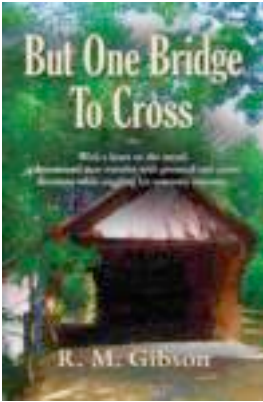


But One Bridge To Cross

With a heart on the mend,
a determined man wrestles with personal and career
decisions while juggling his romantic interests.

R. M. Gibson



The early months of 1970 leave in their wake an array of indelible memories for single parent Cameron Ross Gordon. All of them painful. In March, his younger son is confined for treatment following a nearly fatal OD. Cam then loses a blue-chip job due to restructuring and, soon afterward, his fiancée is gone. But a gentle young woman comes into his life, he launches a challenging new career, and his future finally shows promise.

But One Bridge to Cross

by R. M. Gibson

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The Cam Gordon Chronicles

Book Three

**But One Bridge
To Cross**

Second Edition

R. M. Gibson

R. M. Gibson

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Second Edition

R. M. Gibson

Chapter One

When Cam got home from the funeral, his older son, Drew, was waiting for him. “You don’t look too good. You gonna be OK?”

“Not much choice.” Then, struggling with his emotions, he added, almost inaudibly, “This . . . has been . . . so hard. An awful, brutally painful day. One I’ll not ever forget.”

“Yeah, really.”

“You know how I felt about Danielle. But she’s gone, and the plans we’d made were buried with her this morning.” His words evoked the image of her coffin being lowered into the open grave. That was all it took. Buckling under the weight of his grief, Cam Gordon cried. “I . . . hurt all over. Sorry.”

Drew was uncomfortable seeing his dad in tears. He wanted to help in some way but didn’t know what to do. Then, instinctively, he reached out and hugged Cam tightly, held on for a moment, and said, “It’s a real bummer, and I’ll miss her, too. She was always super nice.”

Wiping his tears away, Cam agreed. “That was my girl. But since I haven’t said much about what I’ve been going through, I need to start talking about it. Be good for me, I think. If you get tired of it, say so.”

“It’s OK.”

“We had a lot to look forward to and would’ve had a wonderful marriage. But much as I wanted all the pieces to fit together, I’ve known for quite a while that our little dream was about to turn into a nightmare. When you went with me in late May, you saw how much Danielle had changed. She was hardly ever sick, so having to watch her waste away was heartbreaking. And these last few days have been a bitch.”

“I know. Glad I didn’t have to go with you today.”

“It’ll leave you with better memories. But life goes on, and I’ve got other dragons to fight. First is to find work, but the job market is in bad shape and most companies don’t need people with the kind of experience I have. Another problem is that I’m not ready to tackle anything new, at least not yet. So I could use a little time, something I don’t have, to start getting myself back to normal—whatever that means now.”

Since Drew didn’t fully understand the extent of his dad’s worries, he changed the subject. “You had two calls. One was from Jon a few minutes ago. He wanted us to know that he got to camp OK on Monday. He said Maine’s pretty, likes it up there, and thinks he’ll have a good summer. The other one was from Erin. She’s stopping by for a little while after she gets

off work. Said she wants to find out how you're doing. She's being a really good friend."

"She is, but there's more to it than that."

"If she likes you, that's good isn't it? I think you need somebody like her when things go bad."

"Sure, but a few minutes at a time may be all of me she can handle. It isn't easy getting used to the idea that death is forever, but when it takes somebody you've been close to for over three years, you find out about pain. Danielle doesn't have any now. It's those of us she's left behind who do. I'll eventually get over mine, but there isn't any way I'll ever forget her and what we meant to each other. What's certain is that my story has been rewritten. So maybe it's Erin. Maybe it isn't. For sure, I'm not getting any younger, and without a job I don't have much to offer."

Before Drew could say anything other than, "You'll be OK," Erin was at their door.

"Hi, guy. You probably know this already, but I have to say it anyway. You look terrible." Having called a spade a spade, she hugged him tightly and held on. It was something Cam Gordon badly needed.

"You lost your mother not too long ago, so you know something about the hurting that won't go away."

"I Sure do."

"Danielle wasn't a wife, or a blood relative, but she mattered. You know how much. But enough. She's gone, so what I have to do now is put her memories to rest, too. You're here. She isn't, and I'll do my best not to be an eternal drag on the positive things we have going for us."

"That sounds good to me, and you know I'll be here to lean on."

Drew liked what he was hearing.

After they'd talked for a while, Erin left for home to feed Nico and Luca. Later on, Cam asked Drew if he'd like to go out for a bite. "I'm in no frame of mind to share our kitchen with a ghost. Not tonight, for sure. On the other hand, there aren't many restaurants we know that don't have at least a couple of 'em. How about if we go back to The Castle? There's plenty of misery left over from the time Signa was being gutted like a fish. Couldn't be any worse than some of the other places in town."

When they'd eaten and were home again, Cam went through the pockets of his suit before he hung it up. In one of them, he found the note that Megan had given him at the funeral. She'd copied the main parts of what Doyle Strasser at GMI–Australasia had sent up by telex. The essentials were that his family had a young friend in Sydney who'd be flying to London but

would be stopping in the U.S. for a visit. Would Cam agree to show her around New York and other places of interest that were nearby? Their friend's name was Trish Ingram.

Late on Thursday afternoon, Cam called Megan to ask that she telex Strasser for more details. "Be a good idea to have the gal's itinerary, and then I'll know if I can do what he wants. If she'll be here within the next week or so, forget it."

"I'll get to it right away, but is there anything else you'd like me to do? You've got some bumpy days ahead before the last couple of months, and especially this week, don't hurt so much. Be glad to do whatever I can to help."

"You're a sweetheart, Megan. Thanks. But if your meaning is to keep me company overnight, an idea you've had for some time now, it'll take a while before I'm that kind of sociable. Be a waste of your time."

"I'm also willing to be patient, you know."

"You've been that right along. So, sure, it could be that someday I'll say we should get to know each other better. It won't happen anytime soon, but don't lose hope, dear heart. And just so you know how I see things, you've always been very special to me."

"Those are sweet and encouraging words, Cam. You know how I feel about you, so I've been completely lost since you stopped coming into the office every day. It's an entirely different place now that you're not here. With just about everyone else gone, our floor is *so* quiet. It's almost creepy."

"This has been a tough month, so I don't need any reminders of what was. Seeing my girl draw her last breath is the hardest thing I've ever had to face. But you don't need this. Let me know what Strasser says."

"If you're coming in next week, I should have his answer by then. Take care of yourself, Cam. You're important."

"Thanks, Megan. Hearing you say that is a big help. I will be in next week if only so I can give you a hug. It'll be my way of showing you how much I appreciate having your support at a time like this."

"I'll be ready. Always have been. Bye, Cam."

"Have a good weekend, girl."

Erin spent Saturday night with Cam and felt he was making progress toward becoming a whole man again. During the night, she gave him comfort by sleeping close. Then over breakfast, Cam showed Erin a faint

smile and in doing so displayed the first signs of healing his broken heart. She was pleased.

“Given time, I think you’ll live. *Ohh*, sorry. Bad choice of words. I just want to see the guy I knew when we had that weekend up in Sturbridge. It really bothers me to see you hurting the way you are.”

“Just stay close and be patient. I’ll get there. You’ll see.”

“You know I will. But one thing I want to mention before closing the book on all that’s happened recently. I ran into your old flame, Cristina, on Friday afternoon. While we were talking, I thought she’d want to know about Danielle. When I told her, she actually shivered, and then her face turned white as a sheet. She never said a word, but it was obvious that it hit her like a ton of bricks. I remember her saying early last year that she liked the girl, even though she had the feeling the two of you were involved.”

“Thanks for telling me. They did get along well when Cris came down to Forty-eighth and Fifth to see where I worked. Italian bloodlines. It was just before Christmas of ’68. And it was Danielle who supplied the homemade Italian red Cris drank that afternoon we met down in our laundry room. She told you about it. We wound up in bed while our clothes were drying. Potent stuff. Might even be fair to call it an aphrodisiac.” Cam smiled thinly. “You remember, because you had some of it, too. Came from one of Danielle’s grandfathers, and I still have a couple of bottles left.”

Just before midday, Erin left for home. Not long afterwards, Cam took Drew to JFK. He’d be taking a TWA flight to Los Angeles and then spending the summer there with Cam’s first wife. Before they got to their goodbyes, Drew volunteered, “I’m going to tell Mother it wasn’t your fault that Jon got into drugs. I don’t think she understands, so I’ll try to make sure she does.”

“Appreciate it, Drew. But what she chooses to believe isn’t important. The Connecticut juvenile people and I did everything we could to keep him pointed in the right direction. That’s what really matters—at least to me. Now, have a good trip, behave yourself, and I’ll see you on August 30.”

Once home, Cam was alone now for the first time since the end of August last year. How sweet it would have been to spend these two months with Danielle. Had she lived. “Those words again, the ones her papa, Enzo, had spoken just after Danielle died. They’ll always be there,” he thought.

The following Tuesday, Cam went back to his office to pick up the personal effects he’d left behind and then take them home. They included

the two oils that another former sweetheart, Sheila Kerns, had painted for him. Megan was glad to see her ex-partner and her hug confirmed it.

“You got a telex from Strasser yesterday. He says their friend won’t be here until the last week of July. She’s spending a few days in the Los Angeles area first and then coming into Kennedy on Sunday afternoon, the twenty-sixth. Her flight to London goes out on Friday evening, the thirty-first. He’s also given you some clues about how to recognize her. Sounds like she’s good looking. Strasser says she reminds him of Candice Bergen.”

“Late July will be OK, I suppose. I’m not ready for much of anything else at the moment.”

While Cam was in the office, he called T. J. to ask if they could have an early dinner on Friday. Since the long Fourth of July weekend was coming up, he said he’d have already left for Cape Cod to spend the holiday at his parent’s house on Long Pond. They agreed to talk after he was back. Then, before Cam left for home, he phoned Joanna Abrams, the amiable mid-thirties woman he’d met the previous fall and had dated from time to time. He was certain she’d offer him a shoulder to lean on if he needed one.

“Hello, stranger,” she said. “I thought you’d abandoned me.”

“Not so. I’ve been watching a young lady important to me die of leukemia. Guess you can say I’ve been pretty much out of touch lately. I did make the trip to London I mentioned to you back in January. Since then, it’s been nothing but bad news. I’m not fit company yet, but we’ll get together one of these days if you’d like.”

“I would like. Whenever you’re ready. Sounds like you were serious about her.”

“We’d made plans to marry in late December. She was Danielle Savini, the name I mentioned to you on that memorable night last November when you and I first met. You may recall that I pointed out the building she’d lived in, one diagonally across the street from yours. I also burdened you with the details about why it was we’d gone separate ways when British O&G and Argus Oil were in the process of gobbling up Signa. Then it was by an incredibly slim chance that we ran into each other in Sydney during my trip down last December. Our love was still alive and well, so we decided that maybe we ought to put our future back in order. There isn’t one now. We buried her last Wednesday.”

“I do remember. When you looked at her building the expression on your face said it all. Then my friend, Linda, told me, oh, maybe three or four months ago, that she was with T. J. and had met her when the four of you had dinner out. She thought your Danielle was a lovely young woman. I’m

really sorry, Cam. I can guess how you must feel. Call me when you're ready, and we'll set a date. I've missed you."

"You're a dear friend, Joanna, and I will call. Promise. Just give me a little time."

"Sure. Be special to spend an evening with you again."

Cam continued to make progress. Still, the road to finding inner peace seemed agonizingly slow. His fond memories of Danielle remained, but the pain associated with their interwoven lives did eventually ease. Having Erin close was good therapy, and by the third week of July Cam's biological needs made their presence known. He phoned Erin to ask if she could come by after work.

"Got a problem?"

"Not really. Well, sort of. I discovered this morning that Cam Gordon is still alive. You're astute enough to know exactly what I mean by that."

"I am, and I do. You don't have to ask twice. It's been quite a while. I'll be up right after work."

Cam *was* very much alive, and without much delay they joined each other at a place called paradise.

"Didn't realize how much I needed that," Erin said. "Guess you did, too."

"It's taken time, so I was past due."

"Tell me about it. I've got the evidence."

"If you'll come back on Saturday, maybe we can pick up where we left off."

Erin smiled warmly. "After a loving like that, I'll come back every afternoon this week if you want. I'm very ready, very willing, and very able," she assured him.

"Why not? Given our motivation, it shouldn't take long, and you won't be too late getting home."

"You're the one who's all wound up. I've been ready for several weeks but knew I'd have to be patient. You're back, in a manner of speaking. Good news."

Cam and Erin enjoyed their late afternoon trysts and Saturday night together. Then, after they'd had brunch on Sunday, and Erin was on her way home, Cam left for JFK to meet Trish Ingram coming in from Los Angeles. Given the description Doyle Strasser had sent up by telex, he had no trouble

at all spotting her among the arriving passengers. Megan had guessed right. She *was* attractive.

Moving into position where he could intercept her, Cam asked, “You’re Trish?”

“Right you are. And you’re Cameron Gordon?”

“See? We’re both good at guessing.” She had a delightful little laugh and used it to charm him.

“Not knowing what the plan would be, I have a reservation at the Roosevelt Hotel. Do you know where that is?”

Cam smiled. “Certainly do. For a couple of years, I knew it very well. There’s a tunnel from Grand Central, one of our major rail stations, that ends at the Roosevelt’s main entrance. As a commuter, I used it every time the weather was bad. Anyway, after tonight you’re welcome to stay with me. You can have my bed; I’ll sleep in my son’s room.”

“That won’t be necessary. I’m not a virgin, and I’ve assumed there’ll be an exchange of favors. You’ll be my host, and for a few days I’ll be your mistress, if you wish. I’m delighted that Doyle didn’t make arrangements for me with some portly gentleman who’s on in years. I gather that he knows you and assumed I’d be pleased. I am. Now, shall we collect my luggage?”

Cam got Trish’s bags, then drove into Manhattan and dropped her off at the hotel. That done, he then went on to park in a nearby garage at Madison and Forty-sixth. After Trish had registered, and was settled in her room, they went off to find dinner.

“Let me suggest a restaurant on Forty-eighth Street that’s near a building where I used to work. It’s called Charlie’s. The place has a long bar, so after five o’clock on weekdays it’s where new relationships sometimes get started. I call it a boy-girl pub. I’ve only eaten there a couple of times, but that was before I went down to New York Plaza a year ago April. Food was good, at least then. It’s nearby. Would that be all right?”

“This is your realm, so I’ll follow your lead.”

Within a few minutes, they were across the street from the former Signa Oil Building.

“I used to spend my days in a corner office on seven. There.” Cam pointed. “It’s right where the setback is for the upper floors.”

“Must have been huge. It has two sets of big windows. Does that mean you had an important job?”

“I’d like to think so. Sad part is that two other oil companies bought the one I worked for, but I decided to look for something here rather than to

move back to Los Angeles with one of them. I'm in the same boat all over again. GMI just wiped out my department and a good many others, too."

"What a pity."

"OK. Here we are. After you."

"We would say of you at home that you've been made redundant. Doyle told me just a bit about what's afoot. Must leave you up a gum tree. Any prospects?"

"Not many. It's a soft job market, especially for administrative people like me. But if I'd already found something, I wouldn't have been able to spend the next few days with you."

"I'm pleased that you can, although not with your situation being what it is. Will my stopover interfere with your search?"

"Not really. I've already met with several prospective employers. But I'm dealing with something personal and haven't been at my best."

"An illness?"

"In a sense, maybe. If anything, it would be psychological. I lost my fiancée to leukemia, and it's taking time for me to accept the fact that she's gone. The future isn't what I'd planned on, or hoped for, but it isn't much different than some of the other things that've happened over the past seventeen years. Enough about me, though. It's not your cross to bear."

"I'm truly sorry to hear about your intended."

Drinks came, and dinner orders were placed.

"Appreciate your concern, but let's move on. I have to. No point in continuing to talk about something that can't be changed, now or ever. So, tell me about Trish Ingram."

"It isn't a very long story. I'm Sydney born, educated in the local school system, and had a taste of university at Macquarie, a school recently founded in northwest Sydney. But then I ran out of money and took a post with the Westfield Group right after it was incorporated. I've put away a fair amount in savings and am on the break I've planned on for quite some time now. London is my final destination, and I'll be there for the better part of a year. At least that's the plan."

"Seems to me you're taking a sabbatical pretty early in life."

"Like you, I'm older than I look. I judge you to be nearing forty, based on your comment about 'seventeen years', so that means I'm not all that much younger than you."

"I turned forty at the end of April."

“I wouldn’t have guessed it otherwise. But a woman shouldn’t talk about her age, so let’s leave it at the fact that there isn’t much difference in our numbers.”

“Anyone ever tell you that you bear a striking resemblance to Candice Bergen?”

“Hardly a week goes by when it doesn’t come up. Some of my friends have urged me to see if I couldn’t be her stand-in.”

“And you’re not married?”

“No, and I have no plans to be. It isn’t that I don’t like men, because I do, but the right one has yet to come along. Being that fussy, I’ll one day be wrinkled, unattractive, and unwanted. That means I’ll likely end up a lonely spinster.”

“But one with some spicy memories, I would guess.”

She chuckled warmly. “You might say that.”

After they’d eaten and were back at the hotel, Trish wasn’t at all shy about undressing in front of Cam. He was taken with what he saw. She was maybe an inch taller, trim, and well built. Long honey blonde hair enhanced an exquisite image of womanhood.

“You may have ideas of loving me tonight. But it . . . it just isn’t done. There are two beds, so we’ll each have our own. Tomorrow night will be different, and we’ll get better acquainted then. Sorry, but that’s the way it must be.”

“And if I protest? Just kidding. This may be my realm, as you called it, but those are your rules so I’ll abide by them. We’ve done without each other for about forty years, so one more night won’t matter.”

“Thank you for seeing things my way. Now, I’m tired and need to call it a day. Part of my body is still on Sydney time.”

“I know the feeling very well. Night. Pleasant dreams.”

“G’night, Cam. Thank you for meeting me and for a pleasant evening.”

Trish was up at a fairly early hour. Cam shouldn’t have been too surprised. He’d already assumed that she intended to cover a lot of ground during the next few days. But from the bed he was laying in this morning, he couldn’t know just how far her plans would take him, geographically, by Friday evening.

“There are two places I’d like to see before we leave New York. One is the U.N. Building. The other is Greenwich Village. And from an insert in my tour guide, I gather we can also see the new twin towers. The building site seems to be somewhere close by.”

“Not exactly, but we’ll manage. The first building should be done by year-end. If you use your imagination, you’ll get a pretty good idea what the pair will look like when they’re done. The second tower has a ways to go yet. So, to do what you want, we ought to check your luggage and leave the car where it is. We can walk to the U.N. Building and then take the subway down to Fulton Street. That’s a good place to start, I guess. The Trade Center is only a block away. After we’ve done that, we’ll take the subway back up to Bleecker Street, start our tour from there and do a walkabout, as I think you call it. When you get hungry, we’ll find a place in the Village to have lunch.”

They made the easy walk to the U.N. and toured the General Assembly Building. Trish was taken with the Foucault Pendulum and stood watching it for several minutes. It was a pleasant day, so before they started back toward Lexington Avenue, and the IRT subway ride to lower Manhattan, she took pictures of the Plaza and all the flags along First Avenue that were fluttering in the summer breeze.

After they’d seen the World Trade Center construction site, and then gone up to Bleecker Street, Cam didn’t have a plan. It wasn’t his part of town. They chose a direction that looked interesting and walked until their appetites said it was time to refuel. Picking a place at random, they wound up in a restaurant where two streets came together at an angle so that the building was shaped much like an isosceles triangle. The food was good and a cold beer hit the spot, so when they’d finished they were sufficiently fortified to continue their stroll. It included even more streets running off in various directions, each home to low-rise apartments and townhouses, bistros, shops, nightclubs, and whatever else an outsider might equate with the Bohemian colony that it is.

Trish was fascinated. “Reminds me of Paris. At least parts of it do. Be fun to live here. Artists, musicians, writers, and all sorts of creative people you wouldn’t characterize as mainstream. Their scruffy appearance tells me that.”

“I’ve been a corporate animal too long. And with two teenagers to bring up, it hasn’t allowed me to think about alternatives. If I were to do that, it would be somewhere on Viti Levu. I loved Fiji.”

“Different sort of appeal. Here you’re under the influence of a distinct kind of charm that can’t easily be defined. I wouldn’t have expected to find something like this in America, even though the tourist guides accurately describe what we’ve seen. The Village is indeed unique.”

“Same thing in San Francisco. If you’re taken with this, then you should make a stopover in the Bay Area on your way back. That assumes you can book your return that way instead of through Los Angeles again.”

“It’s a long way off. I’ve yet to think much about it. But it’s getting late. Shouldn’t we be getting on to your place? My feet are telling me we’ve done a fair amount of walking.”

“Fine with me. I’m ready.”

They made their way back up to the Roosevelt Hotel via Grand Central *and* the tunnel. Cam got the car and then picked up Trish and her luggage. Bags stowed, they headed for Sudbury. On the way, Cam thought about Erin. He’d told her that it was going to be a busy week, so she hadn’t asked any awkward questions. They’d shared several enjoyable days, would be together again on Saturday, and that was all she really cared about.

On Monday evening, the first night prerequisite of “it just isn’t done” had been satisfied, so their late evening, after dinner out, turned into pleasure time. Far from the most exciting woman in Cam’s experience, Trish seemed happy with the event of the evening and said it had been good for her. Neither a partner who was especially animated, nor one who’d allow a morning encore to interfere with her agenda, they got an early start on Tuesday. It was a good thing they did. She had big plans.

“I know big cities, so you needn’t take me into Boston. My aim is to see other parts of your New England. Two of the places I want to visit are Plymouth Rock and the nearby plantation. But you’ve told me about an old village near some property you have. That sounds interesting as well. Is it possible to do them all in one day?”

“Sure, if we spend twenty minutes at each place.” She charmed him again with her delightful laugh.

“I’ve built a buffer day into my schedule. Then could we go to your old village and stay nearby, or should we go on to Plymouth?”

“Old Sturbridge Village is at least a half-day. We’ll stop by my land first. It’s on the way and will only take a few minutes. After we’ve seen The Village, we can decide then. I’m guessing the drive home from Plymouth will take close to three hours, so it’ll probably make sense to overnight there.”

“Capital idea! I’d like us to be on our way as soon as we can get ourselves organized.”

Cam was beginning to see that Trish Ingram was going to be an expensive guest. And the week had only begun.

They made the drive to the lots above Hampden Lake in just about record time, even with a stop to take pictures at one of the rest areas adjacent I-86. He pushed his Mustang, so it tested his ability to avoid a speeding ticket. It meant checking his rear view mirror fairly often to see who was behind him.

Trish loved his land. Everyone did. She had fantasies about coming back and spending a weekend in the new cottage. It was highly unlikely that a return trip with her to Hemlock Drive would ever happen.

Their tour of Old Sturbridge Village, and lunch on the grounds, took almost five hours. Trish was taken with the early nineteenth century community and buildings and was once again very busy with her camera.

Late in the afternoon, Cam suggested that they should go on to Plymouth. "It's a couple of hours, or close to it, so I'd rather not add that to what we're doing tomorrow, plus the drive home."

As it turned out, Trish was pleased because they were able to find a comfortable motel room that overlooked Cape Cod Bay.

"Spiffy idea, Cam. A lovely setting. Because of it, I'll get more involved than I was last night." A rather odd promise, he thought, and for the first time, at least that he could recall, he didn't much care one way or the other. That is, until he got drawn in, and Trish was able to show him what she had in mind. The sound of waves must have reminded her of home, or another bed on another night. Didn't matter. He had good reasons to smile as he fell asleep.

After an ample breakfast, they visited Plymouth Rock, the Mayflower II, and The Plantation. Cam hadn't seen any of them before, so he didn't mind playing tourist. Being aboard the replica Mayflower was interesting, although the passengers back in the autumn of 1620 would hardly have called it that. Later, when Cam and Trish visited The Plantation, they were both impressed with how knowledgeable their "interpreters" were. But ask them about an event after their time, and they would say they couldn't answer that kind of question. They were familiar with their settlement, but not the future. Interesting approach. Trish took even more pictures, and Cam was glad he wasn't paying to have them all developed.

At midafternoon, Cam suggested that it was about time to start for home. "Another night's lodging isn't in my budget," he said. Trish didn't object, and they were soon on their way back to Sudbury. After they headed west on U.S. 44, and then got on I-95, Cam realized it was a mistake to drive past the Museum at Mystic Seaport. If she saw the signs she'd want to stop, and he'd be trapped. So he kept her eyes looking in other directions, or

checking the map and mileage, until they were past the signs for the Mystic exit.

Back in Sudbury, they went out for a simple meal and then settled in for the evening. Cam put Trish in front of a mindless American TV program and then went to his bedroom to phone Erin.

“Hi, babe. How’re you?” he asked.

“Good, love. I called last night, but there was no answer.”

“I went up to Massachusetts to see Thorpe, the real estate guy,” he fibbed. “He’s not ready for me yet, in spite of what he’s said all along. He has a guy named Davidson managing his businesses, but he’s going into sales with a car dealership in Springfield and is done when the season’s over at the end of October. He’d still like me to work for him anytime after that.” Pretty good story he was inventing, Cam thought.

“What that means is you’d be leaving me behind. That’s not the kind of news I want to hear. Good for you, maybe, because you’re out of work, but already I feel lonely.”

“Not to worry. I don’t have a place to live up there, and it would only be on weekends as it stands now.”

“There go our Saturday nights.”

“Thorpe has bedrooms upstairs in that big house he uses as his office. Maybe we could spend the weekend there once in a while. We’d go up early on Saturday morning and come back on Sunday evening. We wouldn’t do it very often. Be a fun outing.”

“Not for me. What would I do if you went to work for him?”

“Crosswords? I don’t know. We’d figure something out.”

“Whoopee doo!”

“Not a good idea, it sounds like. Well, nothing will happen anytime soon. In the meantime, it may be that I’ll find a decent job either here in town or in Manhattan.”

“A much better idea. That way I’d still have you close by.”

“If we’re finished with that, will I see you on Saturday?”

“Yesss, and I’ll be ready for more of that spoons arrangement overnight, but only after you-can-guess-what.”

“Yep, I know about the ‘guess what’ as you call it.”

And I have to say it. You sound the best you have in months. You don’t know how good that makes me feel. I know it’s been a really hard spring and summer, but it tells me your head is in charge now and that you and time are healing the wounds.”

“It’s slow going, but I think you’re right.”

“Still, it’s positive news. Got to go, love. See you on Saturday.

“Night, Erin.”

After he hung up, Cam rejoined Trish in the living room.

“Someone special, I presume?” She asked.

“Yeah. Erin was the one who kept me propped up when Danielle died. Before and after. Don’t know what I’d have done without her.”

“I’m very much enjoying my visit with you, and our pleasant outings, but it appears I shouldn’t plan on extending my stay for a few more days, tempting as it’s getting to be.”

“Might get a little crowded on Saturday evening.”

“Without much question, you’ve taken steps to repair the damage your Danielle caused. I wouldn’t have wanted to deal with what you just did. At her young age? Dreadful. I’m a guest and grateful that you’ve been willing to do what you’ve done so soon after her death. But I feel it best not to impose on you beyond Friday. You have an agenda and therapy of your own making to facilitate your recovery. Perhaps I’ve helped some, too.”

“You have, and you can further support the cause through Friday morning, if you’re so inclined. I’ll put myself in your care until you leave.”

“Won’t your Saturday be less interesting?”

“Wouldn’t expect it to be. I convalesce well.” Cam grinned.

“I’m not a morning person, but you’re unquestionably familiar with female anatomy and know how to leave a partner rapt, as we say Down Under. Your involvement, let’s call it, would give me a proper sendoff. If it can be arranged, I’d like to come back through New York. I’m thoroughly enjoying your company and all we’ve done.”

“Your being here, and getting me out and around, *has* helped. I’d never been to Plymouth or The Plantation, so I should say thank you because you’ve been a part of the healing process. If you were to stay on, it could be I’d start to think that you and I might have something to build on.”

“No, Cam. Don’t look to me for a long-term arrangement. If you feel the beginnings of romance, then it is best that I go on to London on Friday. I don’t want to sustain any false hopes.”

“That says it like it is, and I appreciate your honesty. For sure, I have an empty space called Danielle that I want to fill, so I’m probably inclined to be too hasty, too aggressive.”

“We might talk about it again tomorrow on our way to the Roosevelt home in Hyde Park—assuming you’re willing to take me there.”

“So far, I’ve done everything you’ve asked. Sure. I’ve never been there either. More therapy. Now, shall we call it a day?”

“Mostly so. Lead the way. I’m yours before we sleep.”

And she was. “Perfectly delightful,” Trish said afterwards. “It’s plain that you also understand a woman’s needs. Not often I’m sorry I can’t express my sentiments in the same way a kitten would. I feel like one.”

“Maybe when, or if, you’ve reached the spinster stage, you’ll remember the summer of 1970. And me.”

“No doubt.” Trish took the initiative, and kissed him warmly. “I’m truly sorry that I can’t stay on. I could use more attention of the kind you provide. I’m pleased Doyle contacted you, and that I made the stopover. But he couldn’t have known this much about you.”

“I would hope not. But it’s possible he may have gotten some kind of feedback from Simone Dekker.”

“Of the wool family? They’re big money. Did you bed her?”

“No. We weren’t introduced until the day before I left Sydney. She might have been interested in getting better acquainted, but you know that ‘it just isn’t done’, as someone once put it.”

Trish laughed softly. “Touché. She’d have been quite a catch. You certainly wouldn’t have had to worry about your future.”

“There wasn’t time, and it would’ve taken that. It’s a shame that I won’t be going back. Now, dear lady, we need to get some rest. Big day tomorrow if we’re going to Hyde Park and see the home of our thirty-second president.”

“You’re positively right, especially if we’re to have a quickie before we leave.”

“Not a morning person? Aha! It seems that something new has been added to Trish Ingram’s repertoire.”

“It’s as I just said, I’m pleased to have made the stopover.” She gave him a hug and sleep they did.

Cam and Trish spent her penultimate day in the States, as she called it, at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Historical Site. She couldn’t explain her fascination with the late president, but she was impressed with the grounds and the Roosevelt home. Cam had to agree that it was well worth the trip, even though his parents weren’t FDR supporters, had voted for Willkie in 1940, and then Dewey four years later. Political differences aside, Roosevelt could hardly be ignored as an effective president, the architect of programs that helped America recover from the Great Depression, and a charismatic leader during World War II. An interesting and informative excursion.

On Trish's last day as Cam's guest, he had to face the fact that he'd grown attached to this attractive and proper young lady from Sydney. He didn't look forward to seeing her go on to London.

At breakfast, Trish asked, "Could we drive around to places nearby? I want to take photos so I can remember where you live. This is a charming region, your New England, and I love it. Given time, I might love you as well, but I must go on. There are compelling reasons to do so." It was the only time she would use that word.

They had their drive, and then late in the afternoon Cam drove Trish to JFK to see her off on BOAC's Flight 500 that left at eight o'clock. It wouldn't be easy for him to say goodbye. She'd begun to mean something to him, and, once again, he was at a place of departure and trying to avoid the empty feeling that would almost surely follow. He thought, as they were parking, "Guess the basic problem is that I don't like to see something end unless it's distasteful. But I have Erin, so there's no reason to feel lonely. I'll miss Trish, though. Maybe I should see a shrink and have him explain why it is I don't like being left behind."

After they were inside the terminal building and on their way to BOAC's gate, Trish commented on Cam's apparent frame of mind. "You really shouldn't look so glum. I'll write when I'm able and will very likely come this way next summer if you're here and unattached. And before I go, let me express my gratitude for all of the interesting places you took me. It's been a grand stopover, and you've been a perfectly splendid host. I also want you to know that in just a few days you've taught me that morning pleasures can be just as satisfying as those in the evening."

"You're welcome—for both the tours and the lesson learned. Next summer? It's hard to know where I'll be, but I'll stay in touch. And I'd like it if you'd do the same. Have a smooth trip and a good visit in the UK." They hugged briefly, and then Trish boarded. After she'd disappeared into the Jetway, Cam thought, "Another sweet and attractive young lady. Too bad they don't stick around or live long enough to become a member of the family. *Damn.*"

Friday night traffic was heavy and getting back to Sudbury was slow going. People were starting their weekend, or their vacation. Many of them were probably headed for parts of New England. The Hutchinson River Parkway was one way to get started in that direction. Cam thought about Trish as he sat in stop and go traffic. She never was specific about why she was going to spend nearly a year in London. In fact, she'd avoided the

subject. “Compelling”, she’d said. He had all sorts of wild ideas—not a one of them pleasant.

When Erin showed up early on Saturday afternoon, she asked, “Why so gloomy? Maybe I should go out and come back in again. Hello. It’s me, Erin, the female person who cares about you. I thought that after a week you’d be glad to see me.”

“Sorry. I am glad to see you. Let’s try that hug all over again.”

“Much better. You haven’t forgotten how to do that after all.”

“My mind is sort of drifting. I’ve spent two months trying to find a job, we’re into August, and this is the last month I’ll get any severance money out of GMI. Thing is, the memories of Danielle are still there, so it’s not very likely that anyone will hire me until I can put them to rest and shape up. But the fact remains that I’m still unemployed, the outlook is just plain awful, and my finances are starting to run a little thin. Had too much fun, I guess. My bank account shows it. But you don’t want to hear me whine.”

“I have a feeling something will break soon,” Erin suggested.

“If not, I’ll be forced into talking with Eddie Sulma again about getting into the executive search business. Not really my cup of tea, and there’d be no instant income, but it’d help keep us from starving during the winter months. I’m beginning to feel like the grasshopper that did.”

“Well then, I’ve showed up on the right day with the right idea. If you come down to the car with me, you’ll find a picnic basket on the back seat. We’re going over to the park and dine out.”

“Great! And it’s exactly what I need. You’re somethin’ else, Miss Erin.”

“Now, I’ll share a secret with you. Part of this is bait because after we picnic, I want you to bring me back here and love me properly before you take me to the movies. I’ll buy something to eat afterwards, and then you can look after me again. After a week alone, I’m in need.”

“I guess you are. And you have yourself a deal. I like your Saturday plan. All of it.”

Cam and Erin’s Saturday was perfect. The picnic brightened his day, and it was good to have some fire back in his bed. Then the Eastwood – MacLaine movie, *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, was all right, even if the violence at the end wasn’t necessary. A snack afterwards, and a gentle loving before they slept restored Cam’s outlook on life. He was neither alone nor empty. Erin was great therapy and just what the doctor ordered.

Over breakfast, Cam said, “Thanks for pulling me out of the dumps yesterday. You don’t know how well timed your planned outing was. It

helped that you were among the needy and then later on found a way to orbit that planet we know so well.”

“You helped, you know. Takes two to tango you once said. And you do your part very well.”

The following week, Cam kept interview appointments, few as they were, but came up empty. “The market is dead, at least for people like me,” he concluded. “Companies aren’t looking to hire anyone. They’re tightening their belts.” He did have an interview with a company in Sudbury, and was hopeful, but it didn’t go any further. Younger people with less but similar experience, and lower salary requirements, got what few offers were being made. It went back to the point that was made about him some years earlier. A college placement director had said of him at the time that he didn’t have twelve year’s experience, but one year of experience a dozen times. That wasn’t accurate in his case, but it might be said that he fell into a six years times two category. At any rate, being forty and having been very well paid was more than most companies wanted to take on at a time when the economy was flat on its back.

Late on Wednesday afternoon, Cam went back to his now mostly empty office, visited with Megan, and showed her pictures of Trish that he’d gotten done at a one-day developing shop.

“She’s good-looking, Cam. Any chance that it’ll go further?”

“With her spending nearly a year in England, and then maybe coming through New York on her way back to Sydney, not very likely. Doesn’t matter. She isn’t as good in bed as you are.”

“How would you know *that*? You never let me prove it to you, and now maybe it’s too late. I’ve met a neat guy, and it would be hard for me to cheat on him. Still, you could be the exception. I remember how you always had something else going on at the same time. Would depend.”

“I’m happy for you, Megan. You deserve better than what you got. Your marriage ruined a good, longtime friendship with Colin. Now, I’m going to make a couple of phone calls—the first to T. J. at TWN, *The Week’s News*, to see about a drink, and the second to my friend, Joanna Abrams, to see if she’d like some company. Both of my guys are gone, so I’m alone. Just about like you are here. Eerie.”

“You don’t have to tell me that. It’s awful, and I miss you like crazy. I sure hope something works out for you, Cam. You’ve had a year that would test most anyone’s character. I still feel terrible about Danielle and think

about her more than I probably should. But let me get out of your office so you can make your calls.”

“Hi, T. J. Any chance I could buy you a drink at The Watering Hole at five o’clock or thereabouts?”

“No, but I’ll buy you a drink. You’re unemployed. See you at a quarter after five. All right?”

“Sold. I’ll be there.”

“Joanna? It’s a voice from your distant past.”

“Cam! What a coincidence. I was just thinking about you and wondering how you’re doing. We must be on the same frequency.”

“And *I* was wondering if you’d be interested in dinner and maybe some company afterwards.”

“Oh, I’d love it! Be so good to see you again. What time?”

“You may remember T. J. from the evening we met at Capricorn’s last November. We’re getting together for a drink. You name it. I’m the one who doesn’t have a job, you know.”

“Sure, I remember him. But why don’t you come up to East Eighty-third afterwards? We can figure out where to go from there.”

“See you at home, then. It’ll probably be six thirty or so.”

Cam got to TWH ahead of T. J. and found a small table with a second chair that someone tried to steal almost immediately. “Leave it, please. Got someone coming in a few minutes.” T. J. saw the exchange and confirmed that the “someone” was real.

“How’re you doing, Cam?”

“Well, I’m . . .”

“Really no need to answer because I can honestly say that you look much, much better than the last time I saw you.”

“Been six weeks, today in fact, since we all said goodbye to Danielle. Been a bitch dealing with the hardest hit I’ve ever taken, but I’m on the mend. Erin, the gal in Sudbury, has been great support, and I’m seeing Joanna this evening for the first time in months. She seems especially pleased with the idea. Me too.”

“Say hello to her, if you will. Any change in the job outlook?”

“None, really. I’ve done a lot of sniffing and hunting, but it’s a tight market. Awful. So, I’ve about decided to try executive search, not because I want to, especially, but Eddie Sulma has shown interest in having me join him. We go back to my early days at Signa. He’s something of a nut, better at search than businessman, but he’s been effective in the past. I’m damned

stuffy by comparison. Too bad you don't have an opening. Be great to work with you again."

"It would that, but I don't have requirements of any kind in my department. If you and Sulma get together, I'll want you to be one of our sources for the few needs that'll come up. It can't be on a retainer basis, but you'll have an even shot at making placements."

"I'm sure Eddie would like it if I could bring in at least one client. Be a plus. How's the new job going?"

"Much better than the retail business, even though I was pretty well paid. But I enjoy working for a media company. Interesting to be in a place where whatever is going on in the world is gathered and then turned into a first rate weekly news magazine. Lots of deadlines to be met and breaking stories to deal with. A world apart from retailing. It's a good situation, so I plan to stay on. No reason to think otherwise."

Cam and T. J. talked about what else was going on in their lives, and then, drinks finished, they walked to Grand Central to catch a Lexington Avenue subway train. T. J. got off at his Seventy-seventh Street stop; Cam went on to Eighty-sixth. They'd promised to stay in touch and to have a drink or dinner once in while just to keep current. Cam was pleased that he and his former boss at Signa had remained friends.

Back down to East Eighty-third Street, Cam buzzed to be let in. "Yes?" a voice over the intercom inquired.

"It's the Iowa farm kid . . . the one from your past. May I enter?"

"You may, but be careful how you phrase your questions." They both chuckled.

At Joanna's door, they held each other snugly. Cam appreciated the warm reception.

"Thanks for letting me come back. I thought you might tell me to bug off, or the equivalent of same."

"Why on earth would I do that? You didn't offend me. I was just curious about the long silence. But when you explained what had happened, I understood. And before we go any further, I want you to know how sorry I am that you've lost someone so important to you. The way it came about had to have been terribly painful."

"Still is."

"Would you like a drink?"

"Red wine, if you have it."

"I do, and I'll join you. Two glasses of Cabernet coming right up."

They had their drink, and then went to dinner. Joanna was interested in Danielle and wanted to hear more about their three-year relationship. It took a while because some of it was hard to talk about, but Cam needed to empty his mind of at least some of the memories. It was the first time he'd gotten specific, so he supposed it helped him in the same way that a confession might have.

When Cam had finished, he said, "You've been kind to listen to all of this, Joanna. I appreciate it, and I feel better now that my memory and my soul have been purged to some extent. I'll never forget her, but it's out of me now and I've been unshackled, or at least partly so."

"It really isn't my place to suggest it, but maybe later on I could help you take your deliverance a few steps further. I hope you're not offended by my proposal."

"Not at all. Our nights together have always been, uh . . . well, what I'd call memorable." Cam grinned.

"That's the face I remember from last fall. You'll be all right, and I'll end up contented, as always, whenever we get together."

When they got back to East Eighty-third Street and were behind Joanna's closed door, they stirred up a roaring fire—and then dealt with it. Afterwards they slept well, but all they had left in the morning were smiles.

"Guess we did it all last night," Joanna said. "I don't have much reserve to draw on. We should've saved something for later."

"There'll be another morning. The best I can do is give you a hug. That was quite a reunion, gal."

"You got things going and were at the top of your form, so to speak. Heady stuff. I'd like you to share my bed whenever you can. You leave me with lots to remember. Keeps me smiling for days."

"I'll come back. Promise. But it's getting late."

"Don't worry. I'll call my secretary and ask her to hold the fort. I'm mid-level management now, so it gives me some leeway. I'll make it up at the end of the day if there's something that won't wait. And now that I've thought about it, maybe I could handle a little more excitement."

"Strange. I was thinking the same thing."

And finding delights, again, is how their early morning ended.

"You've made my day," Joanna said. "I won't have to explain my funny smirk at the office. It'll be obvious. You haven't skipped a beat, and you're still good at putting out my fire."

Joanna went off to shower, and Cam phoned Eddie Sulma.

“Eddie? Cam Gordon. I’m in town and was wondering if I might stop by for a while this morning.”

“Should I ask you why you’re in this early, or shall I guess?”

“No need to. I’ll take your question right out of the dark and put some light on it. I was brought in to contain a wildfire. Now that it’s out, we’re cleaning up the mess.” Sulma’s reaction was a hearty laugh.

“I thought as much. Sure, come on by. I’ll pour you a coffee, and we can talk business, assuming that’s what you have in mind.”

“It is, even though my preference is still corporate rather than search. But that well is bone dry at the moment. I’ve never seen anything like it, either here or on the West Coast.”

“We’re busy, but mostly for people at the management level. We’ll talk about it when you get here. Where are you?”

“On East Eighty-third. Soon as I scrub off the scents and have some breakfast, I’ll be right along. Probably be close to an hour, maybe a little longer. Since you’re straight across from where I am, I’ll take a cab to save time. It’s 489 West End Avenue. Right?”

“That’s it. I’ll expect to see you when the fireman is fit to be out in public again.”

Chapter Eight

At just after one o'clock on the morning of July 20, Cam's phone rang. Expecting the worst, he answered.

"H'lo."

"Mr. Gordon?"

"Yeah."

"This is Officer Volanti down at the police station. We have your son here."

"Which one, and why?"

"Drew. I'll let him tell you about it."

A sniveling Drew got on the phone and said, "I got the keys off your bedroom dresser and took your car out."

"And?"

With an unsteady voice, he added, "I wrecked it."

"You *what*?"

"I was driving too fast down a street that ended in a 'T' and I hit a high curb. It's where the city keeps all their trucks and stuff. I'm sorry, Dad."

"We've got enough things on our plate, so I don't need your help to do a number on our bank account. The well is about dry, buster. I guess you're OK, that's a blessing, other than you're suffering from a bad case of stupidity. Give me the officer."

"Yes, Mr. Gordon."

"Lock him up. Be good medicine. Besides, I don't have any way to pick him up at this hour."

"We'll do what you want. And just so you'll know, we smell alcohol. He'll spend the night here, and someone on the morning shift will run him up to The Ridge. You pressing charges?"

"No, officer. He's my son. But I will deal with him tomorrow. Where's what's left of the car?"

"At the city pound. What do you want us to do with it?"

"Get it over to the Ford dealer."

"That'll mean another tow charge."

"I'm sure it will, but I've got to see if they can fix it."

"The whole front underside is all ripped out. I'm guessing it'll be pretty expensive. You might be better off trading it in."

"It's a great car and not much over two years old. Dammit!"

"I know how you feel. We'll keep your boy here. He's broken some laws, and we'll have to at least write him up for driving without a license."

“OK. Thanks, I guess. G’night.”

Cam was absolutely livid, and it took him well over two hours to get back to sleep.

After a few hours of agitated rest, Cam killed time until about nine o’clock and then called Sulma at the office. “Eddie. I’ve got another problem, and I don’t know what time I’ll be in.”

“What now?”

“Drew came into my bedroom during the night, took the keys to my Mustang, went for a joyride and tore it up. The police say they smelled booze on his breath.”

“Sweet Jesus, Cam. Won’t it ever end?”

“If someone else had been here, there’s a chance she might have heard him. First item on my agenda is to see if the beast can be fixed, or if I’ll have to spring for another car. It’s to be towed over to the dealer this morning. I’ll try to come in sometime this afternoon.”

“Why don’t you stay home and do whatever has to be done. I’ll cover for you. From your activity log, it looks like you’re in pretty good shape with your searches.”

“Thanks, Eddie. Appreciate it. It may take the whole day. And I have to deal with Drew. The police have had him locked up since early this morning.”

“I don’t envy you. Any idea what you’re going to say to him?”

“Nope. I’m going to let it unfold on its own. Not a good plan, but I’m too upset to have one. I suppose a TV father would have all the right words. I don’t have any of ’em.”

“Well, take it easy. You still have to live under the same roof. See you tomorrow morning.”

Cam then called Erin at work to give her the bad news. She was shocked—and obviously disappointed.

“This is one of the concerns I’ve had about our being partners. My guys are a problem. Both of ’em. I don’t want them to infect Nico and Luca.”

“Two adults, together, would probably make it work better. But, yeah, you could have a point.”

“I’ve got to sit on Drew, hard, but I haven’t figured out what to say. A shouting match isn’t the answer.”

“Just be the guy you were when Jon got into trouble last year, and you’ll be fine.”

“Good advice. Thing is, I need to cool down first.”

“When the time comes, you’ll be OK.”

“One thing for sure, I’m going to get acquainted with the public transportation system. It helps that a bus down to the station stops right across the street.”

“If you want me to drive you anywhere, just let me know.”

“Thanks, sweetheart. I probably will.”

“When I get home, I’ll call to see how your day turned out.”

“I may be in jail for assault by then.”

“Take it easy, Cam. You know that isn’t the answer. Now, I’ve got to get busy. While I’m at it, I’ll get your policy out later this morning. I’d forgotten that you’ve been a customer of ours since before we met. Talk to you later in the day.”

Cam then called Megan with the same news.

“This would be a week that I didn’t stay with you. It might have made the difference. Guess I need to move in and be a mother to that young man.”

“Thought you already had. You’ve got a whole bunch of clothes at the back end of my bedroom closet.”

The intercom buzzed.

“I heard that. Sounds like you have company. I’ll let you go. Call me after you’ve sorted things out.”

“Yes?”

“Officer Daniels, Mr. Gordon. I have your son.”

“Bring him up, please.”

When they came through the door, Cam shook hands with Daniels and without saying a single word glared at Drew. He froze.

“Sir, I’m going to stick around until I see that there won’t be any domestic violence.”

“There won’t be. I don’t hit people. Most of ’em are bigger or stronger than me.”

Daniels smiled thinly.

“Dad, I’m . . . I’m sorry. I’ll do whatever you want to make it up to you. I loved that car, too. I know how you feel.”

“No you don’t. You’re not inside here with me. You’re OK, that’s the positive news, and the car can be replaced. Bodies can’t. Same with Jon. But what is it with you two? What were you thinking? You’ve both got a streak of suicide in you. First, you get into my booze, steal the Mustang, drive without a license and then tear it up. Is there anything else destructive you can think of to do? Today’s your mother’s birthday. After she’s out of bed, and before she goes to work, you’re going to call her and explain in detail exactly what you did last night.”

“Not a very good birthday present.”

“You bet it isn’t. And don’t sit down. Stay right where you are. I’m not done yet. While you’re at it, you might ask her if she wants you back. I’ll pay for the ticket.”

“*Ohhh, Dad.*” Drew broke down.

“Yeah, I’d be embarrassed and scared, too. What you did, the whole lot, are criminal acts.”

“Mr. Gordon, we’ve cited him for driving without a license,” Daniels said. “We couldn’t prove that he was under the influence because he was able to do the basic tests we gave him.”

“I hope you’ve got a hangover, Drew. Serve you right.” Then, turning to Officer Daniels, “What can you tell me about the car?”

“Such as?”

“Where is it?”

“It should have been towed by now. We asked that it be moved to the dealer’s back lot first thing this morning. If it isn’t there yet, it should be before long.”

“Any chance you could give us ride downtown?”

“Sure. I guess there aren’t going to be any problems, so we can go if you’re ready.”

“You’re never ready for something like this.”

When Cam saw his Mustang, he couldn’t decide if he wanted to scream or cry. “Look at it, Drew. You do excellent work.”

“I don’t like looking at it either.”

“Well, remember it. For the rest of your life!”

Cam got the service department manager and had him come up with a ballpark idea of what the repair costs would amount to. After looking the car over, he said it was impossible to figure it exactly until they could put it up on a lift, but he gave Cam an “at least” number, and he nearly choked on it.

“That’s the cost of your joyride, young man.”

Drew looked away.

Cam then talked with Ernie, the salesman who’d sold him the car now sitting dead on the Ford lot.

“What can you do in the way of a trade on the horse I bought in the spring of ’69? I just got a rough estimate to rebuild it and got close to having cardiac arrest.”

Ernie went out, looked it over, and remarked, “You’re not giving us much of a trade-in.”

“C’mon, Ernie. Don’t start sounding like a car salesman. Work with me on this. I’ve come back to you instead of talking with Buick or some other dealer in town.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Another Mustang. I loved this one. And you can see how much my son loved it, too.”

“That kind of affection you can do without.” He scowled at Cam’s son, and Drew Gordon wanted to hide.

“Well, let’s see what we have in stock.”

They looked at the new Mustangs sitting on the lot. Although Cam thought they’d really improved their looks and had also solved the problem with the trim on the pointed hood that kept getting dents in it, he didn’t see anything that turned him on. Ernie showed him the locator, cars available from other New England dealers. A couple of them might do, but he still wasn’t really excited about what he saw. Last, they had a look at what was coming in. That did it. Cam checked the color charts again and found what he wanted.

“There. Light pewter metallic coupe with saddle interior and a 351 Cleveland engine. That’s the one I want, Ernie.”

“It’s just come off the line, so we won’t have it ready to deliver until probably sometime in early August.”

“I can live with that, I think. Show me what you can do with the numbers. But be gentle.” Ernie smiled.

The trade-in amount wasn’t much, but the first set of numbers didn’t look all that bad. Erin’s agency had the insurance, so there’d be at least some help there, Cam figured.

“Two years ago, I didn’t need a car. This time you’ve got me over a barrel. Maybe I should go talk with the Pontiac dealer and see what they can do on a Firebird. I took a couple of Polaroid shots that ought to give them an idea of what my Mustang looks like.”

“Let me go talk to my manager before you do that. We want your business, Mr. Gordon.”

“And I’d like to stay with you. Your location is convenient, and you have a first-rate service department.”

When Ernie came back, he and his manager had put together a deal Cam thought he could handle. Drew hadn’t said a word. With the numbers being tossed around, he was beginning to see what his nocturnal escapade would wind up costing his dad.

“Only rub is, I don’t especially like the interest rate your finance outfit charges. Let me see what I can do locally, or with Chase in the city. I bank with them.”

“Fine. Since the car hasn’t even been loaded for shipment yet, you have plenty of time. And I’ll make a note that shows you have first right to it. We don’t very often sell a car that’s still at the plant.”

When Cam got home, he called Erin at the Metro Agency.

“Hi, gal. I may have struck a deal on a new car. It’s still at the factory, but the dealer has come up with a number I can live with, even without knowing what kind of money I’m going to get out of my policy. The only problem is that their finance charge is higher than those I’ve seen advertised in the *Star*. Didn’t you say you have a cousin who’s with one of the local banks?”

“Yeah. Len Fortuna. He’s in consumer loans with 1st National Bank. I can make an appointment with him if you’d like.

“Would you, please? Aim for Friday—earlier the better so I can see him before I go into work.”

“Lenny owes me, so plan on it. Why don’t I pick you up and then take you to the station when you’re finished.”

“That’d be great. What a sweetheart.”

“Maybe we could have breakfast someplace first.”

“Love it. I’ll buy.”

“It’s a deal.”

“See you on Friday. And Saturday night, too,” Erin said. “I’m still not caught up on my backlog yet, you know.”

“We’ll work on it. If we were able to start our weekend on Friday night, we might be able to get your books in order.”

“Good idea. I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thanks for all your help, babe.”

His calendar mostly set, Cam said, “Drew. Time to talk.”

“Yeah, I thought that’d be next.”

“First. The liquor cabinet is locked up and will stay that way. Second. Your allowance is suspended. Indefinitely. It won’t pay for the new car, but you heard what the numbers are. If you want spending money, I suggest you get a job bagging groceries or something equally stimulating. And I’m not paying your fine, so you’ll have to work that out with the city. Third. It’ll be a while before you get your license. The state may have something to say about it. If not, I will. Any questions?”

“Nope. Guess I better go out tomorrow and start looking around for a job of some kind. Only thing is, I want to help out at the cottage on weekends, so I’ll see if there’s something I can do during the week, at least until school starts again.”

“The hole you dug is a deep one. You figure it out. And if I find out you’re into alcohol again, I *will* ship you back to California. There’s plenty of time to get into booze after you’re twenty-one and legal. You follow?”

“Yep.”

“Now, call your mother.”

After Erin picked Cam up on Friday morning, they had breakfast at The Diner, and then in his meeting with Fortuna at nine o’clock he came away with a much better rate on a car loan. It put the payments well within his comfort zone. Afterwards, they went to the station and Erin gave him a quick kiss, just like any commuter’s wife or sweetheart might do. Then, as he was closing the car door, she told him, yes, she’d be spending the whole weekend with him. Cam showed her a big smile.

“I like seeing that. It says you’re pleased with my good news.”

“You bet I am,” Cam said. “And you’re the reason for it. Thanks for all you’ve done.”

“See you at 6:43?”

“If that’s OK. But if I can get away earlier I’ll call you at work before five. Might be I can catch one of the trains I used to take during my Signa days, the 5:09. Gets in just before six.”

“I’ll provide taxi service in exchange for dinner.”

“You’ve got yourself another deal. See you tonight. Now, I’ve got to run. Really.” And he sprinted to catch the 9:45.

When Cam got to the office, the first thing he did was call Ernie to tell him that he’d gotten a loan from 1st National and that he should write up the contract. “I’ll come down tomorrow with everything on the busted horse, plus the insurance information you’ll need. Get all the paperwork together on the new one, and I’ll bring a pen and lots of ink with me. Be after lunch, I imagine.”

“That’ll be fine. See you tomorrow, Mr. Gordon.”

On the last Saturday of July, Erin picked up Cam and Drew at an early hour and drove them to the lake. The cottage was finished now, so they all worked like beavers around the place until they were exhausted. On the way

back, they stopped for a bite, but once they were home they all showered and afterwards collapsed.

The following Wednesday, Ernie phoned Cam at Sulma's to let him know that his car had just come in. He said it would be ready for delivery anytime after twelve o'clock on Friday.

"Given my schedule, it'll be a tight squeeze. Why don't I come down on Saturday morning? You're all set with the bank and the insurance people, I guess, so figure on ten o'clock or so."

Cam called Erin and gave her the news. He also asked her if she'd like to have dinner and then stay over on Friday night.

"Yeah. I'll work something out. What time will you be in?"

"We have a late afternoon assessment interview, but if I walk fast I should be able to make the train that'll get me in at 7:10. If I'm going to be later than that I'll call you at home."

"I'll be there. I'm as excited as you are about picking up the car tomorrow."

"Maybe because I won't have to borrow yours anymore."

"Cam! That has nothing to do with it. Your comment is out of place. Don't take the edge off a fun thing."

"You're right. Sorry. See you on Friday evening."

Megan had spent most of the week in Sudbury, and before Cam saw her off on Friday morning he reminded her that after today, there wouldn't be any more bus rides down to the station. "You'll see my new horse the next time you're out. Think you'll like it. Better looking than the old one. A design change, heavier, a bigger engine, and it's a very different color from the '69."

"Good news, Cam. You have to be excited."

"I am, I guess. Ought to be a fun machine. We'll know soon."

They said their goodbyes at Grand Central and both went off to finish their week. Cam had trouble concentrating, which told him that he *was* looking forward to taking delivery in the morning.

Then the big day came. Erin saw to it that he started the morning with a smile, not that he needed it, but it very nicely set the tone for the remainder of his day.

At the Ford dealer's lot, they saw the car sitting there all bright and shiny and ready to go. "Oooh, I love the color, Cam. Looks like metallic cinnamon with a dark chocolate cap."

Erin stuck her head inside and liked what she saw.

“It’s called saddle. What do you think?”

“Perfect match. You sure know how to pick ’em. You’ll have girls all over town wanting you to take them for a spin. I better keep an eye on you.”

“Let’s find Ernie and get the keys. I’m hot to trot.”

As they started toward the door, Ernie spotted them and came out with everything in hand, including the last of the documents Cam had to sign.

“Mr. Gordon. I suppose you’re looking for these.” He handed Cam the keys, plus some freebies from the dealership, and then gave him a rundown on the changes that had been made to the Mustang over the last two years.

When he was finished, Ernie said, “Enjoy, Mr. Gordon. This is a great car. You’ll love it.”

Cam opened the door for Erin, and then he settled in behind the wheel. “Feels bigger. Already I like it.”

“Wait’ll you find out how much muscle that 351 engine gives you,” Ernie said. “But don’t get carried away—or drink and drive.”

“I won’t. Thanks for everything. I’ll drop by to see you when I come down for service. Buy you a coffee or something.”

Ernie chuckled. “You’re on. Take care.”

Cam started the engine and liked the sound of the new Ford engine. “Oh, boy! Sounds like it means business.” Then, in gear, he could feel the difference. “Since I’m single, maybe I’ll consider marrying this thing. I’m already impressed.”

“It won’t be as much fun after the lights are out.”

“On second thought, maybe I’ll hold out for you, assuming you get your divorce.”

Erin didn’t take the bait. Instead, she suggested, “Let’s go for a drive. Could we?”

“Sure. When we’re done, I’ll bring you back here so you can pick up your car.”

They took their drive, did some shopping, got Erin’s car, and then went back to number 710 to find that Drew had done the laundry and folded everything. He left a note behind saying he was at Phil’s house and would see the new car later.

“Drew seems to have shaped up,” Erin said.

“He has a job after school, but he’s still on a short tether. If he screws up now, I *will* ship him back to California. He knows that, and it’s not something he wants to see happen. I’m the lesser of two evils. Part of his motivation is that he’s also keyed up about the cottage.”

“Whatever you said seems to be working. Guess you handled him like you did Jon when he got into trouble. You’ll have to tell me about it sometime.”

Cam stirred up drinks and they went to the terrace to enjoy the warmth of an August afternoon. They chatted and watched all the boats out on the Sound. Drew came home, went to the terrace and said, “I came through the garage. That’s a neat machine, Dad.”

“Well, you’re the one who made it happen.” Drew’s smile vanished.

“Yeah. I’m like Jon was last year. Pretty stupid thing I did.”

“You might say that. But two things. One, I’ll sleep with the keys in my PJs. The other is, you don’t get to drive this one. You forfeited that right on the morning of July 20.”

After Drew went inside, Erin said, “I probably won’t want to handle your keys now.”

“Given the exploring we do after dark, and then what follows, I’m not sure I understand what difference it’d make.”

“Suppose you’re right at that.” Erin leaned back and laughed.

Toward evening, Drew said that he and some friends would go for a burger and then just hang around at somebody’s house.

“We’re having dinner out later on. You be back tonight?”

“Not sure. But I’ll leave you a note, or call, and let you know where I am if I’m not coming home.”

“Fair enough. Have a good time. But behave yourself.”

“I get the message.”

On Sunday, Jon called to say that his summer break had been changed to August 29. They were giving him the entire week, and most of the long weekend, so he wouldn’t have to be back until Labor Day, September 6.

“I’d like to make one of the trips with you,” Erin said, “but I know for sure that Labor Day is out. We’re having our barbeque, like always.”

“It’s a right powerful stallion I ride now. I might be able to get back in time to eat a hot dog before it gets icicles on it.”

“Not much chance of that happening in this weather. Be great if you could join us, even if you can’t be there for the whole afternoon. I’ll let you know about the twenty-ninth, though.”

The two ensuing weeks followed the usual pattern of search work, Megan during part of the week, and Erin on Saturday. Over dinner the evening before Cam left to pick up Jon, Erin said she wouldn’t be able to make the trip. The reason was simple enough. She couldn’t get anyone to

stay with Nico and Luca after Vito brought them home at midday. Even her teenage sitter was away for the weekend. So on the last Sunday in August, Cam and Erin had an earlier than usual breakfast and afterwards he dropped her off at home before heading up to Massachusetts.

Since the Mustang was still short of 1,000 miles, Cam had to drive at slower break-in speeds. Drew was at Tom's, so he made the trip alone. He didn't mind. It gave him time to think about life in general, and his own in particular.

The drive east went smoothly. The weather was good and traffic was moderate. When he got to Duchene, father and son were glad to see each other. Jon hadn't put on much weight, but he'd grown. Cam could see that he was going to need some new clothes before the fall term got underway.

On their way home, the Mustang finally turned 1,000 miles and Cam was able to bump up the speed just a little. It made for good cruising and a faster return. By the time they got to Laurel Ridge, Drew was there to meet Jon, and they had a reunion that began with a bear hug and a goofy handshake.

"Erin's asked me over for a little while. Want to come along?"

"Thanks, no," they said. "It's been a while since we've seen each other, you know, so we want to shoot the bull. We'll turn on the music you don't like, make a sandwich and get caught up."

"Fine. But don't eat too much, too late. When I get home, maybe we can go for a pizza or something."

"Yea!" was the reply to that idea.

After he got to her house, Erin told Cam that her dad would come by and look after the boys if she wanted to go say hello to Jon. "I could've saved you the trip over, but when I called Drew said you'd already left." Erin was pleased that she'd be able to see Jon. Within a couple of minutes, Cam turned around and drove back to Laurel Ridge. Erin followed not long afterwards.

That she wanted to come over made Jon's day. He gave her a hug that said he was glad to see her. They both wore broad smiles and then went for another hug. It made Cam feel good to watch them share a happy moment.

When they went out for pizza, Erin wasn't especially hungry, so she had a small salad. They thoroughly enjoyed each other's company, and the chatter that went on non-stop. There was hardly time to eat. Dinner finished, Erin went straight home to relieve her dad.

Toward bedtime, Jon said it was "super" to be home, and that he was glad he could sleep in his own bed—now reassembled and back in place.

When Megan came out with Cam on Tuesday evening, she finally got to meet Jon. Drew had already told him how much fun she was so he was primed for it. To no one's surprise, they had a great time sparring. She also got Drew involved in the give and take. By Friday, as she and Cam were ready to leave for the station, Jon gave her a goodbye hug. But the way he did it suggested that he thought she was a fragile little flower. When she nearly squeezed the air out of him, he found out differently.

"Whoa! You must eat lotsa Wheaties—or spinach. Or did Dad have anything to do with it? You're strong.

"Some." She smiled. The two of them had already become friends, and Jon loved her like the mom she might be someday.

Cam said to Megan on their way to the station, "You haven't said a word about the car. What do you think?"

"Yes I did. It was the Tuesday evening just after you got it. Where were you?"

"Missing in action, I guess."

"All right. Let me try it again. Neat car. Better than your other one. I love it. And I love you, too, Mr. Gordon."

"I paid attention this time. Both my Mustang and I liked what you said." Megan smiled.

On Friday afternoon, and the beginning of the Labor Day weekend, Cam left Manhattan in time to get an early start up to the cottage. On this trip, they'd be spending their first nights there, so they were taking the bare necessities with them—those things they'd need to get by: sleeping bags, a cooler, and food they could stir up on a hot plate that would be left there. With everything loaded, Cam wasted no time pointing his new Mustang toward Hampden Lake. He and the boys planned to put in two long days before Cam had to take Jon back to school on Monday. The prediction was for a good weekend, so he was sure they'd be able to get a lot accomplished. If the forecast turned out wrong, which often happened, it wouldn't make any difference because there was plenty of finish work to be done inside. And although no one mentioned it, a certain amount of excitement accompanied them as they were on their way to the little house on Hemlock Drive.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The new year began where the old one ended. Inquiries for rental space continued, so little by little the building was being leased up. All of the ideas that Cam had set out in early November had been implemented and the local press was following the McCallum-Thorpe success story. That they saw an opportunity, paid very little per square foot for the aging building, spent money to renovate it, and ultimately turned it into a moneymaker, was something business editors liked to follow.

When February was upon them, Abby reminded Cam that the last week of the month was always school vacation time, the so-called Washington's Birthday break. Since Cam could show Owen that he was up to date with all of his projects, he asked if it'd be OK to take the week of the nineteenth. His explanation was that he wanted to take Abby out to eastern Iowa so she could meet his mother. Thorpe smiled knowingly and immediately said OK to his request.

Shortly after Abby showed up from school on the middle Wednesday of the month, Valentine's Day, Cam took his very own sweetheart out to dinner. As they were having a drink, he sprung his surprise.

"Have any plans for your vacation?"

"Spending the whole week with you, if you'll have me."

"Of course I will. Gladly. But what would you think about driving out to Iowa for a short visit with Mother?"

"*Ohhh*, Cam. You know I'd love to. Are you serious?"

"I am. I asked Owen for the week, told him why I wanted it, and he said yes with a big smile. Looks to him like I'm trotting you by Mother to get her blessing. I don't need that, but I think it's about time the two of you got to know each other."

"That's *sooo* exciting! But you're not giving me much time to get ready."

"Casual clothes. Jeans. Take you fifteen minutes to pack. You won't even need a dress. We'll stop somewhere on the other side of Cleveland on Saturday, and then do rest of it on Sunday. Altogether, it's around 1,100 miles."

"I'll pack tomorrow night and come over after school on Friday. We can eat at the cottage. Make it simpler."

"And leave your car in back. I'll put a couple of lights on timers so that it'll look as if someone's around."

"What fun it'll be."

“By the time we get to the I-80 interchange southeast of Chicago on Sunday afternoon, you may think differently about it.”

Early on Saturday morning, Abby made breakfast and then packed some munchies in a bag. With those things behind them, they started their trip west to Iowa. When they got close to Toledo, they were ready to call it a day. Then early the following morning, they were on their way again. At midafternoon, Cam elected to come off I-80 and onto Route 130 at Davenport. Heading northwest, they drove through farm country until they got to Cedar County and a side road to the farm.

“There it is dear heart. The house my great grandfather built back in the 1880s. As you can see, it’s still standing and looks pretty good.”

“It’s lovely, Cam. And there’s your mother coming out to meet us. It is a long ride, but worth it. I’m *so* glad we’re doing this.”

With both of them out of the car, Cam said, “Mother, I’d like you to meet a very special young lady. This is my Abby.”

“Abby. I’m delighted that Cameron has made it possible for us to meet. He’s told me a good deal about you, so I’m glad I can put a face with all of his stories.”

“This is such an important day to me, Mrs. Gordon, and I share your feelings. Our trip, and being able to spend some time with you, is a dream come true.”

“Well, Abby, we should be on a first name basis. I’m Margaret, and Cameron tells me that it’s also your mother’s name.”

“Nearly everyone calls her Peg. It’s been that for as long as I can remember.”

“I was Peg in high school and a couple of my friends from those years still call me that. Most everybody else I know well calls me Margie. But we shouldn’t be standing around in February weather. Let’s get inside.”

When they walked into the living room, Abby said, “Oh, this is charming. It’s so comfortable.”

“Well, when you live in the same house for almost a half-century, you have time to decide where you want to put things,” Margaret Gordon said, chuckling softly.

“It’s perfect. Think I’ll move in.”

“Then you can be the daughter I never had. Cam was supposed to be a girl and the name we’d picked out was Elizabeth Ann. He wouldn’t have told you that, I imagine.”

“No. And I like him just the way he is.” It was Abby’s turn to chuckle.

“How long can you stay, Cameron? You didn’t say when you called.”

“Until Thursday morning. We’re going to make it a more leisurely drive back, meaning three days instead of two.”

“Then that’ll give us time to play some Scrabble. I know you don’t care all that much for it, but would you like to, Abby?”

“I’d love to. But I’m pretty rusty.”

“It’s always a friendly game. I like making good words more than getting a big score. And around here, if we get three of the same letter, we can put one back and pick again without any kind of penalty.”

“I like your rules. Should be great fun,” Abby said.

At the end of the day, Cam’s mother said, “I don’t suppose this is the way it is at your house in Massachusetts, but I’m old fashioned and you’ll have separate bedrooms.”

“Same thing at my cottage.” Cam smiled. Margaret Gordon looked over the top of her glasses and gave him a very skeptical motherly look.

“I know something about Gordon passion, so I’ll let that comment lie.”

Monday was when Washington's Birthday was celebrated, even though it wasn't the twenty-second. The three of them spent most of the day just visiting. That gave Abby and Cam's mother time to get better acquainted. Working together in the kitchen accelerated the process. There was plenty of local news, and it was amazing how many people his mother's age were gone. She'd turned seventy-five just two weeks earlier, so it was to be expected, he thought. After supper, as the evening meal was called in Iowa farm country, the ladies got into their Scrabble game and played each other about even. “You’re good,” Margaret Gordon said of Abby. “Given a little more practice, you’d be hard to beat. Younger minds are more agile, I have a feeling.”

“Thank you, but you’re the best I’ve played. Good training.” They both smiled.

The following morning, while Abby was taking a bath, Cam’s mother poured coffee and then sat with her younger son at the kitchen table.

“She’s a very sweet girl, Cameron. Even tempered, gentle. I hope the two of you can make a go of it. She’s quite a bit younger, but there isn’t much doubt how she feels about you, so in this case I don’t think the age disparity amounts to a hill of beans. But Abby is certainly different the other two. I’ve never criticized you for the marriages that didn’t last, but if you two take vows, I have the impression they’ll finally mean something. It shows in the way you treat her. There’s a degree of respect that was never

there before. The best word that comes to mind is deference. And that leads me to believe I know more about your feelings than you do. On the other hand, I understand why you're being careful."

"And so do I," Abby remarked as she came through the door.

"Morning, dear heart. Guess you took a speedy bath so you could come down and listen in." Cam gave her a quick kiss.

"Morning, Mum. Oops! Guess my subconscious just let the cat out of the bag."

"Not really. It's all right, dear. But if you call me 'Mother G.', it's sort of halfway in between until Cameron makes up his mind."

"I like your compromise. 'Mother G.' suits me just fine."

"Glad we could come to terms so easily. But I have an idea that's how you are about most things. I'm the same way."

"Ordinarily that's the case, especially when it comes to this guy." Abby tilted her head toward Cam.

"Much like I was with Cameron's dad, Adam. I see a lot of me in you. To the end, I revered the ground he walked on."

"I don't want to give away too many of my secrets, but let's say that I can relate to how you felt. Anyway, coming back to the beginning, it's been a long time since I've been in a tub, so I wasn't sure what I should do first." She grinned. "But it didn't take long to get scrubbed."

After they'd had a good breakfast, Cam took Abby for a walk around the farm. She'd brought some new watertight boots from L. L. Bean and was actually better prepared for their tour than Cam.

As they got started, he pointed out the barn where his dad had been working the morning he died. "He began to feel bad and thought it was something he'd eaten. But then he started having severe pain in his shoulders and left arm and within an hour he was gone. I know what mother went through. Thirty-two months ago I had a taste of the same thing. She was your age. But you know the story, and I've already spent enough time talking about it. Sorry."

"No need to be. I understand. But if you're still at it five years from now, assuming you keep me around, I'll remind you that it's about enough."

The balance of the morning was spent looking at fields, seeing what crops had been harvested and where the wheat had been sown. As they walked, Abby asked about Cam's dad.

"Born in 1895, had rheumatic fever as a young man and that was part of what shortened his life. At that, he was seventy-two. His younger brother, a surgeon, was amazed that he lived as long as he did."

“He died when?”

“In the fall of ’67.” Then Cam abruptly changed the subject. “As Iowa farmland goes, I don’t know that I’d call this the best of it. Maybe it is, and I’ve forgotten what Dad said. Having been gone almost twenty-five years, details like that have gotten away from me. Sign of old age, I suppose.”

“Hardly the sign of anything, but if the cemetery is close, could I go pay my respects to your father?”

“It’s just a little bit further up the road from where we turned off Route 130. We’ll do that after lunch and then go on and make a quick pass through Tipton. It’s where Natalie grew up and also where I ran into her in late ’62.”

Abby was thrilled that she could see some of the places that were part of Cam’s early life. “You know that seeing all of this will make it impossible for me to let go now. This is just about the final part of our bond.”

“I don’t have any trouble with that.” Cam smiled warmly.

After they’d been to the cemetery, and then drove on to Tipton, the pass through was, as Cam had said earlier: quick. He showed her the high school he’d gone to and the restaurant where he’d met Natalie. They drove up and down Cedar Street, then got on Route 130 east and went back to the farm.

“Wasn’t that exciting? It’s roughly the same seven-mile bus route I had to take into school every day. Bennett High was closer, but we were led to believe that Tipton High was a better school. Guess the teachers did their job because just look at how important I’ve become, at least to you.”

“You are. But I suppose somebody might one day say the same thing about Hampden Lake versus Bloomfield. That aside, I’ve enjoyed every minute of the tour, which includes seeing terrain that’s so different. Not much farming in our area. Too many rocks, and it isn’t mostly flat like this. But you already know more about that than I do. Problem here is that without many trees or bushes, it’d be hard to find a place to hide so you could get friendly.”

“Not really. There isn’t much traffic late in the evening, even now, so back in the late forties you could have spread a blanket out in the middle of Route 130 and done your thing. Unhurried.”

Abby laughed merrily at the thought. “I’ll bet you didn’t test the odds. Now, be honest.”

“You’re right. I didn’t”

Back from their outing, Cam was ready for a dry Gibson on the rocks, but his mother didn’t drink so it was a dry house. Abby agreed that a glass of Pinot Gris would hit the spot. Doing without, they had an early dinner

and then the “girls” got involved in another serious round of Scrabble. It was obvious that they were thoroughly enjoying each other’s company.

After goodnights all around, they went upstairs to bed. On their way, Cam said he’d tell Abby about his bed. She hadn’t seen his room yet and was taken with the beautiful four-poster he was sleeping in.

“First thing you have to understand is this. When I finish telling you the story about the bed, and I’ll be brief, we’re going to make love in it. Very quietly.”

“I could use some excitement. By now, it’ll be that.”

“Don’t go winding me up, or you’ll never hear about the bed.”

“OK. I’ll behave myself, but for no more than a few minutes.”

“The bed is solid cherry and was brought here by covered wagon from eastern Pennsylvania. It was originally a Colonial period rope bed, and it’s where the expression ‘sleep tight’ comes from. You had to keep them pulled snug. I suppose if you made love the way we do, they’d break and we’d be on the floor.”

“That’d hurt. The mattress must be almost three feet off the floor.”

“It is. This was Mother and Dad’s bed, and he put in wood slats so they wouldn’t break any bones.”

“It looks smaller than a standard double bed.”

“The mattress always had to be custom made because it is a little narrower than mine, for example. Mother said they slept like spoons, which is where I picked up that expression. But I saved the best for last. I was conceived in this bed. Does that turn you on?”

“It does, but not to do the same thing. Even if you weren’t fixed, I’m a week beyond being in flower so pollination wouldn’t work anyway.”

“OK. Out of your jeans and undies. I’m going to fix you right up.”

Their union was brief, *and* quiet. But they quickly discovered that they were both in need so it didn’t take long to find exactly what they were looking for. Their finale was especially satisfying.

When Abby came back from the bathroom, she said, “Wish I could spend the night with you. Your old bed puffs up my libido.”

“Let’s take a chance.” They did as she wished—and didn’t get caught. When Abby awakened, her expression said it all. She’d love it!

Their last day at the farm was spent quietly. Abby finally got around to telling Cam’s mother about their trip west and how different Iowa was from New England, really about the only part of the U.S. she knew. During the early evening hours, there was more Scrabble. Cam’s mother loved having an opponent who offered her a challenge.

On the morning of the twenty-second, Washington's actual birthday, Margie Gordon made sure her guests were well fed before seeing them off. When it came time for goodbyes, Cam was moved by his mother's words.

"Abby, you're the daughter I always wanted and didn't have. It's been a good many years since I've said anything about being disappointed that I never had my Elizabeth Ann. But I'd have been pleased, and proud of you, if you'd been my own. Maybe someday you will be anyhow."

Cam could see that Abby was touched, and she hugged his mother affectionately. It was fair to say that the two women, born nearly fifty years apart, had become close during their visit. Not at all surprising, because their gentle ways were so much alike. In part, it helped Cam understand why he was so fond of Abby.

Then it was Cam and his mother's turn to share a hug. "It's been short, but I've enjoyed being home again. Always have. But let me go back for a moment to the help you gave me when I was short on money and had some big medical bills facing me. You can't know how much it helped us out, so I want to thank you, again, for what you did."

"Life's road isn't always smooth, Cameron. You've learned that. So I was pleased to help. And I accept your thanks; you've gotten part of your inheritance early, at a time when you needed it, so now let's call it a closed matter. If you want to say thank you in another way, ask your Abby to be the last of your Mrs. Gordons. You were right when you introduced her to me as someone special. I think she's every bit of that, and I'd be delighted if one these days she could be a member of our family."

Abby, misty eyed, said, "Thank you, Mother G. Those are lovely thoughts. I like what you suggested and will pray that it turns out that way. I'd be proud to add Gordon to my name, and I would honor it."

"I'm just sorry that my Adam isn't with us so he could have met you and heard you say that. He'd have been as moved as I am."

"You have my promise. And another is that I will write, like I promised last night."

"I'll be pleased to hear from you. I know Cameron doesn't always have the time. Now, drive carefully, and call me after you get home. I'll want to know that everything went all right."

"We will. It'll probably be on Sunday. Take care of yourself, Mother."

"You too. Both of you."

As they drove down the lane, they all waved. And then when they turned into Route 130, Cam looked toward Abby and saw that she had tears on her cheeks.

“*Ohh*, sweetheart.”

“These have been five days I’ll never, ever forget. I hate to see them come to an end. Your mother is a rare woman. I just love her. And to use one of your expressions, she’s *so* special. And if she gets to be my mother-in-law someday, I’ll love her as if I am the daughter she never had.”

“We’ll come back, if you’d like.”

“Oh, Cam. Yes. Please?”

They pulled onto I-80 and drove for a while without either of them saying much. Then Abby asked how they were going home.

“By car. All the way to Hampden Lake.” Cam chuckled.

“I know *that*. Which way, silly.”

“We’ll keep going until we merge with I-94 south of Chicago, and then stay overnight in Benton Harbor on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. Tomorrow, we’ll drive across Michigan to Detroit and enter Canada at Windsor. Our day ends on the Ontario side of Niagara Falls, and we’ll overnight there. Saturday, we get on I-90 in Buffalo and take it all the way to Exit 8 in Palmyra. Long day.”

“My guy, the planner person. You sure have everything worked out. I suppose we have reservations, too?”

“Wouldn’t be without ’em. I try not to leave much to chance.”

“I like the way you do things. Making travel arrangements, among lots of others.”

Their trip went as planned, and on Friday evening Abby loved having a view of the Falls. Then on Saturday, their day across New York and nearly half of Massachusetts began at a reasonable hour. To Cam’s surprise, Abby didn’t complain, but he knew that her bottom side was probably getting weary. When they’d gone past Utica, Cam pulled into the Indian Castle Plaza to get fuel. “Ready for a bite, dear heart?”

“I’m not all that hungry, but I could go for a sandwich and a visit to the ladies room.”

“Makes two of us. We’re a little over halfway home so this ought to be our last pit stop since we left the farm.”

“Thinking about that, and your mom all alone, makes me sad. She’s such a sweetie.”

“So are you, love.”

When they got to a table and had ordered, Abby stared out the window for a moment.

“Thinking about our week together?”

“I was. It’s been simply wonderful. It was a surprise you pulled on me, and it’s left me with such precious memories. You’ve taken me places I’ve never seen, I got to meet your mother, and saw where you grew up. I couldn’t have asked for more. I’ll be talking about our trip right into our summer break. And probably beyond.”

After their food was served, Abby chuckled about something that crossed her mind.

“What’s funny?”

“I was thinking about the last Scrabble game your mother and I played on Wednesday evening. She was getting such awful letters, often three of a kind. You could tell she was getting exasperated. Finally she said, ‘Oh, I think I’ll just quit!’ She didn’t mean it, but just the way she said it was so cute. She’s such a love.”

“I’ve known that for a long time. You’re so much like her in so many ways, and I have no doubt that it’s one of the reasons I’m so taken with you. I’m feisty at times, but you, like mother, are a good stabilizer.”

“And those are sweet words, too. You Gordons have a way with them, I’ve discovered. Maybe you *should* write a book. Some of the things you’ve done, places you’ve been, the involvements you’ve had, both good and bad, would make a good human interest story, I think.”

“I’m not as certain about that as you seem to be, but it’s something to think about when I’m retired, maybe. Now, my horse has been fed, as have we, so it’s time to head for Hemlock Drive.”

“I’m ready. Tonight I’m going to pour myself a glass of wine, and I’ll stir up a very dry Gibson for you if you’d like.”

“I’d like. And while you’re pouring, I’ll get a little fire going.”

“We’ve eaten pretty well for the last three days, so I’ll make a light meal, let’s call it supper, and we’ll have ourselves a romantic evening at home sipping, and then munching whatever it is I can find.”

“We’re already beginning to think alike. It’s a little scary. On the other hand, maybe I should recognize that I’m becoming a domesticated lion.”

“Think tamed. You swept me off my feet a long time ago, so maybe you should take your mother’s advice and make an honest woman out of me. But I won’t lean on you. I still think that would be the wrong approach, so I have to make you think it’s your idea.”

“That sounds just a tad calculating. If you mean it, that’s one way Abby and Margie are different.”

“I’m just kidding, Cam. But part of it’s true. Making me an addition to the Gordon family has to be your decision. Abby Gordon. I like the sound of it, and you know I would honor the name, just like I promised on Thursday.”

“And I have to admit that I rather like the sound of it, too.” Abby smiled at him lovingly.

As they got into the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, Mother Nature arranged for them to drive through a snow shower. It slowed them down quite a bit, but once they were down in the Connecticut River Valley Cam was able to let his horse run and they got to the cottage a little before five o’clock.

“It was a fabulous trip, my love, but it’s good to be back. Thank you for everything.”

“You don’t have to thank me. I wanted you to make the trip. It was important to me, too. Now, I’m covered up with trail dust and *verry* thirsty, so let’s go pour something into empty glasses.”

They had their drinks, and a fire, and supper, *and* an enjoyable night together. Abby confessed later on that the memory of having loved in Cam’s bed at the farm stirred her up.

“I wondered what was behind all the enthusiasm. I have a photo of it. Maybe I should have it enlarged and hang it on the wall.”

“Isn’t necessary. You know how to light my fire. Doesn’t take much. Just being next to you usually does it.”

Sunday was the quiet, restful day they needed to get ready for their return to work. Abby had been thoroughly loved and might have purred if she were a kitten. Aside from behaving like one, she was clearly at peace with herself and the world about her. It was contagious and Cam soon became infected with a severe case of tranquility—a very agreeable feeling. Then before the day was out, Cam called his mother to let her know that they’d gotten home safe and sound. Abby also had a chance to talk with Mother G., so it was a perfect ending to their vacations.

When the workweek began, they had breakfast and got ready to leave.

“This past week has been one I’ll always remember,” Abby said. “My love for you has grown even more, if that’s possible, so I’m already looking forward to coming back on Wednesday.”

“Did I say you’re invited.”

“Please don’t say things like that, Cam. After the week we’ve just had, that hurt a little. No, more than a little.”

“I just wanted to see if you still love me.” Cam smiled at the painful expression that was facing him.

“Oh, *you*.” Abby smiled back and then kissed him tenderly.

“I guess there isn’t much doubt,” Cam said.

“None at all.”

“In that case, we’ll continue all this on Wednesday evening.”

“I’ll be here, have two fires going, and be ready.”

“Sounds delightful. But I’ve got to go, dear heart.”

“So do I, shortly.”

They hugged, and as Cam drove up over the little hill in back, they waved. Abby didn’t move from her station on the back stoop until he was gone from view. There was no reason for it, but she felt just a touch of emptiness. Why? Simple. It had been a wonderful week. And she loved Cam Gordon with all her heart, but she didn’t need any reminders.

The week began with Bobbi showing Cam a naughty smile and asking, “How was your week, lover?”

“Absolutely magnificent.” Then to tease her a bit, he added, “And I made several contributions to Abby’s well being.”

“I’d like a serving myself.”

“Bobbi, there must be at least fifty good-looking studs in this town who can look after you. I’m not a candidate. You know that, so let it go.”

“But the aged product, like good wine, is the best.”

Cam saw that he wasn’t about to make a dent in her ardor, so he shrugged his shoulders and walked back to his desk.

When Thorpe came in, he sat with Cam and was pleased to tell him that they’d signed two more leases in his absence.

“Good news, boss.”

“We’re getting close to being fully leased up. McCallum’s beside himself. He can’t believe what you’ve done in four months.”

“Timing is everything. In sex, and in business. We hit the market right. Leases were running out, and we had the right product, at the right lease rates, at precisely the right time. I’m no miracle worker, but we put some tools to work that helped pull it all together.”

“You’re being modest. But say it whichever way you like. People are amazed at what we’ve done. And you know that I’m almost 90 percent pleased.” It was then that Thorpe, entirely out of character, laughed robustly. For him to acknowledge their success didn’t surprise Cam in the least—even though he felt Owen’s attempt at humor fell flat.

“OK, but I’ve got to get back to work.”

“You haven’t said a thing about your week. How’d it go out west?”

“Margaret Gordon and Abby Wallace fell in love with each other. Abby, my mother believes, is the daughter I was supposed to be, so she’s adopted her. What it means is, I have to start thinking even more seriously about our relationship and where it’s going.”

“I’ve said it before. All the beauties you brought up to the lake were easy to look at, but your mother’s right. Maybe it’s time you settled down. Be hard to do better than Abby.”

“Looks like I’m outnumbered.”

“It’s up to you to decide, but I for one would like to see it work out.”

“Thanks, Owen. I still need a little more time.”

As Cam was making his rounds of the building to check on the renovation projects that were still underway, he ran into Drew.

“Hey, guy. How’re you?”

“Dad! I’m fine. With all the stuff you’ve got going on, Stash and I have been real busy.”

“Helps keep you out of trouble.”

“Not exactly.”

“I thought you might spend some time out at the cottage, like maybe this past weekend.”

“No, I met a gal here in town. She’s about my age, but she’s got her own place. We hit it off right from the start. I remember when I asked you about Joanna and how you could know about her so fast. Now I understand. Nothing serious. We just have fun together.”

“If she’s got her own place, I suppose so.”

“You’ve done the same thing since ’68. So what’s different?”

“I was thirty-eight at the time. You’re nineteen. That’s what’s different. Just don’t come to me someday and tell me I’m going to be a grandfather. I’m too young for that, and you’re still a minor.”

“Won’t happen. Promise.”

“That’s reassuring. Thanks.”

“How was your trip? How’s Gram?”

“Great. She’s adopted Abby. Says she’s the daughter she never had—or that I was supposed to be. I’d have been Elizabeth Ann.”

Drew cackled. “Never thought about anything like that before.”

“Abby loved seeing where I grew up. And we had a good trip both ways. Weather wasn’t a serious problem, and I enjoyed having Abby with me. It’s beginning to feel like that’s the way it should be. Every day.”

“I don’t have to tell you she’s nuts about you, and I’d like it if she could be my stepmom. There’s something real special about her. She’s a sweetie.”

“I know, Drew. I know.”

When late February merged with early March, Cam could see that his projects in the building were coming to an end. The timing was ideal because the start-up of the season at the lake was drawing near. Whatever work there was to do would be minimal since there was hardly any space left to rent. As spring approached, Cam took satisfaction in how well he'd done after having gotten totally immersed in another facet of his new career. He also welcomed the rather sizeable bonus the two owners paid him for a job well done. Never mind that they were pleased. It was important to Cam that his inner man was satisfied. That was what really mattered.

Then at the beginning of April, Thorpe told Cam that he was going out of town but that he should be back before it was time to open the office at the lake. If not, Cam knew what had to be done. Owen wasn't talking about what it was he was up to, and Cam didn't ask. Knowing that his boss saw himself as something of a Casanova, and was even bedding the lady lawyer who looked after most of his legal affairs, he assumed that it was a tryst of some sort, maybe with someone Cam knew. His guess was well off the mark, but he wouldn't know that until late summer.

As it happened, Owen didn't make it back by April 14. It was neither important nor necessary. Cam got the people in to see that the office utilities were up and running. He then wrote and placed the first ads in the *New York Times*, and elsewhere, and got everything in the office organized so that he was ready to do business on opening day. Abby was around and glad to help out. And for Cam, it felt good to be 'home' and in the casual environment of Hampden Lake. It struck him that he was still a country boy at heart.

Cam opened on schedule and had some traffic during their first weekend. Abby was in and out of the office if only because she'd grown accustomed to having him all to herself from late Friday afternoon through Monday morning. No longer. She'd have to share him with his job until October 21, or maybe a week later. That would depend on the weather and late season customer traffic. But when her school vacation started, she was counting on spending lots of time with Cam. It might be that he'd agree to let her spend the summer on Hemlock Drive. She'd want to talk about it sometime soon.

On April 21, Jon came home for the Easter break. He was able to get a ride with the Koehler family again, and Abby said she'd meet them at the foot of the Exit 106 off-ramp. She wasn't gone long and brought Jon by the office to say hello before she took him to the cottage. Drew had come out

for the weekend, so they'd have plenty of time to visit before he had to go back into Springfield on Monday morning. When Cam got home, Drew told him he'd asked Thorpe for the week off and that he'd agreed to it. A stipulation was that Drew had to work out arrangements for Jon and Owen to meet. He'd be interested in talking with him about maybe working for him during the summer—at least part-time.

"Guess we'll need to talk about this some," Cam said. "You will be coming home this summer, right?"

"It's for sure now. Don't know why they haven't told you."

"Maybe they will after the break. About Owen, if he wants you to work around the lake, that's fine. If he has the office building in mind, I won't agree to that. He hasn't said a word to me about what his plans are, so there are some unanswered questions. But you haven't seen your mom since the summer of '69, so I thought you might like to spend at least part of your vacation in California."

"Sounds like it'd be a fun trip," Abby remarked.

"I've thought about it, but I don't care as much about it as I did four years ago. The letters Mom wrote, and the way she dumped on Dad turned me off. She didn't have any idea about how hard 1970 was for him. Me getting into trouble, Danielle dying, and then him losing his job. All of it was a real bummer. Let me think about it. I'll probably decide to stay here and work around the lake if that's what Mr. Thorpe wants me to do. Be a chance to earn some money. But thanks for asking, Dad."

The Gordon guys had a good week together and then on Saturday, April 28, the four of them celebrated Cam's forty-third birthday. "This is the happiest one I've had in quite a while. It's good to have the guys here, and with my Abby sharing it too, it's turning out to be an extra special day."

Abby showed Cam an affectionate smile. "That I can be a part of it makes me feel good, too, you know. Maybe we can do it again next year, and the year after, and the year after that, and . . ."

"I'd like that," Jon said. Drew agreed. It was Cam's turn to smile. It came easily.

Jon had told the Koehlers that his dad would be working, so they agreed to pick him up early on Sunday afternoon for the return trip. It wasn't out of their way. At the time they'd arranged, Cam had customers. Both he and Abby thought that might happen, so she took Jon down to the restaurant at the foot of the eastbound off ramp at Exit 106. As they waited, Abby had a coffee. Jon thought it best not to add anything else to all the orange juice he'd had before they left the cottage.

From the chair Abby had taken, she easily recognized the Koehler's big Cadillac as they drove up. She and Jon went out to greet them. After hellos and before Jon got in the car, he said, "Not long now. We're finished on June 21, the beginning of summer. I've decided to work for Mr. Thorpe around the lake and skip California. I can maybe do that some other time."

"We'll come get you. I just looked at my little calendar, and it's a Thursday. But by then your dad will have found someone to cover for him. He plans to hire at least one other person to work in the office."

"Super. Be good to come home. Finally."

"And it'll be good to have you home, Jon. See you in a few weeks."

As the Koehlers drove off, they all waved. Abby stood perfectly still until the Cadillac was up the Interstate toward Sturbridge and gone from view. She missed him. But he'd be coming home soon, and the thought of that made her smile.

With early season activity usually lighter, Cam decided that since he'd just gotten his broker's license he could start listing properties for sale that weren't part of the Thorpe inventory. Sellers paid a good commission, but Cam was mindful that his primary responsibility was to sell Owen's lots, with or without a building. But to take listings, he'd need one or two brokers to work alongside him in the office. The first person he brought in was, like Abby, an educator. Her name was Cindy Marston. The plus was that she was local and had worked in real estate before, part-time, so the training she needed was minimal. It wasn't long before she was in the swing of things and Cam went off to solicit listings as time allowed.

When the weather turned warmer, traffic increased and it brought an end to Cam's listing efforts, except when sellers came to the office and asked him to put their property on the market. Now into his second season, Cam was finding out that Owen Thorpe's reputation wasn't all that it might be. And the word had circulated that Cam Gordon was running things, that he was low-key, honest, and that he also treated customers with respect. When that got back to Cam, it made him feel good. Adam and Margie Gordon's upbringing was paying dividends. Customers were coming back to do repeat business and also to list their properties when they were ready to sell. They had other options in the real estate community, so the increase in their brokerage business was evident. Owen Thorpe eventually took note of it.

The reputation that Cam was building was confirmed by a longtime summer resident, Sophie Kaminski. She and her husband lived in western Connecticut, but for years they'd spent five to six months at their little

waterfront cottage. Sophie dropped by the Thorpe office one afternoon mainly because, Cam thought, she had nothing better to do. A short, chunky woman, who, by reputation, liked her Scotch, she got into the subject of Thorpe. “You know, in all the years we’ve been coming up here, you’re the first guy Owen’s had that treats people decent. He tries to squeeze every nickel he can out of a customer. It’s almost like he don’t care about tomorrow. You’re different. It’s like when you do business you want to make a friend at the same time, somebody who’ll come back, maybe.”

“Smart business, but I’m serious about what I do. I’ve always tried to make a customer feel like they’re the one person I really wanted to see that day. More often than not, that’s the case.”

“Well, since we came up for the season, I’ve talked to a lot of summer regulars around the lake, and we all feel the same way. We hope you stick around.”

“You may know that I’m an Iowa farm kid who was raised on the Christian principal of do unto others, et cetera. But I’m also a fugitive from corporate New York and you can be gutted down there for trying to shaft somebody. Thing is, I haven’t needed the fear of that to teach me what’s right. And I learned a long time ago that I wouldn’t be worth a damn in a cutthroat business.”

“Just stay with it, Cammie. You’ve made a lot of friends around the lake—people you don’t know. Yeah, and we’ve seen you with that nice teacher. Any plans that include her?”

“Could be, Sophie. Might very well happen.”

The period between the Memorial Day and Labor Day holidays was prime time and very busy, both in the real estate office and personally, as it turned out. On Memorial Day weekend, Abby had gone to visit her mother for a couple of days. After he got home that Sunday evening, Abby’s roommate, Liz Porter, stopped by. She knew Abby had gone to Worcester but pretended that she didn’t.

Cam offered her a drink, and when the booze hit her, she began to open up. “It’s time you found out that I’m in love with you, too. Ever since that first day we met, the one when you helped Abby move in, and now every time I’ve seen you since then, I’ve wanted to change places with her. I guess that’s a way of saying that my feelings for you grew little by little and now they’re in full bloom. Something else. I’m still a virgin and I really want you to be the one to change that for me.”

Cam gulped. “You’re good for my ego, Liz. But given that Abby and I are as close as we are, I don’t see how we can do something like that to my sweetheart and your good friend.”

“I predicted that you’d say something like that, but I want you know that the affection, and the desire to have you love me, are there for the taking. Like I suggested, it’s gotten out of hand. I even have dreams about having your baby.”

“Sounds like your fantasies are a little out of control, but you’ve kept it pretty well hidden.”

“I have to because I can’t let Abby know how I feel.”

“Let me put it this way. If she and I ever go separate directions, I’d most likely be more accommodating.”

“Sure you don’t want to show me what it would be like, and then do your thing? Not even once?”

“Liz, you’re a sweetheart, but I can’t do that to Abby. She wouldn’t know, but my conscience would, and it’d bother me. She’s very trusting but also fragile. You know that, so it wouldn’t be fair, in spite of the fact that doing what you want has a lot of appeal.”

“I understand. So, in that case, I’ll save myself for you. Maybe the time will come, and you will, too.” She giggled.

“You’re being a naughty girl.”

“It’s all right. I’ll make believe when I get home.”

As Liz was leaving, she gave Cam a genuinely affectionate hug and a steamy kiss.

“That’s to show you what’s inside.”

“I know very well what’s in there. But I have to confess that your kiss was delightful.”

“It’ll help you remember me, then.”

“No reminders needed.”

“See you, Cam.”

“Maybe so.”

Liz Porter was on Cam’s mind at various times on Memorial Day. Given her internal fire, he had no doubt that she’d quickly figure out how to become animated. A year ago, he’d have gladly satisfied her request, but by now Abby was too far inside him to do what she’d proposed yesterday. Besides she was local, and a good friend of Abby’s, so it could lead to serious repercussions at some point. Smart to just let it be.

The thought of Liz was still on his mind when Abby got home, so she was the beneficiary of the fire that Liz had kindled.

“Maybe I should go away more often,” she said. “That was sizzling and some welcome home. *Whew.*”

During the third week of June, T. J. Atwood stopped by the cottage unannounced. Abby was there and told him Cam was still at work but that he should be home shortly.

“I can’t stay long. Yesterday was my birthday, and I spent it with my folks out on the Cape. Good day all around. Got in a little boating and some swimming even though the water was still fairly cold.”

When Cam came home soon afterwards, he was delighted to see T. J. “How’re you, boss? Great to see you again.”

“Fine. Changed jobs, something I was considering when I saw you on New Year’s Day. Bigger title, more money, and expanded responsibilities. A much better situation than my last involvement with retailing.”

They had a drink, Abby put out some snacks, and they exchanged news until T. J. said he wanted to get back to New York and see Nicole. He added that they were now close and that he might eventually propose.

“We probably couldn’t come into New York, but be sure to let us know if you do tie the knot again. After all the chasing around we’ve done, be good to see you settle down. Not that you were like the rogue I was.”

“Your turn next. When?”

“It’s under review. You know how careful I’ve been. There’s always been something important about knowing someone two years or so. Abby and I are getting close to that. Patience, T. J.”

“I understand. Now, I’ve really got to go. See you again soon, or at *your* ceremony.” They all smiled. “I want to be a part of the festivities.”

On June 21, Cam and Abby drove to Duchene to bring Jon home. Permanently. He had lots of goodbyes to look after and while he was doing that, Cam went to the office to pick up Jon’s release papers and grade reports. Something that was in his folder was a comment by the soccer coach. It said that Jon was one of the best forwards he’d ever coached. Cam was completely surprised. Jon had never said a word about being involved in Duchene’s soccer program. Something to talk about on the way home. Abby was the consummate female sports fan, so if he continued playing, which was almost a certainty, she’d go to games that were scheduled right after school.

And that was one of their topics of conversation as they made their way back to Hampden Lake. “Yeah, I want to see if I can get on the team when I start at Goddard High.”

“You never mentioned that you were into soccer.”

“It’s not as big a deal in America as it is in other places, but I love it. I didn’t think it would matter to you.”

“You’re wrong about that. And your grades are good, too.”

“They have some really great teachers at Duchene, and they sure made us work.”

“Well, it’s good to have you back, and I don’t have to tell you that you’ll have to behave because you’ll be eighteen in December. If you screw up after that you’ll be in deep doo-doo.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. The first thing I want to do is see Mr. Thorpe to find out about working around the lake.”

“You got a letter from him. Came at the beginning of the week. Maybe it’s what you’re looking for.”

And it was. Owen said he’d be out at the lake office on Sunday and that Jon should come over to talk about a summer job.

When he shared his news, he said, “Great! I’ll get to do the same stuff Drew did. I’ve got lots of old clothes now that I can work in.”

“We’ll have to get you some new ones soon. School will be back in session before you know it. Abby has the calendar. One of us will get you over to Goddard, maybe in August, so you can pre-register. I’ve got your grades and everything else they’ll need.”



The early months of 1970 leave in their wake an array of indelible memories for single parent Cameron Ross Gordon. All of them painful. In March, his younger son is confined for treatment following a nearly fatal OD. Cam then loses a blue-chip job due to restructuring and, soon afterward, his fiancée is gone. But a gentle young woman comes into his life, he launches a challenging new career, and his future finally shows promise.

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