

If You Forget Me

(excerpt)

by Lawrence Uhlin

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*Dedicated to my wife Nancy,
who is both my love and muse*

Prologue

Outside the wide, double-glazed windows, beyond the protective stucco and cedar wood exterior of the building, an easterly wind whipped the waters of Haro Strait. Whitecaps tumbled over each other at the beginning and end of every long swell that angled its way to break on the stony beach. It was typical February weather on the Peninsula of Vancouver Island, varying wind and rain with occasional, spotty periods of sunshine and temperatures that seldom fell below 8 or 9 degrees Celsius. Amanda Tam's home is a spacious two-bedroom condominium. One of twelve units built in 1984 and located in the small town of Sidney by the Sea, British Columbia.

On this blustery day of February, 2001 Amanda Tam's eyes dart about the room, then through the window where the sea-spray rattles against the glass. The weather does not detract her inward focus, it fits with her turmoil. The memories of conversations and the reading of Naomi's journals are confusing. Bittersweet loss moves aimlessly amidst her bewilderment. Overwhelmed, she utters: "I didn't know you, Naomi. How could I have known you when after all this time ...? Amanda's words are smothered by sobs. She weeps and gasps for breath. Calms herself, and in a moment words come to her, but they feel inadequate like petty rehearsals for

another time, unworthy. Yet the words that express inadequacy and some small relief are also laden with a sense of personal betrayal.

* * *

Amanda Tam is thirty-nine years of age, petite, a face that some see as still pretty, attractive in appearance, of average intelligence, and of a kind and sensitive nature. She loves this place, this shelter, this town and this country.

Amanda rises from the sofa and walks toward the wide window; she watches the tumult as the wind-driven sea slams into the break-wall, spraying sheets of salt water over the walking trail below her. The sea swells continue to build and again the saltwater spray washes across the windows, distorting the outlook. The distortion accommodates her thoughts, unclear, indecisive and frustratingly persistent.

* * *

Amanda Tam's journey with an elderly woman of delicate features and considerate nature began shortly after she immigrated to Canada. Having landed in Toronto, Amanda spent a few weeks there before moving to the quieter and less crowded town of Sidney by the Sea.

Toronto was, if anything, larger than her far-off home of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. She perused the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star's* want ads seeking companions with nursing training to live with elderly women, somewhere beyond the city, somewhere small and sheltered.

The *Globe and Mail* ad brought Amanda across Canada, across Haro Strait to Sidney where she was met and employed by Naomi.

Naomi wanted a live-in companion and someone who had medical training, though she was not incapacitated, at least not then. But Naomi *was* seventy-four and acutely aware of the physical limitations that age imposed on most people, especially people who lived alone; she looked to the future for dependency and the present for companionship. They became true companions quickly. Their days spent in walks about the small town or cozy in the warmth of the condominium overlooking Haro Strait. Naomi assured Amanda of her continued employment. They would remain companions until death ended the relationship.

* * *

Naomi's journals told of the time before Amanda knew her, the time that was written in a small and crammed script, as if the lives written about were not to exceed the pages available. It was months before she could bring herself to read the journals. And often it was wearying; some days she was left with a feeling of chaos, a sense of disbelief juxtaposed against a clear sky and a calm sea. But on this day Amanda gazed through the window at a darkening sky and raging

whitecaps that battered the sea wall, it was the backdrop for reading the last entry of the final journal. Amanda's thoughts were filled with recollections of confusing and occasionally puzzling comments, their conversations. The mystery of her spoken words were now finally crystallizing against the crammed and cramped memoirs of Naomi, and Nora.

Part 1

Birth, Youth and Age

Chapter 1

"I can't stand the pain." Nora's voice was strained; her breath came in quick and irregular gasps.

"You've got to stand it; I can't give you this now." Cassie was stern but not strong. She stared hard at Nora and wondered if she was physically able to endure the hurting. Cassie remembered through a haze of the past that some of the women succumbed; they just gave up. She put the hypodermic aside, its needle pushed into a wad of cotton wool.

Nora asked, her voice trembling, "Did you go to the drug store and get the other things?" Her body shivered, but less than it had a moment ago. She lay flat, pressing her hands against the surface of the bed, willing the pain to recede.

"Yes, I've got it and lots of it. I've got enough gauze to open an emergency department. I had to make two trips to the supplier for the other stuff; it's very heavy. I don't know why you have to do it that way, it doesn't make sense."

Nora forced a smile and said, as if an adult to a child, "I'm not going to tell you again, Cassie, I have to do it this way; and it's too bad that you'll have to stay here with me for a while. You can sleep in the spare room; you'll be okay; I've put some of your meds in the bathroom, enough for a couple of days, freebies.

"Consider yourself lucky, Cassie. It should all be done soon, and then you can go your way." Nora's voice trailed off for a moment and then announced with more force than she felt: "Don't forget, there's a bonus in this for you – but only if you see me through it." Awkwardly she pulled herself up, shifted her legs over the side of the bed; her head was spinning and nausea blackened her thoughts. With a tremendous effort she pushed it back. There were many things in Nora's life

that were difficult, but pain was only a sensation and though it was sharp, hard, demanding and at times enough to make her faint, it was still a passing thing; she would soon be rid of it.

Despite Nora's discomfort, the surroundings were pleasant, the room was bright and warm, the sun shone in through the large windows of the old house. She thought of it as *a contradiction, a mind game – and I'll win*. Everything became a challenge and the pain struck again, with force; it felt as if her groin was being torn from her body. She fell back and grasped a knotted dish towel, pushing it into her mouth, biting hard, stifling a scream that sounded like a smothered animal's resistant death cry, perspiration squeezing through her pores, bathing her in a clammy wash.

Nora lapsed into unconsciousness. Cassie was nervous, afraid of this woman who lay comatose and shuddering. Afraid to leave and afraid to stay. Nora was manipulative in a way that made Cassie feel that she was indebted to her. Cassie felt bound by her addiction and the promise of a way out – in just a few days. "*Hang in,*" she told herself.

* * *

The house was well over one hundred years old and had been built as a mansion of a modest sort. At the time of its construction it was the first on the large plot of land that eventually became a street and would bear the name of the building's owner – Smitham; then, the house was close enough to Lake Ontario to allow the Smitham family members to hear waves lapping at the sandy beach area of the place in the country, a few miles from the bustling city of Toronto whose population at the time was rapidly closing in on twenty thousand citizens.

As the home in the Beaches grew old its country setting was drawn into the environs of Toronto. Over many years the house underwent several renovations, the latest undertaken by its most recent owner, Alan Ableman. Ableman had it fitted it out as two separate living accommodations and installed a central heating system. In the upstairs duplex a young married couple, Julia and Rodney, had happily moved in to their first matrimonial home. The downstairs duplex had another couple living there for a while but they soon moved out. The next tenant was a young woman who would come and go by way of her own entrance. The upstairs couple seldom saw her in the joint foyer with its two large oak doors leading to their respective flats, and on those rare occasions when they found themselves passing she would hurry in or out, nodding, seemingly unwilling to socialize. They observed over time that she was pregnant.

One day, Julia hesitatingly knocked on her neighbour's door to introduce herself. As well, she offered any assistance that the beautiful, young and very pregnant woman known as Nora might require. The offer was not well received by Nora, who advised her equally young neighbour that

she was pleased to make her acquaintance but did not desire help from anyone, and with that the door was closed on the conversation and the possibility of friendship.

One very hot July evening Julia and Rodney were woken by the sound of a baby crying. The thin, helpless sounds had echoed through the new heating ducts of the old house and emerged from a floor vent in their bedroom, where they lay hot and sleepless in the humid darkness.

“Rod! She’s had the baby,” Julia said, a smile spreading across her face in the dark. “Do you think I should go down and see if I can help in any way?”

“Don’t you bloody dare,” he said quietly. “She’s already given you the message in no uncertain terms that she doesn’t want help in any way.

“Besides, earlier tonight I saw her friend go in, the same one that was here last night. She was loaded with bags of things, probably all in preparation for the baby’s arrival – though I wish to hell people would go to the hospitals to have them.”

“I know, Rod. But I feel so bad about the baby – I mean, just listen to the little thing crying.” Then, as if on cue, the crying stopped. The young couple again lay in their mutual silence, in the heavy and humid air. Picturing in their mind’s eye the events associated with the sounds they were hearing – a car arriving, the heavy entrance door opening, closing; muffled voices. *Was that a man’s voice?* Julia wondered. Then, sounds of leaving, another car door, and motor noises receding. Finally, sleep.

Over the next few weeks neither Julia nor Rodney heard the baby cry again. They were aware that for a while Nora was away and then returned for a short time, and then, quite abruptly, she moved out. Before long the lower duplex was again rented and soon the strange and mysterious Nora with her quiet baby was forgotten by the young married couple upstairs.

Chapter 2

Naomi, no matter the weather, always wore a jacket when she made her slow way along the Lochside Trail. And she always wore a hat, usually a cotton affair wrapped around most of her short grey hair. The brim shaded her eyes, which were usually looking down to position each footfall as she made her way along. She wore slacks, never a dress or skirt. It was sensible attire for the walk along the trail, which varied from tarmac top to round stone and chipped gravel that worked its way into the rough clay or was pushed to the embankment or seaward sides of the trail. The placement of her cane and feet then became acts of calculated precision.

Most of the walkers whom the elderly woman passed would cover the distance of the trail in about a quarter of her time. Still, in her own time Naomi traversed the same route five or six days a week.

The cane, gripped in her right hand, was a truly functional aid; over the years a limp caused by an enlarged nerve in the metatarsal area of her foot became increasingly painful. She had several visits with an orthopaedic surgeon to discuss treatments but to no avail. The problem persisted.

The loose gravel part of the trail thus made her journey to the bench surrounded by wild flowers something of a minor challenge. Still, she would not stop or turn around before reaching the bench. She rested at that bench, a prolonged break before returning by the same route to her beginning point – home, the condominium and Amanda.

Her bench, as she had become used to calling it, was the only bench of several along the walkway through spring, summer and early autumn that was surrounded by flowers of the season: tulips – red and yellow, beautiful orange California poppies, blue bachelor buttons and a scattering of yellow-orange nasturtiums. Often she would stop at the bench for long periods of time. She told Amanda that she liked to look out to sea while she rested, and sometimes a recollection – a memory, savoured or unwanted – would fill her world for a while, perhaps for a few vivid minutes or only fleetingly. But always, there was a memory.

Most of the walkers along the trail would say hello or good morning to her, and she would raise her dazzling blue eyes and in a voice too soft to hear would mouth “morning,” the last syllable curling the corner of her mouth in a smile.

The pain would lift from Naomi’s ailing foot soon after sitting at the bench with the little metal plaque attached to the top rail, inscribed, “To the memory of Senator Vaughn Lombard.”

She felt a sense of satisfaction at having had the bench placed at a point on the Lochside Trail where it was most needed for her arduous and necessary morning slow-walks. Others rarely used it. Most walkers, by the time they reached that bench, were either almost finished or were heading to the turnaround point where another bench provided for them a more suitable place to break their activity and pause for rejuvenation.

Though the bench was dedicated to the late Senator Vaughn Lombard, she referred to it as *her bench*, although in her imagined conversations with her long-dead twin sister she would refer to it as *Lombard’s bench*. *I remember the day she told me, she was of course still in that asylum, still alive but mad. Suffering terribly, the doctors said, from severe psychotic episodes.*

“If you really wish to appease me, dear sister...Naomi would hear Nora’s voice say, “...you might honour my request to have a memorial of some sort erected in Lombard’s memory. No matter what the newspapers have said about me, Vaughn was a fine man, a true and strong Canadian. I’ll pay for it from the trust fund.” Ironically, Lombard’s death occurred long after the beautiful Nora’s death, so one can imagine how confusing it was.

Still, the words would rattle through Naomi’s mind as if part of a script. At times she would pause in her remembrance and in a mildly chastising manner say to herself, *“Oh, dear, do I have that correct, or am I imagining again?”*

But, as for the trust fund, well, such legality could not have been established as Naomi was the designated executor of the family wealth, and that shift from dual to sole executor came about on the date that her sister had been committed to the institution for the criminally insane: incompetency was part and parcel of her institutionalization. But how the bench and tribute were paid for was an inconsequential issue for Naomi, who always, just before sitting, would touch her fingers to her lips, then press them to the brass plate with his inscribed name. With a similar sense of caring Naomi, often with help from Amanda for the heavier trowelling, would cultivate the earth around the bench in spring, plant new annuals to complement the perennials, and clear the dead flowers in autumn.

Naomi matter-of-factly paid the cost of the bench, never telling her sister when engaged in one of the imaginary conversations while resting on Lombard’s bench.

Naomi knew the man her sister had so often talked of. Knew him far better than he knew her. She was aware of the public man who supported and assisted at least two candidates for the role of Prime Minister of the country, aware that he was a writer before and after his political endeavours. He wrote throughout his life and all but the first book was written after Nora had made a lasting impression on him.

Naomi had read all of his books, usually searching for references, oblique or direct, to her sister’s place in Lombard’s world. But there were never obvious references, though she could sometimes stretch a description or a scene and catch a glimpse of the beautiful and deeply mysterious Nora. Of course, in the case of Nora’s trial – Naomi well knew that Lombard would never write of that. It was bad enough that he too was tainted by rumour and later shamed by fact, not the least of which was the press coverage of the trial, the event that shocked so many and damaged the pure and true with undeserved and taunting malice.

At the time of her sister’s affair with Lombard Naomi knew little of the man. His public profile had not then become one of a nationally known writer and politician. The details of his

relationship to her sister were gleaned through correspondence with her twin and occasional long distance telephone calls or personal visits. Naomi learned more details of the affair at the trial and after her sister had been committed to the asylum for the criminally insane. As well, she knew before the trial that there was issue born of their relationship.

Vaughn Lombard was not the only man of consequence in Nora's life. *Oh, and there was Pascal, the young man from Montreal. The man whose name was to Nora romantically French – doubly so as he was called Pascal Pascal.* Nora's relationship with Pascal Pascal was of a darker colour, ambiguous, strangely complementing and deepening the quality of inscrutability that Nora wore as a mantilla. He passed in and out of her life as a shadow, sporadically present, never indispensable but seldom far away. His presence became undemanding but disturbing enough to be of continuing interest to the curious Nora. From her journal readings Amanda realized that his influence was more than passing when Naomi first broached the subject of Pascal after completing one of the longer journal entries. Naomi had seemed disinclined to pursue the subject further in conversation; and Amanda had learned not to press her. The intriguing subjects of Naomi's writing always re-surfaced, like black thread stitching blindly while attempting to complete a circle on white fabric.

Chapter 3

Naomi's journal entries were written daily in a designated space, on a small table that served as her writing desk, exactly between the living room and the dining room and always facing the window to the sea. The completed journals and the current diary were stored in a small den. There they rested on a teakwood shelving unit side by side with her collection of Lombard's books. Other books rested on several other shelves, their groupings composed of authors who she felt were important and informative. A few ornaments filled out the shelves; a La-Z-Boy chair with a glass coffee table and an unlocked, antique oak secretary's desk completed the furnishings which were placed upon an expensive oriental carpet. It was Naomi's habit to bring the current volume of memoirs out of the den to the little table where Amanda had laid her tea service, and there, in the lightness of the room with the view of the ocean, Naomi would carefully script her thoughts of the day, her inventory of reminiscence which told mainly of her sister's strange and tragic life.

Naomi wrote little of herself – a fact that caused the young woman Amanda to experience a sense of confusion and wonder at the finish, the denouement.

Amanda recalled the day that she summoned the courage to open the memoirs and begin the journey. She had opened the door to the den and looked at the ringed volumes, their familiarity causing her to feel sadness, grief, loss and anticipation. Her immediate thought was not of the memoirs but of the day that Naomi had died, three months earlier.

Her voice had become reed thin, frail like her small body. Amanda had to lean very close to hear Naomi's words.

"Call John Mortimer when I ..."

Naomi's voice had trailed off; a slight wave of her left hand completed the sentence. Then she gathered strength and said:

"Please read my journals, Amanda. Someone must give meaning to ... life, my life."

At that, with a force of effort that wrenched a terrible sob from inside of Amanda, Naomi raised her right hand and stroked the young woman's face. And with that gesture of familiarity and meaningfulness, she passed.

John Mortimer, the lawyer, informed Amanda that she was the sole heir to all that Naomi had possessed. There were no other relatives, and if there were other significant friends then neither Amanda nor the lawyer had not in their time known of them. The condominium had been fully paid for. Apart from that and the possessions within the residence there was also a substantial sum of cash: these totalled all of Naomi's worldly possessions. Amanda bore the new-found wealth with equanimity. She was grateful, but sorry that her future had become financially secure through the death of her friend and companion, albeit a companion that she now believed she knew so little about. So it was that she followed Naomi's direction – she began reading the journals, commencing with the notebook identified on the inside cover as #1.

Naomi's handwriting was small, clear and beautifully scripted, happily so as she wrote on every available line, front and back of each page.

She wrote of the early years, of the twins, of her thoughts, of her memories. The journals had always been written after Naomi's morning walk, the passages probably composed during her slow progress to Vaughn Lombard's bench where she would rest her foot and gaze across Haro Strait to the islands beyond. Naomi would summon up the images that described the differences between the sisters, and also the similarities, which were few beyond the physical. The differences in their personalities were many and vast, and yet Amanda came to believe there was a mysterious equivalence. Perhaps, she thought that is simply how the fates intervened.

Chapter 4

The twin sister Nora, though apparently genetically identical to her sibling, had a personality twist. “*She has a rogue gene,*” a doctor from long ago explained Nora’s predilection to be a risk-taker, a predilection not shared by Naomi, who preferred to sit and wonder at the life her sister led.

The “rogue gene” presented itself as more than a personality twist in Nora’s life. Whatever the similarity between the sisters, the difference was self-evident to all who knew them and laid the pathways of divergence for their two lives.

Nora’s impetuous behaviour manifested early in the twins’ lives but for at least the formative years it was seen by the parents as almost endearing. Father had regarded her actions as risky but correctable, while the more attentive mother thought the things she did bordered on being cute and were a means of differentiating herself from Naomi with her calmer and quieter demeanour.

Good fortune in the form of wealth had smiled upon the girls, who were born into a well-established and dignified Victoria family. The parents had been married fifteen years before the birth of the twins. Many visits to many doctors were not encouraging concerning their hopes to be parents. Instead of parenting for those fifteen years the couple continued their families’ pursuits of guarding the ancestral fortune and erecting a large home on Dallas Road, overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca, with multitudinous rooms and wide welcoming hallways designed for entertaining in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of British Columbia’s capital city. They were Roman Catholics, and devoted much of their time to serving their church in various ways, not the least of which was organizing and raising funds for the numerous needs of their religious community.

So it was with mixed joy and uncertainty after fifteen years that they discovered they would soon have a child to run through the wide hallways of the vast home and enjoy with them the pleasures of the expansive gardens.

Joy and uncertainty changed to shock at the arrival of not one but two daughters. They were born in the year that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that women were not persons who can hold office according to the British North America Act; their birthdays coincided with that of Thérèse Lavoie-Roux of Quebec, who became a leading Québécois politician and in the course of her life took advantage of Britain’s 1929 Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to recognize

women. The girls were 19 months old when the Great Depression commenced on Black Tuesday, October 29. But thanks to the attentive stewardship of their father the family suffered but little while the bulk of the Western world lined up for work and handouts of food.

Apart from minor annoyances of not doing as she was asked, when she was asked, Nora's differences from Naomi were of the sort considered to be relatively unimportant until shortly after the twins' seventh birthday. It happened on a day when the Monsignor of their family's church had dropped round the house to solicit a major donation toward the cost of a new rectory.

The Monsignor sat before the sterling silver tea setting and described to the patriarch the worn door jambs that allowed winter winds to suck out the heat of the old rectory, the ill-fitting windows that were worse, and floors that had lately buckled because of a flood of rain streaming down through the walls and seeping into the soft pine flooring. As the weather descriptors droned on the patriarch of the house decided on that occasion to withhold financial support, feeling that he had given more than his share to the church. He was about to say as much to the Monsignor, when the girls burst into the salon where the meeting was being held. They realized that they had interrupted a conference of some importance and quickly left, Naomi upset that she had not knocked first as she had wanted to, and Nora becoming excited, happily perceiving in the Monsignor's visit an opportunity to tell him of a great secret. She hurried off to her parents' bedroom and returned, running at full speed, to burst into the salon again. Nora stood before the somewhat annoyed Monsignor, who though trying to plead his case was also beginning to recognize the wealthy parishioner's fidgeting as a warm-up to declare his refusal to donate. He was impatient with the child's insistence.

"I've got a secret!" Nora called out. "Father has balloons in his bedside table and he and mother play with them. Look!" The condom dangled limply in her hand as she waved it back and forth in front of the priest. Proud of herself for being the centre of attention, Nora proceeded to blow up the condom and was just able to let it go when her father roughly picked her up and hurriedly left the room with the squirming, squealing little girl. The deflated condom flew erratically round the priest and landed at his feet. With a look of horror he hastily retreated from the room and the house, muttering promises of calling again to the blushing mother, while the railing father's angry voice reverberated through the wide and empty hallways.

That was the beginning of Nora's fall from grace in her father's eyes. It was the beginning of his finding fault with most of what she did that was out of the ordinary, and it was the beginning of Nora's realizing that she had the power to anger and infuriate someone with her intended

actions. It was a power that she would cultivate and direct with the accuracy and effectiveness of a scalpel in the hands of a skilled surgeon.

Nora constantly rubbed her impatient father the wrong way, but it was Mother who matched her constancy and tried to excuse her behaviour as healthy, her way of differentiating herself from the more sedate sister. Until at last, during the years of puberty, it became clear to the tolerant woman that the difference in the girls was more than Nora erring while establishing her own individuality. Her behaviour was chronic and deliberate. Most often there were small incidents that irritated and irked Father, as most of what Nora did, whether contrived or accidental seemed to upset him. But two unpleasant incidents followed and convinced even Mother that Nora was developing very risky behaviour.

Father had purchased a brand new Cadillac in 1943, a few months after the twins' fifteenth birthday. Being something of a very precise character he ensured that the vehicle was washed and cleaned regularly, supervising the family chauffeur's efforts lest someone in the neighbourhood remark about a scuff mark on one of the whitewall tires. He would also engage the services of the twins to bring the wash and rinse water into the two-storeyed detached garage, the upper part of which was the maid's quarters while the bottom housed the car. On a brilliant summer day halfway through the car washing ritual the chauffeur took advantage of the girls' father being called away to answer a telephone call and excused himself to go to the washroom. Both men returned to the garage area at precisely the same time as the shiny new black four door sedan crashed through the rear wall of the garage and rammed into a stone fence that had been built as a privacy barrier between the neighbouring properties. Nora was, of course, behind the wheel, laughing somewhat hysterically.

"Why did you laugh, Nora?" Naomi asked, shaking her head in disbelief. They were sitting on Nora's bed discussing the incident. Naomi had been sent in to see if her sister wished to have more of the dinner that she had been ordered to take alone and in her room.

"It just struck me as absurdly funny. I thought I knew what pedals to push but got confused and pushed one and let go of the other, then – bang! It was fast, and funny. Don't you think that was comical, Naomi? Didn't you see the look on Daddy's face? I thought his eyes would pop out!"

Naomi wore an expression of bewildered dismay. How could her sister think it was comical? "No – I just got ... terribly frightened. The maid was screaming out of the upstairs window and the car was spraying water, and Father... well, you know what Father looked like, and poor

Robert, I think he had gone into the house to use the washroom but I swear, he peed himself again, when it happened.” At that Nora rolled off the bed laughing, though her sister was stone-faced.

Nora’s look softened; she reached over to her sister, stroked her face and said, “Naomi, you worry too much. No one was hurt, Father has buckets of money to fix the garage and the car, or buy another one if he wants; and now I know where the clutch pedal is and which one is the accelerator.” She smiled at Naomi’s look of concern and coldly stated: “Now I know how to drive.”

A few months later Nora was sprawled again on the bed, and again isolated from the society of the home after an act of youthful sexual indiscretion. Naomi sat in a chair close by and asked the mirror-like image of herself, “But why would you take such a chance, Nora? Knowing that at any time Father could come into the garage and see you, hear you.”

“I just couldn’t help it, we got so excited. He wanted to do it right on the front lawn. I knew Father wouldn’t like that, especially if we were seen by one of the neighbours; you know how that Mrs. Roberts is always looking over at us, and it was just barely getting dark. So, I snuck into the den where Father keeps the keys, snuck back out and we got into the back seat.” She smiled wickedly and raised her eyebrows as if to say, *It was fun and I love it!*

“But didn’t you think that Father would miss the keys and perhaps think that he had left them in the car? Nora, he’s done that before.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter any more. Father caught us. Father’s mad and I’m bad.”

“Nora, I don’t understand you. You’re so different. I wish we were closer, but I certainly don’t wish that I could be more like you. I’m not sure what I like or don’t like, but I feel awful when you get into trouble, I almost feel guilty.”

“Guilty! Well, that’s up to you, sis.” Nora’s expression smouldered, as though a fire was burning in her eyes which contradicted the iciness of her flat, calculating tone of voice: “I know exactly what I’m doing and I don’t care about being safe or being nice. I want to try everything. You can be boring and stuffy if you want to, but not me, thanks very much. We may look alike, Naomi, but inside we are really different. Especially inside here!” she said pointing at her head, sneering. “Guilt, shit!”

Perhaps it had happened earlier, but with the last two events it was clear that the conditioning process was complete. By the time of her father’s discovery in the back seat of the Cadillac there was no way of undoing the dislike of the man for his daughter Nora. Mother then stepped back from defending her daughter’s behaviours. There were never again any expectations of Nora

achieving anything praiseworthy. The parents could only hope that she would not bring further shame to them or to Naomi.

For Nora, the hatred she felt for her parents and from her parents was tangible, something to wield covertly, as a weapon, into the future.

Chapter 5

The deathbed request of Naomi to read her journals was to Amanda not unlike an order of honour, a promise made, an act of respect that must at all cost be carried out. She could not conceive of disobeying her great friend's dying request. That Amanda allowed three months to intervene between the request and the reading was owing to her need to feel, finally, a lifting of the burden of grief. Then, in October of 2001, she was ready. *Time to get on with a celebration of Naomi's life.* Later, she would marvel at the level of her naiveté.

There were many early differences between us. Even more developed and became obvious as we grew older. We graduated from Douglas Academy, but not without having to share Nora's reputation for trouble. Those years were difficult and I believe that we were both relieved to finally part company by going off to our respective choices of a university to continue our education, Nora to Queen's in Kingston and I to the University of Ottawa to study English literature.

Both cities were far away from our parents and the familiarity of Victoria. Nora was delighted to be across the country from our parents. I, less so.

Queen's was the place and that was the time when Nora discovered the allure of the novelist-philosopher who was to cast a net of compelling influence over her life.

Naomi wrote of Nora's budding intellectual radicalism while she studied at Queen's. She had been experimenting with courses in philosophy, studying Aristotle, Locke, Kant and Nietzsche. But for the most part she simply wanted to get her bachelor's degree and head off to Europe and the world.

In Amanda's role as her companion she was often told of what Naomi had written on any given day, perhaps because she needed to embellish verbally what she could not find the words for in script; whatever the reason, Amanda was an eager and intelligent listener.

Naomi told her that 1947, the year they both started university, was difficult for Nora. She said that her sister easily tired of the routine of attending daily classes and would often sacrifice attendance to read about and participate in radical movements where new ideas were founded on some often strange vestige of intellectual certainty. And one day it came about with a feeling of near-ethereal excitement that Nora read on a poster outside the philosophy department that the author of *The Fountainhead* would be a visiting lecturer, speaking on the 30th of October, at Queen's University.

"She was so excited that she telephoned me, demanding that I come down to Kingston. "You must come, I don't know anyone well enough to talk to about something this important." But it was impossible for me to get away, I had my own schedules, and anyway the lecturer Ayn Rand meant absolutely nothing to me – very unlike what she meant to Nora." Naomi said that Rand's opus, *The Fountainhead*, had articulated what Nora thought exemplified her own strength – the pursuit of pure, uncompromising individualism.

"In fact, Nora thought that the *fight* to have individualism accepted might very well be as important as individualism itself. She said she believed that the thrill of fighting for what one believed in was equal to the appeal of the philosophy of individualism. *That's why you must come with me, Naomi; who else can I argue my beliefs with without insulting them?* Even if I had the time I would not deliberately expose myself to Nora's rants. I patted myself on the back, thinking that I was acting mature and grown-up. But the thrill of the conflict motivated Nora to plan further than simply attending the lecture; without me, she went on to arrange a private meeting with the woman who was to become a leader of a philosophy Nora had until that time not known of and yet firmly believed in. She contrived a persuasive letter promising a fee for the one-on-one consultation opportunity.

"Nora received word from Rand that she would indeed agree to spend some time with her to discuss in depth what she would present at the lecture.

"After the lecture came the formalities, and then the breaking away from the many-tentacled embrace of an audience both pro and con; the chain-smoking Rand accompanied her young new-found friend on a cool October evening walk round the campus of Queen's University, and later to Rand's hotel room.

"Their discussion ranged from the nature and origin of knowledge to Ayn Rand's still formulating theories of rational self-interest. Nora was captivated; more, she was entirely infatuated with the petite Russian-born American intellectual. Above all, Rand spoke of what Nora had long felt was a profound truth which the world with all of its ignorance could not or

would not admit to – that the object of one’s perception is reality. “*Perception*,” she said, clasping Nora’s hand, “*is infallible; it is a base from which to reason the fallibility of conceptual interpretation. Thus, the object of perception is reality.*”

Nora had barely been able to attend to classes after her meeting with Ayn Rand; her excitement about the new thinking and being on the edge of a new philosophy seemed to trivialize every other subject she was studying. Nevertheless, Nora graduated summa cum laude and throughout the three to four years following her meeting with Rand, interspersed with school and a host of volunteer jobs and causes, Nora would fly off to Los Angeles and later New York to join the intellectual elite surrounding the icon and embodiment of the developing philosophy of Objectivism.

Chapter 6

In 1954, the twin sisters Nora and Naomi were twenty-six years of age. It was the same year a young Marilyn Bell stepped into the cold waters of Lake Ontario and swam from Youngstown, New York, to Sunnyside Beach at the western end of Toronto. It was also a year when Canadian literature was having a marked influence within the country. A small coterie of writers, a few of whom were considered to be bordering, if not fully placed in middle age, were exploring a new genre. Through their efforts the Canadian reading public was becoming more aware of the increasing number of books and authors in the field of Canadian fiction.

Vaughn Lombard, then forty-three, was one of those fully placed in middle age and he was a writer of some minor stature. He was handsome, not unlike the French movie actor Jean-Pierre Aumont, who was also of the same age. He wore his hair in a style similar to Aumont, slightly long for the day, rationalizing its youthful length as an artistic prerogative.

In 1953 he had a book in the running for the Governor General’s award for literary merit. He lost the contest to Igor Gouzenko’s *Fall of a Titan*; though it was clear to Lombard and his supporters that the futuristic *Thirsty*, Lombard’s book, was a tome of greater importance to Canadians, and it was argued by some to be superbly written while Gouzenko’s effort at espionage was stilted, rigid and stoic, as one might expect of a Soviet double agent living covertly in Ottawa. Moreover, the man wasn’t *really* Canadian.

Vaughn was born and raised in Toronto and, like the woman he was about to meet, he was fortunate enough to not be concerned about full-time employment. Usually he was immersed in

writing another Canadian epic, but now and then, between his own desire to make Canadian writing an identifiable entity and the efforts of his friends to raise the stature of Canadian writing to one more recognizable on the home front, Lombard would occasionally volunteer at local literary events. The events were usually dismally attended but for Vaughn they were an opportunity to meet new acquaintances. Those that came to hear his little lectures were usually women – often young and attractive women.

On one special, and as it turned out, serendipitous occasion he found himself volunteering at an event north of Toronto at the Geneva Centre. The Centre was a landmark getaway picturesquely positioned across Lake Couchiching from the town of Orillia. The affair was sometimes billed as “a counter-literary event” because a number of the writers participating strongly felt that Canadian fiction was a larger and more important body than that of the Stephen Leacock Award for Humour, also awarded annually in the same cosy cottage community.

Vaughn Lombard volunteered to be a ticket-taker, registrar and one of fourteen presenters of literary skills for the single-day presentation. Unfortunately, very few people attended the counter-literary event; the local press shunned it, no doubt because it competed with the Leacock legend and popularity. But something else of more immediate interest, captured Vaughn’s attention.

Ottawa, that city harbouring the rigid and stoic Gouzenko and the largest gathering of bureaucrats in Canada, was not much on his mind as he stood before a mainly middle-aged group of women eager to hear him expound on the subject of plot development in modern Canadian fiction. At the end of his talk he greeted several of the women seeking further details on plot development. As it happened, one of them, not of middle age, approached him. For a short space of time Ottawa began to take on a character drastically different from its earlier evocation in Lombard’s mind – the vision of Gouzenko faded rather quickly. She was lovely and he felt immediately drawn to her. Nora said: “Thanks very much for your informative talk, Mr. Lombard. I truly enjoyed every moment of it. And, frankly, I wasn’t expecting anything even close to a literary event here in this gorgeous part of the province.

“You see, I just arrived last night at Twin Lakes Resort for a brief getaway from Ottawa and all of its boring fall weather. I moved there from my home in Victoria a couple of years ago, needing a change and a get-away. I sort of knew the area as I had gone to Queen’s in Kingston, but I knew it more as a place to get away to, as a student.

“Oh, just listen to me going on!” she exclaimed, and Lombard detected a slight blush cross her perfect face.

“Now it seems I just love to get away from it. I mean, from Victoria,” she continued, seeing that they were alone in the now vacant room. “I have a part-time job with the government in Ottawa. Anyway,” she said, flashing her eyes toward the window and sweeping her arm toward the door leading outside. “I just can’t believe how beautiful the trees are here – brilliant colours, breathing their last sad adieu to their roots, I suppose.” She wrinkled her brow slightly and cast her eyes down as if to ... *what, weep?* Lombard wondered. And how corny – “... *sad adieu to their roots.*” Nevertheless, Vaughn Lombard was smitten.

She was beautiful, about five foot six or seven, having to look up to his five eleven. She wore pink pedal-pushers and a lightweight, V-necked charcoal sweater showing a décolletage worthy of his efforts to quickly think how he could slip away this evening for a moonlit stroll with this exquisite woman. He sputtered his thanks and held out his hand, hoping she would tell him her name.

The woman in pink and charcoal wore an expression of minor embarrassment that seemed to Lombard to confer a slight sense of enigma rather than discomfort.

“Oh, I’m sorry; I ought to have introduced myself. My name is Nora, and as I said, I’m staying at Twin Lakes Resort, just down the road. Do you know it?”

He knew it well. They talked on, each disinclined to leave the presence of the other. Nora relaxed when he shook her hand, warmly, deliberately continuing their touch, each of them sensitive to a lingering moment of intimacy.

Lombard tried to look the part of a confident writer but his thoughts were a jumble of plans to continue the present perception of magnetism, and to prolong the conversation.

A brief silence allowed Lombard an opportunity to propose a rendezvous. Nora eagerly responded, not particularly looking forward to a rather boring night of reading in her little cabin.

“Well, yes, as we are both here and on our own, and I would love to see the sights along Orillia’s shoreline. Especially as I’m only going to be here until tomorrow; I want to get to Toronto and check out that marvellous new subway system they have there. I’ve heard that it can take you all the way downtown, practically from the suburbs.”

Chapter 7

Naomi had cautiously made her way to “Lombard’s Bench.” It had been another slow walk, her foot especially sore. She wondered if it would ever improve, or was she doomed to one day

lose the opportunity of using this conduit, this measured and meaningful experience that served as the past's recall to the present.

She shifted her weight on the bench. There was a sign of weather-change in the air. Naomi watched a strong easterly wind blow a long, low bank of clouds across the south shore of Bazan Bay. The clouds soon covered the distant trees in a mist and brought a cool temperature to the morning and the Lochside Trail. The mist closed over the trail and, peering through it, she perceived the vision of Nora and Lombard's fateful meeting. She felt a slight thrill at the detail that crowded her memory.

The excitement of their fateful event was so much more than a hormone-driven encounter. The meeting, the mating, was such an ultimately far-reaching and deep corollary to their expectations of the world about them.

Interesting, she thought, how the disappointment of a relationship can re-birth as radical infatuation in just another moment.

Naomi felt the coolness of the damp air and interrupted her recollections. She shook her head, not to rid herself of the wave of romantic memory but rather in consideration that it was time, in the present reality, to continue the daily sojourn, return home before the cloud coldly wrapped itself around her frail body, chilling her for the day. This was how the days passed: the walks, the thoughts, then the writing, and often the conversations during which Naomi informed Amanda of her life.

Arriving once more in the warmth of her home, Naomi would gather her writing material while Amanda prepared the tea. She would write of the meeting – the beginning of all that followed.

* * *

Nora had been thoroughly fed up with Ottawa in 1954. She joined Naomi in their jointly rented flat, which had two separate entrances – a necessity that Naomi had insisted on if they were to live together. Not only did Naomi want the assurance of peaceful evenings unbroken by her sister's late-night rendezvous, she wanted as well the quiet of rooms and space to meet the days and slip easily into the nights. It was the year that Nora met Lombard, and it had been a frantic few months for her – in and out of relationships, in and out of love with four men by the end of July. All but one of her lovers had been men she met through her part-time volunteer position at the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings. Two of them just clerks, young and attractive. The third a bureaucrat, a liaison between the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and the

communities of southern Ontario, and he was married. It was he who suggested the visit to Twin Lakes Resort, an escape, a rendezvous, a place where they need not fear discovery. The bureaucrat didn't make it though. A ministry shuffle kept him at his desk in Ottawa and his burning, reckless passion necessitated a dangerous local assignation. This tryst was too hastily arranged and was easily discovered by his suspicious wife.

"Stupid men," Nora cried, exasperated, describing the awkward confrontation with the bureaucrat's wife to her sister one Friday evening when she was at loose ends with nowhere to go. She knocked on Naomi's door, asked her for a cup of coffee and slouching in a chair at the dining table, she folded her arms, lay down her head and asked rhetorically:

"And just how does it happen that I'm the guilty party here? The fool was always coming up behind me and poking me.

"At first, he was at least cautious, when we were out of sight of the others, most often in his office. I thought that it was a juvenile sort of thing to do but not bad enough to scold him for it; then he started doing it as if it was a joke and I was his personal sex object. He was embarrassing me and making a proper fool of himself."

"You do get yourself into some bizarre circumstances, Nora." Naomi could only shake her head and think, again: *how different we are, here I am quite content with friendships and in no hurry to be seduced while Nora seems to seek out a hedonist's existence and a lecher's attentions.*

"But I'm curious, Nora, who is the fourth man you're supposed to have taken up with last month?"

Nora raised her head. A smile replaced the scowl of ridicule. Naomi recognized the coy, coquettish smile from her childhood: "Ah, that man is Pascal. Interestingly, Naomi, I met him as a result of a rendezvous with that bureaucrat, the one who thought of me as his personal concubine. Very recently, "Pokey-Man" and I went off to Montreal for the official Groundbreaking Ceremony of the St. Lawrence Seaway. My bureaucrat was to be present as part of the official entourage and I was there to attend as après-ceremony amusement. He expected me to stay in the guesthouse getaway but I insisted on attending the ceremony, though agreeing to act as his guide so that no one would be suspicious. Well, right after the ceremony we were leaving to return to our little *lust-nest* when he saw an old acquaintance who happened to be among the guests at the event. It was Pascal, and it was a very awkward situation for the man I was with. Pascal did most of the talking, and directing a lot of very charming smiles toward me. He suggested we go to a little restaurant nearby and continue our conversation. It was clear that

my bureaucrat was getting quite impatient with Pascal's talking. Most of the talking was directed at me. He has a wonderfully cultured accent that seemed more Paris than Quebec. Well, "Pokey-Man" decided that it was time to return to the *pension*. Naturally, he felt that I would snap to attention just like a good little girl and accompany him. But I declined. I told him that I was enjoying the conversation. There was nothing he could do but accept my decision.

"The next morning he was quite upset at me when I stopped in to the *pension* to get my things. I told him that Pascal was going to drive me to Ottawa. He asked me where I had spent the night; the man was livid. Where did he think I spent the night?" She laughed in the delicious way that even her sister found inexplicably enticing.

"Driving back, I told Pascal which office I was then volunteering for in Ottawa. I gave him the phone number. He knew where we lived because he dropped me off and I gave him my home number. I wasn't very surprised when he called me two days later. I have to admit, Naomi. I was kind of thrilled. He's very lovely, teaches economics and political science at Laval University, charming and good-looking. He has a small, barely noticeable limp but it doesn't detract at all from his overall appeal. In fact, it seems to make him even more interesting, I think."

Naomi asked, "He quite impressed you. Do you see him any more?"

"No," she said, somewhat wistfully.

"We did go out for dinner after. It was another time when I went off to Montreal by myself and decided to give him a call. He seemed surprised by the call, but didn't hesitate in inviting me out to dinner. Then he invited me back to his apartment."

Nora paused; her eyes had narrowed for a moment, recalling the heat of the night, and the passion that had started gently. Pascal had offered her a brandy. She looked through his books and picked one from a shelf.

"You read poetry?"

"Occasionally, when I need to escape reality. I especially enjoy Pablo Neruda. He writes about real women, lusty and sexual."

"So the night began, Naomi. I won't go into the lurid details. Suffice it to say I was exhausted but I felt that I could fly, I felt as if anything was possible. Then, it all went to hell. We got into a very heated discussion that turned into a terrible argument. It was about our different political points of view. I still don't understand how we both got so emotional about it, but we did.

"It was as if we really hated each other, both of us very angry. Animosity just burst out of nowhere with a fury I've never felt before. I think now that was a different sort of anger, more

like a rage,. I didn't want to keep going but I couldn't stop. I said some awful things to him, even insulted him for being a libertarian without direction, a French-Canadian libertarian at that.

“Anyway, a lot of damage was done with that quarrel; and yet, when I think of him I am of two minds. Pascal Pascal could have broken my heart, or maybe he would have been good for me.”

* * *

Nora had all of her life been given to mercurial moods, highs and lows, the extremes – and Naomi knew those moods well. Yet it was through Nora's present state of feeling doubt that Naomi sensed that she was coming to understand Nora at a deeper level. Still, she knew also that when it came to an issue that her sister felt confident about, like politics, then Nora was a force to be reckoned with. Feeling conciliatory toward her frustrated sister. Naomi made the suggestion that proved to be a catalyst for the future that would have a profound effect on both of their lives.

“Nora, the arrangements you made for that resort with that Pokey-Man fellow, why not just go by yourself? Take a few days; after all, the place where you were going to stay has a vacancy now – take advantage of it. Just get away, Nor.” And so it began.

Chapter 8

Lombard borrowed a friend's car and expanded the walking invitation with Nora to include dinner at a Chinese restaurant on the main street of Orillia.

They picked cautiously and selectively at the won ton and fried rice. She too afraid of spillage from the chopsticks and too vain to use a fork; Lombard, too absorbed with Nora's delicious beauty to eat his share of the food. Leaving their dinners largely unfinished they left the restaurant in the warm and humid early evening. Looking down the main street, they saw the invitingly cool vision of the lake.

As they walked alongside the water their conversation was mostly about Lombard's novel and his disappointment at not winning the Governor General's award. Nora was in awe of his achievement regardless of the award and Lombard found that he thoroughly enjoyed being bathed head to foot in her admiration. He slung his coat over his right shoulder, keeping Nora on his left, hoping their hands might brush together.

“I’ve always wanted to write,” she said, sounding regretful. “But my life’s not very interesting – what could I say?”

“Well, for starters, Nora, you don’t have to write about your own life. Although many authors do, or they describe imaginary lives in their own voices, in fact the late, local celebrity bard, Stephen Leacock, wrote all kinds of stories where he expressed himself in the first person. He used to live near here, you know.

“We could drive over to Brewery Bay – that’s the place where his summer home still stands. You never know, Nora, perhaps you’ll be inspired.”

“Won’t it be closed or too dark to see anything?”

“Yes, it’ll be dark, and it is closed, but there’s a moon tonight, and I know my way around that place like the back of my hand. It’s also a good night for a walk; I can hardly believe it is October, it’s so warm. We’ve had this great weather for quite a few days – unseasonably warm, as they say.” Vaughn’s conversation was growing desultory, he was distracted, excited. By the time they reached the car he had a firm grip on her hand. In the car he was reluctant to release her warm hand and quickly grabbed it again after each shift of gears. They drove for ten minutes, finally pulling the borrowed car into a broad gravel driveway, its lights reflecting off the water of the bay and outlining a finger of land stretching into the lake. It was almost ten o’clock. Vaughn led the way from Leacock’s darkened house to a narrow trail alongside the water. About halfway along the footpath he guided Nora onto a dock where a small rowboat was tied. The night was very still and the temperature continued to rise in the darkness. They stood motionless in the quiet of the moment, absorbing the water sounds, letting their eyes adjust to the darkness.

Lombard looked at Nora and said, “I live in Toronto but I have a cottage not far from where you’re staying. It’s closed at the moment for repairs to the roof which bore the brunt of a falling tree. In fact, it’s just across the bay from the Geneva Centre where we met. When it’s in good repair I visit the cottage often, and I frequently come over to this place at night, for a little inspiration. It’s always quiet, the lake smooth and still except for windy nights when the waves beat up on the shore. You might think that it would be a great spot for kids to come and park, smoke cigarettes, have a beer or two, and do some serious necking; but it doesn’t seem to have that appeal for kids, I guess, so it is a great escape for me.

“On a hot and humid summer night I’d come out here and strip down, dive off of this dock, swim around to cool off and then climb back onto the dock, lie down, and look up at the stars. Looking up at that starlit galaxy I’d wonder if Leacock ever swam at night; I doubt it, but I’ll bet he got a lot of his ideas from looking up at those same stars.

“Let’s try looking up at the stars, Nora. See if we can get some ideas. We’ll leave the swim for another time,” he joked. His arm was around her waist, his hand resting on her hip. She turned very slightly toward him; he read it as consent, completing the turn so that they were face to face, both his arms around her – she, pressing closely, he, excited and beginning to tremble.

“You’re shaking, Vaughn; are you chilly?” Nora’s voice soft, comforting as she rubbed his back.

“No, I’m just ... I’m not sure, I ... think I’m just ...” His voice trailed off as Nora pulled his head down to her mouth, the kiss hungry, blood-hot, their hands searching eagerly.

“Let’s sit down.” His voice was quavering, barely a whisper. He spread his sports jacket for her to sit on and as she did, her skirt, which she had changed into before dinner, rose up on her legs. Lombard thought of her as a goddess in the moonlight.

He waved a mosquito away from his face as he kissed her, again. He moved his hand from her face to her breast and was about to unbutton the blouse when another mosquito bit his cheek. Nora brushed one away from her face. The unseasonably warm weather had brought the mosquito population to life in the small water ponds around the property and especially on the small finger of land where the dock was situated, where they were now lying.

Lombard, sensing no rejection of his groping hands, quickly slipped his trousers down to his knees, the dock boards chafing his legs and the mosquitoes gathering in force. Nora tried to help him unbutton her blouse but was kept busy brushing off the buzzing attackers.

“Wait, wait,” she said to him, and stilled the hand trying desperately to pull her panties aside. They were both trembling and breathless, groping for each other and fending off the horde of mosquitoes that seemed to have grown exponentially.

“Let’s go to the car, or back to the cottage at the resort.”

“Yea,” he muttered and slapped another as it lanced his buttock.

They ran to the car, Nora’s right arm covering her breasts and waving off the blanket of thirsty insects. Lombard pulled the door open for her and let go of his pants to whack again at another biter. His trousers followed gravity’s route and gathered round his ankles, causing him to trip and sprawl across Nora and the front seat; the gear shift buried itself in his shoulder. He stifled a scream of pain and instead groaned in agony. *Christ*, he thought, *I feel like such an asshole*. He gathered his clothing, tried to ignore the pain of his shoulder and quickly short-stepped his way round the car, tumbling into the driver’s seat and slamming the door against the invasion. Finally, he breathed easier and though his pants were still undone he was moderately composed and busy planning his attack on the buzzing horde inside the car.

They set to serious slapping and hitting in the direction of every buzz. In due course the buzzing ceased and they hastily straightened out their clothing. When they were well enough composed again, Vaughn reached under the driver's seat and pulled out a mickey of lemon gin.

"I was saving this until later but I think we could use a couple of shots right now."

They drank and sat quietly, staring out of the windshield at the reflecting lake, its peaceful visage in stark contrast to the awkwardness of their half-dressed and stumbling escape to safety. The buzzing had stopped and the itching was tolerable. Another buzz was filling Nora's head; the liquor was a welcome diversion, spinning in her brain and tasting like pure sin.

"Oh, I like this stuff," she said, her voice a sexy purr.

"Yea, it kind of relaxes the busy body." He laughed at their busyness of the last hour – extremes of frantic movements focused on a goal, then frantic movements focused on another goal, more pressing and demanding.

Nora laughed too, the scenes running through her mind, the slapping and brushing away, mixed with deep-throated kisses that created hormonal whirlwinds.

Pulling away from the lakeside laneway the headlights again shone on the water's surface; large raindrops had started to pelt down. The rain caught up with the car and splashed hard against the windshield. A few minutes later they pulled into the small resort's parking lot where the rain had become a torrent, pounding and pooling in hollows and low areas around the small cottages.

Lombard and Nora ran the gauntlet of torrential downpour to the cottage; they slammed the door against the force of the wind and fell breathlessly into a narrow bed. The panting from the run and pushing at the door shifted quickly to their physical desires.

Passion became more deliberate, pleasures more considered. They indulged their combined fantasies, and their mutual consummation was heightened and brought to a peak with the accompaniment of driving wind and pounding rain on the cottage roof and windows. The heat of the night had finally broken into a full-fledged storm that rattled the walls of the small cabin.

"God, that made me feel like I was truly at one with nature," Nora said of their passion. The wind still howled and continued to wail away while the beating rain streamed river-like on every surface.

"Yes," Vaughn said, a small smile upon his face, "*at one with nature*, ah yes, ah yes."

In a state of mellow exhaustion they lay side by side listening to the storm crash and blow about all that was not secured. They were unaware of being on the edge of a real hurricane. Hurricane Hazel had torn into Toronto, to the south. Huge waves had breached the shores of

Lake Ontario; the Don and Humber rivers overflowed with a record 210 millimetres of rain; an entire street was washed into the swollen Humber along with 35 sleeping residents. The wind they heard and felt rocking the small cottage had hit the city to the south with a rock-hard speed of more than 90 miles per hour. Neither did they know that on that night they conceived a child.

Chapter 9

When the twins' parents died in the boating accident, it was Nora who identified their mangled and almost unrecognizable bodies. She had been at the cottage at Shawnigan Lake for the day, taking a break before returning to university in Ontario. She hadn't told her parents that she would visit the cottage, not wanting a lecture on water safety or some other parental direction as if to a child.

Nora had wanted to spend a few hours at the close of her summer holiday visit to get away from all of the family predictability, get away from everyone, even her friends, to savour the quiet of the boathouse at the lake's edge. She was about to leave when her parents unexpectedly opened the cottage door. Father looked at Nora, surprised, and then he asked angrily: "Why didn't you tell us you were going to be here? We thought you were still in Victoria visiting your friends." He said "friends" as if it were a disgusting word.

"I saw the smoke coming from the chimney and thought it might be that damned burglar who's been around the area breaking into cottages and stealing things and using the cabins for shelter." Even though she was twenty years old, Nora thought, *he still has to rag at me. He'll never change.* She didn't try to explain her presence.

Mother, who had been the least vocal about Nora's behaviours, pleaded with her to stay while they had dinner. She didn't want to, she knew that her mother's conciliatory attitude covered a poorly disguised dislike of the second-born twin; still she gave in when they said they were taking the boat over to Robinson's, the little grocery store on the other shore. They'd pick up some things for dinner so that Nora wouldn't be hungry when she arrived home in Victoria. *The bitch is so artificially polite,* she thought, *at least the old man is honest with his hatred.*

She stayed, poured herself another drink of rye and ginger when they left for the boat and the store errand. She waited, and as darkness began to close in the telephone rang. It was a neighbour telling Nora that he had passed her parents as he returned from a fishing trip with his son; he said they waved and a few minutes later he heard a terrible crash, then an explosion. Their boat had

driven head on into Indian Head Rock, the huge piece of granite that rose steeply a dozen feet out of the water and was fifteen feet in length. It stood as if it were a tombstone marker in the middle of the small lake.

Later, listening to the police officer she heard, “Either your Dad wasn’t looking where he was goin’ or the steering gear wasn’t working. We’re never goin’ to know which.

That boat was a classic wooden boat; it just blew up and burned. Not enough salvage to examine for mechanical problems, ma’am.”

Nora had not cried at their parents’ deaths or at the funeral, but it was a very difficult ordeal for Naomi. She had, after all, been the favourite twin, the one who was considerate of their comfort and their feelings and they of hers. Not that Naomi would side with the parents if Nora’s behaviour became a troublesome issue; in fact, Naomi would make great efforts to remove herself from ever being considered as critical of Nora’s actions or of colluding with her parents against Nora.

But on one point Naomi felt a mixed sense of relief. Their parents would not know of Nora’s pregnancy. The relief was mixed because although she missed her mother and father she was also glad that they would not be hurt by Nora’s final insult to them – they would, of course, have been devastated by Nora’s pregnancy. Naomi knew that regardless of Nora’s decision to give birth or not, the elderly parents would have been merciless, directing their hatred toward such a despicable act and deliberately remiss in assisting her in any way with the birth or abortion of the infant. Nora would have been, in the first place, evil for having conceived a child out of wedlock. As for Nora’s final act regarding the infant they would have said that it was to be expected from one so obviously selfish and inconsiderate of all others.

Chapter 10

The diminutive woman, who once was five foot six inches and now was five foot three and just barely over one hundred pounds, continued to write of her walking thoughts, day after day, remembering. In those early times of journal writing she did not think of who might read it; it was rather an attempt to see the events of their lives through a lens that would help her to understand the twisted thoughts and a lifetime’s journey.

Amanda, as she read through the entries, saw that on some days they were brief, almost a notation or reminder; other times she found herself so engrossed in the depth of words, phrases

and paragraphs that she barely noticed afternoon darken to evening. Scenarios became real, yet detached, as if she was actually watching Nora's world and experiencing from a place off stage the beautiful woman's journey through life.

Amanda could well see that the connection to Vaughn Lombard had been a turning point in Nora's life. His presence, both immediate and lingering in the closing years of the 1950s, no doubt contributed to Nora's destiny. Amanda was beginning to wonder if Nora in her own way was not as insensitive to others as Naomi implied when, after one of the terse entries, she would almost slam the memoir shut and utter a disparaging comment on her own role in the account of the twins. The recollections and readings at times suggested to Amanda that Naomi was unable to see the far side of the moon.

* * *

Nora didn't visit Toronto the day after Hurricane Hazel struck. Instead, she left late in the day for Ottawa. The parting with Lombard was very emotional; both felt as if they had been in the eye of two hurricanes, a place that was relatively calm but potentially dangerous.

In the morning they had driven to Orillia where they had breakfast and Nora made her decision to return to Ottawa. She checked the schedule and realized that she could take a late afternoon train; consequently they had several hours to further explore each other's interests and preferences. The stories they shared were invitations to pursue further the depths of feeling that each wished to experience with the other. Through these narratives were woven sentiments of possible trust, moments of intellectual depth and the still over-arching sexual sensuality that made them both wish Nora had not committed to return to Ottawa. It was as if they had been together for an undetermined number of days, perhaps weeks; they had talked and touched intimately and learned much of each other. Their last embrace felt as if one or the other were leaving for a far-off destination, like separation by war – the future uncertain. Neither felt relieved or happy, and misery had stepped into both of their lives to briefly replace the physical separation of their new-found love.

Two weeks had passed since their parting and Nora decided to relieve the mutual wretchedness and arranged to visit Vaughn, stay with him for a while, cement the relationship and slake their lust. At that moment in time there was nothing else that was even close to the importance of the passion they felt and expressed. Their feelings in absence of each other were fuelled by passion that had mounted daily by way of telephone calls and letters both erotic and explicit. They could not resist.

* * *

Leaving the rented flat she shared in Ottawa, Nora informed Naomi that she would be gone for a few weeks. Visiting a newly acquired friend in Toronto.

“And, Naomi – you are responsible! You were the one who shook me from my lethargy by suggesting that I continue with the mislaid travel plan of ‘Pokey-Man’ and take advantage of that sweet little cabin in the heart of cottage country.”

Naomi had hushed her attempts to relate details of where she would be staying and with whom. She tried to make it seem as if she was doing Nora a favour, sparing her any attempts to rationalize her exploits. Yet, secretly Naomi did not want to be party to more of her sister’s flagrant behaviour. Behaviour that in the decade of the fifties managed more than a little to offend the still-held relics of a prim and proper code for single women that bordered on Victorian mores. Not that there weren’t transitions in that decade. In music the soft, popular, soapy hits of the day were challenged by the more base levels of rhythm and blues, like Elvis Presley’s cover of “Lawdy Miss Clawdy,” originally made popular by black star Lloyd Price, and the Diamonds’ hit “Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots,” originally by a black group known as The Cheers. This beginning, with Presley leading the way, morphed further into rock and roll and it seemed that the world of music was changing the culture of the time. Canadian moral values, shocked but generally accepting of the “King’s” gyrating hips and metaphorically suggestive lyrics, were not to be as liberally acknowledged among the general population as they were accepted by rock and roll’s youth. While closer to the definition of an upper-middle-class representative, Naomi nevertheless worried over her sister’s blatant presentation to the world at large of her sexuality, especially as it was later manifested in what seemed to Naomi as the obvious advertising of her promiscuity – the pregnancy. As Nora’s identical twin, Naomi acutely felt the sting of what she perceived were not well-hidden whispers by those who knew them both. A deep sense of shame battled against sibling loyalty within the heart and mind of the less adventurous Naomi. If Victorian mores still existed then she would have been a standard-bearer for them.

* * *

Amanda had become an eager reader of Nora’s life. Through Naomi’s journals Nora seemed to pull her inextricably into a web of excitement that introduced a time and place unlike anything she had ever experienced. Something enticed Amanda to continue, something bordering on innocence unable to resist the temptation of peeking at a life that she could not know. She understood that Nora had to go to Vaughn Lombard, even as she understood the danger of the web.

* * *

Lombard's apartment on Hayden Street had a pattern impressed into the original tin ceiling; it was largely composed of evenly spaced circular bumps in rows of ten in each direction and the whole circumscribed by a Grecian Key design. The ceiling was painted an electric blue colour; in fact, much of the apartment was painted electric blue, a colour that closed the rooms in, making them seem smaller than they truly were. The intense blue also emphasized and highlighted the bookshelves of Burmese teak scattered about every room. The Clairtone Hi Fi was also teak and it too stood grainily, boldly apart from the electric blue that had been the previous tenant's chosen decoration. The teak shelving units, Hi Fi and other Danish Modern furniture belonged to Lombard. All except the artist palette shaped coffee table. That belonged to Nora. It was her contribution to the décor of the apartment that she shared for the past two months with Vaughn, who lay on his bed staring at the ceiling and thinking that it was exactly three months from the time of their Leacock rendezvous and Hurricane Hazel.

The shared passion on the eve of the hurricane had generated a flurry of ardent telephone calls between Ottawa and Toronto, the couple burbling countless commitments to their mutual love and devotion until it became necessarily reasonable for Nora to visit him, and he to welcome her. Her visit moved quickly to a more permanent shift to Toronto, sharing Lombard's electric-blue apartment.

The sexual passion of the beginning was settling between them as something less than the initial overwhelming desire to move to a bed or place of privacy in which they could satisfy their desires. Living together within the confines of the small apartment necessitated more conversations. The subjects of their exchanges ranged from simple ideas to complex ideologies. The time spans then became the spaces filled with declarations of where each one stood on universal values, politics, greed, nationalism, privilege and poverty. It was a time when Nora found that she was testing Vaughn's place in her life. It was a time when Lombard found he was wondering how much he would have to adjust his comfort level to accommodate the extremes of Nora's philosophic perspective and her provocative behaviour.

As their days together passed each felt the space between them widen. Each still had a certain rationality that informed them of value in the presence of the person they still called lover, but another factor was growing. The first hours of feeling a basis for trust evolved within their shared apartment to an opposite feeling of distrust. Vaughn became uncomfortable with Nora's constant flirtatious behaviour in the company of his friends and acquaintances. A pall of jealousy

would at times settle on him when they were among others. It was uncomfortable for him – unnerving and unwelcome.

Nora perceived his discomfort and that uneasiness, which in her opinion was born of mistrust, lessened the strength and confidence she believed she could expect of Lombard. Of course she would flirt, a man had to expect that of Nora, and she would love him for welcoming that expectation. He was also indifferent to Nora's growing involvement in the Randian movement of Objectivism. He had tried to bridge the gap and understand her interest, but all of his efforts seemed to crash in exasperation and he would finally add insult to injury by labelling her concentration and involvement as no less than the fervour of a member of a religious cult. Nora began to compartmentalize Lombard's personality, loving or caring for just enough of what was left of his allure while despising his intolerance of her beliefs and sojourns to the edge of reason. But there was one aspect of Vaughn Lombard's life she captured with the energy of an avid collector of rare and exotic creatures: Nora prowled the territory of Lombard's society. Her flirtations among his coterie of intellectuals and old-school alumni allowed her to access the decade's denizens who were influential in Toronto's present and future. In her mind she scaled the heights with ease, neither encumbered by protest nor met with the Sisyphean paradox of ascendancy. She felt it all to be her entitlement.

* * *

Amanda, having only briefly visited Toronto on her arrival from Manila, felt herself pause and often re-read the memoirs of Nora's establishment within that society. She wondered if it just happened, a result of several fortunate occurrences. Amanda could not bring herself to believe that Nora would have contrived a plan of such epic proportions and intentions. And yet, all that Naomi wrote of her sister was in the sense of reportage, almost journalistic, and not at all deemed to be with apochryphal purpose.

But even level-headed Amanda was caught up in what seemed to be romance, or at the very least, romantic adventure. Where Naomi's words recounted facts about her sister's life, Amanda was seeing what she perceived was Nora's real goal – to live her life and beliefs among people who could and would connect with the truth of her sincerity. Amanda could not imagine such a disingenuous sister of the demure and understated twin, Naomi. And yet ...?

* * *

"I guess it's a touch of the flu," Nora said, entering the room where Vaughn was staring at the ceiling. She threw her kimono on the chair in the corner, explaining her upset stomach, her need to expel her nausea yet again.

“Anyway, I’ve brushed my teeth and I’m sparkling clean, ready to dress to the nines. Where is it you’re taking me tonight, Daddy-O?” she asked, towelling her short blond hair.

“We’re going to a place called the House of Hamburg; it’s a cellar club where they have a jazz combo. And, Nora, I would really appreciate it if you would call me something other than ‘Daddy-O.’ It’s not that I’m old-fashioned, though having seventeen years on you might at times seem like I’m from another century, but ‘Daddy-O’ doesn’t feel right in my skin. Perhaps you could use something like *darling* or *lover*,” he suggested, dryly.

Still studying the ceiling, Vaughn knew that Nora didn’t have a touch of the flu. The regularity of the morning sickness, and lately afternoon as well, strongly suggested the pregnancy she chose to cover up in a blasé manner.

“Can we get a drink at this place? Or should I sneak a mickey of lemon gin in my handbag?”

“No drinks served there, *sweet* Nora; this is Toronto the Good, remember. Not like Ottawa where you can just slip across the river to Hull and drink à la Québécois tradition. So pack your lemon gin along. The place is just a couple blocks from here, between Cumberland and Yorkville, east of Avenue Road. Take the mickey in your purse and dress warm, the temperature is about to drop and become bitterly cold. The walking will be tough, but if you’re up to it I’ll take you to the Embassy Club after we catch the first set at Clem’s.”

“At Clem’s? Sounds like a farm.”

“Clem Hamburg is the owner and one of the city’s biggest jazz fans, not to mention supporter of the music and a fine pianist in his own right.”

“The House of Hamburg was probably Canada’s first cellar jazz venue,” wrote Nora in one of her irregular letters which updated Naomi about the events of her early life in Toronto.

“We’ve gone there several times now. It’s a great place for atmosphere. Vaughn knows the owner well; apparently their friendship goes back several years. Jazz is what brought them together. The basement is really large with just the natural red-brick walls and a cement floor. It’s heated pretty well and there are a lot of tables scattered around, every one a different shape or style, from desktops to dining rooms, and the chairs are just as mismatched; but it does add to the atmosphere, kind of romantic, almost in a dangerous, risky way, especially when the music starts. It’s a big room with a low basement kind of ceiling, pipes and wires everywhere; and when the music starts it’s kind of like being up there on the slightly raised stage with the musicians. One really gets the feeling of being part of the whole scene, très Bohème.

“What they lack in food service – oh, there’s a small kitchen in what used to be the old coal bin, and you can get sandwiches and sometimes a hot soup. But anyway, even though there isn’t

a lot to choose from on the menu, the music is like a delicious pastry wrapping around me – everything is so immediate, or, as Vaughn says, it’s existential!”

* * *

Amanda read the next entry. How different life was for Nora, and yet Naomi rattled on about Nora’s continuing sense of wanting to experience everything in life. So unlike Naomi, who was content with the day-to-day living of her own time which was divided between volunteer work and literary interests: predictable days and nights pursuing interests that were gentle and passive. So different from Nora’s need to experience the riskiest parts of what life presented. Nora – wanting to be singularly in the present, wanting only the existential, to feel certain that her perception of the moment was the only reality – but even if it wasn’t, it was the only one worthy of pursuit – and if that failed, then there was the life of her mind’s eye, the introspective and private foray into to the *other* world.

It wasn’t as if Naomi thought that her sister was the only young woman driven by fulfilment of the moment and the excessive excitement of risk, but as her identical twin she felt the difference to be disconcertingly blatant in its manifestation. A skewed symbiosis bringing not reward but a form of punishment shaped like responsibility for the fault of a genetic phenomenon. “Did Nora ever feel guilt?” Naomi wondered aloud one morning before her walk, before her memoir. Were these memoirs a way of reaching into her psyche to discover more of Nora, or less of Naomi?

Amanda found between the pages of Naomi’s journal a letter. It was clear who the author was:

“I’m pretty sure that I’m pregnant. And, guess what, Naomi? I’ve decided I’ll have the child, but I’m not going to keep it, I’ll adopt it out, immediately. I don’t even want to know the adoptive parents. I just want to have a baby, to feel what it’s like, experience that part of motherhood. I want no more. I know I’m something of a selfish person; I have a hard time thinking of anyone else besides me. I even get that way with Vaughn. The excitement of beginnings changes quickly for me, what follows becomes too predictable and that’s too awful to have that sort of feeling about people I’m supposed to care about. I can’t even stand to see beginnings grow to that thing called love. Does love really just become a word for comfortable routine or warm and dependable friendships? I’m not even sure I know what love is – I know the infatuation part, the rush – that’s what I like, maybe what I live for. As you well know, Naomi, life for me is about having fun, about feeling excited by the little mysteries around unknown corners, about my feelings. So, I’m sure you understand why I couldn’t think to keep a child, care for the little

thing; Christ, I'm just barely able to care for myself, sometimes; and if it weren't for our inheritance from Mother and Father I don't know how I'd cope with a monotonous job, especially the job of a mother.

"Oh, Naomi, imagine what Father and Mother would have thought of me having a child, but at least they can rest in their graves with the thought that their prodigal daughter did not succumb to an abortion but remained that much a Catholic to their memory."

At the time, the concern that Naomi felt wasn't so much the fact that Nora was pregnant, it was in Nora's own writing and therefore, her thoughts of herself, the superficial woman she had become. Nora, like many others, would indeed have difficulty raising a child, but others did so and both child and mother survived and thrived for the most part. The interesting thing was Nora's recognition of herself as a user of things and people. Everything was a convenience or an inconvenience for her. The world was spinning for Nora's interest alone. *What was it that Freud said – egocentric?* Yes, that was Nora

Chapter 11

Vaughn Lombard stood at the window of his apartment looking down toward the busy intersection at Yonge and Hayden streets. It was noon on a cool mid-January day in Toronto. It could snow, he thought. Everyone down there was rushing, walking in double time, nobody window shopping; everyone, it seemed, moving with the cold and a purpose.

"Do I have a purpose?" he wondered aloud as he walked to the desk and sat in the teakwood chair in front of his typewriter that was on the teakwood cabinet that was part of the teakwood wall unit – *part of my teakwood life. Perhaps I'm just a teakwood man, a modern expression of Eliot's "Hollow Men."* No, that was to death, and death is not what I feel, more like his *"Ash Wednesday"* for my dilemma – *"Where shall the word be found, where will the word resound? Not here, there is not enough silence."* That was a fit for his attempts to pick up the thread of importance that ran through his latest half-finished novel. The attempt was not working. He couldn't stop thinking about Nora's pregnancy, about the fear it instilled in him when she had confirmed his suspicion. Lombard had already thought of contacting one of his more shady acquaintances, someone he met at a bar one night. A guy who was clearly connected to people who worked the dark side of the street. That guy would know someone who could fix a problem

like this, he thought, and was about to suggest it to Nora when she announced her plan for the next several months.

“I’ll stay here in Toronto, Vaughn. I’ll get an apartment of my own. In fact, that friend of yours, Alan Ableman, told me that one of his duplex apartments will be vacant soon. The current tenant is moving out. Anyway, Alan’s place is in the Beaches, a lower duplex in an older house. I just love that area.

“Then, I’m going to have the baby and have it adopted immediately.” She spoke with a fervent enthusiasm as if going off on a trip to the Amazon, a great adventure. “I’ve already talked to a woman with the Children’s Aid Society who put me in touch with an agency.

“That way you won’t have to be explaining what you did with the bastard child that everyone will correctly assume is yours.

“I won’t move into the new place until March. I’ll pay for the apartment for the month of February though, so that we can get some furnishings together for the new place. We’ll do the moving out gradually in February, Vaughn. That way we can explain to people that it was time for us both to get on with our careers, and with any luck I won’t be showing much by then, but even if I am, I won’t be seeing a lot of the old gang for a while. Though there are a number of people whom I’ll keep in touch with, probably by little notes through the post.”

It was all done so matter-of-factly that Lombard couldn’t decide whether he was okay with the whole thing or not. He was relieved, on the one hand, that he didn’t have to risk doing something illegal and Nora would not be at risk for one of those *god-awful* botched abortions. He had even thought of suggesting that they marry, though that idea was quickly put to rest by just a moment’s reflection on the reality of their lives. Nora, he felt, could never settle down to the life of a married woman with child; more still – could he? *NO!* His brain was churning and spitting out that notion before even a vestige of it was articulated.

But an unease at Nora’s aloof attitude of just moving out and getting on with her life, her excitement about it all, left him feeling disconnected, unsettled. At one alcohol-infused moment he had even imagined assuming responsibility for the infant yet to be born. Could he father, by himself – a child? Work at writing and raise a kid? It sounded vaguely romantic, but the alcohol eventually wore off and he happily rid himself of that delusion. Still, he remained discombobulated and a little off-balance about the moving plans. It felt to him, as it was, a plan made by one only and not the two of them. It left him with a sense of belittlement, an uncomfortable feeling of insignificance. A strange feeling for a man of some self-confidence. Stranger still when his thoughts finally arrived at the unsettling sense that he was also being

denied his paternity. *Did he, as the father, not have a responsibility in the decisions surrounding his child's future, quite aside from living in parental matrimony or as bachelor father?*

The ambivalence and uncertainty, combined with his own feeling of being left out, competed and won the battle over attention to his writing. He had been blocked for days, typing and tearing up the drivel that fell from his mind. The preoccupation stood in the way of every creative notion. And a distance had, of course, developed between them. How could it not, they lived so close to one another. But the distance broke down the close affection that had been a constant between them; that was the first familiarity to go. Sex then became a stranger to him except when Nora would stimulate him and his body would respond to the physical and leave shaking, emotional wreckage after the act. Their distance was manifest.

* * *

Sitting at his desk he stared blankly at another empty page. Nora was on the sofa; she had just finished writing a letter to her sister in Ottawa. Licking the envelope and the stamp, she bounced up and placed the large coffee table book that she used as her letter support carefully and precisely again on the artist palette-shaped teak table.

“Well, Vaughn, I’ve told her!” she declared of the letter addressed to her sister. “That’s one more little thing out of the way.” She was smiling, as if in triumph at slaying yet another dragon – and proud of it.

“Oh,” he said, musing, “was another of those little things finally telling *me*, Nora; letting me know that you were to have a baby, fathered by me?” He didn’t try to disguise his deliberate matching of her expression of detachment, but his utterance was injected with a toxic intent. She ignored his comment.

A few seconds passed. Nora’s eyes narrowed a little, her head tilted at an angle as though she were curious and a slight smile formed and filled the void of her silence. Approaching him, she raised her eyebrows as if in expectation. The slight smile still on her beautiful face, she gestured, as if to stroke his cheek in the familiar way, then stopped, shrugged into her coat, and left the apartment.

Chapter 12

Amanda found that she would often wander about the home she had inherited; at times just looking at the various possessions she had come to own; at other times reading from the journal,

stopping here or there in the rooms, often unable to grasp the reality that Naomi was gone. Though they described incidents, conversations and observations through the journey of years, the writings were very present in feeling. Amanda would often fondly recall the simple act of opening the door for the elderly woman as she returned from her walk. The daily routine that had varied only with the limitations on Naomi's health and occasional days of inclement weather.

Naomi would set off between eight and nine o'clock each morning and return home two and a half hours after she had left. She would ride the small elevator to the second-storey condominium and Amanda would ceremoniously and with a broad smile open the door and welcome her home.

"How was the walk this morning, Naomi?" she would inquire. From their very first meeting Naomi had insisted that the young Amanda refer to her on a first-name basis.

"One can only stand so much formality at my age; it just makes me nutty," she had declared. And so Amanda, the young Malaysian woman Naomi had hired for all of the tasks she herself was no longer able to do and for the quiet companionship, addressed her by her first name.

"The walk was lovely, though I could see a cloud laden with trouble gathering above the sea at the end of the trail."

And so the exchange of pleasantries and chatting would proceed as Naomi prepared to sit at her desk and open the notebook in which she chronicled the events of the lives that she and Nora had lived, and of the lives of those who had touched and influenced theirs, in both good and bad times. The "journals," she called them, though on occasion she would refer to them as "memoirs, of a sort."

Amanda read the journals as they had been written, an entry at a time. She was coming to know the characters described by Naomi, though feeling she knew less of Naomi herself. Or was it simply that she knew her as a living person and the perspective of the entries was surprising. Little does one know of the lives around one and most especially those whom society begins not to see as they age. *The stories of this little woman – her twin sister, the men in her life – who would have guessed?*

* * *

Vaughn Lombard, Naomi wrote, did not seem to be a man who would long condone Nora's proclivity to jump from the declared intensity of their relationship to the remoteness that bordered on an intensity of another sort, that of her admitted and well-practised ego-centricity. Nora's behaviour would have been a trial for any man, though it seemed that there was one who was able to stand aside, observing, perhaps at times sardonically. Pascal Pascal may well have been Nora's match for detachment, or more likely the possessor of control that rarely lessened,

yet he was ever watchful of her forays into darkness. Noting her risks, at times participating albeit without the commitment of emotion, however short-lived. But Vaughn Lombard – he was a man of parts, open to the scrutiny of the world and vulnerable to the hazards of love.

Chapter 13

Though Lombard was unsettled by Nora's attitude, he decided that it was time to resume his life, to embrace again the larger world about him. He had become too much of a cocooned butterfly, unable to break out of the enclosure, to once more realize there was more to his being than the grappling with both pleasurable and dissonant sharing of the too small apartment and his too involved heart and mind. He tried to act upon what he thought would be the honourable thing, help her through the pregnancy, but Nora brought all of that to an end shortly after persuading him to set up the new apartment and move furniture about until she was satisfied with its placement. She was cool and direct in her conversations about how she wished to live: "without attachments or pressure from the outside." He understood that he was now the *outside*. *Fair enough, on with life*, he thought, though dissatisfied and still off balance. He was both angry and relieved and through it all Lombard discovered that his ego had been dented – the mature, middle-aged, successful writer image, the independent man-of-means took a hit.

Their times of contact, whether by telephone or in person, became fewer as the end of Nora's pregnancy drew near. He wasn't even sure of the date when Nora gave birth. It was weeks after the occasion when she sent him a note telling him when the baby had been born and that she had arranged to have the child adopted by a French-Canadian couple living in the Montreal area. July 15 marked the birth date of his son whom he was not to know.

Lombard, now distanced from Nora in time and contact, began to wonder if he had ever known or understood her. His memories began to fill with incidents of her flirtatious behaviour, how she could charm and entice even his closest friends and acquaintances – well, for that matter, she seemed to charm all of the men she met, and not a few of the women she encountered, though often he would hear from the wives or lovers of his male friends that he was lucky to be free of Nora. One of the wives complained that Nora met almost weekly with her husband to discuss investment ideas for her inherited portion of the family estate; while it was not insubstantial it was much less than his top-ranked clients, and yet Nora captured most of his attention for several weeks during the winter of her pregnancy. Another, an artisan woodworker,

had offered to help Nora prepare a wall in her lower duplex apartment in the Beaches; the preparation was to be for a wall safe, but Nora had changed her mind once he had cut out the space.

“Leave it, darling,” she said. “I’ll just plaster it over again and have Vaughn move the sideboard hutch over to cover up the patch.”

“So, all of that time and work you did for her was for nothing,” the live-in partner of the artisan observed, forlornly, knowing that even in pregnancy Nora was beautiful and had a sexual energy that compelled men to delve back into their pubescent need to please, to gain attention, to receive an immediate or future reward. It was tacitly understood.

Lombard felt that Nora’s most notable and absurd conquest was Alan Ableman, a noted homosexual who had gained notoriety by persuading a former lover to sign over a valuable Avenue Road property so that he could open one of the city’s highest priced, and therefore exclusive, antiquarian establishments. Alan also boasted to Nora of the huge old house he owned in the Beaches; and that news set Nora to pestering the poor man with daily phone calls concerning the status of his renter’s removal from the lower duplex. He was also the target of her questions and requests for advice on particular pieces of furniture she wanted to procure. For some unknown reason he could not bring himself to say no to the gorgeous woman with the rising belly. Ableman’s latest lover was beside himself with the frustration of seeing him practically swoon at her every beck and call.

Vaughn Lombard began to wonder if, indeed, he was the father of the child, born and adopted so quickly that his interest in knowing if there were physical similarities was left only to be imagined; he knew only that the child was a boy born into this world on the 15th of July, 1955. Lombard felt reasonably certain that Alan Ableman was not the father, but his guilt and frustration would not permit him to vouch for the others. Vaughn tried to attach a sense of paternity by speculating on how Nora had arranged the birth of their child. *Did she go to a hospital, a private clinic? Who was the doctor involved with the delivery?* Nora had told him very little, but rather than blame her for his resulting position of ignorance he questioned his own lack of motivation in pushing for details of the birth. Later all that he could recall of the days surrounding the child’s birth was the torrid heat of the summer of 1955. The high temperature and cloying humidity of mid-July set the stage for a bizarre drama and introduced others whose actions following the birth of an unknown child would play heavily into the future of Vaughn, Nora, Naomi and Amanda.

Chapter 14

Mid-July was sizzling hot as the sun was going down and the humidity going up. Around College and Spadina the street scene was a demanding, dripping mix of sound, sights, smells, tastes and feelings.

North and east lay the spreading St. George campus of the University of Toronto. South and west was Kensington Market, cluttered with food and dry goods shops and stacked wooden cages with squawking chickens, pigeons and geese. The market was a sweltering mosaic of Old World languages and customs and inner-city chaos. Streets on either side of Spadina were crammed with small, colourful houses paying homage to Portuguese, Italian and Polish heritage. The smells of knish and pastrami from Jewish delis mingled with the tastes of kielbasas and heavy Polish breads. Further south the garment district quieted in the night and bled its daytime busyness east to Chinatown.

On Spadina south of College two of Toronto's music venues stood ready to crank the heat over the steaming street level – Grossman's Tavern on the east side known to aficionados as the pre-eminent purveyor of mediocre food, jazz, hot blues and thick blue smoke. On the west side of the avenue was the El Mocambo. The *El Mo* catered to a nightclub crowd; its tall, building-high neon marquee shimmered, a magnetic beacon in the heat of the night.

The sun set fast, College and Spadina streets came alive; teens kibitzed on the wide sidewalks and suburban music lovers and partyers lined up outside the *El Mo*, eager to get in and cool off. Neighbourhood regulars streamed sweat and stared at the line-ups suspiciously while they plodded the streets searching for relief from the stifling city humidity.

At Sammy's, a couple of storefronts north of the *El Mo*, an angry young man stepped into the rising heat of the wide sidewalk. A ravaged-looking beggar approached him.

"Hey, man. Can ya gimme some change? I need ta eat."

Artie Blandman glanced at him, upset and preoccupied; he was thinking about the *asshole* waiter giving him a hard time.

I just wanted some soup. Prick had to go away and then come back askin' if I had the 75 cents for the soup.

"Go 'way." Artie walked unsteadily toward the curb and the crowd of people moving in the humid neon night. It had rained earlier, rain that didn't cool the heat, just made the street glisten and reflect a palette of busy, blurred, muted downtown colours and smudges.

The old man grimaced as Artie moved away; he screwed up his mouth in a sneering smile and followed him.

“Come on, man. I gotta eat too.” He stuck out a dirty right hand, almost touching Artie, who shifted awkwardly through the crowd, staggering in large concentric circles around and between the people milling about the street.

“Fuck off,” he yelled at the beggar. The street was noisy with streetcars passing through the College-Spadina intersection, their steel wheels grinding on steel tracks, sparks flying; dragsters and hot-rodders braking and screeching, others gunning motors and laying down rubber that screeched into the night. The lights of the streets flashed, neon glowed and dark corners held a moment’s secret, for nobody specific, but a little something for anyone interested. Artie wasn’t interested. Anger boiled beneath the surface of his youthful but wasted appearance. The beggar caught up; he had his own anger and he spat it out.

“Fuck you, jerk. I seen ya ’round here. You ain’t no goddamn prince. Can’t spare a little change for a buddy, hey?” The vagrant followed Artie through the throng ranting at him.

Artie stopped, then spun around quickly, grabbing a lamp post to steady himself, as his balance shifted. He pulled something from his pocket. Fumbled with it, found the release button and a blade snapped open, flashing the threat of violence.

“I told you to fuck off, bum.” He let go of the lamp post and staggered toward the man. The older man backed off.

A streetcar ground to a standstill at the concrete island opposite them, then, with its bell clanging, moved off, and a cop on a motorcycle with a sidecar pulled up in its place. The panhandler yelled:

“Hey officer, this kid’s tryna’ kill me. He got a knife, and ...” The voice was lost to the buzz of the streetlights and the screeching metal on metal of another streetcar grinding to a halt on the east side of Spadina.

People passed the scene on the wide sidewalk; some stopped to look but most quickly hurried on, not wanting to be involved.

The angry slurs and retorts between the panhandler and Artie suddenly stopped. For a moment the world stopped, became a different place. Artie moved toward the older, grimy-faced man.

The panhandler’s call was too late – the kid had lunged. The old man tried to dodge the flashing blade; he miscalculated and his body opened to an angled roundhouse slash that caught

the left side of his face, slicing down the unshaven jaw and neck. Blood rushed, sprayed over his dirty shirt, and shone an eerie green in the neon glow of El Mocambo's tall flashing palm tree.

The cop looked in their direction as Artie took off, running; he turned west on College Street then south, beating and dodging his way through Kensington Market. Turning again he stumbled past the provincial trade school, crossed Spadina and glanced back up the street. Sweat stung his eyes but he caught a blurred glimpse of a crowd around the cop bending over the fallen beggar. He ran hard, at times tripping; clambering to his feet, he made his way to the next avenue heading north. Artie's wind gave out, his chest thumped hard, his head hammered and he was soaked with perspiration – exhausted. Slowing to a jagged walk he looked behind. There were a few people strolling in the dark, occasionally lamplit street, but no cops. He crossed College heading north until he spotted a cop's motorcycle heading toward him. It moved slowly, searching, the motor almost purring.

Artie ducked behind some stinking garbage cans that blocked an alleyway between two of the street's old houses. The bike purred by; the cop looked left and right.

When he couldn't hear the motorcycle any more he moved out to the sidewalk and walked down a block to the Madison. The pub was always busy, a place to get lost. It was jammed with bodies but cooler than outside and it was easy to steal someone's drink from the crowded bar.

What the fuck was all that about? he asked himself as he squeezed into an alcove seat on the second floor of the Madison. He'd already swiped a full mug of draught beer from the main floor. His head still hammered but he was glad for the noise of the pub. Sipping at the beer he re-ran the scene in his head.

Old prick, buggin' me for a handout. I told him, I told him not to bug me. I'm in no mood for bein' bugged. Had enough of that shit already today. He remembered how the day had slammed into the night.

It had started at a wedding reception over on Palmerston Street. A chick he met at a dance last week had invited him. *I just wanted to go to the wedding party with her. Have a little fun, maybe get lucky. How would I know everyone there liked to argue? They had some problem about Macedonia and Bulgaria, she says to me. Then she likes to argue too? She starts yelling at me, at the top of her voice.* Some of the guests, those not drunk and rowdy, had tried to calm the arguments down, but it all got louder and pushing led to a smack and then a punch. Soon most of the wedding guests were involved in a brawl, moving like some kind of staggering, multi-legged blob to the left of the backyard and then to the right, ties pulled off, dresses torn.

Artie moved to the make-shift bar and picked up a bottle of rum while the bartender tried to separate the loud melee of men and women. His date was in the thick of it, grabbing handfuls of something white and slimy from a big bowl and pushing it into the faces of grey-haired women in baggy black dresses.

Too many free drinks drunk too quickly and too little food. It was easy to argue, get drunk and be offended. Artie had already had enough when she cried and said he was the same as that *sonofabitch* she just got separated from.

He sat for a while drinking the bottle of rum by himself, watching her and the wedding guests untangle themselves, still yelling insults at each other. “Enough,” he mumbled to himself, and stumbled down a laneway leading to the street – away from the noise of the backyard brawl and the chick who didn’t understand what he was about. He walked till he got to College and Spadina. A block down he was supposed to meet Jackson outside Grossman’s and get his package but he had too much booze and couldn’t remember what time to meet. Anyway, he’d go to Sammy’s and have some soup – get sober and catch up with Jackson later. That was when it all went to hell; the bad day got worse – the waiter wanting the 75 cents up front. “No, the boss says you can’t put it on your tab. He wants the cash – now!” Artie didn’t have it but he wasn’t going to let the prick know he didn’t have it – he’d just leave, yelling back over his shoulder about the bad service.

He grabbed a basket of pretzels from the bar nearest to his alcove seat in the Madison. The pretzels weren’t as good as the soup at Sammy’s, but then he didn’t have to put up with that *asshole* waiter.

Christ I can’t go back down there to meet Jackson tonight. That place is goin’ to be crawlin’ with cops. I’ll have to stay away for a while ’cause someone might have recognized me with that old bum. I knew that bastard was trouble. One of them pricks who just can’t leave well enough alone.

Artie left the Madison and headed back up Huron Street, toward step-sister Cassie’s place. He climbed the fire-escape at the back of the old house knowing that she wouldn’t be home at that time of night; she’d be down around Jarvis and Shuter looking for *johns* or with that broad she met who was paying her tab at the rate of a “C” note a week. The one who was having a baby and needed help. *As if Cassie could help – fuckin’ junkie.*

It was the landlady that he was afraid of rousing. She had raised hell whenever she heard him thumping around in the flat upstairs. Artie had made the mistake of using the place as a drug

drop a couple of times and once Cassie brought a john back for a tumble; the old lady didn't like her respectable manor house being used for shady business. She threatened Cassie with eviction.

Then they discovered the other room. The old house once had wealthy people living in it; they had built a small, secret room, concealed behind the servants' staircase. The room had never been finished; loose boards crossed the two-by-six stringers that supported the ceiling below. There were no lights. The room had probably been used as a temporary storage area. Artie had found the doorway which had been screwed shut many years earlier and he persuaded Cassie that he could hide and sleep in there. He would use a candle to find his way in and out and remove his shoes when walking around the flat so that the landlady wouldn't know when he was there.

Still drunk, hot again and tired from his escape, Artie pushed through the door of the hidden room. Downstairs the landlady had just settled in to watch the *Lawrence Welk Show* when a leg crashed through her ceiling and a scream of pain drowned out the Lennon Sisters' harmony.

* * *

An hour later, Cassie Poulos unlocked the door of the house. She hoped she could get through to the stairway without Mrs. Herschel hearing. The rent was late and she needed just a little more time to get the cash. She closed the door quietly and turned into the darkened foyer.

Unexpectedly the landlady threw open the door of her own apartment.

"Look, look at this," she yelled in broken English. The light of the room spilled out into the foyer and illuminated Cassie's shocked expression.

"Oh my God. What happened, Mrs. Herschel?"

"What happened? What happened?" She grabbed Cassie by the wrist and pulled her into the room which was strewn with plaster and pieces of thin lathe that had fallen from the jagged hole in the ceiling.

Her face red and bulging with anger, she screamed at Cassie "You friend up there that not supposed to live here, he crash through!" Cassie turned away and ran up the stairs. Mrs. Herschel yelled after her as she too mounted the flight of steps, "You move, tomorrow, maybe tonight. You go take piece of shit with you." At the top of the stairway the two women turned left into the kitchen of the flat.

"Jesus Christ what have you done? Jesus, what the hell am I supposed to do now?"

Cassie Poulos looked at the young man who stood in the kitchen of her flat. He was hurt, his hand bleeding, and dark blood seeped through his pant leg. The landlady, a short, chunky woman in her sixties, stood with her hands on her hips and yelled in a foreign tongue at Artie who stood shaking his head, not comprehending either woman.

“Shutup, shutup! Goddamn it! I can’t understand either one of you,” Artie yelled at them. The older woman turned unsteadily and moved to the stairway and her flat downstairs. Her arms were waving wildly and her voice raised as the distance from the two in the kitchen increased. “I call goddamn police, you shit piece! Break my house, I fix you, call goddamn police!”

“She’s goin’ to call the cops, Artie. And just in case you didn’t get it, she’s throwing me out. All I needed was one more day; Nora is going to give me the money tonight. Then I would have enough cash to pay the rent. But now it’s too late, now she’s throwin’ me out. Jesus Christ, that’s what I get for helping you.”

Artie Blandman, moved to the sink and ran the cold water tap. He put his bleeding hand underneath the water and grabbed a dishcloth to soak and wipe his leg. “Oh shit,” he said, looking at the leg. “I’m gonna need stitches, it’s a fuckin’ mess.”

Cassie grabbed at another dishcloth and started mopping the blood from the floor, then decided it was a waste of time. She threw the cloth in the blood-stained sink.

Artie tried to be apologetic. “I couldn’t see in that fuckin’ room Cas. The candle went out and I was tryna’ find my mattress, then I tripped and my leg went right through the bloody floor and this fat bitch is yellin’ at me like I *wanted* to crash through her fuckin’ ceiling. There I was straddling this goddamn piece of wood in the ceiling, one leg in the room the other hangin’ over her head and my nuts almost crushed.” Cassie stopped listening and only vaguely heard him utter, “I had a goddamn bum buggin’ me for money and I stabbed him Cassie; I got nowhere to go.”

“I gotta get out of here, Artie. I need to be somewhere tonight and I can’t get involved with you.”

“Hey, you’re welcome for last night, eh. Last night you needed me, now when I need something...” Artie’s voice trailed off, she was gone.

Cassie slipped out of the house and started down the street as a cruiser with a flashing dome light headed north on Huron Street, toward the house and Artie.

Artie staunched his wound with a dish towel and worked on a story to tell the cops. His half-sister melted into the still hot night and headed south to Dundas Street and the Brande Hotel, and it didn’t matter that she was evicted.

Chapter 15

Through all of his misgivings about Nora, his injured pride and speculation about her promiscuity Lombard struggled to get back on track with his creative career. His writing continued to evolve – “matured,” some of his friends said. It wasn’t long before he had another Governor General’s contender with the novel *Loose Ends* – the work was a follow-up to *Thirsty* but equally acceptable as a stand-alone book – which garnered praise from both those who had read each of the works and those who had read only the successful last publication and eventual winner of the prize. In time Lombard had the feeling that he was living his life to what he characterized as “the fullest.” He also enjoyed watching the city of his birth, Toronto, as it too matured, becoming Canada’s pre-eminent cosmopolitan city. The metropolis that was the lasting tie between Vaughn and Nora, and the place where their lives continued to cross. Often their connections were mutual acquaintances and occasionally good friends to both of them.

* * *

Nora wrote to Naomi after the relationship with Lombard had supposedly come to its end; the letters mentioned Vaughn Lombard still. And many of his friends, for his was the chosen circle from which Nora assembled her reputation.

“Vaughn,” she wrote, “has much of the fatalist about him. Like many artists, he’s never satisfied with his work, even wanting to edit Loose Ends after its publication and winner of the Governor General’s award! I tried to encourage him to accept the success and move on to other literary challenges, just as Mordecai Richler had done – off to London he went and it seemed to be for him the catalyst that made him a great success. But to be fair, Vaughn certainly recognized that about Mordecai, I think he might even have been somewhat envious of his talent. Though he did insist that I come along to Mordecai’s send-off party in Montreal. What a time that was!”

Nora could not resist the excitement of men and women immersed in lives that were bound to change, always in flux. She sought the company of the talented, the famous, the brilliant and those with eccentricities and excesses as extreme as their cultured masks would allow. Naomi often wondered who else she would have shared the details of her adventures with; did she communicate like this with others? She thought not, though it did seem that Nora always required an audience for the vicarious life she was living, perhaps even more than she had done as a child.

Lombard, despite Nora’s passing concern, was not immersed in a state of “writer’s block,” feeling sorry for himself or longing to become Canada’s Bard. He had a solid society of local writers that he liked to socialize with: Gallons of coffee were consumed, with Morley Callaghan

talking of style and technique; and gallons of draught beer were quaffed while discussing Canadian content with Hugh Garner in the street-level draught room of the Embassy Tavern. At the rooftop bar of the Park Plaza Bill Mitchell talked about his CBC radio adaptation of *Jake and the Kid*.

“It was easy. Like visiting an old friend, and it sure helped my hard-cover sales too. “Why don’t you adapt your works for a radio script?” Mitchell added.

Lombard looked at his friend and tried to determine whether he was serious or just pulling his leg, again. Bill Mitchell was known for his devastating sense of humour and uncanny ability to cover his own smile with a dramatic expression that could mean anger, frustration or near tearful as he led his listeners on.

Vaughn had decided that Mitchell was expressing a sincere suggestion and said, “I don’t know anything about radio scripts, Bill. I’m not sure that I’d even know where to start.”

“Crap! I remember being on a panel with you when you shocked the hell out of an audience by telling them that you play-acted every scene in your head before you put it to paper. I remember that because it’s exactly what I do. The radio stuff is really the original work for me; I wrote all of that in my head years before putting it on paper. So it’s kind of like revisiting the original concepts.”

Lombard considered the idea and eventually it began to make sense. It was true that he envisioned every scenario as if it were being acted by the characters, finding out which piece of dialogue worked convincingly and which monologue was too long and boring.

“Maybe, maybe. I’m not hard up for cash but I can see how that format might increase readership. Yeah, maybe you’re right, Bill.”

“You bet I am. That book *Thirsty* is a radio script or movie screenplay just waiting to be done. I’ll give you the name of my CBC contacts. They’re pretty open to new story ideas.”

So, rather than stymied by an indifferent muse, Lombard was in fact considering other literary options.

* * *

In 1959, Lombard asked Nora to attend the wedding of another Governor General’s award winner in Nova Scotia. Lombard had met Hugh MacLennan at Mordecai’s send-off and the two writers had become fast friends, beginning a correspondence that coloured their political and social commentaries which were addressed in their respective works of fiction.

Initially, Vaughn was reluctant to ask Nora to accompany him to the wedding. He rationalized that it was not so much that he still felt a slight stinging at her peremptory dismissal of him from

her life – at least peremptory insofar as a lover and father of their child was concerned; in a strange way his reluctance was an expression of inaction – passive aggression. He well knew that Nora was building a base of *his* friends, and his friends had other friends who were also influential in an ever-rippling series of concentric circles of social and business spheres. He didn't wish to deliberately restrict Nora's acceptance among the elite, but neither did he feel that he ought to facilitate her rise in popularity.

But in the end, Lombard's own needs overcame the negative feeling of rejection. Despite an occasional faux pas, usually in the form of a frank, derogatory or condescending remark and often to men who resented the image of a strong woman, Nora by virtue of her beauty and intelligence was a magnetic attraction and a provocative personality. For the most part Vaughn could enjoy the pleasure of her company and the beauty of her presence. Consequently, the invitation for Nora to go along suited each of their needs, she to widen her social contacts of well-known writers and other celebrities in attendance at the wedding and he, doubly, to inquire if Nora had yet any contact or news of their son (her answer a dissatisfying negative); and secondly, to feel again the fascinating allure of her beauty and wonder, again, at the enigma that was Nora.

* * *

Eventually, even Nora realized that Vaughn Lombard was not at all in a slump, a depression or aspiring to be greater than his peers. It was one of his strengths, in fact, the Gouzenko selection notwithstanding, that he suffered not the pangs of envy. If he had a major obsession it was his overwhelming thirst for knowledge relating to all things literary, which in its turn had evolved to include most concerns of mores and values and the intellectual questioning of mainstream and dissident thought. No doubt it was these interests that led him to another Montrealer, an interesting young man – Pierre Trudeau. A man who would come to play a large role in both Lombard's life and the future of Canada.

At the time of their meeting many thought that Pierre Trudeau was generally a “pain in the ass,” chafing at the then Quebec premier's heels, even writing a book about it. Trudeau was known as an intellectual who occasionally got out of hand; he had, for example, been arrested in Moscow for throwing a snowball at a statue of Stalin, and for some reason that little exuberance was sufficient reason to have him barred entry to the United States.

To Lombard, Trudeau was an exceedingly interesting man, who could protest to the heights, even going so far as founding and editing the nonconformist journal *Cité Libre*, thought to be the

foundation of Quebec's Quiet Revolution; and yet a man who valued individual voice and privacy of person. Lombard thought of him as a twentieth-century Voltaire.

Trudeau would go on to become a law professor, a Justice Minister in Lester Pearson's Liberal Cabinet and eventually the Prime Minister of Canada.

Vaughn Lombard found none of the contentious characteristics that others identified as problematic whenever the two engaged in conversation or the friendly debates they both enjoyed. He admired Trudeau's intellect and capacity for meeting a challenge, no matter the force of opposition. At least, that was how Pierre would respond with his male acquaintances. The provocative Nora was quite another story.

Part 2

Madness, Maturity and Death

Chapter 16

Little of Vaughn Lombard's day-to-day life, much less his friendship with Pierre Trudeau, was known to Nora's sister Naomi. She knew of the popular press icon and had heard by way of Nora the Lombard had supported Trudeau in his run for the leadership of the Liberal party and his eventual rise to the position of Prime Minister; but those things were of little interest to Naomi. It was Lombard's personal predilections she enjoyed hearing about, the details of the man with whom Nora had shared an intense but brief affair, the man who had fathered their unwanted child.

Naomi learned that despite their falling out of love, Lombard had with some regularity visited Nora in the institution where she had been confined after the horrendous spectacle of the trial. The secure hospital facility was situated near the cottage that Nora said Lombard had inherited from his parents. Though Nora's correspondence had decreased since her incarceration she did include, among her usual dreary but occasionally frightening missives, little bits of information concerning Lombard. Tragic though the circumstances of his visits were, Naomi still gleaned a sense of satisfaction from the mention of Vaughn Lombard.

He was one of the few visitors considerate enough to take the time and effort to stop over, to try to engage Nora in conversation, even to try to pretend that the visits were not difficult. His

visits were all the more ironic as it was largely Lombard's interest in discovering the whereabouts of his son that led to Nora's imprisonment.

The visits were difficult for him. Difficult to see Nora in the stark surroundings, the spare clothing devoid of the grace and style that would complement her natural good looks, but even more the behaviour, the attacks and screaming, disjointed rhetoric. Finally, he brought the visits to an end. Little did he know that ending was but a small part, a cog in a wheel, not of fate but of deception.

* * *

Now and then another friend from Nora's Toronto social set would visit her, but usually they failed to return, so horrified were they at the physicality of the locked and barred buildings incongruously situated amidst Georgian Bay's historical beauty. For Nora, contact with the world outside was limited by distance, fear, guilt and ultimately the violence of incomprehensible frustration.

But, to be fair, there was one other notable visitor. Pascal Pascal had "paid his respects," as he termed the meeting – a singular meeting. He talked with Nora as if they had casually met on the street; he attempted to ignore and dismiss the reaction of horror he experienced within the enclosed walls, the barred windows, and the sensory assault of stench and distant cries.

Though constructed in 1933 and not terribly old, the institution was nevertheless a Canadian version of Bedlam, with its rancid odours and constant noise sufficient to break down a weak spirit and cause it to become what it might have been already accused of by a protective and condemning justice system, overly influenced by, in Pascal's opinion, "the *au courant* voodoo master of the Western world – modern psychiatry."

Pascal was under no delusions as to Nora's guilt. At the trial Nora's frank testimony verified that charge. And it would have been unproblematic for him to maintain the view that their casual conversation during his singular visit was spotted with words and phrases that at the time he attributed to her psychotic episodes; but at a later time – the distance of years and clarity of intention having seeped through his bias – Pascal realized that he had listened incorrectly to a moment of truth.

Another visitor midway through the period of Nora's incarceration happened to be a reporter from a Quebec paper. He visited her twice in 1972, the first time at Nora's request to offer her story for publication but with a condition - to earn her revelation the reporter had to agree to a search for someone and it was concerning the search that he returned to the institution for his second meeting with Nora.