The spaces in her life have always been filled by the chorales. She can’t remember when they changed over from being a chore to becoming a pleasure. Maybe it’s just that they’re short.

Soon Richard will be 65. This year she will send him a present. One time when Mother was sick and he was perforce in charge of his little sister, they had talked about the year 2000 and how old they would be then, 72 and 69, inconceivable to her, a five-year-old, and maybe even to him at the grand old age of eight. She’ll send him some music, maybe some Gershwin, get him going again.

Chapter 62

Breakfast

Routine, the routine of breakfast. After six weeks, breakfast has become routine. At first, there had been pride of achievement, that breakfast in a new place could finally happen, after much advance thought and effort. Then, frustration that it still wasn't easy. Someone once joked that, after moving, you have to keep asking yourself "where's the toaster?" Before breakfast, when one is not really awake yet, not needing to remember much is important: eggs three days a week, cereal three, pancakes or waffles on Sunday. Boil water for coffee. Put a large orange in front of Jim who peels it all in one piece, with some pride, of which she gets half. Later Barbara will tear the one peel into tiny pieces, the better for it to decompose/recycle.

Routine. Boring? Depressing? First thing in the morning, maybe one is down anyway. Jim is down anyways, anyway. It's the week-end, and he doesn't know how to spend it. They talked a bit, last night, about her missing her friends. And he said, she almost didn't hear him, he missed his friends too.

If she had stayed home, if she hadn't come, people here would probably be making more of an effort to include him. Jim says one shouldn't ever allow oneself to get too comfortable. Barbara feels comfort is a rare achievement, not ever to be taken for granted.

Chapter 63

Beached

The beach. The day today is blue-gray. Barbara is now on the top of a cliff looking down. Fewer people are up here than down there. An elderly couple Barbara had followed while she was down there have gone on as far as the great pier. They turn around and come back, probably on the last lap of their constitutional, the woman's red scarf twirling in the wind. The man's pants are rolled up but he no longer walks in the water. The tide is moving in and the surf is rising. Five surfers passed Barbara as she climbed back up the stairs from the beach, one saying it was time to buy a new wet-suit. Other surfers are already in the water. It's as if some of them do nothing else. That might be a glorious life, forever bobbing, once in a while riding in....

In where the water is quieter, a young mother, long dark hair, holds her naked baby and jumps with each wave.

Two bright hang-gliders, seemingly only slightly larger than the gulls, soar back and forth along the next cliff.

Not too far off shore, a gray battleship from the nearby naval station passes, its presence ghostly in the hazy mid-afternoon.

Barbara, already out of breath, has another harder climb up the hill to where she and Jim are living during his sabbatical. She could have taken the bus, but the whole point of this outing was - well, to replenish their supply of Scotch. Each day Barbara plans a project and this is today's. Thank goodness for it because, not feeling too well, she might possibly - would she really have? - just slept all day. She decided to walk to the liquor store down in the village, rather than to the other more convenient one. She had forgotten how expensive Scotch was, but she did have enough money for a small bottle.

Along the beach there were a lot of no alcohol signs. Barbara put the Scotch bottle in her canvas bag under her purse and sweatshirt. She did not get arrested.

Now she can't believe she doesn't come here more often. She was so

right to have come. The place is a tonic. She is sitting on the ground, to one side of the top of the beach stairs. To her right is a small parking lot and a few cars with old people in them. They make her think of her mother who would come to such a place near where she lived on Cape Cod, nearly every afternoon, trying to ease her loneliness. It didn't always work, but sometimes it did.

She herself is lonely. For whom? Maybe just a familiar face? At home she often feels pressed with too many friends. Oh for a happy medium.... A couple of friends have written, one of whom said others were about to write.

Barbara is seeking a role-model, someone living a fruitful old age, someone self-sufficient, not cutting into someone else's life, not causing someone else concern. In fifth grade she had a friend, an unforgettable experience, who was exactly her age, who ran the same, giggled the same, felt sad the same.... Thelma lived in a wooden trailer at the gas station next to the school. She just appeared one day after school had re-opened that fall. Before Christmas she'd had to move again. Thelma liked to do things, not always being too tired. There was so much to talk about.

At home Barbara is often desperate for time to herself. Here, finally she has time to think, read, write.... At home she intersperses such pursuits with working, inside or outside the house, depending on the season. The room, here where she and Jim are living, is quickly cared for and the yard is not hers to putter in. Laundry can be done in the sink and hung outside each morning, for the weather is always perfect ("71 and clear"), except for occasional haze like today. Shopping is the only big production. It takes most of the afternoon to walk to the store (they decided not to rent a car). She chooses to walk for the exercise. She returns in the bus with no more groceries than she can carry for the five-minute walk to one bus stop and ten from the other. Barbara is now a senior citizen and can ride half fare. She usually has to prove that with her driver's license.... Maybe the bus driver is pretending, just to be nice.

So when in her life had she been the happiest? As a child? Certainly not in summers when, as the youngest, she was all too aware she was kind of in the way. But how she had loved winters in school, the people her own age and - reading. Happiness was reading, even then. Even about Dick and Jane. Their adventures really did interest her, though she sometimes wondered a little about those stories being real life. At school Tommy's problems had something to do with the fact he didn't get enough to eat - too many Wonder Bread sandwiches with not much in them. And Robert - you had to watch out for Robert, he was so sneaky. But sometimes even he got interested in something besides pulling hair and lifting dresses.

With great effort Barbara has made a few friends here, knowing full well she is one too many in their busy lives, even as new people are for her at home, at least until if/when they become a part of her own life. At home

it's nice to have someone to wave to, doing errands, someone to chat with in the aisles, grocery-shopping. Here there are mammoth grocery stores, where she has yet to see the same person twice, even behind the check-out counters.

Getting late. Time to climb the rest of the way home.

Chapter 64

Old Friends

The Salton Sea was formed when an earthquake dislodged a river that then flooded a low-lying part of the desert. From a distance, from the rock-strewn, jagged hills that drop into the arid flats and badlands, the sea looks like a mirage. Long deserted by the river, the sea is now being kept alive, just barely and only for a while, by the run-offs from mountain snows and rains.

The area around the sea was to have become a resort. Streets were laid out and a motel was built which is now empty and windowless. There is nothing, not even old papers blowing, in the streets barely distinguishable anymore from what lies beyond.

There are a few houses, still, at the edge of the sea, all for sale by their owners, and a few tarp-covered boats in front yards. Though the fresh-water fish have died, the sea has been stocked with fish from the ocean. They are managing to stay alive so far. Fishing is still possible.

A few dark birds ride the waves.

The water, near the edge of the sea, is brown, frothy, warm and, yes, smelly. Further out, the water is blue, very blue, miles and miles of blue in the middle of dry land that begins to turn, in the late afternoon, from shades of gray to shades of rose.

Jim and Barbara have driven here with old friends from home who moved west thirty years ago. The wife's first husband, a young doctor, had died dramatically in an airplane-rescue effort. A couple of years later, the husband left his own family, took the doctor's widow and her two young sons with him, and helped establish a new university. The departure had shaken the home community. But the three hundred souls in one building out here have become 18,000 in a handsome and still expanding campus where Jim is teaching this semester.

Barbara had telephoned these friends, truly wanting to see them again, though wondering if seeing her would cause them pain. They had all known each other through music. Barbara suggested lunch together at the faculty

club. They suggested a drive to the desert instead, cooking a steak and drinking wine - "Do you still drink wine?"

Together they drink wine, in the lengthening shade of the mountains where they have returned, cool after the hot desert. Once again the sea has become a mirage, part of the heat waves rising. The stars and a tiny moon begin to shine. They talk and talk.

These two remember only a few at home, the people they are talking of now, the ones still left from that earlier time who never divorced or separated before attending each other's funerals or dying themselves. As the stars brighten, they go on to talk of East and West, and then of the South. The husband's specialty, he was a Professor of English Literature, was Faulkner. And then they talk about the sad ending in Santa Fe, recently, of Wallace Stegner.

A little high on wine, higher still on space and time, they pack up and leave. How generous these two old friends have been, in response to Barbara's phone call. As they parted, the wife said that hearing from Barbara had been like hearing from the few people who called after she had made her decision to move to California. How grateful she had been for those calls, though no one had quite known what to say.

Chapter 65

Four-letter Words

Barbara hadn't felt like doing anything, a day of fever and aching. Even staying in bed hurt.

"It was so - boring!" she explained to the eight-year-old who came over to talk a few days later, when Barbara was very much better and wondering what all that had been about. The little girl was thoughtful. Then she said, "Well, being sick is not exactly boring...." She turned an elegant summersault on the big rug. "It's just that, after you've taken your pill and there's nothing else anybody can do, you have to...." She paused. Then, deliberately she turned a more difficult backwards summersault.

This weekend, Barbara and Jim are going to Hollywood to see Elizabeth's play, a theater piece written, directed and acted in by her. Elizabeth said her friends couldn't believe she would be doing it all, and in front of her parents. She did add that the eight-year-old, probably should not come along.

Wallace Stegner calls Elizabeth's kind of writing meta-reality. He does allow it reality, possibly the dark side of reality, barely this side of chaos. An article in today's paper considers the value of an ordered life.

Stegner said friends called his own ordered life boring, which he accepted. But, for himself, he sought to be rooted. He drew nourishment from place, he said. He wanted to reach into, grow into, where he was. Some claim his recent death, from running a red light, was caused by his compromise with machinery, his willingness to drive a car though he never did learn to use a computer. Others say he ran a red light because he'd had a heart attack.

So, can human beings really and truly draw nourishment from roots? Jim's world-famous mentor has never left his small-town house for very long because "I know the bumps in the sidewalk." In front of his house the sidewalk is brick and indeed memorable.

But there must be at least some nourishment in the dark side of reality, some order just this side of chaos. Is it order that is nourishment, then? Just this side of chaos is not boring, at least, that certainly can be said

for it. And there might even be some advantage to acknowledging the dark side. Everyone recognizes its existence, even children, or perhaps children especially until it is repressed, possibly for the survival of society if not of the individual. Once again she remembers Jim's story about the trip to the dump with Elizabeth, aged six. At the dump they came upon an old crate with four-letter words all over it. As he began to draw her away, she looked up at him with her big blue eyes and said, "Daddy? I thought grown-ups weren't supposed to know those words."

The value of confronting the dark side may be to realize that the sky won't fall if one does. And for some, an unsettled life really could be better than a boring one. Or perhaps when you've been sick or otherwise overwhelmed, the best response just is some kind of equivalent to an eight-year-old's backward summersault.

Elizabeth wants them to come to her play. There, at the theater, it will be obvious who Barbara and Jim are, parents, unless - maybe Barbara should dye her hair. Green. There has been a sequel to the Dick and Jane readers she grew up with. Jane's daughter has dyed her hair green. Elizabeth dyed her hair too, once, but not green.

Barbara called Elizabeth yesterday, to wish her happy birthday. Elizabeth sounded happy, was sleeping late after a late night of work on the show which will happen this week-end. Elizabeth called back, later, worried they might not be able to get tickets, so many people were coming, or at least saying they were coming, and that they should identify themselves, but they should not come early - and should not try to see the art works in the gallery where the show will be given. Her friends, Elizabeth says again, can't believe she wants her parents to come.

Jim was making a copy of Elizabeth's tape of her show with Elizabeth helping. When he thought he might have erased something they were working on, Elizabeth said some four-letter words. And before they all went out to dinner, the family next door came over to watch another section of the tape that was being copied. That section actually included those words. Elizabeth stopped the tape but the family said "no, no," and the eight-year-old had added "oh, please....." Elizabeth warned everybody there would be four-letter words. Afterwards the eight-year-old added "and, seven-letter words."

People at the college where Jim is teaching are up in arms about all the four-letter words carved on a new art object, part of a growing outdoor

sculpture collection. The college provost has pointed out that the students use those words all the time now.

A child psychiatrist has written about children needing to learn the appropriate, as opposed to the inappropriate, use of those words. But he does not define what he means by appropriate, or inappropriate either for that matter.

Meanwhile, how glad Barbara is she went to Elizabeth's performance, rich, profound, and dense with personal references.

There were few couples in the audience, rather groups of singles or singles alone, mostly in their thirties, the women, gamin-like, in wrong-side around baseball caps.

The Supreme Court justices are upset because Thurgood Marshall's papers have just become public. The justices are worried the myth of what supreme court justices are will be spoiled by what they are really. They fear their effectiveness might be undermined. The editorial on the subject agrees, suggesting people need myths more than they realize.

And now Barbara will put on her shoes and then skin cream and dark glasses, in deference to the vanishing ozone layer, and go down to the beach. She'd go swimming but the day is too cool and anyhow it wouldn't be swimming, just jumping in the waves. How beautiful the surfers are. Too bad surfing is not as easy as it looks.

Chapter 66

Pacific

It is night. Barbara is waiting for Jim to return from a two-day trip, all the way to Washington D.C., for a meeting. Maybe he's too old for this sort of thing.

Their stay out west is almost over, only three more weeks. They will return to dead and dying friends, their own ill health, their own aging, all of which has been put on hold during this time away.

Soon there will be a grandchild. They are even pretty old to be grandparents.

Barbara feels tired, but maybe only because it is night. Jim will be exhausted. After his class tomorrow there will be a chance for him to recover.

It is so quiet Barbara imagines she can hear the surf below the cliffs near where they are living. During the day there are birds, many, many birds. They sing all the time. Not quite so many at home. Dad used to say how much lovelier one or two daffodils are than whole fields of them. There are also lots of flowers here, mostly scentless except for the orange blossoms. No lilies of the valley, no lilacs.... She has missed spring, those brief and fragile New England springs.

On TV there was a program about a Chinese man who stood so solidly no one could break in to his center of gravity. That's what she wants. Does she have even the possibility of that kind of gravity in her, or is being swayed by people and places the way she is? She might respond more honestly and deeply to people and places if she herself were more grounded. Digging in is hard, though.

And after all, this may not be the time for digging in, but instead time to enjoy the balance, precarious as it may be, and explore this new country, a bit more, that is after all becoming more familiar and easier to operate in. She has made a couple of friends. Curious too how little things acquire value in her present simple life - the mornings they have eggs for breakfast. In fact all breakfasts now are pleasant. What has changed? And there's the feel of late afternoon approaching, when soon it will be time to prepare

supper and listen to the news.

Out there, how big, how vast the Pacific is...

Chapter 67

Perfection

A man on a south sea island is supposed to have said, before he shot himself, “another perfect goddamned day”, this from a journal on retirement. Barbara does not feel like shooting herself, but in fact she has nothing to do today. This afternoon she will walk to the beach and watch the surfers and the people who come to watch the surfers. The writer of the retirement journal describes watching yellow leaves being blown up into the air outside his window - from his New York City apartment above the tree tops. He has never seen this before. Nature does not quite fill a life, he says, but suggests that maybe writing a journal does.

Barbara has one more week to fill with things to do, followed by a weekend at Palm Springs with Jim’s brother and wife, and then, on Monday, home.

She is thinking about their re-entry, the old and the new, the getting the house and yard back in shape: the pleasures, but yes the responsibilities too of friends. So, to what degree is she their responsibility in turn, and is the pleasure she may bring to them worth their effort. How hard it must be for Barbara’s ms friend to have to pretend she is content, so people will continue to come and see her. But she had been such a wonderful friend.... Then there’s the lace lady, 93 years old, fun, mischievous even. With family, the lace lady is, it has to be admitted, domineering: the sheer strength of character of the previous generation never ceases to amaze Barbara.

And then there’s Laura, still struggling on with cancer, needing so much - aware of and missing, as she wrote in a letter, Barbara’s “willing help”.

Elizabeth is giving up her own apartment, turning to dependence on friends. That might be a defense, though, against friends doing that to her. The balances between need, responsibility and pleasure among friends are delicate under the best of circumstances.

Meanwhile, the fancier telecommunications get, the dizzier she gets just thinking about them. Jim seems to keep up, on the cutting edge even.

The two voyager satellites are approaching what is known to be the edge

of the solar system.

And the grandchild is about to arrive. Barbara wonders if she will be needed, she so wishes that sort of thing were more clear. She is available to all these people in her life; but it might be easier or better all around if she weren't?

Yesterday, the beach was glorious. How beautiful it was to watch the surfers, hardly more than children, some of them, when seen up close. They know exactly where the waves will break, the good surfers. The not-so-good ones can hardly get themselves out beyond the breakers.

Barbara talked with someone who says she is hardly aware of the ocean any more. Her house is right on a cliff, but in the afternoon she must pull the curtain against the too-much sun.

And now, a few days later, Barbara has been sick again, the third time in as many weeks. Perhaps it is only that a little wine-drinking is becoming more than her radiated insides are able to handle.

And another blissfully beautiful day, Memorial Day. Barbara has been cleaning house. The children next door are home one more day, this long weekend, needing their parents. Barbara tries to explain to Jim, the husband there is not free to go up to the math department today, that both husband and wife are involved, that the days of a wife dealing alone with domestic responsibilities are over....

Chapter 68

Return

They have been home from California a month. Barbara is about to resume working with the Bach Study Group and volunteering at the library, and playing tennis. But no reading Shakespeare till next week, since Jim is holding a conference and people will be arriving and coming here for supper on what may be going to be the hottest day of the year. The river, this weekend after the Fourth of July, is full of boats and swimmers. They celebrated the Fourth with friends by climbing a mountain to see the fireworks in the villages down below. They got home about 1:30 AM, hardly able to move. Jim says that was a lesson in how not to act their age. Barbara will remember the full moon, though not the fireworks, which were too far away almost to even see at all, and nobody fell, at least not seriously, or broke anything.

Laura died last night, the end of that complex situation. She had been hospitalized in a coma but had revived, happily receiving all her family, planning to go home. But once again she fell into a coma....

They are grandparents now, the wonder of holding a tiny body again. Her granddaughter reminded Barbara of Peter, 37 years ago - his expressions, his intensity (so different from Elizabeth who was, as a baby, docile). Astonishing memories came, perhaps even more unconscious than memories, from when she was so busy tending Peter she didn't really take in how he was until now. Barbara was talking with another grandmother at the grocery store today and forgot a bag of groceries and had to go back for it. When she returned to the store, she met another friend, but this time she kept her hand on the groceries while they talked grandchildren.

She had better keep an eye out for that handsome white skunk who was wandering across the back yard last night. It is after supper and she is under her tree. Jim has gone to Math meetings. Ah. Barbara hears the deep voice of the opera singer who is staying for the month at a neighbors'.

She must write an introduction to her grandfather's memoirs which, in Mother's translation, she plans to bind, in book form, to give to his great-grandchildren at Christmas. She hopes she will be able to sustain her interest in his notebooks, not to mention in Mother's notebooks, or even in her own notebooks....

She remembers her grandmother and Mother calling her into the room at Prats, where Grandmother was born and died. This was in the summer of 1973. They were standing by the big armoire. Grandmother reached down to the floor of the armoire and gave Mother a handful of copybooks which Mother passed to Barbara, saying Grandfather had written them and Barbara might want to read them. Barbara raced through them, dragging herself away from the rest of what was happening during their 3-week visit, wondering why there had not been more talk about the notebooks. Back at Prats, ten years later, she asked Mother and her aunt if she could see them again. She was surprised there were only two. There had been more.

Her aunt said a Xerox machine had been installed at the town office, so Barbara got permission to go in, one morning, and do as much copying as she had time for. She managed to copy all of one notebook but only a small part of the second, in a desperate attempt to include what Grandfather had written about his father-in-law, before the office closed. She does remember returning the two notebooks to her aunt. Now only one of the notebooks remains, being kept at the house of Annette's sister who claims Barbara stole the notebooks. All Barbara brought with her was the Xerox copy, which she left with Mother who began her translation for the family on this side of the Atlantic.

Soon she will go in, but not yet. The fallen crabapples are beginning to smell, yum. The ones on the tree are bright red against the green leaves and blue sky. Some kids are giggling, maybe about the opera singer.

A miracle has happened. Jim got a hearing aid. It will take him a while to get used to it. He says now he understands what Mom was always griping about with hers! But his speaking voice is quieter, less strained, and he is less strained and his singing is on pitch.

Their granddaughter will wear Grandfather's christening dress when she is baptized, though it might have been Mom's dress, made by the Carmelite nuns, from whom Grandfather rented their apartment. He described paying the rent into a pair of beautiful hands, all he ever saw of the nun. Grandfather's own mother had left the church and had encouraged him to leave too,

partly because of Voltaire (according to one notebook) but also because a priest had made a pass at her in the confessional.

Their granddaughter will also wear a little bonnet made from a handkerchief that turns back into a handkerchief for the baby to carry when she grows up and gets married, to become a bonnet again when the next generation comes along. It was a gift from one of Barbara's tennis friends, the one who can always find four-leaf clovers in the grass when they're sitting around talking instead of playing tennis.

Already it is March 1994. Barbara hasn't written much recently. Mother has been dead two years. It has been a month of more deaths. Maybe March is generally hard.

The wife of the math department couple who welcomed the Veres to the college has died. At her service there were many people and moving memories by children and grandchildren. One grandchild had been surprised to find, in her grandmother's desk, an impassioned plea against nuclear weapons, unaware of her grandmother's interest in other than family things. And a note was found in the grandmother's bible about her efforts to accept a failing body and a failing mind.

Barbara has begun to write in the notebook book she gave her own mother, thinking, when she gave it, Mother might write, not realizing she had been writing all along. Mom had put a number 1 in the top right-hand corner of the first page but nothing else. So Barbara will write a few things Mom didn't write about. Toward the end of WWI, Mom was one of the many who came down with the flu. Her father's school had been turned into a hospital for the Americans, and the nurses there took care of Mom. They baked her an apple pie when she was better. Mom had never seen a pie before. She showed it to her father. She, and her father too, thought the cinnamon in the pie was tobacco. They decided she would just have to eat some of it, the nurses had been so nice....

Barbara remembers dust storms in Colorado from when she was little, in the '30s. One afternoon she and Mother looked out the kitchen window and saw a great brown cloud forming in the north. They raced outside to collect the laundry from the line before the storm arrived, just managing before the wind began whining through the doors and depositing fine sand over the floors and on the furniture.

Once there was a cloudburst between the school and the town where Dad had gone to do some errands. The river, usually only a trickle, suddenly filled right up to the bottom of the bridge. The road had to be closed. Dad eventually got home, coming the long way, and the next day the whole family drove down to see the river and the bridge, still closed. It was wild. Barbara still has nightmares about it, though they didn't go very close.

It is Holy Week. She is so glad not to be a church choir director anymore, though she did go, on Palm Sunday, to help with a six-part anthem, replacing a sick soprano. It was fun to be with old friends and the church was full and beautiful. There are plans afoot for a community bridge group, to include the math husband whose wife died.

The annual book sale is about to happen. All the Veres' books will be a problem eventually, that's for sure. Maybe that's when one first faces the fact that one is getting old, when one contemplates giving away one's books. Jim has a lot of math books and she has a lot of almost everything else, except Chemistry, which neither of them has. Music they both have, except his are opera and how-to-sing books, hers everything else.

The new neighborhood golden retriever is driving the next-door house builders crazy. They keep throwing things for him to chase, out into the woods along the property borders. The dog is having fun. It looks to be a lively summer, and Barbara hopes she is not too old and crotchety to enjoy it.

This year this is the day, April 15, when all at once the brown grass turns green. Daffodils are coming up by some old logs. Last year at this time the Veres were in California. She had forgotten about those daffodils. The birds are mad because she has put away the feeder, especially the birds who have once again made their nest where the telephone wire comes into the house.

Jim is about to leave for Israel. His suitcase is packed, though forgotten things do end up needing to be put in. Odds and ends still seem to be flying about, in and out of drawers....

Then Jim, who'd had to go to the office one last time, didn't come and didn't come, and then finally there was a toot-toot. Luckily Barbara had her coat right there, ready to dash. He had lost his keys, which was why he was late. They did not go to the airport by way of the river, where there may still be going to be a flood. Well, he just barely caught the plane, the ground crew picking up the socks that fell from his suitcase in which he had packed some last minute papers.

Barbara's 63rd birthday dinner was last night at a nice restaurant by a lake. Children were playing "Red Rover" on the lawn, joined by a little girl who came outside just as the Veres were going in to join their friends. An older girl called out to the little girl and she ran there. In the dining room were three high school couples, having dinner before their prom, the boys' jackets hanging up on nearby wall-hooks. But Barbara was sick and had to leave early, still managing to drive herself home. It reminded her a little of her 10th birthday when, after her party, she came down with a high fever and measles. But Mom wasn't here this time, though it was the same kind of so pleasant, bird-filled evening.

A long-time music friend is moving away. There will be a party. Barbara will say: "The eight songs you are about to sing are not quite a summary of all you have sung in chapels, churches, schools, living-rooms, coffee houses, an Elks Lodge, a Town Hall, a Barn and a new student center. But a couple of the songs you'll be singing, here in the town library, you sang in a concert in the college library about forty years ago. Among the roles you've sung are *Pertelote* (the hen in our friend Ruth's setting of Chaucer's "Nonnes Preestes Tale") and, in French, *Phedre*, from Rameau's "Hypolite et Aricie". And about every ten years the occasion seems to arise for a revival of Purcell's "Dido and Aeneas". Four times you have been there for the key and most difficult part of *Belinda*. Of course that meant someone else got to sing "Dido's Lament". But today it is finally your turn, your next-to-last song. This is as informal a concert as we can manage, since most of us prefer not to perform these days. But who knows what the future will bring, yours especially. After all, you did sing before you came here - how old were you for Gounod's "Sanctus"? Fifteen, I think. Thank you for the pleasure you have given us over the years, from those of us here today and from many, many others."

The lilac bush she was given by the Bach Study Group in memory of her mother has many blooms, this year.

Annette's oldest brother and his wife are coming to this country today, both for the first time. Barbara is a little nervous about going to see them on the Cape, next Sunday. Mom was continually being told by her sister that she didn't understand about the war, she couldn't possibly, not ever, what the war had been like. Barbara plans to show her cousin the stoop where Mom would wait for mail, to tell him about Mom's graciousness with the garrulous mailman who would be so pleased with himself those few times when he brought mail from their grandfather. Through friends, Grandfather

had managed to smuggle mail to Africa or to the Red Cross. This morning Barbara talked with a friend who is working on a book, studying family dynamics during the Nazi occupation of France. Barbara suddenly realizes Mother wrote next to nothing about the war, about that period in her life.

Barbara's friend with ms has had another birthday party. Someone told one of the daughters she looked more and more like her mother ("the way I remember her", she added, thank goodness) and the daughter, very simply, said "thank you".

Today is July 4th, Dad and Mother's 69th wedding anniversary. Annette's brother has sent pictures of his visit.

Recently Barbara heard someone say that nature is silent. Joys and sorrows, for the most part, simply end and are forgotten in silence. Well, words and music break silence. Words came first, she supposes. (Dare she insist the Bach Study Group begin each session with reading the words of the chorales and then singing them in unison?) She remembers seeing both Toscanini and Bruno Walter conduct. A friend of hers from music school and she had stayed behind after a rehearsal of their own chorus in Carnegie Hall, hiding behind seats because no one was allowed to watch Toscanini. He was a very old man: there were bars all around his podium to keep him from falling. He was indeed precise, as she had heard, to the point of obsession, bawling out a flutist for sloppiness. And probably it was a good thing she couldn't understand the Italian words he was using. In great contrast, Bruno Walter approached music from the inside, rather than from the outside. When he came to the music school to rehearse the Brahms Requiem, he just stood there, his hands up and out, almost motionless.

Jim should be on his way to Morocco to give a talk, but he still hasn't left Boston because of storms in New York....

He stayed overnight with Peter and then came home. The plane only goes three times a week. He is still trying to go, though he may miss his own talk. Nope, he's not going and is cross about the shots he had and all the pills he bought for diarrhea.

A message on the answering machine said the lace lady was in the hospital because of shortness of breath. The weather is so heavy, no wonder she is having trouble breathing. How can it not be raining?

And now, Peter and two of his in-laws have come and gone. An English cousin was in this country for the first time and there was even a Shriner's parade, which they all watched from where they had lunch on the terrace of the Inn.

In September the Veres will have been here forty years. Jim will soon be preparing for his last class before retiring next June. There is already a sense of closing in, fall coming. The late afternoons have been magically beautiful, especially the afternoon when deer came. Tomorrow is the first duplicate bridge game with the math husband who welcomed them, forty years ago.

Tennis this morning was in the field, part of which Peter mowed, riding a big machine, when he was about twelve, such a responsible job for such a little boy. Watching him, from the hill above, remains one of her special memories.

Cantata 92 was more special than usual yesterday morning. It's not that they were all so good, although an excellent visiting cellist had come, making Barbara wish, for a moment, she had gone that route all along (good musicians rather than enthusiastic ones). But all were doing their best and all became truly caught up in the music. This is what she is good enough for. With experts she'd only get in the way.

A busy but fun week is coming up, if only she can stay well. She is losing weight and is sick more often. Jim's eyes are worse. The person she played tennis with this morning's husband is blind and must always have someone with him. It is beginning to seem important that the Veres get themselves moved to the retirement community sooner rather than later, especially if she is not going to be around. She is not really taking all this in, just sort of putting it down on paper to look at, before going shopping for dinner.

Annette's twin is on the warpath again about those notebooks. Barbara wrote a letter back in English.

"No, I wasn't the one who translated the writings. The reason for making the copy, when we came in '83, was that Mother wanted to translate it for her grandchildren. You have the copy she used - so you can understand why she made mistakes. It is very hard to read. Richard, who has a copy of your copy, does plan to finish, on his computer, the work you began on your computer. Right now he has two jobs - flying as usual, plus he is now teaching pilots, in a machine that simulates real flying conditions.

"I still hope that some day the originals of the writing will appear. I can only say once again that I did not take them. I do not have them. And I did not have time to copy anywhere near all he wrote. If, by any remote chance, they were destroyed, I am sure it was to protect us, or perhaps our memory of him - something of that kind. He tried to write about the war; and some of the scars of that time have not healed even yet. (How odd that I, the only one of us who could not really understand his writings, seem to be the only one who read them.) I know he would be very sad that you are angry with me about his writings - not at all what he had in mind. I can only say once again that I did not take them. And I do understand that you will continue to be angry with me as long as you believe I have the originals,

though that makes me sad, too.”

Now she is sitting, eating grapes and a cookie since they will be eating out later tonight with department visitors. She has on her jacket, after digging a while in the garden, saying goodbye to the nasturtiums after clearing them out in preparation for the predicted frost, collecting a nice bouquet. New crises are happening in the mid-east, on top of what’s already happening in Haiti. The newscaster even got confused about which he was discussing. As Jim says, there’s too much going on.

Barbara is learning some new lace patterns, with and for the lace lady, and she is learning to play duplicate bridge with the math husband. Those bridge afternoons she sees people she cares about and never would see otherwise. Bach and Shakespeare she has always done for herself, but both keep her in touch with those people too, whom she might not see otherwise. And even with her friend with ms, who is now silent, fun things happen. At the end of the last visit, Barbara was telling her about Elizabeth driving to Flagstaff, Arizona and suddenly her friend joined in when Barbara started to sing “Rt. 66”. The helper was blown away.

Daylight saving time has ended. It feels like the middle of the afternoon but it is only one o’clock. Barbara has picked a last bouquet for the big pitcher under the mirror in the living room, including a buttercup even. She won’t finish digging in the garden because the broccoli is still blooming, delicate little yellow flowers.

The lace lady seems so tired. Her son gave them both notebooks with lace decorations on the covers. Barbara hopes he will say if she should stop visiting, though the lace lady does still seem to enjoy seeing her. She told Barbara a charming story about picking squash with her dad when she was about four and, all by herself, picking a last little one.

Election day is over too. When Elizabeth called yesterday, she said she had voted and also that the director for the play she was in had quit - all pretty intense. What a contrast all that is to the Bach Group, now about 40 strong, singing and playing away so happily. But the Cantata people are not also trying to make a living.

And now, it is only about five, but quite dark. She just got back from the readers meeting - up at the little house overlooking the river valley. How lucky they are to live in this fall-glorious countryside. She drove alone today, instead of going with friends, because she was late after waiting for a call from Social Security in honor of Jim’s retirement and 70th birthday. He has just received a large grant for a workshop next June. Some retirement!

Bob Bishop was reminiscing, today, about the Thomases. He used to ride with them, Mrs. Thomas driving. Barbara remembers seeing him and

another reader pushing the Thomases' car out of a snow-bank, he with his bad heart. That must have been ten years ago, at least. The Thomases had just pointed out to him where a commune had existed in the famous "sixties", where the Thomases had gone to deliver a baby. Mrs. Thomas was Dr. Thomas' assistant. She was in the process of shooing away the commune people when she realized no one was going to leave. The baby belonged to them all, she was told, and they wanted to be part of the delivery. So the Thomases got to work and "delivered the baby to everybody's satisfaction," Mrs. Thomas had concluded.

A new reader added a story about the Thomas' oldest son, part of the sixties revolution also, who was at a talk where someone was lambasting the revolutionaries for being no-good, non-people. The son stood up to rebut, first deliberately pronouncing his name, both his first and his last, two of the most highly respected names in the area.

Barbara has just had a long and amusing phone conversation with Cousin Jeanie. Jeanie told a story about Mother playing a piano concert for her new family when she first came to this country. It was quite a formal occasion, but it was decided there could be quiet conversation during it! Jeanie is a great-grandmother now and her son, who was with her listening to the conversation, a great-uncle. Barbara remembers when that son was born, her aunt telephoning Dad and calling him great uncle. Then Jeanie said she remembered when Richard was born, a telegram arriving, which Jeanie's mother read out loud.

Elizabeth says her play has been delayed a week because an actor was fired. The play will run till December 23 and she will join them in North Carolina on the 24th. They are planning to go to North Carolina still, even though Peter's father-in-law is not at all well. Barbara did insist the Veres stay in a nearby Inn, perhaps hurting the feelings of Peter's mother-in-law, if so only temporarily, she hopes. She feels, as usual, she is no good at these holiday productions, though she must remember the one who always has the best time is she herself.

The other evening Elizabeth came home to her apartment to find a broken window and a man in the bathroom. Elizabeth truly knows now she must move and she also knows she can't afford a really safe place. The play opens next Thursday.

Feeling helpless, Barbara goes off to get a haircut. Now she pretends to read some poetry but mostly is staring out into the still green but cold back yard.

They're home from North Carolina. Jim leaves for math meetings in two days. Barbara cannot imagine going anywhere else again, right now. But it was a memorable holiday, worth the strain and expense. For her the high point was the four of them, she, Jim and their two kids, walking together back to the Inn from the dinner the Veres gave the evening after Christmas.

Peter's in-laws have the perfect Christmas house. They celebrated with what will probably be their last traditional Christmas Dinner, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and flaming plum pudding surrounded by holly picked from the trees outside the back door. That's simply not the way people eat any more.

The next day they were driven to the farm owned by the father-in-law who had actually bull-dosed a lake all by himself. He is not well but he swung into the holidays with a will, playing bridge and working with Jim on the computer. His wife is much stronger than Barbara remembered her being. And the granddaughter was a delight, though confused by all the people. She missed her dog and would pretend to be one herself. When there was talk of a walk, she ran for the little harness her parents had used to keep track of her while traveling, hand it to Peter and then say to herself "sit!" Barbara wished her own father could have seen her two children, Peter and Elizabeth, beating the other mother and herself at bridge, Dad who had taught them both his beloved game.

Outside is golden, almost sunset at 4:15. Forty-two years ago the sun went down behind the mountains, timed by Dad who then drew open the curtains and she and Jim said their vows in front of the view. Barbara hardly knows any one in Colorado any more. She is about to throw away one of the two calendars which have taken turns slipping off the shelf. She remembers the New Year's Eve fireworks, when she was little, shot off the top of Pike's Peak.

And now it's on to 1995. The sun came out around 2:00 as Barbara was walking over to the lace lady's to celebrate her 95th birthday. "No big deal" was the firm instruction. But Barbara did get a little dressed up, and the lace lady looked really better and stronger and so glad to be at home again, though with round-the-clock help. She seemed very pleased with Barbara's little present of 4711 soap, saying she'd feel "like a debutante".

There will be a retirement party on Jim's 70th birthday. He doesn't want either birthday or retirement at all. Barbara remembers his mother telling a story of when Jim was ten and hit a home run - and then ran home to avoid a fuss being made over him.

Yesterday, reading to her ms friend from a kind of memoir her friend had written during a year spent in England, Barbara was truly swept away by a description of northern England in early spring. She stopped reading

to say so - and her friend even managed to answer, "It was so beautiful..."

It would be Mom's 93rd birthday. Being alone and very old can be so sad. The math husband for whom Barbara has set up duplicate bridge once said something like "I keep thinking of Job - the trials of Job".

The lace lady prefers to talk about other people who have broken hips too. Also, she likes to talk about how her mother used to entertain the women's club at her house for teas, complete with tea set, silver and everything. So Barbara talks about her French grandmother's "at homes", one day a week, on her day (Thursdays), when the ladies would come. Mom used to describe them, when she herself would be allowed to pass - well, maybe not cookies, but slices of a fruit "tartine".

At the last duplicate bridge game, Barbara and the math husband actually won. That seemed to give him a real boost, since he had not been feeling well. Barbara can hardly believe people care that much about bridge.

Jim may have the chance to see Elizabeth next week, a quick side trip to California on his way to Washington D.C.! Right now he's sick.

A bomb just blew up a building in Oklahoma City. How fragile people really are. Barbara can hardly believe what can happen to human beings even just in the normal course of events.

Spring again. Yesterday, watching some of the best tennis she has ever seen, who should come up and give her a big hug but the Ellen who helped start the reader's group (21 years ago!), who had taught "Paradise Lost". That Ellen said she had gone on teaching and was here to watch one of her students play tennis. What fun to see her - and to realize that not all of the early readers have got sick or died. Barbara told her they were still meeting, but now in another town, in a small house with spectacular views over the river and mountains. After today's reading, how Barbara had wished she had had a camera to capture the other Ellen and Bob Bishop, standing by the barn, looking beyond, the late afternoon sun on Ellen's white hair and Bob's Irish cap, both so tall....

The lace lady was cross with her son today. He waited till Barbara came, on purpose probably, before saying good-bye before leaving on a trip. The lace lady may be failing, but boy she still can make herself felt. Even Barbara thinks twice before coming to visit her in pants, so as not, with a skirt, to have had to put on stockings too.

Meanwhile, it has crossed Barbara's mind that Mother may have been a lot happier the last ten years of her life than she has been given credit for. She may have been scared, alone at night, and often lonely (and those

awful crank calls, most likely the neighborhood children) but she did too have many inner resources. And all that handiwork of hers may have been fun. Barbara is making lace again and it is pleasant to do, its patterns, rhythms, results.

Barbara has given the last of three luncheons, a project she set for herself to pay her debts and also to get to know some of her favorite people a little better. It has been a lot of work, though. For this last one six people came, only two of whom knew each other. She thought they'd enjoy each other and they certainly did. One is always alone but her life is filled with people she has known who, though they have died, are still very present for her. Those people become present for Barbara too, when she and that friend are together. Even so, Barbara bets it was good for her friend to have some real live people around her for a few hours. Deaf though she is, she began to hear. And the one with Parkinsons stopped shaking.

President Clinton is coming for the college graduation. A giant erector-set kind of building is going up on the football field, teams of men being organized to raise them. Tables are set for meals under one of the stands. Community people are either very excited or leaving town. Barbara's friend Anna's husband will be here for his 40th reunion, so Anna is coming over to say Hi.

Barbara hopes her insides behave this next week-end when she drives Jim to a Math conference in Maine, he still on the mend from pneumonia. How nice it has been to be home this entire spring! Tom called earlier this evening. He and his wife (he has remarried) are in the throes of leaving for the summer, renting their house with all that that entails. He wailed: "Why are we doing this?!!"

Ah. She has been stretching out on the grass. This may just be the best afternoon of her whole life, a few summer flies buzzing. She remembers the flies buzzing by the well at Prats, in the garden. She would be helping her French grandfather wash and whiten all the canvas shoes - except he tended to wear sneakers and they'd wash and whiten those too, among the sweet-smelling fruit trees.

And now the fireflies are out. One came to the kitchen window as she was finishing the dishes, so she went to look at the backyard from the deck and there they all were.

Elizabeth called and said a plan was afoot to have every one e-mail Jim the first day of his retirement, flooding his computer. Elizabeth said every one is having fun planning it, so many wondering what they could possibly give back to him, he'd given so many so much.

Tomorrow they go to visit Peter and also a daughter, husband and grandchildren of Annette's sister. Part of Barbara pulls away from family, but

family does seem to become more important the older one gets, and she does miss seeing Richard's children. Jim grew up in the Midwest, but only one brother is there any more. She feels closest in touch with people with whom she is in regular contact, much more than with those with whom she shares long memories. But, after seeing the visiting French family, she will write to her aunt, Mother's older sister, about to celebrate her 97th birthday, and include something written by each one of the people at Peter's.

It was fun to see her cousin's daughter with her family. Also, there is a little more evidence that it was Barbara's aunt who destroyed their grandfather's notebooks, in a forgivable effort to make things seem more right than perhaps they were. Maybe that's what anybody does, recreate the world to where it can be borne.

Barbara's cousin's daughter began talking about how her own daughter was named after the grandmother and has her wedding ring, which Barbara's aunt had barely been able to remove from the grandmother's finger. But Barbara's mother thought she herself had been given all the family rings, that one included, and which Richard's youngest daughter received at the time of Mother's burial. Well, perhaps one day the two owners of that wedding ring will meet and compare.

Meanwhile, the daughter reminded Barbara, overwhelmingly as Barbara caught sight of her getting out of a car, of Annette and her twin getting out of a car, that last summer they were all together before the war.

Barbara is deeply sorry most of her grandfather's notebooks are gone, but she does realize the pain of the war years must have been overwhelming for those directly involved. Yet Grandfather did try to come to terms with that pain for himself - and for her, though she hadn't really been able to follow what he had written. No way will she try to confront her aunt. What was it King Lear's Cordelia said? "Love and be silent."

Barbara has just received a card from her aunt and Annette, and her aunt's writing looks strong and clear. They were so happy to get the note signed by them all.

Chapter 69

April '97

It has been a very long time since Barbara has written anything at all. She isn't even sure where her last notebook is. She has been putting Mother's writings on the computer, with an eye toward trying to publish them. If that doesn't work, she will "publish" them herself for the family next Christmas. Annette has also found a chest-full of all the letters Mother had written to France over the years. Richard will bring them to Barbara when he and his wife go to France in June to buy things for his wife's Antique store. Mother's sister died a year and a half ago.

Soon Barbara must go outside, wants to, to dump old leaves, sticks, and a few papers she has already raked up. The latest forecast says today will bring the end of the nice weather. The readers just left. Some one new has replaced Bob Bishop and his friend, both of whom died earlier this year. The Bach Group continues too, though on Fridays, instead of on Tuesdays. Parking at the library got so bad the group was asked to move to the morning when the library was closed. Two afternoon bridge games, one duplicate, keep Barbara in touch with the Math husband, the widower, who will be 95 soon. Some one new and very good enjoys playing with him and they win or come in second in duplicate most of the time. Barbara plays with an amusing lady in a wheelchair. They keep the rest of the players from being the bottom, which the wheel-chair lady at least pretends not to notice.

Barbara has inherited books and equipment from the lace lady, who also died earlier this year. And Barbara is directing a singing group at the retirement community. She is continuing to shelf-read at the town library, now also making a list of the people who wrote the book reviews glued to the front of the older books in anticipation of the planned celebration in 2000 of the library's 100th birthday.

Snow is crashing down from their new roof. Too soon Barbara has moved the branches and boards, which she put over the deck last fall in an attempt to spread out the sudden weight. Her chair, out under the apple tree as of a couple of days ago, looks cold. Jim was supposed to go to a meeting in

Boston, but the weather is too messy.

Yesterday she had lunch with Tom's widow (Tom died suddenly last summer) who is in a tangle over who gets what among all their kids, his and hers.

And now Barbara is doing a final proofreading of Mother's opus and has sent the Colorado section to the school there, to get permission to use what she took from an article Mother once wrote for the school's Alumni Bulletin. She is beginning to choose pictures. The temptation to add some of her own memories must not be yielded to. She won't tell about the owl that settled on top of their porch light, staying there for several days. All the boys kept coming over to return its stares and to watch how its head turned around. She won't tell about the student who planted all the tulip bulbs at the Egg Lady's, which bloomed for many years. There were lots of snake stories, the best being about the bull snake who crawled up the drain pipe into the kitchen sink. And there were hailstorms. Anna's dad went out in one of the hailstorms to rescue a baby bird on the lawn. He put it under a bush before racing back to the porch where the two families were standing.

Mother did tell, so well, about a herd of sheep being driven south from the mountains, blocking the road to the school.

Today at the college swimming pool, several black students were trying to pass the college swim test. A girl, tall and heavy, was afraid to jump in at the deep end even when holding on to one end of a pole, held on the other end by the instructor. But she finally did jump in, from a sitting position. How tough, being so conspicuous among all the trim white students swimming away with such confidence. Barbara herself feels conspicuous among them, and she is only old. A boy, at first clumsy, began to get the hang of the water and of himself in it, though he must have taken in several unpleasant nosefuls of water in his enthusiasm.

At Shakespeare, Ellen, with a cold, could hardly breathe and seemed, suddenly, very frail and tired. Maybe Barbara will give her a call tomorrow or just leave some daffodils by her door. Or maybe she will do neither of those things.

Great enthusiasm about Mom's book, from the school. Today is cold and rainy, but green, green, green, really green. The forsythia is out all over, except in front of the house, still under snow and maybe crushed because of snow crashing down from the new roof.

May First. Barbara wonders if the neighborhood children will leave a surprise May basket again. Last night she and Jim ate outside on the deck for the first time this year. And right now there's an angle of sun over the leaves of the lilies of the valley between their house and the next one. It

is almost her last day of being 65. She can almost feel not being able to remember things. She forgot the car at the library yesterday and, last week, almost forgot a dinner party.

When Barbara got up, her birthday, the sun was shining on the three daffodils in the small brown dime-store pitcher she salvaged during one of her trips to see her parents in Colorado. Maybe today she will get done all those things she ought to have done. She wonders where the name “May” for this month comes from, a word with such possibility, such promise. Even though the world and, much worse, her kids seem overwhelmed, even so probably it behooves her to relish her own, her still new, freedom. More and more of what she does now is self-chosen. Here she goes, getting her Kix (on Route 66) except it’s Wheaties. Does Kix still exist? She remembers telling her mother the radio announcer had said it was the best and Mother answering the radio didn’t always tell the truth, which came as quite a shock.

Mid-summer. Much has happened. Elizabeth is in Senegal. Jim, Peter and Peter’s daughter leave for the Lake Superior island tomorrow. Barbara and Anna are driving together to the Cape, visiting one of Anna’s daughters on the way...

Barbara was gone barely two days but came home exhausted. And now, two days later, she is having trouble getting organized. Being in the garden, clearing, thinning, picking, was wonderful this lovely morning, so quiet except for herself and the birds and the breeze. This afternoon it is really hot.

On the way to the Cape, Barbara met four of Anna’s grandchildren. Barbara herself was sent to pick up the oldest grandson who was fly-casting beside a nearby inlet. He reminded her very much of Anna’s father. On the Cape, she and Anna stayed at a bed and breakfast not too far from Richard’s. They met Richard for lunch, who hadn’t seen Anna since Barbara’s wedding. But instantly the three of them were as they had always been, Anna practically their younger sister. Then Barbara took a copy of Mom’s book (people are calling and writing, loving it) to one of Mom’s friends, age 90 and now living in a retirement community in South Yarmouth. Anna, not feeling too well, decided to stay at the bed and breakfast to read and rest. And then they went to Richard’s for wine and cheese and a tour of the property before going, with Richard’s wife, out to dinner.

The next morning, Anna really wasn’t well. Barbara suggested they think about going home and then she went out to mail a card. There was wind and some but not too much rain, a great walk. The Cape is unique in

its feel, she thinks, but she does miss Mom. Barbara and Anna decided to go home, making the necessary phone calls. It was raining hard by the time they got to the bridge over the canal. Anna said she felt better the minute they had decided to go home and was worried she was a “head case”. So they decided after all to turn off the highway to trim the bushes at Barbara’s family’s cemetery. Barbara had thrown some clippers in the back of the car before leaving home. And the cemetery, next to Dad’s childhood skating pond, was a good place for a picnic. Barbara suggested they go by Anna’s mother’s cemetery as well, but Anna said that it really was too far out of the way. This had been almost a short cut. And the rain stopped, until it started up again just as they were leaving. The trip felt short, in spite of all the traffic, and they did have a good time. They have talked on the phone since. Anna claims she is fine but is keeping notes about waking up at night and feeling peculiar.....

On the hardest day of her life, still not having heard a word from Elizabeth in Senegal, Barbara manages to write, pretending to be writing to Elizabeth: “Not having heard from you.... you have put yourself - I have allowed you to put yourself - not quite out of earshot you to me - you’ve long since been beyond me to you.... I don’t have a passport and who knows why I’m keeping my 200 dollars worth of travelers checks I didn’t spend last weekend with my friend Anna. I’ll play tennis at 9:00, swim and wash my hair at 10:30, talk to a friend sometime today about music and possibly manage to sit under my tree a bit during what promises to be a nice day. I cannot make your happiness for you. Only you can do that. Losing yourself in the desert, if you can even get there, is not quite my own idea of happiness or even the best of unhappinesses. You must be very unhappy. I really am crying for you....”

The dog belonging to the man who is remodeling the downstairs bathroom peed on the carpet. So the man cut out the pee spot and had it cleaned. And now Barbara is about to sew it in again, except that the piece has shrunk and Jim might trip on it, half-awake, on a night visit to the bathroom. Maybe she had better think of something else to do there.

But tonight Barbara will sleep well, having heard about Elizabeth from some one who has seen her, who said she was fine and writing a lot and will return in two weeks. Barbara has also heard from Jim, safely off his island and in Detroit, though he sounds tired. And the new kitten in the neighborhood has come by to introduce herself, the birds peeking at the two of them through the leaves of the apple tree....

Blessed rain. Elizabeth has telephoned, from Africa. The cover of this week’s New Yorker magazine was of the statue of liberty sneaking off for a nude swim....

And now Barbara is again unhinged. Yesterday around 5:30 she was in the garden picking beans when there was a telephone call which she did not

run in to answer. When she finally came in, she found a message from a local travel agent about having a message for her. After the agent had hung up, there was a strange-sounding “hello” followed by a man’s voice saying “slow down”. And that was all. She listened several times and had Jim listen to it when he got home around 6:30, neither of them able to rule out Elizabeth, calling from Dakar, 10:30 PM Dakar-time. Unable to get through to Air Afrique, the airline Elizabeth was planning to come home on, to make sure, if possible, she was on their passenger list, Barbara called her travel-agent cousin Jeanie, who managed to find out the plane would be leaving Dakar at 3:00 their own time and get into New York City at 8:00 tomorrow morning. And this morning at 8:20, Elizabeth telephoned, from New York City, alive and sounding like herself.

All day Barbara has been on the verge of tears. She called up Jeanie, who had been wonderful last night, chatting about this and that, encouraging Barbara to stay calm without saying so....

At last Elizabeth is here, exhausted, frightened, but here. Jim just called from the hospital where he has gone with her, trying to find out what’s wrong. Flu? Malaria? “This will take a little time”, they were told, waiting at the hospital. “It can’t last much longer,” Jim said over the phone....

Now it is raining but the sun is shining and the chestnut tree near Jim’s office has yellow chestnuts against the green, like Christmas decorations. Elizabeth feels she has failed, but she has indeed done what she has somehow had to do, with courage but not much luck. How does one pull one’s self together and start again, especially when one is feeling so rotten?

Fall '97. A monarch butterfly settles on a matching marigold. Elizabeth went home just a week ago and is already sick again. The diagnosis was Murine Typhus. There have been scary times the past six weeks, but some happy times too.....

Jim is in Mexico. He left yesterday, after the usual mad before-leaving flurry. Elizabeth called. She is driving to northern-most Maine with two friends, to be in a movie.

Barbara feels this is a crisis period for her, that the daily round she is involved with is some kind of self-preservation, no exaggeration. The new Bach cantata is close to miraculous, the people, after all this time together, almost able to sight-read it. Afterwards several of them waited outside in the sun for the daughter of their 92-year-old singer to come. Skin is what gets old. The dryness of the 92-year-old’s lips was causing them to bleed a little, which she tried not to let bother her or any one else, more or less succeeding as they talked quietly, no one wanting to leave her.

Ah, the noisy game (soccer?) is over and even the squirrels and chickadees are quieting down. The air is so soft, but she must go in and make sure

the candle will stay upright in the jack-o-lantern before the neighborhood kids come by....

In about an hour Barbara may don boots to go out and rescue her chair under the apple tree before tomorrow's "winter storm". This morning was the best Bach ever, from beginning to end. She came home exhausted and took a long nap and is now just sitting with a cup of tea. There is music to sort out and put away, and yesterday's bridge scores to go over, and maybe some phone calls to make but those can be done tomorrow. Maybe she will just stare out the window for a while. She is about to reach the end of the last empty notebook, she inherited from Mom. She hasn't typed anything up for a long time. She should. After all, she managed to type up all of Mother's. Some of her own is good, but some of it isn't, too. She had better get to it, if she is going to, while she can still read her own handwriting.

She wonders if she will ever get back to making lace. Someone called the other evening, wanting an address to order new bobbins.

They are off to Peter's for Thanksgiving, even though Peter's family would prefer not to eat a lot and would like to go out square dancing afterwards with their friends. These forced holidays continue to distress - not too strong a word - Barbara.

One of the five birthday party people died yesterday, speaking of distressful times - those birthdays, the spending of incredible amounts of money going out to dinner, and, more recently, having to count on being sick afterwards, no longer able to process the fancy food. But he will be missed, who has been part of their lives for a very long time.

Next week is the Holiday Concert at the retirement community. Being the director has stretched her, containing so many diverse if not contradictory elements. A Jewish lady could not tell her Hanukkah story (ending with the holocaust) without weeping. Barbara had asked her to try the beginning and the end, just to practice how it would connect with the rest of the program. A friend will finish for her next week, if the lady herself cannot - who said she would drink a brandy ahead. Incredibly, the lady reminds Barbara of the little girl on the ocean liner Statendam, with whom she was not allowed to play in 1938, returning from France....

The concert went pretty well except for a 93-year-old cello player who has recently gone off into a world of her own. If Barbara herself reaches 93, how will that be? Perhaps faith, hope and, the greatest-of-these, charity will prevail over doubt, despair and - what would the third word be for the-least-of those....

For her, Thanksgiving turned out definitely to be worth doing, seeing the two grandchildren. There were two especially magic moments - watching the oldest totally absorbed in a game and the little one responding first to ice cream and then to the spoon that had produced it, which was given to her. But Peter is so very tired! She and Jim left early to avoid a storm, a

great trip home with Schubert songs on the tape recorder, even though Jim kept worrying they were taking the wrong road.

When Elizabeth was told about their friend who had died, she said, simply: "There has to be a memorial service - he sent me birthday cards - anyone who does that, there has to be a service...".

Now it has been almost a week since the concert and Barbara is still recovering, it has taken her this long to re-collect herself. It was a good concert, but oh, performing is simply not worth all the who's better than whom (or, more usually, who's worse) and all the time spent on logistics instead of music. So, even though there are some great people at the retirement community whom she would never have met otherwise, she must work out a way for someone else to take over next fall.

Jim is in the middle of a day-long series of "Chance" talks, preceded by a banquet and talks the night before. She has been included since she is the proofreader for his "Chance News" internet publication. Unused as she is to a day of sitting and listening, no matter how interesting, she has now come home for soup and bed. Jim and the leftover people have gone out for Chinese food....

Happy New Year 1998 and much has happened that will never be recorded, too bad. At least the sun is out, waltzes are on the radio and cookies are in the oven....

Peter's boss died yesterday in a skiing accident....

Peter and his wife attended the wake and are, today, at the funeral, meeting people from all over the world....

Today is the day of the memorial for their birthday-party friend. Jim will be speaking. He looks tired and is also very upset about his oldest brother's sickness. Barbara's own friend Ellen is not at all well, not that Barbara sees her that much anymore. She has come to realize, with a pang, how very much she would miss Ellen - her humor, her brilliance, her common sense....

Barbara is trying to get back to doing her own work, going through her writings - trying yet again - but it really is very hard. It takes more than time and being in the mood. She wonders if she is losing a certain kind of concentration.

She is also thinking of starting a conducting class to ease out of the Bach Group when they finish going through all the available cantatas, now in the foreseeable future. And would the readers continue without Ellen? the bridge games without her old partner who has been in the hospital? Maybe she should start thinking about pulling away from all busynesses, which have also, though, been such a pleasure and have given shape to her life. Well, back to her writing (after hanging up the laundry) and she will see how this day goes. She still hangs the laundry on lines Peter put up years ago, ever since the dryer broke down. But the washer has carried on for - can it really be 31 years? Her electrician, whose name was Harry Albaugh,

encouraged her to buy it and what a great buy it was! (The kids called him hairy eyeball.) Barbara thanks him weekly, though he is long gone, for the washer - and Peter too, weekly, for the lines.

Most of her writing she started when she was 34. But her first, "Apology", she wrote during her freshman year in college at 17. There was also a long story she wrote in high school - too long, said the teacher - about the army horse called 82, his leg branded with that number - whose name was given to the gymkhana field at the Colorado school, though people at the school no longer remember there was a real horse of that name. Now she wishes she had kept that story. Barbara has one more page to fill, in the last of Mom's notebooks. Mom died about six years ago, now. Which are better, journals or stories? In what sense better?....

Ellen came back to the readers yesterday, gaunt and yellow, but back. And Barbara's bridge partner plans to return to play this afternoon.

Tonight she and Jim go to a Chinese New Year celebration way up north. The snowstorm is supposed to hold off till after midnight.

Yesterday, walking home from a cancelled-because-of-sickness concert (so many people are so very sick this winter) Barbara was yet once again struck by the beauty of this place she has come to know so well, the snow, the sky, the sun and the others who were out on an unexpectedly warm afternoon.

Chapter 70

An Early Spring

Barbara has just had her driver's license renewed, and the picture taken for it is the best yet. Maybe they don't do wrinkles any more, for driver's licenses. It is windy, hard to tell which are old leaves flying around and which are birds. A few crocuses are in bloom, and something next to the hedge is sprouting, tulips maybe? Did she (who else of course) put them there?

Jim is in California, spending Easter weekend camping with friends in a National Park. He is worried about her because she is never home when he calls. She is touched. Mostly she is out in the garden. The new leaves are barely beginning, right now just a pale green fuzz around the trees in the late afternoon sun. The white birch is white, white, white. She has cut back bushes so Mom's lilac is in full view. When it blooms, she just might have a lunch for the people who gave it to her after Mom died. She has just re-read what she wrote during Mom's last year, six years ago. Elizabeth recently wrote a section in her own - well, she calls it her novel, about Mother as she had been then, as well as about Barbara getting older, and about herself sick with whatever she had after she came home from Africa, all as if they were contemporaries in their need.

One of the two northern spy apple tree stumps, where she hung her hammock the first years they lived here, has vanished. She crunched the other one which will soon vanish also, but it hasn't yet. Lots of daffodils are sprouting which can be split and spread around some more. The wild white grape hyacinth is up and she has been watching it, not being surprised to discover it any more and finally knowing its name. She hopes this will be a long wonderful spring, even as it has begun. She has received her first letter ever from her granddaughter....

Jim is home. It is still lovely out and she has even sat under her tree. She still, after all these years, gets a thrill from being free at 11:00 in the morning, and not at school or at work.

The books she has ordered from Red Lake, in Canada, have come. She

wonders when her grandfather left there. She must try to find what he wrote and perhaps send a copy to the museum there. He probably used an alias, so there may be no way of truly identifying him. Cousin Jeanie remembers a newspaper article about his creditors giving up on ever finding him. Jeanie had heard a friend's parents talking about it, so she had asked her friend to show her the article. Jeanie remembers the day he gave her a doll.

There has been a cold spell, but nothing has frozen, including the apple buds over her head. Maybe tomorrow Barbara will put pansies in the window boxes and begin to leave plants out overnight instead of hauling them back inside. At a poetry reading, the leader said something about "the grace of the unexpected". Barbara had to interrupt and ask where that expression had come from. "I guess I just made it up...."

And now it is raining and all is turning green and there are lots of birds and the apple tree will be full out by her birthday, this year, instead of the week after. Time to pick asparagus for supper.

Barbara has never seen the apple tree so glorious, so early. The furnace man has just left (singing the furnace's praises) and the back yard quite blew him away. Maybe she will put in beets and carrots this weekend and buy seed potatoes. She is under her tree again, surrounded by forget-me-nots and buttercups, the lawn mowed for the first time, and the lilac is in bloom. In a while she will start cleaning around the iris and then move some ferns to around the carport. She is watching a very funny squirrel teasing two crows. Now the crows are mad enough at him to send him scampering.

Today there's wind, the forget-me-nots and buttercups wild in the bright sun. Barbara has got her jacket on, it's that cool. A letter came from an old student at the Colorado school, wanting a copy of Mom's book which he had just happened to see at the headmaster's house.

Barbara has bought some tomato plants, since she didn't get around to growing any from seed this year, but there may be a frost tonight. So she has left the tomato plants out of the wind and in the sun, next to the woodpile. She will bring them inside tonight and maybe plant them tomorrow. Other flowering trees are beginning to bloom. Their mountain ash is like nothing she has ever seen - ah yes, which means she'll be busy next fall sweeping all the red berries off the driveway before they get squashed. This has been and continues to be the most beautiful spring she can remember, even counting the one she remembers from high school, all the lilacs there along with masses of bridal wreath....

In the world, Pakistan and India both have atomic weapons now and, in the solar system, a new planet has been discovered. Barbara is in the house looking out the window at her chair in the middle of all the forget-me-nots under the tree, wishing she were out there. She has seen a smallish woodchuck, oh oh. Or will the now-thick hedge of mint (the burdock didn't work) she planted around the borders a few years ago be a deterrent? There

are bad storms predicted, she had better move the car out from under trees. And she will move herself to the underground recital hall at the college to hear a concert of English cathedral music....

There was an article in this morning's paper about the death of Amy's mother, Amy her old friend from the backyard. They haven't been in touch much, she and Amy.

It is dusk, a lovely, lovely red evening now darkening except for the first fireflies. Meanwhile the college is gearing up yet again for commencement and reunions (the 25th of her own class). Tents are going up, the largest just down the street. A whole crew was involved in setting it up, reminding her of all the people who worked on their Barn to turn it into a concert hall, including one oldish man named Junior, "Junyah".

Can post office people really just move a mailbox with no warning? Barbara sometimes gets herself to the pool because she has something to mail and today she had to keep on going to the next mailbox. If she had known, in today's downpour, she would perhaps have neither swum nor mailed her letter. The traffic was unbelievable. There were few pedestrians except for an elegantly dressed gent with a college-colors umbrella and an older man in a pork-pie hat and sweatshirt, also in college colors. The latter had no umbrella but seemed to be feeling no pain. Also there were several beautiful and beautifully turned out Chinese men and women. She and Jim had recently talked about who irons shirts any more. Barbara is planning a family collection of writings for the year 2000: maybe she will write about ironing shirts. How she wishes some one had thought to collect family writings in 1900, not to mention 1800....

It is still raining, but just now the sun is beginning to shine through the heavy rain. Barbara watched the graduation ceremonies on the local TV, all the plastic bags and also towels being distributed. The brass band was less affected than were the bag-pipe players. There are now so many people the authorities have finally given up even thinking about moving inside, though they do provide rooms with TVs....

Yesterday Barbara was returning geraniums to their accustomed spots after the floods when her already aching back took a sudden turn for the worse. She nearly dropped beside the geraniums, the pain was that bad. No one should live alone. Jim is away for a few days. Barbara did get so she could return to the house and get through the rest of the day. Then today she was better and noticed the back stoop was in need of repair. Doing that, she did all sorts of bending and now, miracle of miracles, she feels okay again. She can hardly believe it. She must even have forgotten her back, going ahead with fixing the stoop. Then, while she was doing errands uptown, she passed one elderly man, barely able to walk. But he was capering about, so glad to be back for his reunion.... There's quite a difference between the 50-year class and the 40-year one. Two of the forties were playing singles

tennis as if they hadn't quit playing since they graduated.

And now it's going to rain again, what a week. Peter had two feet of water in his basement - "up to my knees, Grandma", said her granddaughter over the phone. Elizabeth had been planning to give a picnic, which she has put off for two weeks.

A chickadee fell out, or maybe was blow out, or maybe tried to fly out of his nest. Great excitement in the chickadee world. He had hopped onto a brick by the tool shed. That was yesterday. He is not there today.

How much she hasn't done! The fireflies are almost gone and it is now after Barbara's granddaughter's fifth birthday. Some past graduate students were here this weekend. There was a big party Friday. It was fun, but she realizes she no longer entertains easily and/or is resentful because she really does have other things to tend to. But she always has other things to tend to; for instance she is incapable of reading only one book at a time.

A friend had a stroke but is now home. She asked Barbara to stay with her tomorrow, at a time Barbara couldn't come. The friend does need her or someone, which again reminds Barbara that no one should live alone. Barbara will just have to say when she can come.

The one with whom they shared birthdays willed them a thousand dollars! Jim agreed they could give it to the kids, half and half, as proof windfalls do happen, "the grace of the unexpected" once again....

Pretty soon now, it is going to be too late to prepare for tomorrow's party for people teaching in Jim's summer workshop. He is frantically getting ready for the week. Barbara needs to produce table cloths, dishes and silver....

The house is being stained (not painted) for the first time since they moved here in '73. She hates to lose the fuzzy old rust color to a maybe too red rust. But that too will soften. A just right breeze is turning leaves inside out and then right side out again. Jim's workshop is almost over, the usual great success though he is exhausted.

Barbara has come across a picture of a painting of Saint Anne who is spinning thread. Mary is passing the thread to the baby who is making lace! Barbara will create a card of it for Annette's friend who is particularly interested in Saint Anne. Saint Anne's birthday is July 26th.

Chapter 71

Nearing an End

1999. Only a few more cantatas to go, and the Bach Group is now working on Cantata 14. Outside, so bleak and gray. It is Jim's birthday. His brother telephoned and couldn't believe Jim wasn't home but at math meetings in San Antonio. Barbara and Jim are not heavy on either birthdays or holidays. The brothers' 92-year-old cousin has died. Barbara had hung up on the funeral parlor man when he telephoned since he sounded so like a salesman. Barbara said her usual "Thank you for calling" and hung up. He called back, for which she truly is grateful.

Barbara has begun working with a music friend, who will be taking over the Bach Group in August, with people at the retirement community who have Alzheimers. One of the people there, who is now deaf, loves to watch the piano being played, referring to "finger songs". Another, who used to come sing with the Bach Group, has died and there was a Quaker service for her, no flowers, no music, but moving and peaceful.

Ellen, who has lived at the retirement community since its opening in 1991, keeps slogging along, out of the Health Center as much as possible. She continues to join the readers, though she no longer reads, today a wonderful afternoon of Richard II. Ellen, so very frail, went off arm-in-arm with the shy, gentle bachelor who joined the readers a couple of years ago, he too at the retirement community now. What good company they all are.

Barbara's 95-year-old bridge partner has promised his children he will move to the retirement community when he turns 100. Meanwhile, as Barbara continues to get bills from the hospital from two years ago, she realizes that having the retirement community take care of all of that would be special indeed. But maybe already Barbara doesn't have the energy to move themselves to the retirement community. Even under optimal conditions, how does any one have the energy for that....

Cousin Jeanie's husband has had a "slight stroke". Jeanie says he's not a "happy camper". What a change that is making in Jeanie's active life!

Jim's cataract operations have been a great success. He can see much

better. The day they were in Boston back at Christmastime, he bumped into a lamppost.

It is fifteen years to the day, this Washington's Birthday, since Barbara's first operation and how awful it was and yet here she is still. She has even taken out some lace making equipment for the first time since Mom died, almost 7 years ago. Barbara said she would bring it to the retirement community next Sunday. People there who don't talk almost talked yesterday when Barbara spoke a little French, including one person who had never graduated from anything because her mother was always dragging her off to France....

One of the people Barbara visits regularly is a friend of Mother's, the only one she knows who can still talk about Colorado as it was in the thirties. And Richard phoned. Barbara told him she wants all ten pounds of Mom's letters that were found in the shed at Prats....

March is so ugly, brown, gray, foggy, icy, rainy, all that. Barbara can see why people tend to go away in March. There was a long phone call from Elizabeth who is going through hard times, much harder than she deserves.

Mom's letters are wonderful. Oh yes, Barbara does believe she sees now that Mom's considerable talents were wasted. Mom herself may have come to think so too. Barbara has decided the letters should be organized but not translated into English. It took two weeks for Mom's first letters to reach her parents, and then two more weeks for an answer. The last saved letter was an air-letter, covered with bubbles that were part of the paper itself, leaving barely room for the address. Reading all those letters, as if they had just been written, made Barbara feel the bubbleness of them all. One saved letter had been written, in 1927, by the father of the student Dad and Mother had taken with them to France. Tomorrow Barbara will write a note to the person who may be the student, whose name and address she found in the internet telephone book. If indeed it is the student, he might want his letter back....

Mom's letters are now in order and Barbara is checking over the ones written at the end of 1937. Also her family millenium project does need to be finished. As Aristotle, of all people, said, the woods would be silent if only the best birds sang. Elizabeth leaves Monday for France, a quick trip to Paris over Easter, with a friend, taking advantage of cheap airfare. The world situation is grim, complex, unreal. One of Elizabeth's friends, whom Barbara and Jim have met and do like, is a Serb whose parents live in Belgrade. Belgrade was bombed today. Some of Barbara's Quaker friends have been demonstrating in front of the town offices.

A neighbor just called about two big woodpeckers between their houses, drilling away either end of a fallen log....

July going into August: Barbara's family millenium project, with a front cover in the guise of an old-fashioned cross-stitched sampler, has been

mailed and there have been several happy and grateful phone calls about them. She has just returned from an outdoor summer concert at what used to be an artist's colony. An elderly gentleman spoke to Barbara who knew both her parents and the Colorado friend she visits. She hopes the friend will be able to explain the connection.

Jim has left for Israel. Barbara did a big laundry before he left, once again blessing the dear old washing machine, now into its 35th year. She also won the door prize, a hand-blown glass penholder with a pen, at a conference for New England Writers. She went to it at the last minute because it was raining and she couldn't garden. The speaker was John Kenneth Galbraith.....

Jim has gone again, giving two talks, one in Rochester and the other in Baltimore. He says he likes the comfortable motels and having decisions made for him....

Barbara walked to the store, not needing too many things to carry back, meeting no one as she passed houses with windows wide open to the late afternoon silence, summer at a standstill. Magic.

Jim, Peter and Jim's brother are on their way to the island and Barbara is celebrating the first morning of her retirement from conducting the Bach Group by starting in on the job or organizing books and music. After the final run-through of this month's cantata, there was a picnic at the local pond. A delightful letter of thanks, in German, had arrived for her by "vogel post". It was read aloud and she was given a book of pictures and signatures. How good to have completed a project - not finished, though, never finished.

Ellen gave Barbara a reprinted book by Christopher Morley. Ellen is okay but has trouble hearing and talking. She is reading Thomas Hobbes. She says she has no stamina, which would be irritating if, she says, she had the stamina to be irritated. Barbara did not stay long....

This clear blue Sunday September morning, the Veres' little red house is looking good - morning glories reaching all the way up to the deck, roses blooming against the gray wall. Are they crazy to have decided to move to the retirement community when they reach the top of the waiting list?

And now Christmas stuff is all over the bed downstairs, lace making stuff about to be gathered into one place, and shoe laces - where did they all come from - on the kitchen counter. She is trying to get organized, she's trying.... Even so she is enjoying looking through all these things, not without astonishment. Back to the shoelaces, how come there are so many? Why hadn't they been thrown away - because she and Jim were children of the Depression when nothing was ever thrown away?

She is trying to clean out one basement at least - all those old radios and extension cords, at least one of which she should attach to the too-short cord of the wet-dry vacuum they bought last year. She put all the old birdseed

outdoors and it looks as if the squirrels have eaten it already. Decisions, decisions - who gets what, like the samovar with Dad's family's initial on it and who bought it to begin with and why and how did it get to her and who might now even want it? It's like dismantling a play. As Barbara's friend in the college costume shop says after a play: "It's gone, it disappears, all of it." "Disengaging" is another word Barbara has learned.

But, it has been such a big play, there is so much. And she hasn't come close to emptying the laundry-room basement. But - well, neither she nor Jim knew their son Peter had received a commendation in Biology when he was in 9th grade: or that he had a slipped a slide of his friend David playing soccer into the slides being shown for a Bible history class about David and Goliath....

This time Elizabeth has got herself to India. The world is gearing up for the new millennium. Terrorists were picked up on the Canadian border. Barbara too has a few extra groceries under the sink, a little extra money in the house, extra containers of water sorts of things....

Elizabeth called. She has been in a hospital for three days with dysentery....

What a miserable rainy fourth day into the new millennium! Jim, with flu, is about to leave for a workshop in Baton Rouge. Perhaps the fact that no dreaded computer glitches occurred during the switch to 2000 will be celebrated at the workshop. Elizabeth, about to board a bus in India to get to her flight home on a Pakistani plane, may or may not have recovered from dysentery....

And now it's the day after Jim's birthday, celebrated with a candle on one of his pancakes.

Spring again. One of the readers came to visit Ellen while Barbara was there, with a small antique pitcher of daffodils. Barbara had brought some paprika, in case Ellen had forgotten what it really tastes like: they're reading Rebecca West together, about Macedonia. Ellen's slow dying is truly appalling, psychologically as well as physically.

The chimney sweep took away both the dead lawnmower and the useless wood stove. Little kids are moving in nearby. How much longer will she have her quiet backyard, though perhaps the miracle is that she has had it so long. So far today she has cleaned up by the roses, replanted the newspaper box, uprooted by a snow plow, and trimmed the honeysuckle bushes so they'll quit crowding Mom's lilac....

Jewelweed has closed in around Barbara's chair and she has had to pull handfuls of it out just to get to where she can sit down, complete with book and coffee. Heaven...The roses are all over the wall this year and the fireflies have begun, evenings. Ellen is better.

The little orange jewelweed flowers are like bells in the summer breeze, almost audible in this afternoon's silence - except for distant construction

which is not going to be so distant, soon, with new apartments going up in the next block....

Peter is 44. Barbara is tempted to go to Boston to meet Jim's plane, but the weather forecast is scary. Jim called last night, after leaving the island. It may have been a difficult time, Peter somewhat in charge of the three brothers, his dad and two uncles, none in perfect health....

The moon is full, this early Sunday morning, 1:00 AM. Late summer hums are beginning. Barbara won't stay up long....

The air has changed and schools open next week. The sun is trying to be warm on Barbara's hand, reminding her of the letter Mother's sister wrote, describing the sun on her hand as she was writing, after having been quite sick for a long time.

A call came yesterday from the retirement community: there is a place for them. They can't quite believe it and what a production a move will be, maybe a good time for the kids, Peter needing furniture to fill his bigger house. Lots of decisions. The readers are coming today, someone's birthday for which Barbara has a cake, confetti and flowers, a bit of sanity for just now....

Barbara has seen where they will be and has to admit she loves it, around the corner from the music room, an elevator to the parking garage and not far from the dining room. Geraniums are growing on balconies, so there's got to be plenty of sun. Two people ahead of them turned the apartment down, she wonders why. Ellen says she is so glad she did move and another friend says she is so sorry she didn't.

There is a three-month trial period and they don't have to sell the house quickly....

Gasp. Definitely edgy. Elizabeth has come and gone, and gone through her stuff so Barbara should be able to make progress on what needs more sorting. She hopes she manages not to panic over details and to keep too much pressure off Jim and the kids. Elizabeth seems stronger now and Peter, though tired, does seem anchored. Both have very different lives from hers, to the point where she could imagine a sea change has happened in what people are, or having to become....

Outside the sun is coming out through the mist. Fall is definitely on the way. Barbara has to stack the last of the cord of wood, ordered before they had heard about the apartment. She had ordered two cords and hasn't dared to cancel it all. The young guy, his wife and their little boy came by and delivered the wood yesterday. Barbara took their business card for the people who will be renting. She wonders how she and Jim would have managed trying to move all at once rather than gradually.

Is it possible she has done more sorting of books in her lifetime than reading? This last "cut" is pretty painful. And she has got to come to terms with her caring for objects because of their connections rather than

because of their intrinsic value.

Surely there will be nice spots around the retirement community, but not like this that she has had for over 25 years. The bee swinging on the orange jewelweed flower is charming beyond words....

The old washing machine has begun to develop a kind of groan. And the kids do complain about the mildew downstairs, there has been so much rain this year.

Barbara told someone the TV would move to the retirement community on October 2nd and she hoped Jim would come with it. She has finished with sorting out her books. Now it's clothes and shoes, mostly shoes....

Barbara is sick and cross and has just taken two aspirin. There is some progress on their move but so very many little things need taking care of. And daily life's responsibilities go on. The lace lady's helper called and said she had found more bobbins and books, so Barbara is going over Tuesday to collect them. She wonders if she is ever going to make lace again. She is trying to make a slipcover for the big chair they have had forever - found some perfect material on sale.....

She asked a friend if one ever recovers from such a move. The friend actually went silent before saying: "One just keeps on...." Hard to believe they are moving in less than two weeks. Jim is anxious. They spent the morning completing retirement community paperwork. She is so really tired. This is the right time to do what they are doing, hard as it is....

The process of moving is terrible. It is the Friday before the Monday when they take possession and the Tuesday before the movers come. The roll-top desk locked itself while she was polishing it and even the lock doctor couldn't open it, though he says he has some more ideas. Someone from a local historical society says he has a whole box of keys which he will lend her. Quietly he said this was probably not a welcome distraction.

She has been told she will forget the chaos very quickly. Nothing will ever again be as pressured. She thinks she will get it all together, though there keeps being another cupboard and stuff she had forgotten that needs deciding about. How did it all become attached to them. She has decided not to take to the rummage sale what she can't identify, not yet.

They have rented the house for three months to someone who may buy, a family with four boys.

She thinks of her mother, packing her twelve trunks to move to the United States - all those linen sheets, the linen gown and woven by the French grandmothers back through the ages, those dishes, hand made by her father's friend, the silver which was the wedding present from her parents.

Maybe tonight Jim will look through the tools. When needed, he tends to buy new rather than look around. She herself can never throw anything away. So they must have 25 screwdrivers, now all in one place. Not so many hammers. Peter might want one.

They have lived here 26 years, more than half the time of their marriage. The seven years across the river do still loom large and also the earlier years when the children were small. Well, Barbara will be glad to be re-settled, though she is not without misgivings. It will be nice not having to rake leaves or to have so many bills to pay (except for the one big one each month) and not to have to deal at all with those bills and notices connected with doctors and hospitals.

Two weeks later she sits in her chair in the retirement community, with a whole afternoon of nothing that must be done at once, nor several such things.

May 4, 2001. The blessing is having Ellen near, continuing to pass along good books, conversation and sheer courage. Ellen calls what she is doing “persistent living”.

One big piece of news is that Elizabeth’s wedding will be June 14th. The second big piece of news is that their house is under contract for the full (exorbitant) asking price. Barbara was there yesterday and ate some asparagus and admired the apple tree, which doesn’t seem to know yet that one of its main branches is broken. (Jim says, the tree is dying of a broken heart because Barbara has left.) And Jim is making friends at the retirement community through poker.

Peter’s oldest daughter just called to say Happy 70th Birthday. She and her sister are very excited about their new dresses for Elizabeth’s wedding.

The founders of the Colorado school have all had their portraits painted by someone who knew them, all except for Anna’s father whom the artist did not know. Anna’s father left hardly a ripple at the school, except for those first students who called him Pop. The pictures will be unveiled at the next alumni gathering. Richard has arranged for the trip to Colorado, for Dad’s own two children plus two grandchildren, Elizabeth and one of Richard’s daughters.

So Barbara will be seeing the prairies again, and the mountains.

Epilogue

There is a real Barbara who is cousin Jeanie's cousin "on the other side", an artist, a sculptress. I still have the lamp, which my aunt gave me when I was in second grade, with the three little kittens all around it looking for their mittens, also all around it.

My parents asked Barbara to sculpt the head, a "bust", of Richard and, several years later, the head of me, the summer I was five. The completed busts stood on the shelves, one on each side of Mother's dresser with the long mirror, in front of which she would sit to comb and braid her long hair every morning.

My head was much better than Richard's. Barbara had become more sure of what she was doing, capturing animation. A light glaze finish added style, even though the glaze has yellowed a bit. When I look at the head, hair pulled back into a rubber band, I can still feel that pull.

The mouth is open. Once I saw Barbara again, at my aunt's funeral. Barbara and her older sister started to giggle about how much I had talked, while posing. Barbara hadn't known what to do about that, about the mouth. Finally she gave up, sculpting the mouth open.

I remember having adored Barbara. Then, I had not realized Barbara was doing a commissioned work. Barbara had said she was making the head of my twin sister, whom we decided to name Ann. Every morning, I - we were visiting my aunt - would go, at first with someone, down a path, all green and ferny, to Adams Street, a quiet street which ran in front of Barbara's house. The house was big and gray. Barbara would be outside to say when it was all right for me to cross. And together we would walk to and climb up the gray steps of the gray house to the white porch, and then through the door which had a window of colored glass at the top. There was a brown hall and steep dark stairs to Barbara's workroom. In the workroom was a table with Ann's head wrapped in a wet cloth on it. Two tall stools were by the table. Barbara would lift me up on one of the stools and put a cloth over me that had hand-holes, so I could make things with clay too and not get clay on my dress. Then she'd put my hair back into the rubber band. I had never, my entire life ever, been so much the center of attention.

I wonder now, when I look at the not quite baby face with the open

mouth, what on earth I could have talked about.

The next summer, I tried to find my way through the path to visit Barbara again. The path was not cleared and I almost got lost. I should have told someone I was going. No one met me at the street when I finally got there, not having got lost after all but getting soaked from the dew and scratched from the brambles. I crossed the street and went up the gray steps to the door with the colored glass window and rang the bell. Barbara's mother came to the door. She seemed very surprised. Barbara was home, but she didn't even say hello and went by herself up the dark stairs. And very soon my uncle came around in his car to take me back to my aunt's.

Many years later, after my aunt's funeral, I asked Mother more about Barbara. I discovered Barbara had been in love the summer she was sculpting my head. But Barbara's family objected to her friend, who was Polish, and refused to let her marry him.

The other day I was talking on the phone with cousin Jeanie. She mentioned she had just seen Barbara. She told me Barbara and the Polish boy had become friends again. He had married and had had a family. But his wife had died and the children had moved away. Barbara's parents had died and so had her sister, leaving her alone in the big house. One day the boy friend came over to fix the screen door and then came again to do other small jobs before he had to move into a nursing home. Barbara visited him at the nursing home every afternoon until he too died. Barbara remains, in the big house on Adams Street.

Well, Barbara will die too, because, as in the old song referred to in five of Shakespeare's plays, for that "there is no remedy". On the surface it doesn't seem Barbara has had much of a life. But she did make that head of me. Even though it's my head, it's more about her than about me. And I bet I was a part of the misery of the next year as unwittingly as I was a part of the happiness of the first. She contributed to her own support with the lamps she made for children. I did see one or two of the others, Little Bo Peep with a lost sheep on the back. The lamps were not all about loss: there was a soldier lamp. The soldier had on a bright red jacket. Dear Barbara: maybe you were the reason I chose your name for my third-person autobiography. I thought I had in mind something like *Savage Truth* (Barbara Vere). But neither you nor I are very savage, except maybe to ourselves. I'm glad my parents decided to have you make the bust of me. Thank you, both parents and Barbara. I wonder what will happen to it.

