

"A riveting adventure through life and psyche that proves hard to put down"

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW BOOKWATCH

LOVE FOR A DEAF REBEL

DERRICK KING

*Schizophrenia
on Bowen Island*

eBook Edition

Reader Comments

I have been moved in so many ways by your story. You have made me laugh, and you have made me cry. I am in awe and want you to know your story has taken me to places inside of me to remember that nothing lasts and we must cherish things as they are. The light and the dark, the good and the bad, are intertwined. Looking back at our adventures and experiences, we see the truths in our life.—J.P.

This book is powerful! It is amazing. I loved it! I read the book three times, and it has been in my thoughts since my first reading. The author put his heart and soul into this book. His telling of the journey taken by Pearl and him is brilliant, heart-wrenching, and insightful. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed all the characters; I feel like I know them. Thank you so much for writing it and sharing it.—D.G.

I couldn't put this book down. What crazy shit the author went through—he lived the lives of a thousand men!—D.B.

This book is fascinating and moving, an exotic love story however contorted the love. New Pearl was there all along, the alter-ego lying in wait to be discovered after the honeymoon. The author truly loved Pearl and was heartbroken by her ultimate failure to recognize his true love; how sad for her indeed! I hope this book goes viral.—P.W.

The author has done a masterful job of documenting Pearl's journey. Schizophrenia is very complicated and not easily understood. The book would be very helpful to anyone with a schizophrenic family member or friend.—G.G.

This book is fascinating. The author is a good writer and my goodness but he has had an eventful life. We have all had our sagas of love lost, and it is unfortunate that each generation has to learn the lessons again with all the heartache.—I.V.

The book pulled me in right away. The author knows how to capture detail and make the story interesting; readers would like to be there with them. It is touching how the author never stopped loving Pearl despite everything that happened. He tried to make things work instead of rushing towards divorce like she did.—D.L.

Press Reviews

*The bond that grows between strangers living in two worlds is compellingly described, bringing revelations about prejudice, acceptance, handicaps, and equality. Deafness and schizophrenia are seen through intense love and personal growth that brings a “you are here” feel in a way few memoirs achieve. The role of friends and family is examined as King stands by her while her mental health collapses. Anyone interested in mental illness or in the interactions between deaf and hearing lovers will find the book infused with a passion that makes it a riveting adventure through life and psyche that proves hard to put down.—Midwest Book Review Bookwatch
<http://donovansliteraryservices.com/june-2021-issue.html#lft>*

*King’s powerful memoir is about the difficulty of dealing with a loved one’s mental illness and disability, and how falling in love with a deaf woman changed his life. His love for Pearl is well conveyed in concise, accessible terms that capture the challenges of falling in love with a person who sees the world in a different way. The coverage of the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse that she experienced is sobering. King’s narration strives to authentically capture his feelings in the moment. Rating: 4 out of 5.—Clarion Reviews Foreword
<https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/love-for-a-deaf-rebel/>*

*This candid account of the author’s marriage to a deaf person vividly details their motorcycle adventure to Guatemala and life on Bowen Island. This poignant love story is well written and becomes a platform for facts about the life of deaf people, also delving into issues such as schizophrenia, blindness, and diabetes. Those interested in the stress that disabilities can place on relationships may wish to read this. Rating: Recommended.—The US Review of Books
www.theusreview.com/reviews-1/Love-for-a-Deaf-Rebel-by-Derrick-King.html*

*King’s love story and memoir opens when he is approached by Pearl, a charismatic deaf woman. Their chat, scribbled on napkins, flows easily, and friendship blossoms. He learns sign language. They move together to isolated Bowen Island, sharing a life of livestock and ferry rides, where her behavior becomes increasingly erratic. King tells this honest and emotional story in crisp, quick prose, with insights and slight suspense, respecting Pearl’s story right up to its bittersweet finish.—Publisher’s Weekly Booklife
booklife.com/project/love-for-a-deaf-rebel-schizophrenia-on-bowen-island-55735*

LOVE FOR A DEAF REBEL

DERRICK KING

*Schizophrenia
on Bowen Island*

eBook Edition

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eBook Edition

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This is a true story. Most written conversations are abridged from transcripts. Signed and oral conversations are recreations from notes and records. The author tells the story as he experienced it, with Pearl’s earliest history revealed last. The names of living persons have been replaced by pseudonyms.

To Pearl

*Sometimes with one I love, I fill myself with rage,
for fear I effuse unreturn'd love;
But now I think there is no unreturn'd love—
the pay is certain, one way or another;
(I loved a certain person ardently,
and my love was not return'd;
Yet out of that, I have written these songs).*

Walt Whitman
Sometimes with One I Love, 1860

Contents

Part I: Together in Love

Under the Clock	1
Shall We Be Magnificent Couple?	14
A Silent Movie	27
Guatemala by Motorcycle	43
The End of the World	54

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Bowen Island	64
Trout Lake Farm	83
Men Can't Be Trusted	101
Rich Couple's House	116
Shooting Pigs in a Sty	127
Alberta School for the Deaf	136

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I Want a Baby	144
Where Are the Bullets?	166
How Did You Find Me?	183
Down the Road	196
Love for a Deaf Rebel	205

Part I: Together in Love

Under the Clock

I walked into a roar of conversation, bought sushi, and shuffled through the lunchtime chaos of the Pacific Centre Food Court, looking for a seat. Umbrellas and overcoats dripped water onto the white tile floor.

A black-haired woman sat under the clock, her back to the wall, scanning the crowd with radar eyes. Her porcelain face, brown eyes, and high cheekbones gave her face a long-distance presence, yet her elegance was neutralized by a brown dress and a perm. Her drab style contrasted with the gaudy colors and big hair of the 1980s. She wore no makeup or jewelry. Her radar locked on to me as I looked for a seat.

The seat opposite her became vacant. I elbowed my way through the crowd and sat down. I was wearing a blue suit with a white shirt and a silk tie; like most bankers, I only removed my jacket on the hottest of summer days.

I loosened my tie. I ate while she studied me with the barest hint of a smile. I smiled at her and looked away. She looked at me while she ate fish and chips and sucked down the last of a Coke with a gurgle.

“What are you staring at?” I finally said.

She pointed to her mouth and then to her right ear.

“Are you deaf?” I said, at first puzzled and then surprised.

She nodded.

I took the gold Cross pen from my suit pocket, picked up a napkin, and wrote, “*Spicy horseradish.*”

I turned my napkin to face her. She read it and smiled at me as if she expected me to write more.

“I wondered why you looked at me. I never met a deaf person before.”

“I watch lips. If you speak and I ignore you will think I am rude. I don’t want hearing to think that deafies like me are rude.”

“Can you lipread?” I said.

The woman shook her head.

Part I: Together in Love

“Most people never look at each other. They only look at the floor. That’s why I spoke to you.”

She smiled. *“We are 200,000 deafies in Canada. Our language is ASL—American Sign Language.”*

“I’m getting an ice cream. Do you want one?”

The woman scribbled on the tattered napkin and pushed it across the table.

“Almond.”

She smacked her lips, grinned, and put the napkin in her purse.

I bought two ice cream cones at Baskin-Robbins and stuffed a handful of napkins into my pocket. The music of Madonna played in the background. We sat on a bench in the mall and continued to write. I noticed her fingernails were badly chewed.

“Congenitally deaf?”

The woman shrugged.

“Born deaf?”

“Mother had measles at 4 months pregnant. Lucky not 2 months or I am blind and deaf.”

I smiled. *“That’s life.”*

“That’s me. I accept my deafness. My children will be hearing.” She looked at her watch. *“I go back to work. Nice to meet you.”*

The woman stuffed the napkin into her purse and disappeared into the crowd as I watched her walk away.

I went back to the food court just before noon. The silent woman was sitting at the same table under the clock. She looked up and waved at me. I sat down. She looked at me expectantly. She seemed to be about my age, almost thirty, yet her face hadn’t a wrinkle.

I reached into my suit and pulled out a few sheets of paper and my pen.

“I remember you.”

She put down her chopsticks and wrote, *“Ha-ha.”*

“How are you today?”

“I feel bothered about my real estate. I am stuck to pay mortgage and apartment rent.”

Part I: Together in Love

“You must have a good job to afford two places.”

“I work at the post office. I sort mails. Managers and union fight. Something not nice to work there. Good pay but I have Medical Lab Technician diploma at St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute. They have interpreters there.”

“Then why do you work in the post office?”

“After divorce I come back to Canada to Vancouver because a lot of deafies in Vancouver so I can get a good job. But no hospital would hire me. All refused because I am deaf. I got a temporary job at the post office.” She turned the paper to face me so I could read it and then took it back and continued writing. *“Six years ago. Temporary. Ha! But I am lucky to have education and job not to be unemployed. Most deafies are unemployed—80%. 1/3 quits high school.”*

“I studied too. Electronics engineer, but I work for a Dutch bank. Boring but better than a post office job! I study Spanish at night school. I will start an MBA in September. I want to work in another country. I taught at night school, so a teacher and a student at the same time. My name is Derrick King.”

“Pearl.” Pearl pointed at herself, looked up to check the time, and mimed punching a time-clock. *“I must go. 15 minute walk back and PO is strict. Bye!”*

Whenever I went to the food court at my usual time, just before noon, Pearl was sitting under the clock, and we started writing.

“I met my husband at TVI in St. Paul but he is from North Dakota.”

“How long were you married?”

“9 months. Then I found him in a gay bar in Fargo!” She stuck out her tongue and hung her wrist limply. *“I lost my mobile trailer down payment from mother—my wedding gift. All my furnitures. That was 7 years ago.”*

I pointed at “Fargo.” *“My wife and I were married in ND too! A strange coincidence.”*

“How long were you married?”

“7 years.”

“Who left who? And why?”

“She left. She said she didn’t want to be married anymore. She said she

Part I: Together in Love

was a feminist so she needed to be single. As soon as she could support herself she told me she didn't need a husband."

"Respect is important. Did you want her to stay?"

"Yes."

"I want a family with Mr. Right. Children are first then the husband is second."

"I'm Mr. Write! Kids need a house. Nowadays that means two incomes."

"Two incomes until children are small. Then wife should be home to be mother if husband will afford. Depends on location."

"Yes. Where do you live?"

"Kitsilano near the beach."

"Me too, 2125 2nd Ave."

Pearl grinned. *"2168 2nd Ave."*

"That is the other side of the street! Another strange coincidence."

A man with a gray comb-over was sitting at the table next to us. He wore several sweaters. He leaned over to Pearl with a big smile, as if we were his grandchildren, and said, "And what kind of game are *we* playing?"

Pearl shrugged and turned to me for an explanation.

"She's deaf, so we are writing to each other."

He pulled back as though I'd said we had leprosy. "I'm so sorry!" He stood and walked away.

I told Pearl what he had said, and her face became flushed with anger. *"I HATE when hearies make pity."* Her pen plowed into the paper.

"Hearies" was a new word to me, and I was one of "them." Pearl slurped her Coke and grinned.

"You carry a paper in your pocket now."

I laughed. "It is for starting fires."

I jogged downhill to Granville Island Public Market. As I approached the market, I spotted Pearl walking with a woman. They carried their groceries in shoulder bags and backpacks to leave their hands free to sign.

Pearl looked over her shoulder as if she had eyes in the back of her head. She waved at me. I waved back, wiped the sweat off my brow, and

Part I: Together in Love

walked through the crowd.

“Hello, Derrick,” said Pearl’s friend in a hollow voice.

“Do you know me?”

She grinned. “Pearl tells me everything.”

Pearl tapped her arm. “Tell him you’re hard-of-hearing and can interpret,” Pearl signed, as the woman interpreted. I was astonished at the transparency of her interpretation; it was as if Pearl had spoken to me herself.

“So *fast!* I’ve never heard Pearl speak before,” I said, as the woman interpreted.

“When people hear my accent, they don’t realize I’m hard-of-hearing. They think I’m Swedish,” she signed and said. She pulled her long hair back to reveal a finger-sized hearing aid behind each ear. “I’m Jodi.”

“Don’t interpret everything,” Pearl signed, as Jodi interpreted.

I laughed. “I must be careful about what I say.”

“Derrick is curious—his eyes sparkle,” signed Pearl. “Will you eat with us?”

“No. I can’t jog home with a full stomach.”

“Then rest with us,” signed Pearl, “so you can run faster on your way home. Today we will eat Vietnamese food.”

We sat down at the Muffin Granny. Pearl put her bag in Jodi’s lap for safekeeping and went to buy food.

“Is it hard for hearing people to learn sign language?”

“That depends on you,” said Jodi. “How badly do you want to learn?”

“That depends on Pearl.”

Pearl and I became friends slowly and cautiously, seeing each other for lunch two or three times a week for two months before we progressed to a date. Our first date was on 14 April 1984—for dinner, at Pearl’s invitation. With a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates, and a notepad, I walked across the street from my apartment, one of the best-kept buildings on the street, to her apartment, one of the most run-down.

At the entrance, I studied the intercom. Her suite was the only unit

Part I: Together in Love

with OCCUPIED instead of a name. I rang the buzzer. A few seconds later, the electric door opened. I walked down the corridor and saw Pearl peering from a door. She grinned and waved. I followed her into her one-bedroom flat, and she bolted the door behind us. Pearl accepted my gifts with a nod, a smile, and a sign I didn't understand. She handed me a corkscrew and two glasses. I poured the wine, and we raised our glasses in a silent toast.

Pearl's apartment was simply furnished and tidy. A crochet project lay on her coffee table. The wooden-cabinet TV played silently while white-on-black text scrolled across the bottom of its screen, decoded by the Sears TeleCaption decoder sitting on top. I had never seen captions before, but now I could read the news line by line.

I walked over to her TV and tried to turn its green tint into natural color, but its picture tube was worn out. Pearl didn't have a videotape player, so her home entertainment was books and green-tinted TV.

Next to the sofa stood a bookcase with *Reader's Digest*, *Introduction to Psychology*, two *McCall's Cooking School* binders, and a *Hume Moneyletter* binder. On her desk sat a telephone, lamp, keyboard device, and a box with wires leading around the room and up the wall to the doorbell panel and the bedroom. Charcoal drawings and oil paintings hung on the walls, original artwork.

We sat at the kitchen table and smiled.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Deaf Aids. If a doorbell rings the lamps would flash slowly. If the telephone rings, the lamps would flash fast. Those pictures that my youngest sister Carol who is artist drew."

Silent News and the *Dictionary of American Idioms for the Deaf* lay on the kitchen table. I picked up the dictionary and browsed through it.

"Do you know many idioms?" wrote Pearl.

"I know all of these."

"Idioms confuse and cause a problem to have deep English communication. Now captions teach me. Before captions I don't understand TV."

The telephone rang, and the lamps in the living room and bedroom began to flash. Pearl sat down at her desk and put the telephone handset

Part I: Together in Love

on the keyboard device, a Krown Research Porta-Printer. It beeped as green fluorescent text flowed across its one-line screen and text printed on a strip of paper, like a receipt scrolling from a cash register. Pearl typed her reply, removed the handset, and hung up.

I sat on her sofa and wrote, *“What computer is that?”*

“TTY, not computer.”

“What does TTY stand for?”

“Telecom? Device for the Deaf. TDD or TTY. Before 1980 deafies must ask hearies to phone. Now all have TTY. This is new. \$600.”

I tried to imagine living without understanding television or being able to use a telephone.

“When you call me you can call the telephone company MRC—Message Relay Centre. I have unlisted number. I don’t want hearies to call without a TTY. Some deafies put number in phone book. Bad! Thieves know owner is deaf and rape if name of woman.”

“I see a hearing aid on your shelf. You are not deaf.”

“I am deaf. I understand nothing with a hearing aid. Only noise.” Pearl jammed her little finger in her ear and wiggled it to show me it was itchy. *“I never use hearing aid. School force kids to use. I did not like.”*

“You must have had a hearing test.”

“Many. I tested myself too. I hear birds fly, stars twinkle, and sun shine. Do you understand?” Pearl smiled. *“But I can’t hear my TV without captions.”*

I laughed. Pearl fascinated me. She pulled a folder from her neatly labeled files and handed me an audiology report. It charted a trace of hearing at low frequencies in her right ear and no hearing whatsoever in her left. Pearl’s ears were useless.

I pointed to the chart. *“140 decibels in your good ear. You hear a jet fly like I hear a pin drop.”*

Pearl put a battery in her hearing aid, put it in *my* right ear, and turned it on. Feedback made it howl painfully loudly. I removed it.

“My breathing sounds like a vacuum cleaner!”

“Ha, your problem. Maple syrup spareribs are ready. My favorite.”

We took turns writing and eating.

“You need a decoder to see CC. When I was a child I could not

Part I: Together in Love

understand TV.”

“Why do some TV shows have a little window with someone signing?”

“Deaf children can understand. Deafies don’t like signing boxes and prefer CC. Easy to read and learn English too. We have to wait for movies to be on video before we can watch captions.”

“When you were small did your family help you with the TV and telephone?”

“Until sisters got bigger then too selfish and busy. My family does not sign. In my youth no signs were allowed so today still no ASL in my family—only ‘home signs.’ Experts told family don’t learn any signs so I would force to be lipreader. Family only talk to me.”

“How much did you understand?”

“Few words. Mother always say I fool her and pretend I don’t understand. Families with deaf today sign—happy. New way is ‘Total Communication.’ My children will sign.”

“Your family can learn to sign now.”

“My sisters and brother learn few signs recently, but mother always refuse signs. I learned nothing until I went to school. There I learned to sign!”

“Your family is handicapped, not you.”

“True! I wanted to hurt my mother for not signing. I think she forgives me now.”

As the kettle behind me began to boil, Pearl gestured to let me know so I could turn it off. I laughed. She looked embarrassed, and I realized I had been rude when I laughed.

“I forgot you hear it boil. Deafies watch pot boil for each other.”

Pearl carried a pile of photo albums to the table and took me on a tour of her life. Her photos were organized and labeled. She looked happy in her photos, especially at college.

“Student in college in USA where I learned to become medical lab tech.”

From her photos, it was clear that attending college in a signing environment had been a happy time for Pearl. She had fewer photos after college. I was impressed that her mother had sent her to study abroad. She pointed at her ex-husband and grimaced. She pointed at her nose, then at her father’s matching nose.

Part I: Together in Love

“When friends looked at my pictures, they said my face does not change. My Father, we were almost same. Smart man in oil company, killed in the car accident. If my Dad is alive right now we would be multimillionaires. Mother. Works in the company kitchen. Warm but not close to me. Sister Debbie is 29. Her husband is teacher. I’m closest to Sister Carol, artist, 28. Brother Kevin is 22. He is manager assistant for cement basement and fire extinguish. You can see in Yellow Pages. He is handsome and charming. He would beat up anyone who bothered me if I asked. I have a hard time to say ‘Kevin.’ K is invisible on lips.”

“Try to say my name.”

“Derrick,” she said softly and unintelligibly, like Eh-ih.

“I can understand you a little bit. How do I sign ‘King’?”

“Fingerspell or we invent name sign. Most people use first letter of name and describe something about personality, looks, etc. King is like this.” She put her right hand on her left shoulder, formed a fingerspelled K, and curved it down to her right hip like a royal sash.

“Then like this for Derrick?” I made the same sign with a D.

Pearl laughed. *“I approve your name sign. Only deafies can give a hearie a name sign. You are not suppose to change it.”*

After an hour of exchanging gestures and notes, Pearl closed her last album, opened a drawer, and pulled out certificates for bookkeeping, office management, and *est* seminars. I was impressed by her continuing self-development. Pearl showed me how she had organized her drawers with hanging files, each with labeled tabs, but her files were nearly empty.

“I will show you my goals now.” Pearl showed me an expensive leather-bound desktop executive agenda, almost empty.

“You have no appointments.”

“Not yet.” She opened a section of her agenda labeled *Things to Do Before I Die*. Her five-year plan listed a dozen goals, including *Find Mr. Right, Have kids before 35, Learn scuba, and Learn computers.*

I pointed at the word *scuba*.

Pearl led me to her closet and yanked it open. I was surprised to see a dry suit, air tank, and a thousand dollars’ worth of diving equipment. She walked back to the living room and sat at the end of the sofa with her

Part I: Together in Love

knees together.

“Your equipment looks new. How did you learn to dive? Did your instructor sign?”

“No lessons yet. I will learn with Jeff who signs fingerspelling. Jeff is my hearing friend that lives nearby. He has epilepsy. He leaves his marijuana here because I don’t want him to smoke so much.”

“Isn’t scuba diving dangerous with epilepsy?”

“Never heard of.”

“Was Jeff your boyfriend?”

“A few times. Jodi liked you. Jodi is the most friendly girl than others deafies and HH. I envy her ability to talk to hearies. But her English is worse than mine. Did you like Jodi?”

“Yes, but not as smart as you. Tell me about the accident. How old were you when your father died?”

“14. Father was killed with all family except me because I was in school. Mother was driving the car. Father was driving another car with all family except me. The car of father passed mother. Then cars hit and went from the road.” Pearl mimed two cars tumbling. “Everyone throw out of the car but only my father died. He was 35. I was only family to go to a funeral because all other family are in hospital.”

“That’s horrible! Why did the cars crash?”

“Exactly! Why? Newspaper and police question my mother for cause. Police call grandparents and neighbors and investigate my mother. They say accident. I think not accident.”

“You believe your mother wanted to kill your father, so she caused an accident that almost killed her whole family?”

“I will research to find the truth. I love my father even he refused to learn signs. He permitted me to drive a car. I sit in his lap and turn the steering. Many griefs. Years to trust mother again.”

She began to cry, and she gulped down her wine.

“I was 17 when I was raped the first time. I was home from school. My sisters invite me to the hearing school dance. Mom said no, but I demanded. Then she say yes if my sister watch me. My sister and I had good time, only dance. Clean. Three men watched me. I went outside to parking lot, then they took me away. I screamed loud but they covered me. They took me in a

Part I: Together in Love

car to a road. Two men raped me. One man watched. Then they went away and left me on the road. Later a car takes me to hospital.”

I was astonished when Pearl unzipped her jeans and pulled her panties down to her pubic hair. I saw a vertical surgical scar on flawless skin. One end started a finger’s-width above her pubic hair and the other end, she pointed, went all the way down. She zipped up her jeans.

“Surgery for my womb. The hospital thought I have brain damage because I am mute. Later an interpreter comes and I tell her about my rape. Police arrested men at party. They think they are safe to rape and go back to party because I can’t talk to police. Stupid!”

“You need a ‘Medic-Alert’ bracelet or card so doctors know you are deaf. If you are in an accident you might get the wrong treatment.”

“I refuse to wear deaf bracelet or card. There was a big trial. The man who watched was witness and confessed. Two rapists go to jail for three years. They should hang! They are out now. That is why I have unlisted phone and etc.”

“You wrote you were raped ‘the first time.’ How many rapes?”

“The second time was at a party. I did not resist. No point to shout at deaf party. I did not call police to avoid court and threats.”

“You can survive anything. Will you come for dinner next week?”

Pearl nodded with delight. *“I will bring dessert.”*

I borrowed *The Joy of Signing* from the library. I fingerspelled “The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog” again and again. In a year, I would work through the book and learn most of its 1,500 signs. Learning American Sign Language for Pearl was one of the most satisfying things I ever did.

Pearl and I saw each other for lunch nearly every day. Our second date was a week after our first date, at my place. I prepared dinner in advance so my hands would be free for conversation.

My doorbell buzzed, but when I pressed the intercom button, I heard nothing but street noise, then a mumble. I pushed the door button and rushed to the lobby. Pearl followed me into my one-bedroom flat. I pointed to a bottle of tequila on the counter.

“Margarita?” I said, wondering if she could lipread me in context.

Part I: Together in Love

She didn't understand me, so I pointed to a bottle of margarita mix. Pearl licked her lips.

While I mixed the drinks, she surveyed my flat. My stereo dial glowed, so she put her hand on the stereo and then on a speaker. She scanned my books and records on shelves that covered the wall. She pointed at *How to Make It on the Land*.

I handed her the cocktail and mimed cheers. Pearl tasted the margarita, smacked her lips, and sat down.

"What do you make on the land?"

"Make it' means to support yourself from your own business."

Pearl fingerspelled, "C-a-n y-o-u f-i-n-g-e-r-s-p-e-l-l?"

"P-e-a-r-l," I fingerspelled. My telephone rang. I ignored it and could see that Pearl hadn't heard it. *"You said something on the intercom. Did you hear me with your hearing aid?"*

Pearl pulled back her hair to show me she wore no hearing aid. She mimed her face pressed against the panel, struggling to feel the vibration of a voice in the loudspeaker.

"I am sorry. I have no experience with deafness."

"Most of hearing men just want to fuck deaf women. They think deaf women are always opening their legs. That's not true. Many hearing men were surprised how smart I am. Many times I hurt them. I believe laws should change to make hearing men to be death by hanging or electric chair or whatever. If one more hearing man do it to me again, I would kill him once! I want to kill them because I see how many hearing men do that to deaf women. 80% of deaf women get raped. Mother worry about I go with hearies. She prefer me to stay in deaf group. I told her that deaf group bore me and where I can go and find happiness and etc. One thing I know she already told police about me. I am still going anywhere I want!"

I wondered why her mother and the police had discussed Pearl, but I didn't think to ask.

"You should carry 'mace.' Police use it."

"No, the man can hold my hands. Mother's friend RCMP taught me this." Pearl mimed face-scratching and eye-poking.

"Would you like to go dancing on Saturday at Granville Island Hotel?"

"I do go dancing. Most deafies like to dance. Jodi and I used to go

Part I: Together in Love

dancing but now she has a boyfriend.”

I borrowed a new company car for our third date. Her lobby door clicked open seconds after I pushed the intercom button, and Pearl walked out in a high-necked, lilac dress. We greeted silently and walked to the car, with no other communication, until we reached the Pelican Bay restaurant in the Granville Island Hotel, one of the most expensive venues in town.

Pearl pushed the centerpiece aside for a clear view of my hands. Her clothes weren't beautiful, but Pearl was stunning. I took out a notepad.

“The car is from the bank. I am an engineer but I work for a bank because I believed hippies about lifestyle being important.”

Pearl pointed to tiger prawns on the menu, and I ordered them for both of us.

“I did not have any date since a long time.”

“Later there will be music so we can dance.”

“The music must be loud. Every summer we have the deaf national reunion. Last year was in Toronto. At the party many deafies dancing hard to enjoy the beats. The hotel complained, then some deafies messed up their rooms. The hotel said no more deaf! Next year we will stay for another hotel, that's our revenge.”

Pearl taught me the sign for revenge: the thumbs and forefingers looked like birds pecking at each other.

“You can hear loud noises with a hearing aid, so are you hard-of-hearing or deaf?”

“I do not understand any words with hearing aid so I prefer deaf. HH like Jodi are not deafies and not hearies. Deafies have two communities. Deaf—'D' and deaf—'d'. Difference is culture. Born deaf and not oral—Deaf culture. Deaf later so oral, or rich parents so oral—not Deaf culture. Some Deafies do not welcome HH. Some deafies have problem to have hearing friends. Some hate hearies. Some deaf men hate when hearing man takes deafie wife because fewer deafie woman left for them. Most of hearing woman don't want a deaf man—few jobs for support. But deafie woman is good mother. I want to marry a man who cares me then work together to find home business plus salary. Plus 1 or 2 kids. I feel worth to have them

Part I: Together in Love

because when I get old, they can visit me, so on. I don't care if I have deaf or hearing. Some deafies prefer deaf children, others want hearing children to be interpreter."

"Do deafies like hearing people to learn ASL?"

"Yes if the hearing has deaf relatives. Some hearies want to learn ASL, then teach religion to convert deafies or want to feel important to help deafies. I really hate!"

"Do you have a religion?"

"If there is God there is no deafness, no father death, no rape. Get it? If there is God why does he let my sisters blame me? One time my sister break the vase and blame me. Mother did not believe them but I said to my mother that yes I did that accident. I don't care because I am going to deaf school."

On Monday, three months after meeting Pearl, I registered for a course in American Sign Language. I was hooked.

Shall We Be Magnificent Couple?

I telephoned Pearl for the first time. "Message Relay Centre," answered the operator. "What is the number you wish to call, and whom do you wish to reach?"

"555-1212 for Pearl."

"Please wait." I heard a keyboard tapping.

"Pearl is on the line. Go ahead."

"Hello, Derrick here. Are you free on Friday evening to visit me?"

"Don't forget to say 'go ahead,'" said the operator.

"Go ahead." I felt like I was operating a ham radio station.

"I am free. Go ahead," the operator relayed from Pearl.

"Come at eight o'clock ... see you then. Go ahead. ... I'm finished talking. What do I say now?"

"Don't talk to me. Talk to the other person," said the operator.

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye," the operator relayed from Pearl.

I didn't know it then, but I was one of the first people to use the

Part I: Together in Love

MRC; the Western Institute for the Deaf and the BC Telephone Company had just launched it.

Pearl arrived on time. She walked around the apartment, looking at my books and collections. I was sitting at my kitchen table, analyzing numbers on columnar paper with a calculator and writing a report longhand; on Monday, my secretary would transcribe everything. I put my work aside and poured drinks. Pearl asked to see my photos, so I brought my albums from the bedroom and sat beside her as she scrutinized them.

“Why so many blank spaces?”

“When Eugénie left I divided our photos. I thought she would come back, and when she returned I would put her photos back in the book—I was so naïve!” We came to a picture of one of my best friends, Leo. *“That’s Leo the cop, my best friend since grade 7. That’s my grandmother and grandfather.”*

“Grandma’s family were very wealth. Grandma has 19 or 16? (I don’t remember) sisters and brothers. When my father was 2 years old, I don’t remember who took him when her mother had heart attack and laid down on kitchen floor and left my father alone. My father’s father and 4 boys (brothers) were all drowned near Squamish. Then my father got killed by a car.”

Pearl’s story shocked me, and the offhand way she talked about these disasters shocked me, too.

“Sister Nadine, 28, student. Sister Lydia, 21, student. Brother, 26, doctor.”

“How old were you when you found out you were deaf?”

“My aunts watched me tear paper to feel vibrations. When was 2 Grandma told her that I am deaf but Mother refused to accept until doctor in the hospital admitted. I was 3. Someone gave measles to her when pregnant. Many deafies are first in family.”

“Is your ex-husband deaf?”

“Hard-of-hearing like Jodi. We open up and talk deeply about something. She or I don’t feel safe to talk to another friend.”

“I talk deeply with Leo and Virgil. Do you have many hearing friends?”

“About 10. Deafies—lots but I don’t want to get close, just see them once

Part I: Together in Love

in 2 wks. is enough. Many deafies have problems. I don't like deafies who are negatives."

Everyone generalizes, but the way Pearl talked about her community, either disparaging or boastful, surprised me. She didn't seem to see deafie and hearies as equals but as "us vs. them." Despite the language difficulties and against her mother's advice, Pearl said she preferred to spend her time with hearing friends.

Pearl walked across the street to my condo. We were constantly dropping in on each other for tea. We scribbled like madmen as we tried to get to know each other.

"Where are you going on holidays?"

"I'll visit grandma and grandpa for few days. Then stay at Uncle's ranch to ride on the horse. I am going to learn to jump the fence on the horse this year."

Pearl caught me staring at her. *"It's amazing how much your face can say."*

She smiled. *"Body language.' Jodi and I go to Bimini Bar once a while after health club. We don't get bothered there. Men are thinking we are weird because of ASL. We are peace. Hardly explain to you. We don't drink very much. Ex-boyfriend Eddy was very alcoholic. I lived with him almost 2 yrs. ago. I did not like his way. Bad influence to children in future. He's my good friend now. I think I meet wrong men."*

Pearl's sexual history included a homosexual, an alcoholic, and an epileptic. What was I to think of her? I thought she, like I, had been unlucky in love.

"You'll make a wonderful wife and mother to some lucky guy."

Pearl beamed. *"I believe that I'll be."*

"What if you met a guy you can love but who didn't want kids?"

"Forget him for boyfriend but keep him as good friend for yrs."

I brought a bouquet, a half-bottle of wine, and plastic glasses to our food court rendezvous, even though it was illegal to drink it there. Pearl handed me a letter, looking self-conscious. Her script was neat and her grammar better than in our speedwriting conversations.

Part I: Together in Love

8 May 1984

Dear Derrick.

Shall we be magnificent couple? ...I want to talk with you about anything we can know each other more deep and also improve our communications (signs). Even touching—so on. I want you to teach me anything that you want. I like to try anything to expand my experiences. We create it ourselves and enjoy it together.

I do wish your separation is over. You are hearty person—wonderful! You are not naive. I really love to see your being a gentleman—to make me a woman. I really want to wear nice dress for my work and meet you for eating together. We would feel fascinate.

I notice myself that you make me weak and to be loved.

I feel like to touch you but I couldn't reach you because you are working on 20th floor, ha!

I love you, Pearl

Cupid had shot an arrow into my heart—three months after we met, six weeks after our first date, and while we were still talking on paper! But although we had connected in a magical way, I didn't want more than friendship. Perhaps I didn't want to take advantage of a handicap, or I was worried that my actions might be seen that way. Release of my prejudice—for that is what it was—was our final hurdle.

I walked across the street to Pearl's for brunch. While she toasted waffles, she asked me to check out her diving equipment. It was stored on top of cartons of World's Finest almond chocolates. The fundraising chocolates were labeled Silent Leadership Association.

I took a box to the kitchen.

"Whose chocolates?"

"Silent Leadership Association. I store them because I can't trust other SLA members not to eat them. There are many deaf groups fighting. Deafies are weak to make progress. I started SLA to make strong association for leadership of all deafies who will join."

"How many members do you have?"

Pearl shrugged sadly. *"Few."* She opened a file from her desk and

Part I: Together in Love

showed me a logo. *“My sister draw for me for SLA.”*

“That is a nice logo. If there are already many deaf associations then another one will divide deafies even more.”

“No because they will join SLA for strong deaf leadership. But few in SLA want to help me sell. These chocolates are for future sale.”

“The expiry date is next month. Can I see the contract?” Pearl handed me a letter from her file. *“This is a final demand for payment threatening to hand your invoice to a collection agency. Do you want me to help?”*

Pearl nodded and looked relieved.

A few days later, I called the general manager of World’s Finest Chocolates and asked for Pearl’s debt to be canceled.

“Thanks for calling,” he said. “Communication with this group has been difficult. This group didn’t know how to organize a fund-raiser. My staff should have checked whether the Silent Leadership Association was a registered society and begun with a small order, so we are as much to blame as they are. I’ll write it off and close the file.”

Pearl’s stillborn deaf association and her unmarketable chocolates were naïve, but her initiative impressed me. I found myself wondering how successful Pearl would have been, and could still be, if she had a mentor. Most people overrate their importance in other people’s lives, and I was no exception.

It took Pearl and me two years to eat the chocolates.

Our next date was at the Ridge Theater, where we saw a Spanish movie with subtitles. As we sat in the theater, I was surprised to see Eugénie walk past the footlights, smile at me, and sit at the other end of the theater. She and I had seen more foreign films than Hollywood films and plenty of both. The Ridge had been our favorite haunt. While we were together, Eugénie and I had worked our way through every non-bondage position in *The Joy of Sex*. Now, ten years later, I was working my way through every sign in *The Joy of Signing!*

After the movie, Pearl came to my place and pointed to the map hanging on my wall.

“Roads I’ve ridden on my motorcycle. All states, all provinces, half of Mexico. Eugénie and I rode across Canada for our honeymoon. I want to

Part I: Together in Love

ride to South America. That's why I study Spanish. I have a pen-pal in Madrid. I ride safely, no tickets. How long until I can sign?"

"Depends on how much we have a conversation. For example, we eat together, I can teach you each food. It's easier for you to remember while we are doing. English—The red dog is under the table. ASL—Under table dog red. It's easy. I have seen so many people who learned ASL. They become more smart than they were before."

I stared at Pearl, baffled.

She laughed. *"I was joking."*

"Hello," I signed, using the sign in the textbook.

"That is for USA. Almost same to Canada but like this is for children."

"Hello," she signed the Canadian way. *"For adult."*

"Sometimes deafies fingerspell words."

"For names and other weird words. Local names we usually name it by our signs." "Granville Island," she signed. "Our invention. G plus island sign. You'll meet deafies children who are hearing—very smart than normal children. My friend Elizabeth has a hearing son 8 years old. He learns both deaf and hearing worlds. So many deafies have hearing children. Few deafies has generations all deafies. My family is nothing. I am only one deaf. Jodi and I talked a lot about having kids."

"If you wanted kids, then why did you buy a small condo?"

"For investments, I don't like to waste \$ on rents. I don't know how long I find Mr. Right. My friends teased me which—deaf or hearing husband I prefer to have. In my teenage I made it clear to my deaf friends that I forbid about marrying a hearing man."

"Why did you change your mind?"

"I thought of having hearing husband cause of few good deafie husband. But many mixed marriage failed because the hearie got bored of effort to talk to the deafie. Then the deafie married a deafie and become happy. Depends on communication and trust."

I felt a twinge of disappointment to realize that as a potential mate, I would be Pearl's second choice.

Pearl drove me to the empty New Westminster condominium she was struggling to sell. The radio in her red Buick Skyhawk roared with static

Part I: Together in Love

when she turned the key. I turned it down and tuned in a station. Pearl felt the dashboard and drove off.

Her condominium was bare but for a mattress, a propane barbecue, and a makeup table.

“Why do you have a radio in your car?”

“It is impossible to buy a car without a radio—discrimination!”

We locked the door and walked upstairs to Elizabeth’s flat. When we rang the doorbell, a handsome boy opened the door and signed rapidly. We walked in, and Pearl turned the light switch on and off a few times to announce our presence.

A slender brunette came from the kitchen and signed; the boy interpreted. “I’m delighted to see you. I’m so happy Pearl has a boyfriend. This is my son, Kieran.”

I was amused that Pearl had told her friend I was her boyfriend when we had yet to kiss! After a look around her spartan two-bedroom apartment, we sat down to dinner.

“Your scuba gear—why did you sell it?” I said, with Kieran interpreting.

“My husband left me. It cost two thousand, but I sold it for one thousand. He sends money, but I have to work in a picture-frame factory. They say it is noisy, but I don’t care.”

“You must be a special son, with two deaf parents,” I said to Kieran, who interpreted professionally, without reacting to anything he was interpreting unless it was directed to him.

“I learned to sign at two and to talk at three,” Kieran signed and said.

“And to fingerspell at five,” signed Elizabeth.

“I’m listening through a perfect interpreter. Jodi interprets well, but Kieran speaks naturally, and he signs naturally, too.”

“He was a devil,” Pearl signed.

Elizabeth laughed. “Kieran would turn the TV all the way up and then ignore our neighbors when they pounded on the walls. When the doorbell rang, he would turn the TV down. When I answered the doorbell, the neighbors were furious, but nothing was wrong!”

“It was *fun*,” Kieran signed and said.

We laughed.

Part I: Together in Love

“I’m lucky we weren’t thrown out of here,” signed Elizabeth. She high-fived Kieran.

Kieran called Pearl “Auntie Pearl.” Pearl seemed to envy Elizabeth, even though her job must have paid half of what Pearl’s job paid, because she had a son, and she received alimony.

I was making guacamole when Pearl dropped by for another chat. I picked up the notepad and pointed to the sofa. She sat down, knees together.

“Often I don’t like to use voices—in public, talk to new people. There were times when I got scolded for using voices because it was not clear or the timing was wrong or I am too loud or too soft. Teachers and Mother tell me my speech is understandable. Then when I go outside people just stare at me! Shit! I get so embarrassed. It is hard to speak when you hear nothing. When we are together I feel—mellow feeling with you.”

I put my arm around her, and she turned to me. We kissed passionately.

“You are a wonderful kisser. I can see us now: waterproof notepad in the bathtub! I have more motivation to study ASL.”

“I really like a man to be real. Why most men are never real? Why most men are so ‘covert’?”

Pearl had just told me that she didn’t trust most men, but I didn’t worry that she could feel that way about me.

“Do you have hiking boots? Let’s hike The Chief Trail. I’ll come next Sunday at 9:00.”

On Sunday, Pearl was waiting for me, wearing expensive hiking boots. They looked brand new. We walked to the parking lot and climbed into her car. As she put the key in the ignition, a warning buzzer sounded. Pearl sat bolt upright and stared at me.

“The sound warns you a door is open. You never heard that before?”

Pearl lifted her hair to reveal her hearing aid. She removed it and put it in her purse. She must have worn it in her car for the first time, for me.

Most of the trail was narrow, so I gestured for Pearl to take the lead. I watched her hold the trees as she passed. She told me later that this was because she, like many deafies, found it difficult to balance because of the

Part I: Together in Love

defects in her inner ear that caused her deafness. We hiked without signing, absorbed in our thoughts.

As we picnicked at the summit, a flock of sparrows descended on our sandwiches. A foot from Pearl's face, I blew a whistle to chase them away. Pearl stuck her finger in her ear and wiggled it to show me she heard it. I used my portable ham radio set to make a telephone call to Vancouver, and Pearl was amazed. Cellphones weren't yet available, so for me to make a telephone call from a mountaintop seemed incredible.

During our descent, I blew the whistle behind her, curious to find out how close I would need to be for her to hear it. I blew it so loudly that my ears rang, each time closing the distance, but Pearl didn't react at all until I was just a few steps behind her. She turned and smiled; she knew I had been testing her.

Pearl came across the street with a bottle of red wine and knocked on my door. She removed her shoes, put the bottle on the table, and sat down at my piano. I sat down beside her. She smiled, took her hearing aid out of her purse, and put it on. She rested her hand on the piano and looked at me expectantly. I played *As Time Goes By*.

"Do you listen to music with your hearing aid?"

Pearl shook her head.

I played middle C *pianissimo*, then *piano*, then *mezzoforte*. Pearl heard the loudest note and nodded. I repeated the experiment at higher and lower pitches.

"You can hear four octaves with your aid. From here to here on the keyboard. Now listen without your aid."

Pearl took it off. I pounded middle C so loudly I was worried my neighbors would complain. Pearl could not hear it.

"Put your aid on. Sit where you can't see my hands. I'll play two notes—tell me if they are higher or lower."

She put her hearing aid back on. I played pairs of notes. Pearl "heard" the order correctly half the time, so she was guessing. With a powerful hearing aid, her right ear could hear a loud tone only as a noise like static.

Pearl removed her hearing aid. *"Peace."* She pointed to the lyrics: *A*

Part I: Together in Love

kiss is just a kiss, and she kissed me.

“You make wonderful kisses. Who taught you?”

She pointed at me.

I put a Moody Blues record on the turntable. “Never Comes the Day” from *On the Threshold of a Dream* filled my ears.

*I feel her gently sighing as the evening slips away.
If only you knew what’s inside of me now,
You wouldn’t want to know me somehow.*

Pearl walked to my record shelf and studied the covers.

“You put the names together but Beethoven is after Mozart. Beethoven was the most famous deafie.”

“Yes, but if he was born deaf he wouldn’t be famous. I put them in birth order because each composer learned from those who lived before.”

She took *Die Kunst der Fuge* from the beginning of the shelf. “So music begins at Bach.” She took *Eine Alpensinfonie* from the other end. Its cover was of the Matterhorn. “What does this music sound like?”

“It tells a story of hikers on a mountain.”

“What about this one?” Pearl pointed at the cover of Vivaldi’s *L’Amoroso Concerto*. I put my arm around her, kissed her, and pointed at the cover, which had two lovers caressing in the grass.

Pearl nodded.

Pearl always wore high-neckline clothes. Her shirt had six buttons, with only one opened. I opened one more and kissed her neck. She nodded as the Moody Blues urged me on.

*But you will love me tonight,
We alone will be alright,
In the end.*

I pulled back, but Pearl smiled as though she were melting.

*Give just a little bit more,
Take a little bit less,
From each other tonight.*

Part I: Together in Love

Pearl's skin became flushed as I followed her onto the carpet.

*Admit what you're feeling
And see what's in front of you,
It's never out of your sight.*

We were lucky we did not become parents that night. Pearl started on the Pill, and every weekend became a sleepover.

When I returned from a live-aboard sailing course, I was delighted to find a stack of letters from Pearl in my mailbox. An hour later, Pearl walked over and invited me to her mother's home for their family reunion dinner. At last, I would meet her family.

A few days later, we drove to her mother's apartment. Pearl pushed the intercom button in the lobby. I nodded to Pearl when I heard *hello* from the speaker.

"*Harroo*," said Pearl into the intercom.

"Come in, Pearl," boomed the voice through the intercom, and the entrance door clicked open.

Pearl opened her mother's unlocked door, and we walked into the aroma of home cooking. Pearl's mother was friendly but reserved, and she looked every one of her fifty-one years. She introduced me to Art, who was her third husband, to Pearl's siblings Kevin, Carol, and Debbie, and to Debbie's husband; all were visiting from Alberta. Her mother made me feel welcome, yet I sensed a vague sadness about her, a feeling I had never felt before. There was warmth and love in Pearl's family, but there was little cheer. Among her mother's four children, only Debbie was married and had a child.

Pearl's mother and Art had been married for three years, and it seemed as though they were still trying to fit furniture from two apartments into one. Art led me through a maze of furniture to a sofa by the window. He had been laid off as a provincial park gatekeeper, and now spent his time working part-time as the caretaker of their apartment building, woodworking, organizing Elks affairs with Pearl's mother, and grumbling about the government. Pearl's mother worked in

Part I: Together in Love

catering and seemed to have an endless supply of one-gallon jars.

I sat next to Pearl, who sat opposite her mother. I couldn't see how Pearl could think that her mother had killed her father.

"Delicious," signed Pearl. "*Good cook*," she wrote.

"Put that notepad away, Pearl," said her mother. "Are you wearing your hearing aid?"

"Noo ...," said Pearl almost inaudibly. "*Lef a hoe*."

"She left it at home," her mother said.

"In the three months since we met, I never heard Pearl speak a sentence."

"What?" gestured Pearl.

"Derrick never heard you talk before," said her mother.

"*Eee ill sigh soo ...*," Pearl mumbled.

"He will sign soon," her mother said. "Pearl needn't be ashamed of her accent."

"I signed up for an ASL course."

"Pearl will like that," said Carol. "It will be an adventure for both of you."

"I once bought a book of signs," said Debbie. "But we live in Alberta, and we can't use sign language on the phone."

"What?" gestured Pearl.

"Derrick will take a course," said her mother.

"Do you know any signs?"

"None."

"Why don't you learn a few? It's never too late."

"We do just fine orally. Don't we, Pearl?"

"What?" gestured Pearl.

"She is misbehaving because we have a visitor. Naughty girl."

"Pearl told me she loves you, but she hardly knows you because you won't sign," I said.

"I follow expert advice. Everything I have done is to support Pearl to become as oral as possible so she can function in the real world. The greater her oral skills, the greater her opportunities, so the better her life will be. We want the best for her."

"Even if you learn to sign, you must help her with lipreading and

Part I: Together in Love

speech,” said Kevin.

“One way doesn’t rule out the other, does it?”

“It does,” said Pearl’s mother. “*That’s* the problem.”

“At thirty, you might as well communicate any way you can. I suppose she’s not with you enough now for your oral practice to make much of a difference.”

“Hearing signers don’t help. Why do you want to sign? To keep Pearl for yourself? Talk to her, and listen to her talk, too. Help her with the hearing world. We support deaf children through the Elks’ oral development fund.”

We ate a wonderful roast beef dinner. There was no signing or writing. An outsider would never have suspected that one of us was deaf.

I invited Pearl to ride on my motorcycle to Mount Baker for a roadhouse lunch and then to my parents’ for dinner. Pearl was happy to have a chance to meet my parents.

Eugénie’s leather suit and helmet fit Pearl perfectly. My polished, black BMW was parked in front of my unwashed, brown Volkswagen Beetle. Both were ten years old. I pushed the motorcycle away from the car, exposing the car’s license plate: *Eugénie*.

Pearl pointed at the license plate and winced. I smiled and shrugged and started the engine. She climbed on. I put her hands around my waist and pressed them tight. I took a deep breath, smiled, and rode off.

When we arrived in Langley, my mother heard the throbbing of the engine and rushed out to greet us. Pearl climbed off the bike and took off her helmet. Unable to speak to each other, my mother and Pearl simply hugged. Father greeted Pearl with a handshake.

Pearl followed my mother into the kitchen and helped cook dinner. Father mixed a gin-and-tonic for himself while I took a beer from the refrigerator. He and I sat in the living room.

“Son, your girl is pretty, but be careful not to let your second relationship be the consequence of your first. Six months is nothing; give yourself time. I spent years working with handicapped people in charitable foundations, and from what I’ve seen, it’s difficult to go through childhood with a handicap and develop a view of the world

Part I: Together in Love

completely free of psychological scars.”

“Like ...?”

“Bitterness. Suspicion. Some deaf people and blind people can’t trust because they can’t know all that goes on around them. For some, suspicion fills that void.”

“Pearl is happier than Eugénie. She isn’t driven to live up to her mother’s and sister’s talents. Other than talk to me, she can do anything. Deafness is a language problem.”

“It’s more than that. Some handicapped people believe the world owes them a living—taxes should pay for interpreters, for example, so why learn to speak? Be careful not to be an entitlement. Do you see what I’m getting at?”

“No.”

Pearl came into the dining room jingling tableware. My mother followed her with heated plates.

“Pearl made the gravy. She’s wonderful in the kitchen.”

When we sat down to eat, I handed the notepad to my mother. She wrote to Pearl in beautiful cursive script, speaking each word as she wrote it. It was a happy evening. It was clear that were Pearl and I to become a couple, she would be warmly welcomed by my parents, despite my father’s concerns.

As we mounted the motorcycle to ride home, my mother hugged Pearl affectionately.

I said, “Isn’t she beautiful, Mom?”

A Silent Movie

“I’m glad you’re here this evening,” the instructor signed and said. “Please say your name and why you want to learn ASL.”

“I have a deaf son.”

“I work with disabled people.”

“I have a deaf nephew.”

“I am a missionary.”

“I’m a woodworking teacher. I would like to teach deaf students.”

Part I: Together in Love

“Good reasons! ‘My country, my language,’ they say. Well, there are two million deafies in North America, and they can’t learn to hear and join *your* country, but you can learn to sign and join *theirs*. This is what makes some deaf people militant at times.”

“I *noticed*,” said another student.

“They do their best to live in our deaf-impaired country, but we are not as generous to them. A global world exists of deafies communicating with each other and intermarrying. My parents are deaf, and I’m still an outsider.” The instructor looked for a reaction, then continued to sign and speak. “Native ASL is not a signed version of English. It branched off from French Sign Language when sign language was established in the US by a deaf Frenchman in the nineteenth century. Syntax and basic signs like ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are French. It’s almost as hard for an American deafie to sign to a British deafie as it is for an American hearie to speak to a French hearie. Even the fingerspelling is different! BSL needs two hands to fingerspell, ASL just one. How many of you know a few signs?”

Most of us raised our hands.

“If you aren’t sure a deafie is looking at you, then wave, touch an elbow, or stomp before you sign. And don’t let your eyes wander—it breaks the communication channel, so it’s rude. You must manage that channel to keep it open.”

“How many signs are there?” said a student.

“Five thousand. Try to learn new signs every day.”

“English has over a hundred thousand words.”

“Yes, but when you need an unusual word, you fingerspell it. I’ll sign some word pairs quickly, the equivalent of homonyms. See if you can spot the difference.” He signed several word pairs. “See the difference?”

Embarrassed, the students looked at each other. “Hardly,” said one.

“I signed, *shy-whore*, *blue-bastard*, *ugly-summer*, *wrong-yellow*, *student-garbage*, *chocolate-church*. ASL has charm every bit as rich as English.”

“I’m done for,” muttered a student.

“This beginner course focuses on signing using English syntax. When you sign ASL using English syntax, all deafies will understand you,

Part I: Together in Love

and they will answer the same way. But when they sign to each other, they will use native ASL, and you won't understand the details of the conversation, especially when they are going at it as fast as they can."

I raised my hand. "How long does it take to become fluent?"

"Few hearing signers make it to native ASL unless they are born to deaf parents, they live or work among deaf people, so they see them signing to all the time, or they study it full time for a degree. The rest, with just one deaf person in the family, end up in the middle, often with a patois of 'home signs' unique to the family."

"Why doesn't native ASL converge with English ASL? Everyone would be better off," said a student.

"Because the native syntax is more efficient. Some educated deafies prefer English ASL because it helps them with written English, but most deafies find it snobbish. For example, 'Have you been to Toronto?' is signed in native ASL, 'Already touch Toronto?'—two fewer signs. Best of all, native ASL takes full advantage of *dimensionality*. This makes it rich and beautiful; spoken languages can't do this. English has to use word order to indicate direction, and a pronoun like 'he' can only refer to one person at a time. But in ASL, we just point to a spot and sign a name to establish a 'he' there. Then we point to another spot and sign another name to establish another 'he' over there, and so on. We can have half a dozen 'he' pronouns in use at the same time. Then we toss verbs between those spots to indicate action. English can't do this without confusion. To make it a question instead of a statement, you just add a quizzical look—a facial question mark. To add common adverbs, you add *feeling* to your signing, like fast, anger, uncertainty. One sign sequence can translate to dozens of sentences! Signed songs are like a dance with words. ASL has puns, too. Does anyone know this sign?" He made a fist and relaxed it several times.

"Milk," said a student.

"And this?" He made the same sign but moved it past his face. "Past-your-eyes milk—pasteurized milk! Now the reality check. Although ASL richly describes anything visual, it describes abstract concepts poorly. Idioms are crucial to abstract thought, but there's almost no idiom in ASL. Think of it this way: ASL is a *silent movie*. English is an

Part I: Together in Love

unillustrated book.”

After my first ASL lesson, Pearl did her part by refusing to use the notepad. She forced me to sign and fingerspell. We met in the food court several times a week and were together on weekends. I studied *The Joy of Signing* at home and on the bus. I signed to myself in the mirror. At first, our communication was 80:20 fingerspelling to signs, but, one by one, the fingerspelled common words were replaced by their signs. Within a few months, our communication was 20:80 fingerspelling to signs. Our syntax was English, as it is for most hearing signers, because that is the way Pearl always signed it to me.

Pearl invited me to visit a deaf couple for more signing practice. We went in my Beetle. I turned on the 8-track player and played “Truckin’” by the Grateful Dead, one of my few 8-track tape cartridges that hadn’t jammed.

“I notice you never drive up to the white line,” signed Pearl as we waited at a traffic light. “You always stop a little bit behind.”

“It’s a habit I learned from Leo—we can see the people in their cars better than they can see us.”

We parked in front of a low-rise apartment building. A sticker on a car read *I’m Not Deaf—I’m Ignoring You*. A terrier forced its nose between the curtains on the ground floor and barked.

“Dwight is a funny man. You will like him. His wife is Dana.”

Pearl pushed the lobby intercom button, and the entrance clicked open. A young man greeted us in the corridor. After introductions in sign language, we entered their apartment, where Dwight introduced Dana.

“Only sign and fingerspell. Derrick is my student,” signed Pearl in signed English, not native ASL, so I could understand her.

“Perfect. Our dog is deaf, too.”

“How did you find a deaf dog?” I signed.

“Many terriers are deaf. The SPCA phoned WID to say they had another one. We adopted him.”

“What is WID?”

“Western Institute for the Deaf,” fingerspelled Pearl.

Part I: Together in Love

“Sit,” Dwight signed. The dog sat.

“Dead,” he signed. The dog rolled over on its back.

“Watch,” he signed. The dog jumped onto the sofa, nudged the drapes aside, and looked out the window for visitors.

“I’m impressed,” I signed.

“Animals learn signs easier than speech,” signed Pearl. “Animals prefer deafies. We are more sensitive. A woman taught ASL to gorillas—it’s true.”

“Children of deaf parents learn to sign before children of hearing parents learn to speak,” signed Dwight. “How did you meet Pearl?”

“In the Pacific Centre food court. We ate at the same time.”

Pearl laughed. “My lunch was one o’clock and only for thirty minutes. One day I had a doctor’s appointment at eleven o’clock, so I ate there at noon, and then I met Derrick. I got approval to change my lunchtime to noon and for one hour.”

“I didn’t know you hunted me.”

Dwight tapped the floor. “I give you some man-to-man advice. Work hard. It is the responsibility of the hearie in a deafie-hearie relationship to understand Deaf culture. The opposite is impossible.”

“How?”

“Through ASL. When you sign well, you can join us.”

Gradually, the deafies segued from slow signed English to fast native ASL, and I became as excluded as Pearl whenever she was with hearies.

I drove Pearl home, stopped in front of her apartment, and turned on the dome light so we could sign.

“That was interesting. Deaf culture. Thank you.”

“Good signing practice.”

“I think I understand how you felt growing up in an oral family.”

“Missing everything.”

“Teach me native ASL. I understand when you sign to me but not when you sign to deafies.”

“You sign to me in English, so I will improve my English, and you learn more signs. Then I will teach you native ASL.”

“When?”

“That depends on you.”

Part I: Together in Love

Pearl retrieved her spare TTY from Jodi and lent it to me. I took the device home, placed my telephone handset on it, dialed Pearl's number, and heard the beeping tones. It was the only digital device in my home other than a calculator.

PEARL HERE GA
HELLO BERRICK HERE TOO
DONT FORGET TYPE GA AT THE END GA
CAN I ASK YOU A FAVOR? GA
YOU CAN ASK GA
I HAVE TO GO TO MY BOSS HOUSE FOR A COMPANY DINNER
TOMORROW CAN I BORROW YOUR BUICK TOMORROW NIGHT? IF I
DRIVE MY RUSTY VW I WILL HAVE TO HIDE IT GA
OK JODI WILL COME TOMORROW SO NO NEED FOR MY CAR GA
THANK YOU I WILL COME TO YOUR HOUSE TOMORROW AFTER
WORK AND GET THE KEY THANK YOU GA
OK WHEN YOU BRING IT BACK PUT KEY IN MY MAILBOX I WANT
TO BORROW YOUR MOTORCYCLE ON THE WEEKEND GA
OK IF YOU HAVE MOTORCYCLE LICENSE GA
NO HA HA YOU NEED TO DRIVE ME GA
HA HA OK IF NOT RAINING SEE YOU TOMORROW BYE GA
WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED TYPE SK NOT GA SK
OK SK
KISS SMACK SK SK SK

As soon as I returned from dinner with my colleagues the next night, my telephone rang. I heard tones and put the handset on the TTY.

HELLO GA
PEARL HERE IS THAT BERRICK? GA
HA THANK YOU FOR LENDING ME YOUR CAR TONIGHT GA
I DONT FORGIVE YOU FOR WHAT YOU DID YOU KNOW WHAT YOU
DID GA
I BORROWED YOUR CAR NOT OK NOW? GA
THATS NOT WHAT I MEAN YOU THINK GA
I AM THINKING AND I DONT UNDERSTAND AT FOOD COURT
TOMORROW PLEASE EXPLAIN GA

Part I: Together in Love

NO POINT TO EXPLAIN TO YOU BUT SEE YOU AT 1215 SK

I waited for Pearl at the food court the next day. My environment and hers were so different—the food court cacophony annoyed me, yet, for her, it would have been peaceful. Pearl had never been late before. When she arrived, she stared at me icily.

“You must accept responsibility for your action.”

“I borrowed your car because a wealthy colleague who just moved from Singapore had invited all the managers to his home. I didn’t want to drive my rusty Beetle there with *Eugénie* on the license plate and park it next to his Mercedes-Benz. I drove to his house. I ate dinner. I refilled your fuel. I parked, put the key in your mailbox, and walked home.”

“It is finished.” She held her finger to her lip.

How could she go from loving me to accusing me of treachery? I convinced myself that I was insensitive, and I had explained myself inadequately.

“Can we stay friends?”

“If you still want to be friends,” she signed without smiling.

“I do.” I smiled. “The weather this weekend will be sunny. Do you want to go to Wreck Beach on Saturday?”

“Is it safe?”

“Yes. Friendly, quiet, and nude, the safest beach in Vancouver.”

“Can Jodi come?”

“Sure.”

“I accept your invitation.”

Pearl said that she was breaking up with me but then seemed to forget about it. She never mentioned the episode again, and she never told me what she thought I had done with her car.

Pearl, Jodi, and I parked near the beach and hiked down the steep trail. I held both women’s hands to help them balance. We spread towels on the sand beside a driftwood log and undressed. A thousand people were nude except for a bodybuilder strutting about wearing only a chrome cock ring and a T-shirt that said, “MY NAME IS DAVE MY NUMBER IS 367-0187.” A man with leathery skin carried a cooler chanting,

Part I: Together in Love

“Tequila sunrise! Margaritas!” A woman on a rock practiced tai chi. In the days before digital cameras and cellphones, nude beaches were like a private club.

“It’s like a party,” signed Pearl, with Jodi interpreting.

“No clothes means no showing off. Most people look better when clothed.”

“I like the coconut smell,” Jodi signed and said.

“Spread lotion on your bottoms, or you won’t be able to sit down tomorrow.”

“Fine,” signed Pearl. “I see pink bikinis over there already.”

Pearl and Jodi lay prone. I spread lotion on Pearl’s back, arms, neck, legs, and buttocks. She rolled onto her back, put lotion on her breasts, and gestured for me to spread lotion everywhere else. She sat up.

“Your turn,” Pearl signed. She slathered me in turn.

“No boyfriend today,” Jodi signed and said. “Gavin is working.”

“On Saturday?”

“He sells investments.”

“How long has he been your boyfriend?”

“Two years.”

“Does he sign?”

“No. I was worried he would find another girl, so he doesn’t have to repeat so much talking, but now I know he loves me.”

“You live in the hearing world, although you sign perfectly.”

“But sometimes I feel like I don’t fit in the hearing world.”

“Why?”

“Because hearing people think listening is more important than seeing.”

“Make small signs,” signed Pearl. “Deafies can read ASL from far away, then gossip. Don’t discuss private things.”

Jodi removed her hearing aids and put them in her backpack. We swam in the surf with the crowd.

“Derrick!” shouted a voice.

I turned to see Eugénie, waving. It had been less than a year since she left, but I felt nothing for her. We waded to the shore. I introduced the women to each other, speaking and signing. Jodi was deaf without her hearing aids, so I did my best to interpret.

Part I: Together in Love

“A different way to meet—everyone nude,” Pearl signed.

“I saw your car, and I came down. It’s easy to spot a car with my name on it!” said Eugénie.

“Let’s sit down. Our towels are over there,” I signed and said.

Eugénie sat cross-legged next to Pearl and opened her backpack. She pulled out a clipboard. Her clipboard and a pen shuttled between Pearl and Eugénie. Jodi and I walked to the suntanned hawker and bought four margaritas.

Jodi put her hearing aids back on and began interpreting. Eugénie put the clipboard away.

“Try buying margaritas on any other beach! I love Wreck Beach,” said Eugénie.

“Me, too. No police—and no plainclothesmen, either!” I laughed.

“Did you bring your Minox?” said Eugénie.

“Yes.”

“Would you like me to take a photo of the three of you?”

“Of course!” I said.

Eugénie took our photo sitting nude in front of the log. I offered our sandwiches, but she stood up and said, “I must go. I enjoyed my conversation with Pearl.” She put on her clothes, and wandered away.

“I don’t understand why she left you. She wrote that you did nothing wrong, but she decided to be single.”

“Eugénie moved out a few months after I found semen in our bed. She told me it was her professor’s semen, and she had been seeing him in our bed in the afternoon for months. She told me his name and that he was married, seventeen years older, and a Cambridge Ph.D. He could do more for her career than I could, and her career was everything to her. She left because she was his mistress. Her grandmother, mother, and sister are actresses, and single, and she felt her mother looked down at her. I even watched them beat her at charades.”

“What’s charades?” I explained the game, and Pearl laughed. “Deafies will always win. I don’t care what anyone thinks of me. Did Eugénie offer to take our photo?”

I nodded.

“I knew it! She was testing us to see if we would hold hands.”

Part I: Together in Love

Jodi laughed. “I hope you pass Pearl’s tests. Deafie-hearie works if the hearie has the patience to be an interpreter, secretary, and everything. Hearie-hearie couples can share 50:50, but deafie-hearie must share 80:20.”

I lay back on the towel and looked up at the silhouettes of the women. Pearl, despite her quirks, made me happy. I could imagine spending my life with Pearl.

I kissed Pearl, put my .22 rifle and cartridges in the trunk of her car, and climbed in. We drove to Jeff’s flat. Pearl introduced me to Jeff, her previous lover, by fingerspelling. Jeff got in the back seat.

“You talk while I drive,” Pearl signed. We drove off.

“How did you meet Pearl, Jeff?”

“Her friend Jodi is my friend Gavin’s girlfriend. Pearl never has a notepad—on principle—so I learned fingerspelling so I could talk to her while Gavin was with Jodi.”

“Why not learn some signs?”

“I pick fights I can win. Learning to sign is like learning to play guitar. It’s easy to do badly, hard to do well.”

“What do you do for a living?”

“Real estate—now also for deaf clients.” Jeff grinned.

“You didn’t learn fingerspelling only for Pearl.”

“That’s true, but that’s why I started it. Try explaining ‘nothing could be further from the truth’ to Pearl. I used a dictionary. I used a diagram. I gave up.”

Jeff and I heard a police siren. Pearl saw flashing lights in her mirror, pulled over, and rolled down the window.

“Turn the radio up. Tune it between stations, and shut up,” said Jeff.

A policeman approached. “Your license, registration, and insurance, please.” The car radio roared static noise.

“I’m deaf,” Pearl signed.

The policeman looked at Jeff and me. “Are you deaf?”

“Deaf,” we signed, nodding.

The policeman wrote in his notebook and showed it to Pearl. Slowly, Pearl unlocked the glovebox, removed the papers, and passed them to the

Part I: Together in Love

policeman. Jeff and I discussed the weather by fingerspelling.

The policeman had written a note to tell Pearl she was speeding, but he would give her a warning. She wrote a note promising to slow down. After he drove away, I turned the radio off, and we all roared with laughter.

“You were wonderful actors,” Pearl signed, laughing, as I interpreted.

“Cops give deafies a break,” said Jeff. “Most are safe drivers—when you can’t hear, you keep your eyes open!”

“I never had a ticket. But deafies have to be careful with police not to be shot reaching for a notepad because he thinks we are reaching for a gun,” signed Pearl.

“I travel with a cop, so I don’t get tickets. When Leo and I ride our motorcycles, they can’t give me a ticket but let him off a warning.”

We drove off. I stopped interpreting so Pearl could concentrate on driving.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve gone shooting. I’ve got a 30-06 hunting rifle,” said Jeff.

“Why didn’t you bring it today?”

“It’s up north—disaster planning. My friend and I are stocking up.”

“You’re a survivalist?”

“I’ll do whatever I need to do to survive.”

Pearl pulled into the Barnet Rifle Club parking lot. The sound of gunfire crackled through the air. I took my rifle out of the car.

“An AR7,” said Jeff. “The US Air Force survival gun.”

Jeff rented a rifle, and we all rented hearing protectors. We sat at a table in the gallery. With the hearing protectors on, Jeff and I fingerspelled to each other and to Pearl, who was the only woman on the range. We jumped from an explosion at the next table. A shooter in a red quilted shirt had fired a hunting rifle.

“I heard that, and I felt that, too,” Pearl signed.

I fired two shots at the 100-meter target, hitting it on one side. Jeff took two shots, missing the target. I helped Pearl to use my gun. She fired and hit the target, and when she saw the hole in it, she grinned. She fired again and hit a bull’s-eye. We all took turns, Pearl using both rifles.

“Let’s try the 300-meter target,” I signed.

Part I: Together in Love

Jeff and I hit the distant target occasionally, but Pearl hit it often. The hunting rifle next to us roared again. We turned to the shooter. “Do you want to try this one?” the shooter signed to Pearl. Jeff and I were astonished he could sign, but not Pearl. “Fine,” signed Pearl.

He lifted the heavy rifle into her arms. “Hold it firmly,” he signed.

Pearl raised it, sighted the target, and fired. The recoil knocked her shoulder back. She lay down the weapon and checked the target through the spotting telescope. “The center.” She beamed with pride.

“My cousin is deaf, and he’s a good shot, too,” signed the shooter.

After an hour, we ran out of ammunition. During the cease-fire, we gathered our targets, returned the rented items, and walked outside.

“A souvenir,” signed Jeff, handing the bull’s-eye to Pearl.

While Pearl drove, Jeff continued talking from the back seat. It is awkward to sign while driving, so my drives with Pearl had little conversation except at traffic lights.

“Pearl’s at home on the range,” said Jeff. “Lock up your ammunition, and don’t mess with her. She’s incredible—I hope it works out. Listen to her dreams. Help her finish things she starts. Did you see the crochets at her place? Did you ever see a finished one?”

“No.”

“You see? Her relationships, too. You would expect her to be tough after what she’s been through, but she’s not. She’s a sucker. Ever heard of *est*?”

“Vaguely. What’s *est*?”

“Werner Erhard’s feel-good factory, the biggest scam on the planet. Pay \$300 to forget your personality, find your new self, and set yourself free.”

Pearl noticed we were speaking more quietly. I turned on the radio and tuned into a station, trying to feign disinterest in what Jeff had to say.

“Did you try to talk her out of it?”

“It didn’t work. Pearl invited me, so I saw it myself. You share your life in four-day seminars, fourteen hours at a stretch, with wristwatches removed. You listen to crap like facts have no meaning—our stories give

Part I: Together in Love

facts meaning. Ride your horse in the direction it's going. If you keep saying it the way it is, your word is law in the universe. Sign up for special courses! Bring your friends! Pearl is keeping it a secret from you because participants swear that they will not tell anyone the contents because that would spoil the show for others when they take the course—and make it unlikely anyone else would sign up. Then they get the participants to volunteer to work for free for a corporation as if it were a church. Pearl did.”

Pearl dropped Jeff off and then drove us to my place. When I opened my door, the aroma of beef stew wafted out. I pointed to my slow cooker.

“This is how I welcome myself home as a single man.”

After a beef bourguignon dinner with baguette and wine, I put a box on the kitchen table. I opened it to reveal a .32 caliber Walther PPK pistol. It was a collector's item—a gun used by the Gestapo and James Bond. It had been decommissioned by the German police, and the German eagle was on it. I took the empty magazine out of the pistol, pulled the slide back to prove it was unloaded, and handed my toy to Pearl.

“Why do you own a gun?”

“For shooting with Leo. I just bought it.”

“Why didn't you bring it for shooting today?”

“I don't have a permit to carry it there, so it has to stay here.”

Later, we continued signing in a bubble bath. It was great not to need the notepad anymore. In bed, she turned off the lights, wrapped my hands around hers under the sheets, and formed signs. We usually left a night-light on so we could keep chatting side-by-side with our arms above the sheets, even though it was slower to sign when looking at the signs from the rear instead of the front; now, in the dark, I had to trace the shape of each sign in her hand with my fingers.

“I love you,” Pearl signed.

“I miss you when you aren't visiting,” I signed, cooking a breakfast of *buevos rancheros* with tortillas and beans. “These are called refried beans. Mexicans say that's because they never do anything right the first time.”

“I understand that joke,” signed Pearl, smiling.

Part I: Together in Love

“Live with me. You can stop paying rent. I will share everything.”

Pearl hugged me. “We can be together every day.”

We were in love, but we had made a practical decision: it would save both of us money. We didn’t discuss the timing for starting a family or when I might divorce and we might marry. It was the same casual way that Eugénie and I began living together.

“We can store your furniture in your condo until it sells. I can swap my car for Eugénie’s bicycle that matches mine so we can cycle together. Your car is enough for both of us. I have the motorcycle. We can share a bank account. I know I can trust you.”

“That isn’t the sign for *trust*—it’s the sign for *penis*. Those two signs are similar: trust-penis-trust-penis.”

I laughed. “Never trust a penis.”

“You can teach me computers to manage our bank account.”

“Fine. How much notice do you have to give your landlord?”

“What do you mean, ‘notice?’”

“You have to tell the landlord before you go—how many months?”

Pearl looked puzzled.

“Show me your lease, and I will write your notice letter for you.”

Pearl kissed me.

Our lives changed quickly. Pearl moved in with me six months after we met. I reserved a U-Haul truck, collected cartons from the supermarket, and bought Pearl a negligee as a welcome gift. We measured our furniture and planned which piece would fit where and which leftovers would be stored in her condominium.

On moving day, I collected the truck and parked it next to her apartment. When I rang the bell and entered, I found Pearl distraught—angry at the world, furious with herself.

“Blender, camera, suitcase, vacuum, the pictures my sister painted, all gone. I put them in my car last night to be ready to move today. Thieves broke into my car. Why always *me*?” I hugged Pearl as she started to cry. “They dumped my diving equipment all over the parking lot.”

“Cheer up; we don’t need two vacuum cleaners. Get a police report to make an insurance claim, and get some money back.”

Part I: Together in Love

Pearl pulled a folder labeled “Insurance” from a cardboard carton and handed it to me.

“It’s expired. You filed an expired policy from your old address.”

Pearl resumed crying. I handed her a key. “My home is our home. This will not happen again.”

It took most of the day to move her surplus furniture to her condo. I set up Pearl’s TTY, telephone and doorbell flasher, caption decoder, and silent alarm clock.

Pearl made the bed, tucking the end of the sheets under the mattress in a perfect 45-degree angle at each corner.

“No wrinkles, like at school.”

I lay down on the bed to test Pearl’s alarm clock.

“A back massage instead of a bell to wake me up. I like it! Let’s eat at the Kamei Sushi.”

As we walked to the restaurant, holding hands, a panhandler crossed our path. “Spare change?”

“We’re deaf. We don’t understand you,” Pearl signed.

“Ears like shit—not work,” I signed.

The beggar held out his hand. Pearl and I shrugged and walked off.

“Fucking dummies!” the panhandler shouted behind us.

In the restaurant, I told Pearl what he said, and we burst into laughter.

Our shared telephone line turned out to be a nuisance. I could respond to hearing or TTY calls, but a hearing caller who called when I was out would hear only beeping tones, and Pearl would become annoyed picking up voice calls she couldn’t answer. She worried this created a security risk because hearing callers would learn she was at home alone.

I bought an answering machine and put voice *and* TTY greetings into its outgoing cassette tape, which were played sequentially. “Please wait for the message after the tones” in my voice was followed by “Please leave a message for Pearl” in TTY tones followed by “I am not available to take your call right now, so please leave me a message after the beep” in voice. A hearing caller would ignore the tones, and a deaf caller would ignore the voice. If Pearl was home when a TTY message came in, she

Part I: Together in Love

could see the text in the TTY and take the call. If we had both been out and a caller had left a message, she would play it back when she returned. A TTY message appeared as text on the TTY, but when a voice message was played, her TTY screen displayed a blinking light; Pearl would then put her hand on the speaker and feel the vibration to confirm it was a voice message.

It worked great, and Pearl was impressed. I loved to find solutions like this for her.

Pearl, Jeff, and I took scuba diving lessons from Jeff's friend. Pearl easily mastered the theory and pencil-and-paper calculation of the decompression tables.

My face mask leaked, so our instructor suggested I shave off my mustache for a more watertight seal. Pearl agreed, saying it made me look gay. I shaved it off and never grew one again.

During our first open water dive, we discovered that the drysuit Pearl bought from Elizabeth was too large, so it trapped air and Pearl floated like a balloon. While we stood in chest-high surf, our instructor added weights to her belt while Jeff pressed the air release valve, and I hugged her to squeeze the air out of her suit. At last, Pearl sank, and the three of us submerged to join her underwater. As we swam into deeper water, the remaining air in her drysuit shifted to her boots. Pearl struggled to stay level, so the instructor ordered us to surface.

When I surfaced, I saw two neoprene legs and fins pointing at the sky. Pearl was floating upside down, and her legs were beating helplessly in the air. Jeff, the instructor, and I took the regulators out of our mouths and howled with laughter. The three of us inverted Pearl so the surplus air moved to her shoulders, and she now floated upright.

"That's not funny!" Pearl spat out seawater with a grin.

"Bring her up higher. Inflate her suit a bit more," the instructor said to me.

I took her inflator hose, pressed the valve open, and blew a lungful of air into her suit.

Pearl screamed. "My *tit!*"

I had forgotten to start blowing air *before* I opened the valve, so I had

Part I: Together in Love

blown a spoonful of cold seawater into her drysuit along with the air. We shared contagious laughter at the farce. Pearl was a good sport.

I looked forward to every day I spent with Pearl, my life partner. It felt like my early years with Eugénie, when being half of a couple had been as important to her as it was to me. I hoped our happiness would continue forever.

Guatemala by Motorcycle

Leo's wedding, to a Mexican, was planned for September. I showed Pearl my map of Mexico.

"How about a month on a motorcycle? You will need a hard ass."

"It will be romantic. But I only get three weeks' vacation."

"I can leave before you and return after you. I can reach Mazatlán in four or five days. Then you fly and meet me. We'll ride to Tepic and stay there for two days for Leo's wedding. From there, we can reach Guatemala in a week."

"I saw on TV there is a war there."

"The war is in the jungle. Tourists on the highway are safe. Is there a sign for Guatemala?" I fingerspelled Guatemala.

"Not in Canada. Just fingerspell it."

"Maybe this?" To make a sign for Guatemala, I signed the sign for "nervous" but added a "G."

Pearl chuckled. "Good—easy to remember!"

On departure day, I packed, put on my leathers and helmet, started the engine, and signed. "If you arrive in Mazatlán and I'm not there, go to the Holiday Inn and wait for me."

Pearl nodded nervously. "I am happy your sister will stay with me while you ride to Mazatlán so you can telephone me through her."

I kissed Pearl goodbye and rode off.

My friend Virgil's house, just beyond the Canadian-American border, was my first stop. My bearded friend gave me a gift of a vial of cocaine.

Part I: Together in Love

“Two grams. Have the ride of your life.”

I started the engine. Virgil, a motorcyclist himself, hugged me; we knew each ride might be our last. I rode off. A few minutes later, I pulled over and snorted a capful.

On the third afternoon, I reached Tucson. I rented a locker to cache my leathers, warm clothing, and camping gear, and I checked into a motel. After two nights of camping rough, it felt good to shower off 3,000 kilometers of dirt. I called home from a payphone.

“Nadine, I’m in Tucson. Tomorrow I’ll be in Mexico. How’s Pearl?”

“She’s been waiting for your call. She says she loves you.”

“Tell her I love her. The day after tomorrow, I’ll be in Mazatlán before her plane arrives. She doesn’t have to worry. I won’t phone from Mexico. I hope you two had a good time.”

“I got writer’s cramp. I decided to take a sign language—*beep!*” Our connection dropped as the payphone money ran out.

I rode off at dawn in the chilly morning desert air. Tucson’s lights shrank in the mirrors as the suburbs and farms gave way to sagebrush, saguaro, and mesas. I enjoyed some of the most vivid painted landscapes in the world on the way through Calabasas to the Mexican border. I crossed the border and began riding to Mazatlán. On the two-lane road with no shoulders, disaster lurked around every corner: gravel, oil, potholes, livestock, dogs, trucks, and speed bumps. Vultures perched on roadside carrion.

On the fifth day, I passed the Tropic of Cancer sign. I thought of the photo I had taken of it with Eugénie, when I believed that we would ride together forever.

The road became banked by cornfields, like riding through a slot in a maze. I rode faster to be sure I’d be at the airport before Pearl arrived.

I almost didn’t arrive at all.

A cow walked out from the corn and stood in the center of the road. My tires squealed as I halted, my front wheel just under the cow’s belly. It bellowed and disappeared into the corn on the other side. I rode the last fifty kilometers at a snail’s pace, shaking.

Pearl walked into the arrival hall. She carried the Samsonite holding our

Part I: Together in Love

formals for the wedding and a bag with her travel gear. She looked nervous and frightened, but when she saw me, the tension drained from her body, and she drooped like a deflated doll. We were both exhausted.

“I was worried. Did you have any problems?”

“Only a cow. Let’s go. Leo and Maria must be waiting for us.”

We walked out of the air-conditioned terminal.

“My God, it’s so *hot!* Your bike is filthy. Look at the bugs on the front!”

I strapped the Samsonite onto the rack. Under the scorching sun, we put our helmets on and began the 300-kilometer ride to Tepic. The landscape shimmered in the heat, and mirages floated over the superheated asphalt. Up a hill, a black cloud of exhaust fumes blanketed the highway. As we passed through the smoke, I noticed the sign on the back of the truck belching it: *Dios permite mi regreso*—God allows my return.

An hour later, we pulled into a Pemex station and, after refueling, ate in a roadside café. Flypaper spiraled down from the ceiling over each table. Outside, children pelted a *piñata*. There was no air-conditioning. For music, we could drop a peso into a Wurlitzer.

“I will show you Mexico. This is my fifth trip.” I pointed to the *huevos rancheros* on the menu. “Real Mexican food.”

A girl served chilled eggs, refried beans, and Bimbo bread on stoneware. She laid a basket of tortillas wrapped in cloth on the red-and-white tablecloth and returned with mugs of steaming milk. I scooped a teaspoon of Nescafé into each mug. Pearl wiped a finger on her arm, showed me her black fingertip, and stuck out her tongue.

“We will be dirty every day,” I signed.

“You went far in five days.”

“They were long days, but Virgil gave me some cocaine.”

“Motorcycle riding makes me want to pee.”

I handed Pearl some tissue and pointed to a door. She came back a few minutes later.

“It *stinks!* I couldn’t sit. My legs are tired from squatting. Mexican woman must get constipated.”

“Never! Mexican food prevents constipation.”

Part I: Together in Love

We laughed. All eyes in the café followed our signing as we walked to the motorcycle for the final run to Tepic.

As we parked at the Hotel Fray Junipero Serra, I looked up to see McGuire, Leo's colleague, sitting behind a window and drinking Tecate beer.

"When did you get in?" I shouted.

"Yesterday! I've been to Maria's already. They're waiting for you. I'm your police escort to the pre-nuptial feast. Delouse yourselves. Call room 314 when you're done. I'll try to be drunk by then."

Pearl and I showered and joined McGuire in a taxi to Maria's. I interpreted between English and ASL, while Maria interpreted between Spanish and English. Between drinks of brandy, beer, and Canadian Club, which Maria's father thought wise to have on hand, there were questions about Canada, deafness, and motorcycles. The family and neighbors filled the house and spilled onto the sidewalk.

"*¡Salud!*" I toasted to Maria's father.

"*Salud, dinero, y amor,*" he replied.

"*Y el tiempo para gustarlos,*" Maria added.

"To health, money, and love," I said, "and the time to enjoy them."

Pearl held up her glass. "I have all four."

In the morning, the five of us went to the beach. We sat on the sand in our bathing suits.

Pearl looked at McGuire's arm. "A tattoo, not like a cop."

"McGuire's a good cop, but he has to wear a long-sleeve shirt," said Leo.

McGuire pulled bottles of Dos Equis beer from the cooler and studied the labels. "No expiry date—we'd better test them." He downed a bottle in one quaff. "That one passed."

"Let me test." Leo drank a bottle in one go. "You guys better test some, too."

We swam, ate a picnic lunch, and "tested" the rest of the beer.

The next day, we put on our formals and walked to the cathedral. Leo handed me his camera and asked me to be their photographer. He was married to Maria in Spanish on 11 September, understanding neither the ceremony nor the documents. The reception was happy and

Part I: Together in Love

drunken. We sat at the head table as guests of honor. The guests pinned money on Leo's and Maria's clothes while we danced to pop and mariachi music.

The sign over the bar reminded us *Después de el Borracho Viene la Cruda*—after the bender, the hangover comes.

In the morning, Pearl and I stored the Samsonite at Maria's, bade farewell, and headed south. We rode along the coast through Barra de Navidad and stopped in a Playa Azul beachside hotel.

We swam, beachcombed, and sat on our towels on the sand. A waiter brought us margaritas.

"Five hundred kilometers today. Are you still afraid?"

"No. This is romantic. Don't look—a man on the beach is watching."

"Your radar is always scanning. Of course, he stares. He never sees sign language."

"Did you come here before?"

"No. Eugénie and I turned around at Puerto Vallarta."

"Do you still think about Eugénie?"

"No. At first, it was hard. Remember when you were small, and you didn't recognize your house when you came home from vacation? I felt like that when Eugénie moved out."

"I felt like that when I came home from boarding school."

The man on the beach approached us. We were astonished when he started to sign.

"I don't understand," Pearl signed.

I borrowed a pencil and paper from the waiter. The man wrote in Spanish, "*Good afternoon. Where are you from?*"

"Canada," I said, startling the man, who had assumed I was deaf.

"Are you going to Mexico City?" he said in Spanish.

"Yes, in two weeks if we have time," I said in Spanish, then signed.

"There is a deaf café in Mexico City. Everyone there understands sign language. It's near the Palace of Fine Arts. I recommend it."

Pearl was excited. "Wonderful! We will look for it."

"Will you visit my village? I invite you."

Part I: Together in Love

“No, we can’t,” signed Pearl.

“Sorry,” I said in Spanish.

He bade us farewell and walked away.

“He was disappointed. I wanted to go.”

“He will ask for money or steal the motorcycle.”

We started early every morning because a late start would mean a short day, and we had to avoid riding at night. The roadside crucifixes where drivers had died were reminders of the risks we took. We stayed no more than one night in each town. The BMW attracted attention everywhere, as if we were a parade. Pearl amused herself by waving to children, and I often heard her laughing.

We rode to Acapulco, to a resort on the beach. As soon as we spread our towel on the sand, hawkers swarmed around us to sell *serapes*, towels, sandals, time-share condominiums, and marijuana.

“I feel like I am meat, and they are flies,” Pearl signed.

“They bother hearies and deafies exactly the same.”

She grinned. “Here, we are equal. There were so many children on the road today. My arms are tired from waving. I want to wave at every kid who waves at me.”

A ragged girl followed us as we walked around the town, begging in English, Spanish, and German. I interpreted, but I didn’t look at her. Each time she touched us, we swatted her hand away.

Finally, Pearl could take no more. “What do you want?” I did not interpret.

The girl held out her hand, palm up, with an irresistible smile. I put a coin in it. She walked away, thinking we were deaf.

“You should not give money,” Pearl signed.

“She may be beaten if she gets nothing. It’s just a peso. Let’s have dinner and eat well here. This is our last beach stop for a while.”

In Oaxaca, we were stopped at a military checkpoint. “*Pasaporte*,” demanded an officer. He thumbed through our passports and asked me if we had guns. I said no. We would be stopped at checkpoints every two hours for the next four days.

Part I: Together in Love

The state of Chiapas seemed like another country. We entered the rainforest. Women with naked breasts walked on the shoulder carrying infants in cloth slings; men whetted *machetes* on curbs; farmers tilled fields with oxen.

Pearl tapped my leg and signed, “Pee.” I saw a café and pulled over. She handed me her helmet and walked inside. When she walked out a few minutes later, a woman’s head peered out the door behind her. A man’s head poked out above it, followed by a child’s head below it. Three heads, stacked like a totem pole, stared.

Pearl was angry. “Stupid! I looked for a *baño* sign. Nothing, so I went like this.” Pearl squatted and pointed to her crotch. “They stared, so I did this.” She pointed to her buttocks and bent forward. “They stared *more*. So I did this.” Pearl pantomimed pulling down her pants. “I must pee now!”

I refueled so Pearl could use a gas station toilet. She ran back retching and crying. “I will have nightmares!”

She guarded the bike while I went to the toilet. The bowl was filled with yellow worms squirming in stinking brown feces.

Light traffic in the rural areas made riding pleasant, and every night we talked about the sights we had seen. Four days later, we arrived in Tapachula, near the Guatemala border. At dinner in the café, the wireless motorcycle alarm sounded. I went outside to investigate.

I signed, “A man was wiping the motorcycle with a rag. He wanted to earn some money, but he triggered the alarm. I told him to stop.”

“He was testing the alarm.”

“That is impossible because he didn’t know it *had* an alarm.”

“Then he was testing to see *if* it had an alarm.”

In the morning, we arrived at the frontier, completed the formalities, and rode into Guatemala. Guatemala was exquisite—green, mountainous, misty, and cool. Peasants walked along the shoulder wearing brightly colored *serapes*. We stopped at Quetzaltenango, at 2,300 meters, and checked in to the Pension Bonifaz, the best hotel in town.

“Here, with your black hair and brown eyes, you look Spanish. You

Part I: Together in Love

are not nervous anymore.”

Pearl smiled. “We can invent a new sign for Guatemala without ‘nervous’ in it. When are you going to take photos? I want to show my friends.”

“I have a thousand photos I never look at. You can’t capture life with a camera.”

“When did you stop taking photos?”

I thought a moment. “After Eugénie left me.”

“You don’t take photos because you think I will leave someday.”

“Show me how to use your camera. Mine was stolen from my car.”

“A Minox is not automatic. It is difficult to use.”

“Eugénie used it on the nude beach.”

“Eugénie read the instruction manual.”

We walked around the cobblestoned streets, where I took a photo for Pearl. I bought machetes for my brother and me. We ate dinner on starched white linen in the hotel’s dining room, our most elegant meal of the trip.

“Order anything.”

“I can’t read the menu, so I’ll point to the most expensive item.”

The next day, it was pouring rain. We put on all our clothing and rain gear. The winding road stopped at a crumpled mass of girders lying in a river. The wreckage was guarded by soldiers, and a checkpoint preceded the detour. We handed our passports to the officer.

“You may proceed,” he said in perfect English.

We rode down a track. Pearl dismounted and forded the river, balancing with outstretched arms. Water poured into her boots. On the other side, she sat on a rock and poured the water out of her boots. I forded the river cautiously. Vapor hissed from the engine as water splashed onto it. At mid-stream, the mufflers submerged, and gurgles replaced the exhaust beat. When I reached Pearl, I remained seated with my soaking wet feet on the ground. I raced the engine to dry it.

“What happened to the bridge?” Pearl signed, wringing water from her socks.

“The rebels blew it up.”

“Why does the army guard the bridge *after* it’s gone?”

Part I: Together in Love

“Maybe soldiers *were* guarding it, but the rebels blew them up, too.”

We continued to Lake Atitlan, shivering in the drizzle, and stopped at the viewpoint at the edge of the volcanic caldera. “Here, we turn around. This view is famous, but all we see is fog.”

“No photo?”

“Of what—clouds?”

I regret not having taken more photos, but we were living in the moment; to have taken out a camera would have cast the shadow of the future. This I could not explain to Pearl.

We continued to Huehuetenango. We peeled off our riding gear under the yellow light of a bulb dangling from the motel ceiling, and showered in cold water. The lights went out.

Pearl lit the candles that were provided in the room.

“My panties turned blue from the jeans’ dye. I felt like I was sitting on a wet diaper.”

“My toes turned brown from the boots. No heat tonight means we will wear wet clothes tomorrow.”

We walked around the gloomy town in our rain gear. We soon returned to the motel café. A generator hummed.

I translated the menu. “Red stew with gray sauce or gray stew with red sauce, and everything with tortillas. Did you notice we haven’t gone over any bridge in Guatemala? All of them are blown up.”

We returned to Mexico; we had *salud, dinero, y amor*, but never enough *tiempo*. In Campeche, the shadows of the mountains fooled us, and twilight fell before we could reach a city. We rode slowly, avoiding potholes, children selling armadillos, and unlit carts, until we came to a cinder-block building with the sign *CUARTOS*. We rode into the compound.

Dim light spilled out a door, along with laughter and tobacco smoke. Pearl guarded the bike while I walked inside and asked for a room. The proprietress led me to a windowless cell whose steel door opened into the cantina. The door and walls were painted blue. A fluorescent tube hung from a humming ballast transformer on the ceiling. The room had a metal bed, a thin mattress, a blanket, a sink with cold water, a pipe

Part I: Together in Love

mounted on the wall of the room, and a drain in the floor. It smelled of urine.

“Are there towels?”

“We have no towels.”

“Where can we park the motorcycle?”

“Inside. We will watch it for you.”

The proprietress dragged chairs aside to clear a path. To the amusement of the patrons, Pearl and I pushed the BMW up a step and rolled it inside the cantina to our room door. We sat at a table next to the motorcycle, now the cantina’s centerpiece, and ate eggs, beans, and tortillas.

A woman approached us. “*Buenas noches*. My family has lived here for three generations. Where are you from?” she said in Spanish.

“Ask about the bridge destroyers,” Pearl signed.

“*Las guerrillas?*” said the woman. “Sometimes, they ask for a cow. If not, then this—.” She drew her thumb across her throat. “Guerrillas want food and money. Police want only money. We pay both sides.”

We washed in cold water and dried using our dirty clothes.

The next day, we rode to Chetumal, near the Belize border, where we found a real motel.

In the morning, we crossed into Belize and rode south on the dusty, washboarded Northern Highway. We passed through Orange Walk and reached Belize City at midday. I went inside a bank to change a traveler’s check while Pearl guarded the bike. When I returned, she was terrified, surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers who had rarely seen a motorcycle like ours. We rode slowly through the crowd, riding several blocks before stopping at Moe’s Café for turtle soup.

“Why did you leave me? You should have guarded the bike while I went into the bank, not left me outside by myself!”

“Only the person who bought the traveler’s checks can cash them. I was terrified, too, to ride through all those people!”

We looked for a hotel, but there were no vacancies. It took four hours to return to the Mexican border, where Pearl seemed unnerved by how easily I bribed the immigration officers to admit us without visas.

Part I: Together in Love

We rode to Akumal, on the Mayan Riviera, for our fondest memories of the trip. We snorkeled in the blue lagoon at Xel-Há and visited the Tulum pyramids, and for two days, we rented scuba equipment and dived in the Caribbean. Pearl liked the resorts we stayed in, and she loved the swimming and diving. We weren't yet certified divers, but that didn't matter in Mexico. The water was clear and warm. And, with no gloves, underwater conversation was easy—diving was an activity where most hearies were handicapped because they could not converse at all.

Pearl saw a football-sized conch on the seabed and picked it up. The divemaster took a flotation balloon from her vest, put the conch in its net, and inflated the balloon—conservation had not yet come to Mexico. When we surfaced, the balloon was floating on the waves. The diving boat collected us and the balloon.

“I didn't see it,” I signed.

Pearl smiled. “Hearies look, but they do not see.”

“You keep the shell, but we keep the meat,” said the divemaster. “If we don't take him out, he'll stink when he dies.”

The next morning, we collected the two-kilogram shell and strapped it onto the motorcycle. The highway that day became a construction site, where trucks and buses peppered us with gravel bullets. Because of the road delays, we found ourselves riding in the dark that night and in a rainstorm—lethal riding conditions. It was hard to see potholes, toads, turtles, roadkill, wagons, and unlit cars, but whenever I slowed down, trucks passed us, spraying dirty water and making it even harder to see. Pearl held on tightly. By sharing these adventures, we felt closer than ever before. We arrived in Mérida wet, filthy, and exhausted.

A few days later, via Chichén Itzá and Palenque, we reached Mexico City in search of the deaf café, and we crawled through the traffic of the world's second-largest city, second only to Tokyo at that time. We fended off vendors who tried to sell us one lit cigarette or wipe the windshield with a dirty rag. We reached Constitution Plaza and searched the side streets for the deaf café. We stopped at shops. We stopped at the tourist office. No one knew of a deaf café. Exasperated, I parked in front of the Palace of Fine Arts.

Part I: Together in Love

“There is no deaf café.”

“Thank you for trying.”

“Do you want to see the famous Folklore Ballet? It’s here.”

“Yes. I like to watch dancing because I can see the music.”

We were lucky to get tickets for the next show. Pearl was floating on air when we emerged two hours later. “I never saw anything like that show. The costumes were beautiful.”

“This is where I met my pen-pal from Madrid.”

“You never saw her again?”

“No. We write. She corrects my Spanish.”

A few days later, we reached Tepic, collected the Samsonite, and rode to Mazatlán. Pearl flew home, carrying her conch.

An hour later, I had a flat tire. We had been lucky: if the puncture had happened that morning, Pearl could have missed her flight. As I repaired it, my sweat dripping on the tire, I wondered what Pearl was thinking about her first trip with a hearing man, on a motorcycle, and to Latin America. We had no cellphones, ATMs, GPS, or Internet. Pearl had been brave.

It took me four days to ride home to Pearl, stopping in Tucson to replace the tires and retrieve my cache. The 15,000 km ride had taken a month.

The End of the World

Our life settled into a routine of short commutes, long evenings, self-improvement classes, restaurant dining, watching subtitled films, reading, and paying off the credit card balance, which had ballooned during our trip. Pearl’s conch was displayed in our living room. We completed our open water diving course, but our instructor refused to certify Jeff and me because we weren’t good swimmers.

Virgil came to visit, and he and Pearl met for the first time. After Pearl made Red Zinger tea, Virgil took a leather pouch out of his pocket. He took out a mirror, a silver tube, a screen, a razor blade, and a vial and

Part I: Together in Love

slid them across the table to Pearl.

“Cocaine. Have you tried it?”

“No. I smoked pot. I can try some for the experience.”

Virgil arranged a capful of powder into six lines with the blade and slid the mirror to Pearl, who slid it to me. I picked up the tube, snorted a line in each nostril, and gave it to Pearl. She copied me, smiled, and wiggled her head.

Virgil snorted the other two lines. “From Bogotá. Uncut.”

We told Virgil about our trip.

“I’m mad at Derrick for not taking more pictures. Always rushing! Never enough time.”

“True, because not enough money to have enough time.”

“Then the next time you ride south, I’ll arrange for you to buy half a kilo for twenty thousand. I’ll sell it for thirty-five thousand, and we’ll split the profit.”

“You’re kidding!”

He grinned. “I’m kidding. I never mix money and friendship.”

“Derrick showed me photos of your property.”

I had told Pearl about Snowslide, the home Virgil shared with Rhea, many times. His house was on the other side of a river and could not be seen from the road. His cablecar was the only way to reach it. When visiting, arranged by mail because there was no telephone, I would park next to his cablecar platform and honk the horn. Fifteen minutes later, I would see the cablecar rolling toward me like a flying surfboard as Virgil’s legs cranked its pedals. I would climb on, and we would roll back, five stories above the river, to the cablecar platform on the other side. From there, it was a short walk to his house in the forest. I can still taste the freshness of the air over the river. Ever since my first visit six years before, when Virgil lived in a cabin lit by kerosene lamps, I had dreamed of living on land like that. Virgil replaced his cabin with a two-story house when Rhea joined him. I loved it there, and I visited often.

“Snowslide is our playground. We cut our wood and heat our own house. We dam our creek and make our own power. We make our own mistakes, and we make a lot of love. A thousand feet of cable keeps it private. We got everything we need and nothing we don’t need. Derrick

Part I: Together in Love

checked for me, with his detector.”

“What do you mean—‘checked with his detector?’”

“Virgil was afraid the police had hidden a microphone in his house, so I made a radio detector. Virgil brought me to his friend’s place to check his house, too.”

“Why was his friend worried?”

“Because he’s a marijuana farmer.”

“If you want to live a country life, you’ll have to decide while you’re young and strong. You got the brains. You just need the chutzpah and a dog.”

I sighed. “I need money. You need to be rich to avoid the madding crowd.”

“How to live without a job?” Pearl signed.

“You work for a bank—figure it out. You two are lucky to live in Canada, where there is plenty of land.”

When we told Virgil that our diving instructor refused to certify me, he said, “I’ll certify you both. I need a few students every year to maintain my instructor certification. You give me the fee, and I’ll mail you the forms. My name will be on them as a memento of the dives we never made.”

That was how Pearl and I became certified divers—certified by Virgil, who never saw us dive.

While I waited for the bus in the autumn rain, wearing a suit and overcoat, a woman tapped my elbow. She offered me a card with a jade-colored plastic talisman hanging from a key chain. The manual alphabet was printed on the card.

“Are you deaf?” I signed.

“Yes,” she signed, surprised.

“Why are you selling this?”

“I have no job.”

“Where are you from?”

“Toronto.”

“How long have you been in Vancouver?”

“Three months. Why can you sign?”

Part I: Together in Love

“Because my girlfriend is deaf.”

When I came home, for a joke, I opened the door, turned the light off and on, and stood in the hall as we had done at Elizabeth’s. I heard a click as Pearl locked the door. I unlocked it and walked in.

Pearl was furious. “Why did you do that?”

“A joke. Don’t deafies make jokes?”

“Never do that again! How can I know if a man is hiding here? Put a viewer in your door! A chain is not enough.”

“Sure. My joke was useful: you discovered my door has no viewer.”

While we ate dinner, I told Pearl about my bus-stop conversation.

“She should not sell those sign-language cards. She is begging! It makes hearies look down on deafies. Vancouver deafies hate it when Toronto deafies come here and sell those cards. If we see her, we will take her cards away, but if a man is selling them, we will hurt him. If you see her, tell her what I said.”

Again, Pearl had talked about violence toward men, but this time toward deaf men. I gave her the newspaper. “Read this. A man without arms wears his watch on his leg. He uses his feet to write and play the trombone. He visits schools to teach kids not to stare at handicapped people. Do deafies visit schools to teach kids not to stare at ASL?”

Pearl read the article. “No, but *Sesame Street* sometimes shows ASL.”

“Then write to the newspaper so hearies can hear a deaf story, too.”

“I will. Then you check my English.”

After dinner, Pearl wrote slowly, thinking about every word. She gave her draft to me. I only changed one word: *fullyfilled* to *fulfilled*. Her letter was published on 29 November 1984.

Editor, Vancouver Sun, Sir:

The Starers Have Real Problem

I have been deaf since I was born, so I read with great interest the article on your Sunday Kids Point page headlined ‘Better Armed than People Think’, which was devoted to letters from pupils at a Burnaby school who had been paid a visit by armless Alvin Law, who works for the Abilities Council.

One of the children who wrote pointed out that Law dislikes the words

Part I: Together in Love

crippled, handicapped, and disabled. I agree with him that it is not he but the people who stare at him who have a problem.

During my childhood I thought normal people had no problem because they easily communicated with others. By the time I was 20 I realized that many of them had a problem worse than mine!

All of my life I have been able to use sign language to communicate with deafies, so to me it is the 'normal' people who keep staring at us who have the real problem.

I am no different from normal people except I don't use my ears and voice to communicate. I can speak words—they sound muddy, but they are clear enough, I think.

It is the people who stare at me when I use a pen and paper to write to them or when I speak slowly to them who obviously have a problem, not me. My life is fulfilled.

Pearl

I was smitten by Pearl. Instead of saving my money for the future, I bought her a diamond ring and invited her to A Kettle of Fish, the best seafood restaurant in town, to give it to her.

"Do you know why we're here?" I signed, after the waiter poured Canadian champagne. "Four reasons."

"Christmas?"

"That's one."

"Birthday? This is my first birthday since we met."

"That's two."

"To have dinner and talk about the year?" She blew a kiss. "Much has happened. Moving in, riding to Guatemala, diving lessons, signing, and so on. It has been a wonderful year. I love my feelings."

"Yes, the third reason."

"When my feelings are strong, I dream."

"Dream about what?"

"A family, of course. I'm a woman. What do you dream about?"

"A house with land, of course. I'm a man."

"A family needs a house, and a house needs a family."

"I calculated how much we can afford: about \$100,000."

Part I: Together in Love

“Land is important for kids to grow up with a garden and animals.”

“Maybe our parents could help us with a down payment.”

“Mother refused to help when I bought my condo because her first down payment went to my husband when we divorced.”

“You are the sweetest and most interesting woman I ever met.”

Pearl smiled. “Also among hearing women?”

“I love your mind, and the rest, too. Do you think we are a good pair?”

Pearl nodded. “We are living happily. I believe the man must be here, and the woman must be here.” She held her hands face down, one above the other, and moved them in horizontal circles. “This doesn’t work.” She held her hands at the same level and bumped them together to show conflict. I want to be with you.”

I gave her a little box. “Then you will need this.”

Pearl opened it. “A ring!”

“Try it on.”

Pearl put the ring on her ring finger, past her chewed-off fingernails. “It fits. How did you know my size?”

“Because you tried on my engineer’s ring, the one I never wear.”

“Does this mean we are engaged?”

“Not yet because I’m still married. But that’s what I want.”

“You are confused. Are we engaged or not?”

“We are engaged to be married if you accept my proposal.”

“This is your fourth reason. When can you divorce?”

“After three years of separation, so in two years. Or immediately, if either of us can prove adultery. Eugénie wants a quick divorce, but she can’t get her lover to sign an adultery affidavit because his wife will find out he’s cheating.”

“If I give you proof of adultery, can you divorce Eugénie?”

“Yes.”

“I will support your divorce. *Pearl King* signs like this.” She signed my name sign but substituted “P” for “D.” “I’m so happy, I want to shout, but I know I shouldn’t do that here. I want to live with you in a house with children and a garden and pets, not in an apartment.” Pearl couldn’t stop smiling, beaming, even glowing.

Part I: Together in Love

“I want a hobby farm if we can afford it. Then we can enjoy the country lifestyle and make extra money. But now it is a dream.”

“If we dream together, our dreams will come true. If we make extra money, we can live on your salary after we have children.”

“I hope we can find a place that we can afford that can help support us. But if we’re too far from the city, we’ll spend too much time commuting to work the land.”

“We need an apartment in the city for working and a house in the country for living.” Pearl leaned her chin on her wrist and looked at the diamond and white gold on her finger. She walked around the table and kissed me. “It’s perfect.”

“Some people think that because you are deaf, you must be poor, but they won’t think so when you flash *that* in front of their noses.”

“Can you afford this?”

“I used all my savings. This is from my heart.”

A week later, Pearl signed Eugénie’s divorce petition as my adulteress, clearing the way for us to marry.

We attended the Greater Vancouver Association of the Deaf’s New Year’s Eve party. The community hall parking lot was packed. Music pounded out of the building. Before we got out of her car, Pearl told me how to behave.

“Don’t complain about the music. Deafies need to *feel* music to enjoy. Don’t forget to look straight at a Deafie when he signs. You have a habit of wandering your eyes to glance at people that walk by, especially girls.”

A greeter took our tickets at the door. The hall was festooned with banners and balloons. The hall wasn’t dark because that would have made it hard to sign. The dance floor was ringed by tables of partygoers who signed furiously, laughed, and sometimes shouted incoherently above the Robert Palmer disco music. Beer, wine, and soft drinks were passed around in plastic tumblers. A mirror ball spun overhead, but the dance floor was empty.

“I see a few hearing aids. Can you hear the music without yours?”

“I feel it through my feet and here.” Pearl put her hand on her chest.

Part I: Together in Love

A rolled-up napkin bounced off my face. We turned to see a man sitting with a group of women.

Pearl waved to them. "That is René. This is my fiancé, Derrick."

"Deafie or hearie?" signed René.

"Hearie," I signed. I caught a look of disapproval on the faces of some men at another table, who, of course, could read our signs anywhere in the room.

"Hold my purse." Pearl began signing native ASL, incomprehensible to me.

I bought wine for her and stood at the side of the hall, drinking beer and surveying the young adults united by language and discrimination. I was an outsider, but until I spoke or signed, I looked like them. Conversations often took place among people several tables apart, so it was a challenge to see who was talking to whom. As the hall became crowded, people rearranged themselves when their lines of sight were broken. There were, no doubt, other hearies there, but I had no way of spotting hearies who were skilled in ASL, and as long as I was incommunicado, there was no way other hearies could spot me. This was the reverse of how Pearl lived in the hearing world.

An attractive woman signed something to me in native ASL.

"Please sign more slowly."

"You are so tall that I can see the hairs inside your nose."

I laughed. "You have wonderful eyes."

She smiled.

After a speech in ASL from an emcee, a band played Brown Sugar by the Rolling Stones. The music was amplified to the threshold of pain for hearing ears. The audience streamed onto the dance floor. As the band segued into the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations," the tempo slowed down, but some dancers didn't slow down. I felt angry to notice some musicians snickering at them.

"Jodi and Jeff are here," Pearl signed. We sat down together.

"No need to shout. We can sign all night and not get sore throats," Jeff fingerspelled.

"Sign language is perfect for discos. Where is Gavin?"

"At a family reunion. Gavin told me you two got engaged."

Part I: Together in Love

Congratulations!”

Jeff’s fingerspelling was slow, like watching a telegram spool out of a teleprinter. Pearl showed Jeff her engagement ring and hugged him.

Jodi and Pearl switched to ASL, so Jeff and I switched to shouting at each other. We got sore throats, after all.

“You’re a lucky man! Pearl will be loyal to you provided she knows you are loyal to her. You’ll need to be sensitive to her culture. She’s a deafie!”

“She’s told me about deaf culture, and I’ve read about it, but I still don’t see how there can be a ‘deaf culture’ any more than a ‘blind culture’ ... a subculture, maybe.”

“It exists because of ASL. It’s like an onion. In the core are deafies and people who have always been around deafies—their family is deaf, they went to deaf schools, they had deafie friends, they live in the deaf community. They see deafness as a language barrier. Out from the center, you get more communication with hearies until you get to the skin of the onion—friends of deaf people who don’t know how to sign. Just under the skin, you have the hard-of-hearing like Jodi.”

“Where’s Pearl in the onion?”

“Near the center, but she tries to move out. Her friends are in the center, except Jodi. Each layer tries to help the layer farther in, but the deeper you go, the more they believe that there are no layers!”

The band played louder. Jeff bought a beer for me and two tumblers of wine for himself, and we walked to a fire exit where a few other hearies had congregated, far from the loudspeakers. The band played YMCA. The audience held up arms, wiggled hands, howled, and waved napkins in applause as the musicians took a bow. The recorded music resumed.

“Are you planning to buy a house?” shouted Jeff.

“We’d like to, but we can’t afford it yet.”

“Let me help—I’m an agent. The countryside is the place for you. ‘Be prepared,’ as the Boy Scouts say.”

“Be prepared for what?”

“Teotwawki—The End of the World as We Know It. I’m convinced we’re coming to the end of the longest period of peace in history. Read

Part I: Together in Love

Life After Doomsday if you don't believe me."

"Your view is extreme."

"Hedging does no harm. We are sitting ducks."

"For what?"

"Terrorism, social collapse, the Bomb; it's a matter of time. If you buy a house half an hour from town, you'll be at the periphery of a one-megaton blast and out of range of third-degree burns. You'd get a half-minute warning between seeing the flash and being hit by the blast—that's enough time to get to your basement. Our westerly winds would spread the fallout eastward, so west or north is where you want to buy your house, and on the lee side of a hill."

Jeff's thinking may sound fanatical today, but it was only eccentric during the Cold War.

Pearl walked over, with Jodi. "Why are you standing so far away?"

I realized that speaking at a deaf party was like having a secret conversation. "Sorry. It's too loud over there."

"Come. It's midnight soon—time for the awards."

While recorded disco music blared, the emcee presented awards in ASL. Volunteers passed out sparkling wine in plastic flute glasses. The music stopped while the emcee counted down the seconds to midnight in ASL. Then "Auld Lang Syne" thundered through the hall as everyone hugged and danced.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Bowen Island

“Is this Derrick King? This is the British Columbia Institute of Technology,” said a female voice on the telephone. “Your students have been sitting in the classroom for half an hour. Why aren’t you here?”

I laughed, and Pearl stared at me. “Because no one asked me to teach! It’s been two years since I heard from you. How much are you paying?”

“We’re paying \$3,000. Tuesday and Thursday nights, 15 January until 26 March. That’s \$150 a night.”

“Fine, but I can’t start tonight. Tell the students your administration screwed up and to go home.”

“Come early on Thursday. See me, and we’ll sort out the details.”

“See you then.” I hung up. “Wonderful news!” I explained the background. “And because this will be my second time teaching International Trade Finance, it won’t be as much work to prepare. We’ll have \$3,000 for a down payment!”

I brought some newspapers and real estate magazines home. I unrolled a topographic and signed, “Let’s find a place to live.”

“We are *here*,” Pearl signed. She put her finger on the map.

I nodded. I drew a line along the USA border. “We can’t go south.”

“Right. What about the east?”

“I don’t want to travel for more than an hour to work. One hour is about fifty kilometers.” I drew an arc fifty kilometers to the east on the map.

“That’s in New Westminster. I’ll never live there again.”

“Let’s look west. The limit is the sea.” I drew a line along the shoreline.

“What about the north?”

“North is the mountains. The limit is the altitude.” I put my finger on a contour line. “The highest road is at 700 meters, so that’s our limit.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

I traced the contour line to the north, joining the arc, the US border, and the shoreline to enclose an irregular area around Vancouver.

“Everywhere is city.” Pearl stared at the map. “Living in the country and working in Vancouver is impossible!”

“We should have bought land a hundred years ago.”

We browsed real estate advertisements while we ate dinner.

“We can’t afford anything nice,” Pearl signed. She slid the *Buy and Sell Press* across to me. “Look! A four-hectare and an eight-hectare lot. Cheap. Where is Bowen Island?”

We looked at the map. Bowen Island, ten kilometers long with three paved roads, stood outside the line I had drawn. “Perhaps our limit should be the distance we can travel on a *boat* in an hour.” I telephoned BC Ferries to find out about the ferries to nearby islands. “Bowen is the only commutable island. There are ferries every two hours. They take twenty minutes to reach West Vancouver. Then a bus takes forty minutes to go downtown.”

“Very interesting. Let’s go see those lots.”

I telephoned the vendor and then signed, “I have the directions. The owner won’t come because he doesn’t live on the island. But one of my customers lives there. I’m sure he’ll show us around.” I called Rokus, then signed, “He said to bring our boots on Sunday. We’re invited for a tour and dinner!”

I stopped the car at the Bowen Island ferry tollbooth in Horseshoe Bay.

“Ask for a discount,” signed Pearl.

“How much is the handicapped discount?”

“Fifty percent,” said the woman in the tollbooth.

Pearl smiled. “Sometimes, it is good to be handicapped.”

The Howe Sound Queen arrived. We drove onto its deck and forward to the chain gate stretched across its bow. After the other cars boarded, the ferry juddered into beautiful Howe Sound, leaving a wake of parallel white lines on a canvas of deep green velvet ringed by snow-capped peaks. We climbed out and leaned against the ship’s rail. The sweet winter air blew through our clothes, so we climbed back inside the car, content to view the stunning scenery through a windshield. As the

Part II: Partners in Adventure

ferry approached the Snug Cove dock, foam spumed as the forward propellers guided the ferry into the creosoted wooden slip. We drove off to the smell of salt air and seaweed, and we passed geese grazing on the shoulder under arbutus and western red cedar trees.

We drove uphill past the Snuggler Inn, General Store, gas station, and a few craft shops and turned at the intersection. The pavement became gravel. Ten minutes later, we passed through a gate. A dog ran after the car as we drove beside the fence surrounding a vegetable garden. On the other side of the garden, ducks paddled in a pond. We drove past a shed, a greenhouse, and a rabbit hutch and halted in front of a double-wide mobile home. A propane tank stood next to the hitch. Blue smoke drifted out of the steel chimney poking out the end of the trailer.

A couple walked out onto a wooden deck and welcomed us. We removed our hiking boots and sat around the woodstove. A boy and a girl were curled up in the corner.

“Rokus and Jenny, it’s good to see you again and to introduce you to Pearl. So this is the bank’s collateral! How do you like living here?”

“We love it,” Rokus said. “Bowen Island is suburbanizing, but the ferry and gravel road keep out the riffraff. We have no TV. We love nature, privacy, friends, and doing things ourselves. We’re not homesteaders who eat fresh meat in autumn, salt meat in winter, and beans in spring; we’re do-it-yourselfers with a freezer and microwave.”

“Why do you have a kerosene lamp?” signed Pearl.

“For when the power goes out. But that’s all right. We don’t really need power. The woodstove is the center of our home. A stove mimics the seasons: spring while the fire builds, summer during the burn, and autumn as the embers fade. Winter, too, if we haven’t put in enough wood.”

“Pearl’s a country girl. We’d love to be partly self-sufficient but keep our jobs.”

“Your land is not going to save you money except on heat if you cut your own firewood.”

“It costs us more to raise rabbits and chickens than to buy them in the store. We do it because it’s fun, and they taste better,” said Jenny.

“There are other ways to make money on a homestead. Hobby

Part II: Partners in Adventure

farmers deduct farm losses from their other income. They don't make money, but they pay less tax," said Rokus.

"Are you safe here?" signed Pearl.

"We don't lock our doors," said Jenny. "Hitchhiking is safe. There's no bus or taxi, so the first car to pass will usually give you a lift. We're a community. Kids grow up with mink, ravens, eagles, owls, cormorants, and deer. Bowen Island has the highest per-capita child population in Canada."

"Fifteen years ago, the population was 600. Now we have 2,000 in winter, 3,000 in summer," said Rokus. "Doctors, lawyers, butchers, bakers, and hippies. Fifteen years ago, you could put a cottage on ten acres for \$30,000. No more! And no more trailers. Now you have to build a real house, and few good acreages are for sale. The lots you came to see are so bad that agents won't touch them—that's why you found them in the free listings. I'll show you why."

Rokus and his dog led Pearl and me to his Suzuki jeep. While he dribbled a can of oil into the engine, he pointed at the power line beside his property. "For decades, the neighbors on the other side of that ridge had only kerosene, propane, and a generator for power. I sold them a right-of-way after I got my power. When their power was installed, it was as if they'd arrived in the twentieth century overnight."

We climbed into Rokus's jeep, which rattled down the lane, spewing blue smoke. Rokus drove us to another gravel road. We followed it for twenty minutes before stopping at a forested slope behind a sign: *For Sale by Owner*.

"The four-hectare lot is a strip straight up the hill, eighty meters wide and maybe half a kilometer long, too steep for a road. All you can do with this lot is build a house by the road. It's dark and cold because the north end of the island doesn't get much sunshine."

We drove to the eight-hectare lot. Another gravel road led to muddy tire tracks pressed into waist-high weeds. Rokus shifted into four-wheel drive. He stopped as the tracks faded into the bush, and we could drive no farther.

"No sunlight here. See those cedars? They thrive in swamps. See the bracket fungus on those alders? It also loves swamps. You'd never be able

Part II: Partners in Adventure

to drive the damp out of a house here. You couldn't even *build* a house here—you couldn't get a building permit because there is no road.”

Pearl and I looked at each other in despair.

“Do you know any other places?” I signed and said.

“I know another property, the Thaxter place, on the other side of this hill. It's been for sale for years, down to about \$100,000.”

We left the Suzuki and walked until we reached a clearing. In it stood the skeleton of a two-story house. Plastic hung from window openings, flapping in the breeze. The house was impressive, the location ideal. Pearl and I stared at each other.

“There is a driveway to the trunk road. The roof shakes were split from cedar trees logged on this property. Bowen Island is part of this house.”

We walked through the house, our boots thundering on plywood. Piles of manure and scraps of lumber lay scattered inside. A chipped and dirty electric range stood in the corner.

“Boy Scouts put that there; they camped while the power was still on. The Thaxters inherited the land from Great-granddad, one of the settlers. They mortgaged their land to buy construction machinery, but interest rates went sky high in 1981 and wiped them out. Fran Thaxter lives on the other side of the trunk road.”

“This will be an *amazing* house in the future,” signed Pearl.

Rokus led us up the hill behind the house. We gazed down at a barn and two horses standing in an unfenced field. The barn was decorated with moose antlers and antique farm tools. I felt like I was dreaming.

“Only an hour from Vancouver, and look at *this*.”

We walked down to the barn.

Pearl pointed at the sign over the door: *DE MAL EN PIS*. “What does that mean?”

“From bad to worse. It's a curse.”

The horses followed us into the barn. Rokus opened the feed room, took two flakes of hay, and fed one to each horse.

“With four stalls, concrete floor, hayloft, and feed and tack rooms, this is surely one of the best barns on the island. And you can't smell it from the house,” Rokus chuckled.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Rokus led us down a path winding through seven-story fir trees. A lake came into view, the water reflecting the trees swaying in the breeze like waving hands. Trout breached, sending circular waves to the blue herons standing on the shore waiting for their chance to strike. Rokus scooped a handful of water into his mouth. Pearl and I stared at each other, dumbfounded, as if everything we saw was too good to be true.

“This is the reservoir for the cove. Swimming isn’t allowed, but we do it. Horses aren’t allowed to piss in it either, but they do that, too. If it weren’t for the trees, you could see the lake from the house.”

We could see that this was a project waiting to reward someone with health, money, love, and the time to enjoy them. We’d fallen in love with each other, and now we were falling in love with Bowen Island, too.

We drove back to Rokus’s home. Pearl played with the children while Jenny cooked rabbit casserole.

“If you join us on Bowen,” said Jenny, “you’ll love it because the happiest people here are city converts. We know where the grass is greener.”

“The city converts are the happiest because they have the money to enjoy it,” said Rokus. “If you *start* here, you can’t afford to *stay* here—it’s the country-city paradox.”

“It makes me happy to see that land by the lake,” signed Pearl. “Derrick and I have a lot to discuss.”

“Watch the time,” said Rokus. “If you don’t catch the nine o’clock ferry, you’ll have to sleep here. That’s another country-city paradox: the Bowen Islander with his ferry schedule. Leisure with a quartz watch!”

Rokus used a flashlight to show us the way to our car. Because there was little light pollution, thousands of stars sparkled. Pearl had grown up under a sky like this. To me, the night sky was stunning; to Pearl, it was like going home.

Neither of us could stop thinking about that property. I called the agent who listed it. After I hung up, I signed, “It’s \$120,000.”

“Can we afford it?”

“No. Do you want to see it again? We have nothing to lose.”

“Why not?” Pearl grinned.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

A week later, the agent, Luisa, met us at the ferry terminal. While we sat in her car during the crossing, she showed us the blueprints.

“The house is designed in two wings around a harvest kitchen. The master bedroom, library, and living room are in one wing. Two more bedrooms and the family room are in the other wing.”

“This bathtub will be wonderful for babies,” signed Pearl.

“That’s a hot tub.”

“Fancy.”

“Yeah, too fancy. Thaxter ran out of money.”

As we drove up the driveway, Luisa pointed at the fenced garden.

“The septic field’s under the garden. To get a building permit, they first needed to ‘prove the septic.’ All the permits have expired, but you can get new ones. For the septic permit, you dig a hole in the garden, pour in a bucket of water, and time it percolating down. Then ignore your result, and write the legal requirement on the form. The soil is rocky here, so everybody cheats.”

We parked at the house. Luisa led me around the house while Pearl walked around the property.

“Thaxter started out first-class. The walls are fifty percent thicker than code, and the shakes are triple-thick. When they ran out of money, they went cheap. The sheathing is quarter-inch and thinner than code—illegal, in fact.”

“How much would it cost to make this place livable so we could move here and finish the rest ourselves as our money allowed?”

“Maybe forty grand.”

Pearl returned. “Look at this.”

Luisa and I followed Pearl down the gravel half of the circular driveway to a pair of hemlock and alder trees spiraling around each other like a four-story DNA helix.

Pearl hugged me. “The love trees.”

“You get a forest and a lake. Well, the lake ain’t yours, but it might as well be. The price started at 180 two years ago, then 150 a year ago, and now it’s 120. You can get another appraiser to try to pull the price down some more. Call Chang’s Appraisers, and tell them you want the lowest possible valuation. Then put in an offer.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Pearl and I studied the blueprints and made a budget. “Can we afford it?” signed Pearl.

“Barely, with both salaries, my night-school pay, a first mortgage, a second mortgage, a personal loan, and a loan from my father. But \$120,000 is the most we can pay, including construction.”

Because the price had crashed and builders had little work in 1985, we *could* afford it—but not to make mistakes.

Pearl grew excited. “What if we rent the barn? Grow food? Have a business? I can sell my uncle’s jades. Deafies get a seventy-five percent handicapped discount on property tax.”

“That will help a lot, so we should put your name on the documents.”

“What if we move there and finish the house ourselves?”

“We could never build a house there and work downtown at the same time. We can’t live in a house without a permit. A permit follows inspection. The inspection follows water, lights, toilets, and septic.”

“What if we pay to finish part of the house and, after we move in, finish the rest?”

I drew a line down the middle of the plan. “Interesting. The kitchen, family room, two bedrooms, and laundry room on this side are all we need. I’ll call the appraiser. Then we need construction quotes for half a house.”

“Soon, we will have a beautiful home with a big garden and horses and farm and dogs and children on Bowen Island.”

Chang’s appraisal was an almost-affordable \$92,000. I made appointments with two contractors and drove to Bowen Island. After I reached the house for the first appointment, Ross, who was our nearest neighbor, wandered up the trail from his house. I gave him a set of plans, and we walked around the house.

“About \$50,000 without sundecks,” said Ross.

“We can’t afford it.” Then I gave him our sketch of half a house. “What do you think of this? You wall off and finish half of it, so I can finish the rest myself. But no paint and no carpet for now. We can only afford \$30,000. What can you do for that?”

“You’d be living in a construction site, but a lot of people here live in

Part II: Partners in Adventure

unfinished houses. Let me think about what I can do. I'll get back to you next week."

An hour later, Edmund arrived. I gave him a set of plans, and we walked around the house. "Around \$70,000," he said.

"We can only afford \$30,000." I gave him our sketch of half a house. "You wall off and finish half of it, so I can finish the rest myself. No paint and carpet. What can you do for that?"

"Let me get back to you—business is terrible."

A week later, I received quotes from Ross for \$28,000 and Edmund for \$30,000 for half-finished houses. Pearl and I were overjoyed. We offered \$90,000 for the unfinished property.

While awaiting the outcome of the foreclosure court, I continued to work, teach, and study. During an MBA coffee break, I mentioned our house activity to a classmate.

"Why don't you ask Frank for advice?" he suggested. "He lives on Bowen. He's an architect. He must know the builders there."

I was astonished. "I didn't know Frank lived on Bowen Island!"

Frank was five or ten years older than me, well dressed, and reclusive. He barely spoke in class, and we had rarely spoken to one another even though our class had just twenty students. I approached him for advice.

"I heard you live on Bowen. How do you attend school while living on the island? The last ferry sails before our class ends."

"I stay with my parents on class nights. Everyone on Bowen has an arrangement with city friends. We stay with them, and in summer, they stay with us."

The blueprints and quotes were in my briefcase, so I told Frank about the house and showed him the plans and quotes.

"Which of these quotes would you choose?"

"Edmund might do a better job, but your neighbor, Ross, won't do anything poorly."

A week later, Frank approached me after class.

"I walked around the Thaxter place on the weekend. Hire me. I've finished two houses on Bowen, and I'm finishing off the house we live in. My son and I work more cheaply than Ross or Edmund. I can deduct

Part II: Partners in Adventure

the cost of materials for my house from my taxable income if you choose the same materials.”

“How can you build my house while you work, study, and build your own house?”

“My son will work full time. I’ll work weekends and take two weeks’ vacation. My house can wait. Come to my place this weekend with your wife, and see for yourself. You’ll like our materials. In the meantime, give me copies of your plans and quotes.”

A week later, Frank handed me his quotation for \$24,000.

Pearl and I visited Frank and his family in their three-story house. The upper floors were finished and appeared to be of high quality. After the tour, Frank’s wife showed Pearl her antiques while I discussed insulation with Frank in his study. On our way home, we drove past Frank’s previous houses.

“Frank’s house was beautiful,” signed Pearl.

“I found out Frank isn’t a registered architect even though he said he works as one. He dropped out of university. He only admitted it when I didn’t see a degree on his wall, only some certificates.”

“Frank’s wife is sweet. We talked about kids and cooking. Frank is strange. Most hearies move their hands when they talk, but Frank doesn’t do that.”

“If Frank can build us a house that looks like his own house for \$4,000 less than Ross, then we should take it. Even if he makes some mistakes, it will be cheaper.”

“How can you be sure Frank will do a good job?”

“He lives there, so he can’t afford a bad reputation.”

“Ross and Edmund can’t afford a bad reputation because they don’t have another job. Frank has another job. He knows what he is doing, but we don’t know what he is doing. But you decide. You know more than I do about houses.”

We accepted Frank’s offer. I took a day off to apply for the septic permit in Squamish, the building permit in Vancouver, and the electrical permit in Burnaby—the departments handling Bowen Island were 150 km apart.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Eugénie and I attended divorce court. The judge said he wished other couples were as cooperative. We had lunch together as singles, ten years after we first met.

Luisa called me two weeks later, hysterical. “Fran’s come up with the money to call off the foreclosure! Our work is for nothing! The Thaxter property is *jinxed!*”

The house was sold to Pearl and me on 27 February 1985; Thaxter had been bluffing. We were thrilled. Life was going our way! We would find happiness. This was high adventure, and we were on a roll.

Frank drafted a contract and gave two unsigned copies to me. The contract specified completion in two months. “Why is the contract with Astra Trading Company Limited and with a Vancouver post office box address?”

“For taxes, to get the benefits we discussed. That’s my mailing address because I don’t want the Bowen Island postmistress reading my mail in her spare time.”

We signed Frank’s contract. Frank ordered materials and began work a few days later. Pearl traded her Buick Skyhawk in on a new blue Nissan pickup truck. I advertised my condominium for rent.

A semi-trailer load of drywall and materials arrived. Frank, his son, and his son’s girlfriend started work. They wired and plumbed; erected windows, siding, vapor barrier, and insulation; installed and buried the septic tank and connected it to the septic field; and cut, nailed, and plastered drywall. The power company connected electricity to the temporary pole, and the telephone company hung a line from the road. A mason built a chimney.

Pearl and I worked at our jobs downtown, restless and distracted, and visited Bowen Island every weekend.

“We are unmarried, so if either of us dies, the other will have a mess. We need wills. Do you know a signing lawyer?”

“There is one deaf lawyer in Vancouver. I don’t want to use him because deafies gossip. I know a hearie lawyer who fingerspells, Quinn.”

I was surprised that Pearl wouldn’t support a deaf lawyer, because she had spoken about becoming an investment analyst for the deaf

Part II: Partners in Adventure

community. We had Quinn make our wills.

We bought work clothes, garden tools, a stepladder, kerosene lanterns, and a used refrigerator and woodstove. We hauled everything in our new truck. I connected the old electric range and the refrigerator to the temporary power. Frank asked us not to be in the house while they were working, so while they worked on the house, we cleared the property and barn to get the barn ready to rent.

We ate our meals at the Snuggler Inn, warming ourselves by the fireplace. Life was lived slowly there, as if coffee were sold by the hour, not by the cup. The linoleum floor was more faded by time than by footsteps.

Pearl and I repaired the garden fence and gate. We cleared half a ton of manure from the barn and raked it into the garden. We collected the old construction material scattered about the property, recycling what we could and burning the rest in bonfires. When the chimney masonry was dry, I started the stove so the drywall could dry. Our fatigue made us feel the progress in our bones as we built our future together.

Pearl discovered a pipe poking up through the soil outside the barn. I probed around the wellhead and found the other end. I connected the pipe so that when Frank completed the plumbing, the barn would have running water, ready for horses.

We advertised in the *Undercurrent*, the local tabloid:

*Barn for Rent. Four stalls,
tack and feed rooms,
concrete floor. \$150.*

“Frank is a week behind schedule. He has run out of vacation. Now he only works on weekends, but someone has to keep the fire burning to keep the walls drying.”

“I can’t delay my vacation—union rules. If I can’t paint in June, I will waste my vacation.”

“And we must move out of my condo before my tenant arrives at the end of May.”

“Can we move into the house before Frank is finished?”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Frank said no. Even his wife called to convince me not to move in until the drywall is sanded.”

“We can wait for two weeks in your parents’ place.”

“What about our stuff? Haul it twice?”

“We can move our things to the unfinished side while we stay with your parents. Elizabeth’s son, Kieran, is on school holidays. We can hire him to guard our things for two weeks while we stay with your parents.”

“Good idea!”

Pearl talked to Elizabeth on the TTY and then to Kieran:

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THIS IS A BIG ADVENTURE FOR YOU TO STAY ALONE YOU KEEP  
THE FIRE AND TAKE YOUR FOODS FROM FRIG AND HEAT ON  
ELECTRIC STOVE OUTSIDE CAN YOU DO THAT? GA
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COOL GA
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THERE IS NO TV YOU WILL BE BORED TELEPHONE IS LONG  
DISTANCE TO HOME SHORT CALLS ONLY ARE YOU SURE TO STAY  
ALONE FOR TWO WEEKS? GA
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```
I WANT TO DO IT IS NOW AND AROUND OK? GA
```

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YES PERFECT WE WILL PICK YOU UP I WILL CALL YOUR MOM  
TO ARRANGE SK
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Pearl showed me a re-homing notice in the *Buy and Sell Press* for a two-year-old German Shepherd. He could keep Kieran company. We drove to Coquitlam to meet the dog, Whisky, and decided to adopt him. We arranged to pick him up on the day we brought Kieran and our goods to Bowen Island.

On the way home, we stopped at a pet shop to buy supplies for Whisky. We left the shop with dog supplies, cat supplies—and a kitten.

On moving day, two men from Bowen Freight came in their truck, loaded our goods, and left for Bowen Island. We put the kitten in our truck and went to collect the dog. The dog was limping on three legs, and a forepaw was wrapped in a bloodstained rag; the irresponsible owner thought nothing of it. We took him straight to a veterinarian. After surgery, he lay down in the truck with a plastic cone on his head and fell asleep. We picked up Kieran two hours later than expected and drove to Bowen.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Frank and his son were plastering when we arrived. The movers had finished unloading our cartons into the unfinished, unheated, unlit, and windowless west wing and were now unloading the bed, piano, kitchen table, and houseplants into the heated and dusty east wing construction site. Pearl took care of the kitten and made the bed for Kieran, covering it with plastic. Kieran walked the crippled dog. I hung our clothes inside plastic bags on a rod over the bare earth basement floor. Whisky liked the kitten. At first, the kitten was terrified by the dog, but they quickly became friends. Rokus's jeep sputtered up the driveway. Whisky yanked the leash from Kieran and chased the jeep, barking furiously and doing his best to be a guard dog while running on three legs with a cone on his head. Rokus and Jenny stepped out of their jeep and greeted us, so Whisky stopped barking and greeted them, too. They welcomed us to Bowen Island and gave us a frozen rabbit.

I drove Kieran to the General Store. It had everything an islander needed, even videotape rentals, and prices for goods other than ice cream were not much higher than on the mainland. It had a butcher, who also butchered for deer hunters and hobby farmers. It was a liquor agency, so, unlike all liquor stores in Vancouver, it sold both cold beer and groceries.

"You can have anything you can cook. Frozen pizzas?"

"With cream sodas and Oreos?" said Kieran.

"Sure. And some mini-pack cereals with plastic spoons."

"Ice cream bars?"

"Sure."

"*Choice!* Can I get more comics? And dog biscuits?"

"Sure. And don't forget toilet paper."

The woman in front of us bought groceries without paying for them. The cashier wrote the amount in a book, and on the wall behind her was a list of defaulters. I opened an account, so Kieran could walk to the store and get whatever he needed.

I taught Kieran how to tend the woodstove. Pearl held the flashlight in the windowless basement.

"Tonight, you can use the electric lamp on a cord, but Frank's using it right now. We let the stove run down today so I can show you how to light it. Use paper, cedar kindling, sticks, split wood, and then a round of

Part II: Partners in Adventure

wood. When you do it right, you only need one match.” I closed the stove, lit a match, and pushed it through the grate. Fire raced across the paper. In a few minutes, the flue pipe groaned as the stove came to life. I closed the grate to slow the burn. “One round at a time, and not too much air. Keep it burning, but don’t let it get too hot.”

We tied Whisky to a tree and drove to the Snuggler for dinner.

“Tonight you will be the first to sleep alone in that house. Keep Whisky with you, enjoy your comics, buy more at the store if you want, and call us or Rokus or the police if you have a problem. You can walk to the store in half an hour.”

“Ten bucks a day!”

Pearl hugged Kieran. “I want to have a boy like you.”

When we returned six days later, Kieran was sitting on a log, whittling. His jeans were streaked with drywall dust. We walked inside. White dust was banked like snowdrifts.

“How was it?” signed Pearl.

“No one came except Frank and his son, mostly his son. Frank told me to stay outside, so it was boring. Except for the deer! I never saw one close before! The kitten kept pooping in the houseplants, so they stink. Whisky slept with me. Can I go home now?”

“All right. Whisky can guard now.”

“You’ll have to tie him up. He barks when Frank or his son come near. Whisky hates them!” Kieran held his finger to his lip. “Look—Bambi’s back! Hold Whisky and watch.” Kieran stepped out the door, pulled some weeds, and approached the deer. It ate from Kieran’s hand, and I took a photo.

I had the photo framed, but Kieran would never see it because Pearl and Elizabeth soon parted ways, and Pearl refused to give it to him. I began to notice her relationships were unstable, and she didn’t care if others suffered while she settled a score.

Pearl drove Kieran home, a four-hour round trip. I drove to the Bowen Building Centre to rent a rototiller and began tilling the garden soil.

When Pearl returned, she and Whisky joined me in the garden. She

Part II: Partners in Adventure

was laughing. “I discovered why Kieran wanted to leave early: the cookies and sodas are gone—and the outhouse is full of diarrhea!”

We pulled stones and weeds. Whisky started staggering, and then he collapsed. I thought he was choking, so I held him upside down while Pearl squeezed his chest in a Heimlich maneuver. He was breathing, but he didn’t move.

Pearl stroked him and called his name; it sounded like “*Eeb-ih.*”

“What was he chewing?”

Pearl showed me the stick she had been tossing.

“That’s foxglove—it’s poisonous!” I ran up the driveway, found some charcoal in the bonfire ashes, ran back, and poked the charcoal into his mouth. We dribbled in some water. Slowly, he recovered.

We planted vegetable seeds until dusk. Frank and his son were still working. We drove to the Snuggler for dinner in our gumboots and overalls and did our best to wash in its bathroom. When we emerged from the restaurant, the sky was a blaze of stars.

When we drove back, we saw the glow of our house through the trees for the first time. The view was magnificent. We were in love, we had our land, and we were building our future.

Frank was gone. I sprinkled Dustbane on the plywood floor and swept it. We went down to the basement to stoke the stove while Whisky cowered at the top of the stairs, terrified of fire. Our flashlight beams were white cones in the smoky air.

We took the utility lamp into the bedroom. I took the pistol from the lockbox, loaded it, and tucked it under a corner of the mattress. Pearl peeled back the plastic sheet covering the bed, pushed Whisky into the hallway, and closed the door. We put our clothes in plastic bags and slid naked between the sheets, shivering. I switched off the lamp. The moonbeam through the skylight fell on the bed like a spotlight—it was perfect. We pulled back the blanket and began to make love. Whisky whined outside our bedroom door, as he would do every time we made love. I jerked and pulled back.

Pearl pushed me off her and sat up. “What’s wrong?”

“Water dripped on my back.” I turned on the utility light and stood on the bed. “Water is dripping from the skylight.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

I covered the blanket with plastic and let Whisky in. We slid under the blanket *and* the plastic sheet. Whisky lay down on the floor next to Pearl.

“Why does Whisky go to your side?”

“Animals prefer deafies. I told you before. Is it quiet here?”

“Inside, I hear the firewood burning and the refrigerator motor. Outside, the wind moves the leaves, like this.” I rubbed her hands. “The leaves whisper.”

On our first night on Bowen Island, we made love while I listened to water dripping on the plastic sheet above my back, ticking like a time bomb.

At sunrise, Whisky’s barking jolted us awake. We looked out and saw two deer on the hill.

“One window is higher than the other,” signed Pearl.

“You are right. It looks strange. I will ask Frank to fix it.”

We dressed, made the bed, and covered it with plastic.

After breakfast, Whisky barked furiously. Frank and his family had arrived. Mrs. Schutt gave us a carrot cake as a housewarming gift. Frank showed her around the house. Then he and his son resumed sanding drywall while Pearl and I continued tidying up the property. Whisky, tied to a tree, barked and lunged at Frank whenever he came near.

That evening, when we returned from dinner at the Snuggler, fine white gypsum powder covered everything as if a blizzard had blown through the house. The dust was so fine it clogged the vacuum cleaner in minutes. We could only sweep with Dustbane and wet-mop. The dust filled our nostrils and made us as dirty as the house.

We showered in the night air by standing naked on a plank behind the house and taking turns aiming the hose. The water system had not yet been installed, so the hose blasted cold groundwater at firehose pressure. Then, wearing only sandals, we ran to the basement by flashlight to warm ourselves before the woodstove, like a sauna in reverse.

On Monday morning, we dressed in the basement, standing on a piece of plywood on the gravel floor. We drove to the cove, parked, and

Part II: Partners in Adventure

walked onto the ferry for our first commute, along with 200 neighbors. I shaved in the ferry washroom and was surprised to find other men shaving.

We commuted by ferry and bus together, ate dinner in the Snuggler together, and, during the week, showered downtown at the YMCA. Because vehicle fare was expensive, we drove the truck onto the ferry only once a week to buy supplies. We were becoming alarmed that progress had slowed when so much work was unfinished, especially Pearl.

“When are we going to have a toilet, lights, and a bath? My holiday starts next week. I have to paint.”

“Frank said he would finish sanding next Sunday. He’s waiting for the electrical inspector. Then an electrician will connect the house, and we will have power and water.”

I used a vacation day to meet the electrical inspector. Frank wasn’t licensed, so I had to attest that I, the homeowner, had done the wiring. I must have made a good impression on the inspector because he approved Frank’s wiring without entering the house. The next day, an electrician moved the power line to the house, so when we came home from work, we had electricity in the sockets and a few lights for the first time. The light fell on chaos, but we were thrilled that civilization had reached us.

On the weekend, Frank plumbed the wellhead to the house and switched on the water. Pearl flushed the toilet and cheered. After two weeks of camping, we had hot water and a toilet.

While Frank and his son sanded drywall, I filled in the pipe trench, which ran from the wellhead to the house. I discovered Frank had spliced two pieces of pipe for our water main, and his splice was leaking. When I examined it, Frank shouted at me to keep shoveling—to bury his defect under two feet of soil! I re-spliced the pipe and made sure the leak had stopped before I buried it.

When Frank left, we put on masks and swept and wet-mopped the new piles of dust. At bedtime, I reached under the mattress, took the pistol, unloaded it, and handed it to Pearl.

“For self-defense. Do you remember how a rifle works?”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Pearl nodded and mimed pulling the bolt and taking a shot.

“A pistol is the same. It fires when it is loaded, the bolt is pulled, and the safety is off.” I loaded the gun, cocked it, and turned the safety lever on. “Now it’s safe—try it.”

Pearl pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.

I turned the safety off. “Now, it’s not safe. The red dot means it will fire.” I turned the safety back on. “We will leave the safety on. Whisky is your alarm; the gun is your defense. If a stranger comes, lock the front door, come here in the bedroom, and close the door. Turn the safety off, stand in the corner, and wait. If a man walks into the bedroom, shoot him. Then call the police.”

“Will I go to jail?”

“No. When he’s inside, not invited, and you fear assault, you may shoot him. Leo keeps a pistol under the mattress for his wife, too.”

Pearl hugged me. “You protect me. I love you.”

The power failed. I took the flashlight from my pocket and used it to find the kerosene lamp in the kitchen and light it. The W-shaped flame cast an island of yellow light. It flickered as I carried it to the bedroom.

“I feel lost when the power goes off, like I am deaf-blind.”

Pearl stayed home and painted while I commuted to work.

When I came home, Pearl signed, “When I was painting, the ladder shook, so I looked down. Whisky was bumping it to call me. The kitten was in his mouth, dead. Whisky looked sad. His eyes said, ‘Please fix my friend.’ We were both sad. Tonight, your first job is to bury the cat.”

The telephone rang. As I put down the telephone, I laughed. “A man saw our advertisement and asked if he could rent our barn to live in—himself, with no toilet, heat, and light!”

“There are some weird people on Bowen Island.”

We decided to introduce ourselves to Fran Thaxter so that she would have no reason to surprise us with a visit. On a Saturday morning, we walked across the street to a graveled compound with a bungalow and pickup truck on one side and cinder-block sheds of machinery, construction materials, and fuel drums on the other. Smoke wafted from

Part II: Partners in Adventure

the chimney.

When I rang the doorbell, barking erupted inside. A woman about ten years older than us with blonde hair, jeans, and an intense face opened the door and held back a German Shepherd.

“I was wondering when you’d drop by. Come in! On Bowen, you can drop in on your neighbors and borrow a cup of sugar. Don’t mind Bear.”

The house smelled of wood smoke and cigarettes. A burly man dressed like a lumberjack shook my hand. “Morning, I’m Wayne.”

We accepted coffee but declined the cigarettes. Fran handed us mugs of Nescafé and we sat down. A wooden model of our house sat on top of their TV.

“I hope you’re not upset we bought your house,” I signed and said.

“No, that land wasn’t important. We own the land all around the lake, hundreds of acres. We’ll subdivide it when prices recover.” Fran pointed to the model. “My former husband and I had it designed for adults at one end and teenagers at the other so the kids wouldn’t hear us in our bedroom. That’s why the living and family rooms are in the middle. We planned how the sun and moon would shine through the windows and skylights. Take the model with you.”

“Keep it. We have the blueprints.”

“My husband wanted to eat in the dining room every day. That’s why the dining room has the best view. I’d love to see the house when you are finished.”

We didn’t want to owe Fran any favors, so we kept our visit brief.

I searched the property titles at the Land Titles Office. The land around the lake was owned by the Union Steamship Company, which had once owned much of Bowen Island. Fran’s lying only served to impress others or, perhaps, herself.

Trout Lake Farm

Our lives settled into a routine. We awoke at 6:30, we took the 7:30 ferry followed by the express bus, and we arrived downtown at 8:30. We

Part II: Partners in Adventure

enjoyed our commute, for we signed for ten hours a week, talking about everything. We shared the newspaper, and we read books. The ferry and bus were havens for bookworms, and we often talked to other commuters. Sometimes, post office shift changes forced us to travel separately and take turns picking each other up in the truck or take turns hitchhiking on the trunk road.

One afternoon, I sat on the express bus next to a man in a black cotton overcoat. Although his hair was thinning and tinged with gray, he appeared just a few years older than me. His aviator glasses magnified the twinkle in his eye. He looked up from reading *Object Oriented Programming*.

“Haven’t you anything more interesting to read than *Guide to Being Your Own Contractor*?” He laughed.

I couldn’t help but laugh, too. “I see you are in computers.”

“That’s my job. The commute gives me time to learn and think. In a month, you can sit on the top of the ferry and suntan while you commute. Take *that*, citysiders!”

“How long have you been living on Bowen Island?”

“Fifteen years.”

I smiled. “That’s a long time.”

“On Bowen, either you just got here, or you’ve been here forever. You love it, or you hate it. I came in the counterculture days—back-to-the-land, Jefferson Airplane, the sixties, all of it.”

“Where do you live?”

“In a house where I can walk to the ferry. But I used to live on a farm. I raised sheep for a decade.”

“Did it pay?”

“It’s a long story.”

“It’s a long commute.”

The man looked at his watch and smiled. “Then I’d love to share it with you. Once upon a time, there was a guy named Fernie, an engineer and investor who never lived on the island. Fernie bought twenty acres nestled in the hills back when land was cheap. It had a broken-down cabin built by the original settlers. It was lovely, but to Fernie, it was a tax deduction—provided it was worked as a farm. So I took care of Fernie’s

Part II: Partners in Adventure

place for free rent, a stipend, and a share. I became a sharecropper. There were only 500 people on Bowen Island in 1972.”

“How long had the cabin been abandoned?”

“Not long. A few years before me, a hippie couple approached Fernie and asked if they could squat in it if they fixed it up. Fernie agreed. By the third winter, they’d had enough. They told me about the place. I moved in, and I built the farm for Fernie.”

“Alone?”

“Most of the time. It was fabulous, as in living a fable. The stars were my friends. Living without human reinforcement purified my soul.”

“Why did you give it up?”

“I quit while I was ahead,” he said, with an enigmatic smile. “I moved to the cove and started a garage and machine shop.”

“What did you do for power and water?”

“I had no power, just a battery for the stereo that Fernie charged for me. Kerosene lighting, wood heating, water from a well.”

“What was the cabin like?”

“It had one room and a loft for storage. I hung my toilet seat on the wall behind the stove and carried it to the outhouse when I needed it. Nothing moves bowels better than a hot seat in cold air.”

“What a unique living room decoration that must have been.”

Our bus arrived, and we waited in the ferry departure lounge. He took a bottle of Karo out of his overcoat and took a swig. His breath smelled of ammonia.

“I was starting to fade. Want some?”

“Corn syrup? No, thanks. Diabetes?”

“Type One.”

“Is that why you quit?”

“No. I went blind.”

“I saw you reading!”

The man grinned. “I was driving, and then the world started to go dark—retinal hemorrhage. I stopped and waved for someone to take me to a hospital. I was blind for years, a member of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. I learned to read Braille, walk with a white cane, and eat by putting my meat on the plate at six o’clock. I never mastered

Part II: Partners in Adventure

urinals, though. The CNIB gave me vocational training, and that's where I learned computers. Now I program assistive devices for the blind."

"But I saw you reading!"

"Thanks to lasers, I eventually regained some sight."

"Would you like a lift? My truck is in the cove."

"No, thanks. I have to walk home because I counted burning those calories when I drank the syrup. Good luck with the Thaxter place."

We bought a chainsaw, hardhat, and wedges. I studied the instructions, put on the hardhat, hearing protectors, and gloves, and carried our new chainsaw into the forest. I felled, limbed, and bucked trees. I was careful to make sure the trees fell in the right direction because they could have killed us if I made a mistake. While I bucked the trees, Pearl loaded the firewood into the truck. Each time the truck was full of wood, we drove back to the house and stacked it. We worked as a team and slept deeply every weekend, exhausted.

At the downtown bus stop, my new friend approached me and grinned. "Derrick, I'm Ralph." The bus arrived. Ralph flashed a card to the driver, walked to the rear, and sat down.

I sat beside him. "How did you board without paying?"

"I'm a VIP." Ralph chuckled as he showed me his Vision Impaired Pass. "Now you know why I wear sunglasses while I'm waiting for the bus. No one asked me to return my VIP pass when I could see again. And I was a licensed driver while I was blind—no one asked me to return my driver's license!"

"What did you do when you weren't shepherding?"

"I'd go hiking with my goat, bring my cup, and milk her for refreshment. Sometimes, I had to wait for her to eat the roses along the way. My only problem was dogs. An ewe costs a hundred bucks. The .44 magnum on my belt gave me a reputation as a wacko even though it is legal to patrol your property with a gun."

"I'll bet that minimized visitors. You only shot dogs?"

"And deer. Fernie and I love venison, so he installed a propane freezer for me. Hunting is legal on Bowen with a longbow and a license.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

So I got a longbow and a license, and I shot them with my gun—in season, of course. One shot can't be traced. Your barn would make a good hunting blind. At twilight, you could sit on a bale in your hayloft and wait for a deer to walk by. Hay muffles gunshots, but if you don't want any noise, make a silencer."

The bus arrived at the ferry terminal. Ralph looked at his watch. "We have an hour. Come, sit in my jeep with me."

I followed him to his Suzuki, almost as decrepit as Rokus's. "Look in my glovebox." Ralph handed me his keys.

I unlocked the glove box and took out a revolver. "A Charter Arms five-shot belly gun! You must be paranoid."

"Paranoia is why I prefer revolvers—the shells are retained."

"I've got the Charter Arms folding rifle. Are you licensed to drive around with this?"

Ralph nodded. "I am. I am a member of the Barnet Rifle Club, and I have a Permit to Convey my gun to the range. Barnet is on the other side of Vancouver, so that lets me drive my gun anywhere between here and there when the range is open—and it's open daily except Christmas. Last year I drove by a deer lying by the road near Tunstall Bay; someone must have hit it. I rushed home and got my gun, but by the time I returned, the deer was gone. Now I carry my gun in my jeep."

Ralph was a good storyteller. I put the gun back.

"Dynamite is fun. I enjoyed stumping, clearing land. I kept my dynamite under the sofa. Once in a while, I'd invite a visitor to my cabin. At night, we'd sit by the stove in the lamplight, stoned in the silence of the woods. When the fire ran low, I'd add some wood, and then I'd take a stick of dynamite and toss it into the stove. You've never seen *anyone* bolt out a door faster into the snow." Ralph roared with laughter. "Without a blasting cap, dynamite is safe. Two bucks a laugh but worth it every time."

"What a lifestyle!"

"It was. Most people live parallel lives, where you live to work. You work and live every day, so you can't optimize your work life or your personal life. A serial life is where you work to live. First, you work to build a stash. Then, you live your life if you still have the strength. People

Part II: Partners in Adventure

who live serial lives often end up bitter because by the time they have the money to retire early, they don't have the health to enjoy it. I had a reverse-serial life. But that only works for stoics, like me, who are prepared to spend our youth in poverty."

The ferry arrived.

"I didn't expect to have to drive after dark. Please drive me home. At night, my vision narrows to a tunnel. But I can't complain. I lived while I could!"

On Saturday morning, the telephone rang. "Have you let your barn?" said a man with an English accent.

"It's still available. Why don't you come over?"

Whisky barked as a yellow Volvo station wagon rumbled up the driveway. A man with a gray beard and a woman with auburn hair stepped out. Their names were Alan and Rose. Pearl made tea, and we sat at the kitchen table.

"When we moved to Canada, Rose dreamed we would have an acreage, ride horses, raise lambs, and spin wool," said Alan. "We grew up with Barbours, Wellingtons, and Tweed, read *Ten Acres Enough*, and fantasized. Here we are—with no land. When Rose saw your advert, she thought we might arrange to keep a few sheep on your property."

"Let's see what we can do together. Fields need to be foraged. Saplings are shooting up already."

The four of us walked around the property with Whisky. Back in the house, I put the property plan on the table, and Alan and Rose outlined their ideas for running a handful of ewes and their lambs in the lower, south field. They sketched a fence built with wooden posts, barbed wire, and sheep mesh. They would supply the materials and hire a tractor to set the fenceposts. Then we would build the fence together. Pearl and I would build an animal shelter in the lower field and, because the water in the lower field would freeze in winter, allow them to use the barn and the upper field in the winter. This meant that we would have to fence the upper field before winter. Their project would last two years, after which the lower field fence would be ours. We happily agreed.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Whisky hears something.” Whisky was Pearl’s ears.

“It’s music. It must be coming from Fran’s, and it’s getting louder. It sounds like a party.”

The next morning, I signed, “There was music all night. I never thought I’d hear anything here but the wind in the trees.”

“Please check to be sure no one from the party is outside.”

I put Whisky on a leash and walked around our property on a glorious summer morning. The chirping of birds had replaced the thumping of rock music. Whisky and I walked down our driveway and looked across the road. A stage, built from pallets, stood in Fran’s driveway. It was surrounded by bottles, garbage, and crows. We walked back up the driveway to the barn. Whisky ran to the barn and leaped up and down below the hayloft, barking. Two sleepy heads peered down.

“Fran said we could sleep here,” said one.

“You have to ask *me*, not Fran. Whose party was it?”

“Fran’s son turned sixteen. We all got wrecked.”

“You can go now. I’ll tie up the dog for a while.”

After coffee, Pearl and I felled a dying maple tree on the property line near the barn. Disturbed by the chainsaw, the teens climbed down the ladder and shuffled down the driveway. That fifty-year-old tree yielded four truckloads of firewood.

The Howe Sound Queen rolled and pitched its way to Horseshoe Bay as I sat in our truck enjoying pastry and coffee from the Bowen Island Bakery. I loved the view of the mountains from the truck on the days when I drove off the island to buy provisions. A knock on the window brought me back to reality.

A man about my age asked me for a ride, so I told him to hop in, and I introduced myself.

“My name is Stanley. You and your deaf wife bought the Thaxter place, didn’t you? I couldn’t help notice the antenna on your truck. I’m a radio ham, too! I work downtown at Eaton’s department store, in debt collections. On the weekends, I’m a Vancouver Police reservist.”

“That’s interesting. I was a West Vancouver Police reservist for three years.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“I wanted to be a career cop, but I didn’t qualify because I’m deaf in my right ear.”

“Then why did you join the police reserve?”

“I use the police databases to help me trace debtors. My wife, Gertrude, and I are building a house on Eagle Cliff. Come visit.”

We talked about our hobbies, and Stanley sketched a map.

A couple of weeks later, Pearl and I followed Stanley’s map to his house. We parked our pickup at the roadside and walked up his steep access road, the pavement turning to gravel after it passed a cluster of houses. Tracks branched out into the trees and led to houses in various stages of completion. Stanley’s place was beyond all of them, at the top. The gravel road stopped at an old four-wheel-drive GMC Suburban. We walked past spare truck parts to a single-axle trailer. Behind it stood the frame of a two-story house, the tarpaper sheathing braving the elements without the protection of siding.

“So small. I can’t imagine living in this trailer,” Pearl signed.

Gertrude, a small woman with straight brown hair, opened the door and beckoned us to come in.

“Welcome!” Stanley shouted. “Wait while I clear some space. We don’t get many guests.” We squeezed onto the bench seats on the sides of the table. Boxes, clothes, tools, and books blocked what little daylight penetrated the trailer through the forest and louvered windows. “We use the table-bed as a table, the sofa-bed as a bed, and the bunk bed as storage. There’s a Porta-Potty outside.”

Pearl looked around. “Where do you shower?”

“At work. When we can’t shower at work, we wash outside. We have to be living in the house by winter because we only have a heater running off an extension cord from my neighbor. The cord is so long, we can’t turn more than one thing on at a time. There’s no phone, so ham radio comes in handy.”

I pointed at a black oval sticking out from under a pile of clothes on the bunk bed.

Stanley grinned. “That’s my Remington 12-gauge.”

“It lets him feel he’s got something to protect,” said Gertrude.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Things were better before. I was a bailiff. Then we bought a tow truck. But, one by one, the private lots contracted to UniPark, so we went bust. Gertrude’s waitressing kept us going.” Stanley sighed. “I once impounded a Rolls-Royce. Next day, a guy knocks and asks how many trucks we got.”

“I told him we had three,” said Gertrude. “But we had only one.”

“So this guy gives us three padded car covers and says, ‘If you ever tow a Royce again, you must cover it first.’ Ha-ha!”

Pearl laughed. “My boss had a Rolls-Royce. He owned a restaurant on Broadway where I worked as a waitress. I gave customers a paper and pencil with the menu, and they wrote their orders on the paper. I quit when I saw a dead body fall out from behind a curtain! It’s true! I’ve seen so many things you wouldn’t believe.”

“You were a waitress?” Her dead-body-behind-the-curtain story sounded like a cliché, but she was convinced it was true.

“I was a waitress after I left my husband.”

We all walked to their construction site. The front door was held closed by a stick on a rubber band through a hole.

“The house will have a kitchen, living room, and dining room downstairs, and three bedrooms upstairs,” said Stanley. “I’m doing the plumbing and wiring now. When that’s done, and I get a stove and some drywall in downstairs, we’ll move in.”

“Where’s your well?”

“That comes later.”

“How did you get a building permit?”

“I don’t have one, and that’s why we don’t invite many visitors. No permit means no mortgage, and that’s why it will take us years to finish our house. No one lives like this by choice.”

“How are you going to connect power? That needs an inspection, which needs an electric permit, which needs a building permit, which needs water and septic permits.”

“I just hope when the house is finished, we won’t have to tear it down. Meanwhile, there’s my neighbor’s extension cord and water.”

Pearl could see that our house problems were trivial compared to Stanley’s illegal house.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

A man leaned over from the next booth in the Snuggler. “You guys rented out your barn?”

Pearl and I looked up from our meal.

“We received two calls: one from a guy who wanted to live in it and the other from a guy who wants it for sheep.”

“That’s because you’re offering *half board*. Most owners have a stable before they buy a horse. Donna and me, we got a horse but no stable. I’m not gonna go up and down your driveway twice a day to feed him, especially in winter. But *full board*? I’d be interested.”

“What’s the going rate for full board?”

“One hundred and fifty. Hay and grain will cost you half of that.”

“Where can we get hay and grain?”

The man laughed. “Hay from Vanderveen’s, in Surrey. They deliver. Or haul fifteen or twenty bales in your truck. The Bowen Garden Shop sells grain. It costs a little more than on the mainland, but you should support local business.”

“I know how to feed horses,” signed Pearl.

“I’m Gus.”

“Good to meet you. I suppose you already know who we are.”

“Of course!”

I smiled. “Pearl and I need to discuss this,” I said. “What do you think?” I signed.

“This is our chance to start a business. It is hard to get the first customer.” Pearl signed.

“He says Mouse won’t escape, but we will need a fence by winter, for Alan. If it costs \$2,000, it will take two years of boarding to pay for it.”

“That’s for one horse, but we will get more horses.”

“All right, Gus. When do you want to start?” “I’ll give you a month to get set up. Make sure to get Buckerfield’s Complete Horse grain and fresh timothy hay, and make a door to lock up the grain to keep Mouse out of it. Don’t feed him that old hay in your barn.” Gus pressed his cigarette into the ashtray and stood up. “Then you feed him twice a day, rain or shine. Whenever you need a hand, I’ll help you.”

“Here’s the fence plan, bill of materials, and the letter of agreement,” said

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Alan. “We can repair the posts and wire along the trunk road. We need new posts only around the other sides. About 270 meters of fencing surrounding a third of a hectare will cost us \$1,000, for which you give us two years of summer pasture plus winter barn use.”

Pearl and I agreed and signed his letter. We all put on work clothes and drove to the lower field. Rose and Pearl cleared brush and stones. Alan and I repaired the old fence along the road and then cleared saplings by pulling them out with the truck.

We marked out the new fence line with orange twine. We drove to the Bowen Building Centre, where Alan bought eighty-two pressure-treated fenceposts. We trucked them to the property in several loads and laid them out at two-meter intervals. Our arms were aching.

A few days later, Alan and I greeted Eddie, the island’s busiest backhoe man. We held each post while Eddie’s backhoe pushed it into the soil. By late afternoon, all the posts were set.

On Saturday, Alan delivered the fence materials, and now the hard work began. I supplied the tools, and Alan and I worked on the fence in the summer heat. It took all day to build four corner braces and two gatepost braces. Pearl alternated between weeding the garden and helping Alan and me. Weeding the garden had become a chore because the manure we had spread had not yet composted; in our ignorance, we had sown our garden with weed seeds.

On Sunday, Alan, Pearl, and I started laying sheep fencing. The three of us unrolled, dragged, pulled, and hammered the heavy mesh in the heat.

Alan returned the next Saturday. “Can you give me a hand with this urinal?” he said, opening the Volvo’s tailgate.

“Don’t sheep pee on the ground?” I signed and said.

Pearl laughed.

“It’s a perfect water trough,” said Alan. “The sheep can’t knock it over. And it was free.”

Alan, Pearl, and I continued dragging, pulling, and hammering sheep fencing. Then, over two more exhausting days, we went around and around the field unrolling, stretching, and hammering barbed wire. We used the come-along to pull the wires so tight they hummed when

Part II: Partners in Adventure

struck. The pitch was so low that Alan and I couldn't hear it, so all three of us enjoyed it equally, by feeling it, before we hammered the wires down tight. The barbs snagged our clothes and lacerated our skin.

When the fence was done, Alan and I built a metal aqueduct over the driveway to carry water to the urinal through a valve on a fencepost next to the driveway. For years, twice a day, Pearl or I would pause in the truck on the way to the ferry, open the valve, and wait a minute while water flushed and refilled the urinal for the sheep.

Whisky barked as the yellow Volvo chugged up the driveway on a Saturday morning. Pearl and I joined Alan and Rose in the barn. They had nailed plywood over two of the three barn door openings. They backed the Volvo into the third door, opened the tailgate, and, aided by their three children, released four sheep into the barn.

Pearl's smile reached from ear to ear. "They're beautiful!"

"Dorsets," said Rose. "They are a lovely white, aren't they?"

Pearl tried to pet them. "They walk away."

"When you feed them, they won't."

"Why did you put them in the barn, not the field?" I signed and said.

"To trim their hooves and sheep-dip them," said Alan.

"How do you dip a sheep?"

"With a watering-can. We'll do their pedicure first. You have to trim their hooves if they are penned because they don't wear naturally."

The sheep were clipped, dipped, and left to dry. In the afternoon, Rose and Alan stuffed the sheep back into the Volvo. He backed it into the lower field, and the sheep jumped to freedom in the sunshine. They ran to the other end of the field and started grazing.

"This is a wonderful sight," Pearl signed.

"Are you interested in goats?" said Rose. "The woman who sold us the sheep, Patty, has two goats to give away, but they must be milked twice daily."

I looked at Pearl. "What do you think?"

She smiled. "Do you know how to milk a goat?"

"No. Do you?"

"No."

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“You can keep them with our sheep for a while,” said Rose. “Goats don’t like grass, so they’ll first eat the weeds. But when the weeds are gone, they’ll compete with the sheep for grass, so you’ll need to move the goats to the upper field. First, you’ll need to fence it.”

“We need to fence it soon for Gus’s horse,” I signed and said.

“Lovely,” said Alan. “Until you can keep your goats near the barn, you’ll be milking them in the rain on your way to work.”

Pearl and I drove to Patty’s hobby farm in Richmond. She was a retiree living her passion for life beyond the sidewalks. She led us past fruit trees wrapped in wire mesh and into her barn. Inside it stood two white goats with horns.

“The doe is seven. The yearling is her daughter. Aren’t they adorable?” she said, with an Irish lilt. “Saanens—the Holsteins of the caprine world. *Sabne* means cream in German.”

Pearl petted them, and the goats clamored for more petting.

“What do you feed them?”

“Hay and Buckerfield’s Complete Goat. You’ll need a manger. Goats won’t eat hay off the ground.”

“When they have kids, what do you do with them?”

“Sell them at auction. I try not to think about what happens to them afterward. Have you ever milked?”

We shook our heads. Patty put some grain in a milking stand. The older doe hopped up onto the stand and began to nibble.

“Wash and dry her teats. Give her a pint of grain; that’s her reward for standing still. Milk with both hands in a wave motion.” A stream of milk squirted onto the ground. “But use a pail to collect it! I can spare three bags of grain; that’ll do for a month. When you go to Buckerfield’s, buy a salt block. You try it.”

Pearl milked perfectly. I struggled to learn the technique.

“It’s easier for her because her hands are smaller. Are you prepared to do this at seven in the morning and evening?”

Pearl nodded. “We’ll soon have a horse to feed twice a day, too.”

“And when snow is blowing? And when you have the flu?”

We nodded.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Grand. Come to my house.”

Patty poured us milk from the refrigerator.

“It tastes like normal milk,” signed Pearl.

“It’s three percent fat, naturally homogenized. Healthier than cow’s milk.”

Patty lined the bed of our truck with straw. We lifted each animal into the truck and tied it so it could stand up or lie down. Pearl climbed up and sat with the goats.

An hour later, as we crawled along Denman Street in a Vancouver traffic jam, Pearl tapped on the window. “Everyone is waving at me!”

We released the goats into our lower field. They trotted to a cluster of bushes and began to eat. “Shall we name them Mothergoat and Daughtergoat?” Pearl signed.

After dinner, we filled a pail with grain, took a wet cloth and a clean pail, walked to the field, and climbed over the stile. A sheep walked slowly toward Pearl, then broke into a canter. In a moment, all four sheep bellowed and stampeded to Pearl.

“Oh. *Oh. OH!*” said Pearl, holding the grain pail over her head as the sheep crowded around her legs, bleating and shoving.

The goats stood back and watched. It was hilarious. I took the grain bucket from Pearl and walked to the goats. They let me approach, but the sheep wouldn’t leave us alone. I held Mothergoat’s collar, kicked a sheep, and cursed it. The sheep backed off. Pearl threw pebbles at the sheep and chased them away.

Pearl put the clean pail on the ground under Mothergoat’s udder and squatted to milk her. I held the goat’s collar with one hand and offered her the grain bucket with the other. While she ate the grain, her body walked sideways away from Pearl to evade the hands of this unfamiliar milker. She pivoted around me like a ship pivoting around its anchor. Pearl, still squatting, crept after her udder, walking like a Cossack dancer.

Daughtergoat walked up to me, stood on her hind legs, and leaned against my chest with her forelegs. As Mothergoat’s collar pulled one hand sideways, and her head in the grain bucket pushed my other hand down, Daughtergoat butted Mothergoat and shoved her own head into

Part II: Partners in Adventure

the grain bucket. Both of us could hardly stop laughing, but the goats still needed to be milked.

Pearl stood up. “I give up! She won’t stand still!”

My hands were full, so I couldn’t sign. I held the grain bucket over my head, walked Mothergoat to the fence, and tied her collar to the fence so she couldn’t turn sideways. Pearl wiped her teats again and began to milk her. Although the goat could no longer move sideways, the grain had all been eaten, so she was no longer interested in standing still. She stepped forward—into the milk pail.

Pearl was spitting mad. I was laughing hysterically.

“Just squirt her milk on the ground.”

When Mothergoat’s udder was empty, we tied Daughtergoat to the fence and milked her onto the ground as well. We walked home carrying the grain and milk pails. Both were empty, yet both of us were smiling.

Milking soon became quick, efficient, and fun as the goats came to trust us, and after we learned to tie one goat to the fence while the other was being milked. The sheep realized we had no food for them and left us alone.

I made a pail carrier that doubled as a stool. Bowen Islanders waved as they drove past on the trunk road, and a few stopped to take photographs. We weighed and recorded the milk and filtered it into milk bottles. We drank a lot of milk.

My father came over on a Saturday morning ferry for a day of handiwork. We built barn doors and a milking stand. We marked the upper field fence line and bought 110 fenceposts at the Bowen Building Centre, making several trips in the truck to deliver them. Then Father drove the truck along the fence line while I pulled posts off the back one by one, arranging them for the backhoe. Whisky was our companion, often rolling on his back in the grass.

When we were done, we walked into the kitchen. Pearl was looking in the refrigerator. “Take some milk with you. We get three liters a day—we can’t drink it fast enough!”

“Make cheese,” said Father. “It’s nature’s way of preserving milk.”

The next day, I photocopied cheese-making recipes at the library.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“It’s easy,” I signed. “Milk, salt, and rennet are all we need. And a pot, thermometer, and cheesecloth.”

It took me an hour of telephone calls to find the only rennet in Vancouver—at Galloway’s Specialty Foods, next door to the food fair where Pearl and I met!

Pearl steadied the twenty-liter pot on the stove while I poured in the milk. It took an hour to reach thirty degrees. We added rennet, and the milk slowly curdled. An hour later, I sliced the curd floating on the top into squares. Slowly, it sank to the bottom. An hour later, we poured out the greenish whey. I draped cheesecloth over a strainer and poured the curds into it. I kneaded salt into the curds, tied the corners of the cheesecloth together with twine, and held the dripping white orb over a pan. “Cottage cheese, from our cottage.”

In the basement, I hung the twine from the ceiling while Pearl set a pan under it to collect the drips. Whisky licked the whey from the pan as quickly as it landed. It was the first installment of an easy ritual we would perform every two weeks for the next two years.

We drove to Buckerfield’s in Langley. We bought hay, alfalfa, straw, grain, peat moss, lime, salt blocks, an electric fence charger and insulators, a manure scoop, a pitchfork, and a teat washer. When I drove off, the steering was heavy. I realized we were hauling a ton, *double* what the Nissan was built to carry. The engine stalled on our first attempt to go up the driveway. I backed down, tried again, and crawled up the twenty percent grade with the pedal to the floor.

At the barn, Pearl stood in the hayloft while I stood in the back of the truck and lifted the forty-five kilogram bales past the *DE MAL EN PIS* sign to her. I was dripping with sweat, and my arms were itchy from hay scratches. We stored the grain and tools in the feed room and bolted the door against animals. We did chores together, bathed together, fell into bed together, and held hands in the I-love-you sign. We were too tired to do more.

We were exhausted yet happy. We were optimistic that after Frank was out of the picture, we would soon have a home to be proud of, and we would start a family. I spent lunchtimes at the library researching

Part II: Partners in Adventure

stable management.

“Four horses would pay half our mortgage, and four horses would not be much more work than one,” I signed.

“More horses would be less work because when we buy lots of feed, we can have it delivered.”

I returned from the basement with a white teardrop. “Chèvre—our first goat cheese.”

Pearl poked it. “It shrank.”

I peeled off the cheesecloth, cut the orb in half, cut a wedge, and ate it. I gave Pearl a piece.

She ate it, and we looked at each other, grinning. “It tastes like nothing. It has bubbles.”

“It’s like ricotta, but firmer. For salads, pizza, pasta, and sandwiches.”

Pearl laughed. “No one made cheese for me before!”

On Saturday morning, Whisky barked. Pearl and I looked down from our dining room window to see a cowboy in a Stetson riding up our driveway.

“Gus looks like the Marlboro man,” signed Pearl.

We put on our gumboots and walked to the barn. Gus dismounted, the saddle creaking. Pearl scratched Mouse under the chin.

“Mornin’,” Gus said. He walked Mouse into the barn, opened the tack room door, and put the saddle and bridle on the floor inside.

“Make a saddlehorse, will ya? Keeps the leather dry.”

Mouse munched on the grass, then lay down and rolled on his back.

“Mouse has come home; he lived here before. Sixteen hands of Appaloosa gelding.” Gus climbed up the hayloft ladder. A moment later, a flake of hay dropped into a manger. Mouse walked straight to that stall and ate. Gus climbed down.

“Do you ride him often?” signed Pearl.

“Mainly my wife and daughter ride. You can ride him, too. Exercise is good for him. As sweet a horse as you’ll find,” he said, stroking Mouse. “And don’t forget to keep the wire gate across your driveway closed.”

“Sorry, we have to leave it open. The barbed wire will wreck my

Part II: Partners in Adventure

suits. But we'll have this field fenced in a few weeks.”

“You gotta keep Mouse from goin’ to the road.” Gus lit a cigarette. “Mouse respects electric fences, so hang orange twine around the field, and Mouse won’t go near it.”

Pearl and I made a temporary fence from bright orange twine. Gus was right: half a ton of horse avoided an ounce of twine.

Pearl and I worked with enthusiasm on building up our business. I stained a plank with creosote, engraved it, and nailed it to our fence:

TROUT LAKE FARM
Horse Boarding 947-2574

We joined the Bowen Island Horse Owners & Riders Association and subscribed to *United Caprine News*, *The Gaitpost*, and *Countryside* magazine. We learned to vaccinate.

Alan rented Bowen’s only ram, rubbed red ochre on its belly, and released him in the field. Within a few days, all the ewes’ rumps were the telltale color.

There was no buck on Bowen to service our does. Ralph suggested we buy a yearling, give him a few days in the harem, and then make dog food of him, so I drove to the Fraser Valley Livestock Auction. Tools and crafts were sold off the tailgates of pickup trucks in the parking lot. But there was only one male at auction that day, and he was huge. After driving so far and facing the same costly trip home, I bid on him. My bid won. Jonathan stank, but he made friends with Whisky, Mouse, and our two does. He never became dog food.

While Pearl did the evening chores, I opened a bottle of wine. When she returned, she kissed me and slumped onto a chair.

“Give the dog food and water. Measure the goat grain. Put the grain and milk containers in the carrier. Walk down to the lower field and climb over the stile. Tie one goat to the fence. Put half the grain in the stand. Wash teats. Milk one goat. Untie that goat. Repeat for the other goat. Climb over the stile, and don’t spill the milk or rip my clothes. Walk up the hill to the barn. Refill the horse water pails. Climb to the

Part II: Partners in Adventure

hayloft. Drop hay down the hole. Measure horse grain in the feed room and pour it into the manger. Walk home. Weigh and filter the milk. Wash the container. Morning and night, together and taking turns. But I'm not complaining. I feel our life improving."

"Yes. Tonight I will show you something special."

"I thought so. This is our first wine since we moved in."

Pearl and I walked out into the polarized twilight under the twinkle of the brighter stars. As we walked to the barn, I heard an owl. Mouse was standing in the field. We walked down the hill and into the barn. Two deer stood inside, one wearing a necktie.

"Thank you for coming," I signed to the deer. I turned to Pearl. "They promised to come tonight."

"*What?*"

"I am joking."

Pearl grinned. "The deer are here because they smell food. Maybe that was Kieran's deer. Someone put a necktie on him."

When I opened the feed room door, the deer bolted into the forest. I flipped a breaker on the electric panel, which I had installed along with outlets, switches, and lighting, powered by a cable from the house lying on the ground. Lights inside and outside the barn came to life.

"Wonderful!" Pearl signed. "It's so bright!"

For the first time in the history of the world, light poured over this Bowen Island hillside at night.

Men Can't Be Trusted

"Whisky pushed the insulation out of the temporary wall downstairs and escaped through the hole," Pearl signed when I came home from work.

We drove around the property, up and down the trunk road, and up and down the side roads in the twilight, searching for Whisky.

"I feel stupid shouting *Whisky!* like I'm drunk. His tag has the telephone number. We must wait for someone to call."

No one called, so, in the morning, I called Bowen's one-man police detachment. Constable Laurent, strikingly handsome, was about my age.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“RCMP,” said Laurent.

“This is Derrick King. Our German Shepherd ran away yesterday. Have you seen him?”

“Oh, he’s yours! He’s at the pound. Dogs aren’t allowed loose on Bowen Island. He chased my jeep along the trunk road, so I opened the door, and he jumped in. Whisky had a great time barking out the window, and he did me a favor: word is going around that the Bowen Island RCMP detachment has a police dog.”

I drove to North Vancouver and bailed Whisky out of the dog pound.

When I returned, Pearl was in the kitchen.

“I wanted to cook chicken pie, so I followed a recipe. I finished it, but the chicken pieces are still sitting on the table. I don’t understand the instructions.”

We laughed, and I helped Pearl to rescue the meal. She could not understand cooking jargon like “reserve broth.”

“Whisky’s adventure cost \$100. I have no cash left.”

“Take some money from my wallet.”

I went into the bedroom and took some money from Pearl’s wallet. While returning her wallet to her handbag, I noticed a conversation note at the bottom. I saw “danger” and “Derrick” on it. I heard her coming, so I put her handbag down and walked out of the room.

That night I could hardly sleep, wondering why she had written those words. I had never looked in her bag before, and I expected her to respect my privacy, too. But, in the morning, while Pearl was in the bathroom, I looked in her handbag.

The note was gone.

Late on Sunday afternoon, Frank packed his tools, but he approached us instead of slipping away. He told us our house was substantially complete, so we were ready to apply for our Certificate of Occupancy. He handed me the telephone number of the inspector.

I suggested we walk around to make a list of the incomplete items, but Frank refused, complaining that we’d been living in the house for weeks at his expense. I didn’t want to alarm the bank that held our

Part II: Partners in Adventure

second mortgage, so I agreed to call the inspector. I counted on him to identify any important defects.

I left work early on inspection day. The inspector and Frank were standing outside the house, and Whisky was barking inside it. I was astonished when the inspector handed me our Certificate of Occupancy! I asked how he could do that when he hadn't entered the house. He explained he had "dropped by a few times" during construction. Frank smiled. They left.

I was stunned. I needed to estimate how much to pay Frank. I phoned Ross, apologized for not accepting his quotation, and asked him for a quote to complete Frank's work. He agreed to come that evening. I picked Pearl up from the ferry and updated her.

When Ross arrived, he looked around and whistled a single note. "The walls have to come down." He tapped the wall near the ceiling, *poked his finger through it*, and laughed. "Air! Frank didn't lift the wallboards up before nailin'm down, so they don't support the ceiling! In six months, the edges are goin' to be hangin' down wavy-like. And then you can rip the walls *and* the ceiling off."

Pearl was furious; I couldn't tell if she was furious with Frank or with me. Ross showed us Frank's shortcuts, errors, and frauds as we walked around the house. He had ruined the vapor shields, which is why our skylights dripped water. He had put four-inch door frames into six-inch walls, so we had to replace all the exterior frames. He had used interior doors on the exterior; they had no sills, which is why we had seen mice. Ross walked into the kitchen, looked at the range hood, and showed us how it dangled from a few screws.

"I smell sewage. Let's go outside."

We walked around the house, and Ross looked up. "There are no roof vents as required by building code."

"The inspector didn't even have to go inside to see this fault! Why didn't he do his job?"

"Good question. Where's the attic hatch?"

We went into the bedroom. Ross took my flashlight, climbed the ladder, and disappeared into the attic. He reappeared a few minutes later.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Frank’s vented the septic, the range hood, and bathroom into your attic! And he nailed your ceiling boards straight to the trusses! Because he didn’t use strapping, your wallboards have that gap at the top, and your ceiling is never goin’ to be flat. And he used half-inch wallboard for the ceiling, not five-eighths ceiling board. You’re stuck with it now. Get Franco to spray your ceiling with spackle. Your home will look like a Greek restaurant, but you won’t see the waves in the ceiling.”

We walked down to the basement, and Ross roared with laughter. “Where’d he get that water tank? From a *trailer*?” He traced the pipes with the flashlight beam. “Your pipes run through the attic! They’re gonna freeze! They’ll wreck the house if you’re not home to shut off the water. He built a time bomb.”

“I watched him do it. I didn’t know it was wrong.”

“It smells worse down here than in your attic. Dig that up,” he said, pointing to the septic pipe. I dug it up. Ross pointed at a hole in the foundation behind the drainpipe and shouted. “The bastard’s cut off your foundation drain! He’s used that drainpipe for your septic, so rainwater drains into your basement! The other foundation drainpipes flow into your septic tank, so rainwater will flush sewage into your disposal field and ruin it.”

We walked outside again. Ross pointed to the mound behind the house. He told me to dig, but I hardly had to dig to uncover the fiberglass septic tank. “Your tank is tilted twenty degrees! You need to dig it up and put it down straight and connect it to the right pipe.” He traced the flashlight beam along a line of plastic pipes scattered down the slope from the house to the garden. “Frank didn’t glue your septic pipes. Sewage is pouring down the hillside. You know what? I’d say your house isn’t fit to live in.”

“How much to make it fit to live in?”

“Ten or twenty grand. You’ll have to dig up and tear down and buy new things and put things back. You can’t reuse anything except the septic tank. I won’t do it. I don’t want to get involved. Sue the bastard. It’s a good thing you only hired Frank for *half* your house.”

I don’t think Pearl ever looked at me the same way again. I wrote down the defects. The bank needed another appraisal before it would

Part II: Partners in Adventure

make its final advance, so Frank had a few more weekends to finish whatever he might deign to finish.

The final appraisal for the bank was issued. Frank's most expensive defects were not obvious, so the appraisal was high enough for me to draw the rest of the mortgage.

On Sunday afternoon, Frank and his son installed windowsills. At the end of the day, Frank asked for the balance of the contract price. I asked them to finish the rest of the work before they asked for the rest of the money. Frank replied that the Certificate of Occupancy was proof that the work was complete, so they would do no more work and had to be paid in full. They gathered all their tools and left.

I went to see Clifford, a lawyer, the next day. He said, "You shouldn't have signed this. It's with a shell company, so you can't sue him. It doesn't say the work must comply with building codes or that materials must be new. It doesn't give a completion date. It doesn't give any remedies when something goes wrong. The only deliverable is a Certificate of Occupancy, so just by getting one, you've accepted completion. You can't let him come this far and then announce it's all no good. Pay him now, and get it over with."

Pearl and I had dinner at the Snuggler and discussed this disaster. If we gave Frank the rest of the money, we would have no money to repair his work. The more we talked, the more furious we became. We knew Clifford was right, but we ignored his advice. We drove home. I telephoned Frank and told him we expected him to finish his work. Frank said nothing.

An hour later, Frank arrived with his wife, both sons, and his baby. We sat around the table. With a smile, Frank said that his work was complete because we had moved in six weeks ago, we had received a Certificate of Occupancy, and we must have received an appraisal of the value his work added to our house. He demanded to be paid in full.

I reminded Frank that he and his wife had asked us *not* to move in because he was behind schedule. I asked them to walk around the house to agree on the defects before we agreed on the amount. He refused, so I reported the defects Ross had identified.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Frank's reply to every defect was "you wanted it like that" or "you accepted that" or "the inspector approved that" or "that was your responsibility."

Pearl wrote notes to Mrs. Schutt, who refused to look at them.

I told him a contractor estimated the cost of completion to be \$10,000 to \$20,000. I asked Frank if he planned to finish the work.

He said, "Are you saying you are not allowing me to finish? Are you saying I can't come back?"

I said that we expected him to finish the work, and we were not going to pay him for unfinished work. I wrote a check for \$14,000, which was the \$24,000 contract price less a holdback of \$10,000. Frank took the check and stood to leave. Mrs. Schutt tried to take Pearl's notepaper, but Pearl held it. They left without another word.

That night, the sound of the water dripping from the bedroom skylight onto our plastic bed sheet kept me awake.

In the morning, I called Clifford and updated him.

"You've just eliminated any incentive for Frank to work. Because homeowners use quality as an excuse not to pay, the law is biased in favor of builders, and Frank knows this. He'll lien your house and use a collection agency. He'll stop *working*, but he won't stop *collecting*. Stop your check!"

I rushed to the bank, but I was too late; Frank must have deposited it as soon as the bank opened. Frank had let us down through shoddy work, but I had to live with the pain of letting Pearl down through shoddy decision-making.

Until the stalemate was resolved, Pearl and I avoided touching any part of the house for which Frank was responsible—which was most of it. Meanwhile, we improved the property and the barn.

On a weekend morning, outdoors, I picked up my electric saw. The weather was getting warmer, so I didn't wear gloves. I felt my hand tingle. I wet a fingertip and touched the saw. Electricity shot up my arm! I drove to the Building Centre to buy a tester. When I plugged it into the outlet, the red UNGROUNDED lamp glowed.

Pearl and I tested the other outlets. All were ungrounded; the wiring

Part II: Partners in Adventure

of the whole house was unsafe! I opened the electric panel—there was no ground wire. I searched outside for the ground rod, and I felt sick to realize that this basic safety component had never been installed and that the house had *passed inspection* without it. All the inspector had to do was plug a tester into any outlet, but he had done nothing. Frank had put us at risk of electrocution to save himself an hour's work, but because he had told me to tell the inspector that I had done the work, I couldn't report it now. The scam was perfect.

I installed a ground rod and connected it. The tester reported the outlets were safe.

"I checked our property registration today at the Land Title Office. There are three liens on our property title, from Astra Trading Company, Dick's Building Supplies, and Frank's son—for unpaid wages!"

"Bullshit. What next?"

"They expire after one year. We need to preserve his work for one year, so if he sues us we will still have the evidence of what he did. We will fix his work only where necessary."

"We're stuck! We can't go forward and finish the house. We can't go back and change builders. We must win!"

"Yes. We need that \$10,000 from Frank to repair his work."

"So ... no kids yet," signed Pearl with a sigh.

"A year is not long, and we both know it would be wrong to bring a baby into this mess. But we will not waste that year. We can landscape and finish the barn and fence. First, we must get the septic system reinstalled."

"And change the locks so Frank can't get in."

Because I worked for a bank, I could access Frank's credit record, which I should have done before signing his contract. I found he never paid his bills on time. Leo checked Frank's police record for me. He had no criminal record but dozens of unpaid parking fines.

I made an appointment with Bowen's drainage specialist and rented a pump to drain the septic tank. Once again, we lived like hillbillies, using

Part II: Partners in Adventure

the outhouse and showering outdoors in cold water.

The specialist reported the tank was sitting on a rock, and the rock had broken through it, so it was seeping sewage into the soil. The specialist hoisted the tank with his backhoe and washed it. I repaired the foundation drain that Frank had damaged. The specialist patched the tank, dug a new hole with his backhoe, reinterred the tank, and connected it to the correct pipe. Now we had running water again.

I noticed that the water pump was starting and stopping, indicating a leak in the plumbing. Pearl held the lamp while I crawled into the crawlspace and checked the air pressure in the water tank. It was low. Using Pearl's scuba tank, I added air—and heard it gurgling into the pipes. The water tank Frank had supplied was broken and unrepairable. I installed a new tank and saved Frank's for evidence.

Working as a team, it took us a month of evenings and weekends to repair the ceiling edges. We couldn't afford to replace the walls as Ross had suggested, so we patched the ceiling edges by inserting strips of drywall in the gaps at the tops of the walls and by attaching strapping to the ceiling edges in the attic. The work was so dusty that when we pulled off our respirators and goggles, we looked like raccoons.

The ceiling repairs had to be meticulously planned and executed because, when one of us was in the attic, communication stopped. Even a dropped screw halted work. When I was below, I could flash the light to get Pearl's attention, and Pearl could bang on a ceiling truss to get mine. But when Pearl was below, there was no way for me to get her attention, so Pearl did most of the miserable attic work.

I made a photo album of Frank's work and took it to Dick's Building Supplies. The manager was appalled by the photos and passed them around to his staff. He said, "This is the worst craftsmanship I've ever seen. I'll remove our lien and recover our debt from Frank. And that's the end of his discount."

Pearl was reassigned to an earlier shift by the post office. Now I drove Pearl to the ferry, did the morning chores, and left an hour later than she did. At night, Pearl arrived home first, did the evening chores, prepared dinner, and picked me up in the truck an hour later. Our joint

Part II: Partners in Adventure

commutes stopped, and distance began to creep into our relationship.

We bought two tons of hay from Fernie's farm, where Ralph had lived. It was more than we needed to feed one horse, two goats, and four sheep over the winter, but our prospects for boarding another horse looked good. Alan, Rose, Pearl, and I spent a day at hard labor loading the hay onto our blue truck, three overloaded truckloads of it, and hoisting each bale into our hayloft using a block-and-tackle.

Pearl and I drove to the General Store for groceries. Pearl browsed the notices on the bulletin board outside. "Look at this: free kittens. We'll keep them in the barn. They'll get milk and have friends. A barn is cat heaven." We drove to see the litter and adopted both kittens.

When I came home on the ferry, Pearl wasn't at the terminal to greet me. I waited until most cars had disembarked, and then I hitchhiked home. Our truck was parked by the house. I changed and went to the barn to do the chores. The lights were on, but only the goats and kittens greeted me. Mouse and Pearl were missing.

Half an hour later, Pearl stormed into the house.

"Where were you? I was worried."

"I arrived home, changed clothes, prepared the milking kit, and went to the barn. Mouse was gone! I walked to the lake to look for him, holding the flashlight in front of my face, scanning the beam, looking for eye reflections. I saw deer eyes but no horse eyes. I walked to the trunk road. Then I walked west," she signed. "*Mow ... Mow*," she said with her voice. "I called Mouse's name. I reached the big house with grass. Mouse was grazing! I held his halter and walked him home, two kilometers. The flashlight batteries died. The moon turned the road into a black ribbon under the stars. I hate walking in the dark because I am deaf *and* blind. We have no fence—and you want to board a horse!"

She put her face in her hands and sobbed.

I put my hands on her shoulders.

Pearl looked up as if nothing had happened.

"I have blisters. Gumboots are bad for long walks. We must finish the upper fence."

The telephone rang. It was Gus.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Ludd called me. He’s got the only lawn on the island, and Mouse was eating it! If it happens again, no one’s ever gonna board a horse at your place. Electrify that string! Leave a radio on! Leave a light on! Finish your fence! *Unnerstand?*”

My father came to help build the upper field fence. He and I held each fencepost in position while Eddie’s backhoe pounded it down. A dozen poles hit bedrock, so we set them in concrete. We built gates and corner braces, ready to support the wire.

Rainy weekend after rainy weekend, Pearl and I strung barbed wire. When the wire was strung, we nailed insulators to the poles and strung electric fence wire inside the barbed wire. Our work clothes were hung by the woodstove at night, where they developed a smoky aroma like Lapsang Suchong tea.

When the fence was complete, we opened the barn door. Mouse and the goats walked out, cantered about, and grazed.

Whisky annoyed the goats, so I tethered him while we dismantled the temporary fence. In a few minutes, I heard yelping. He lay curled in a ball, his paws over his head, cringing as the goats butted him. We laughed as we pulled the goats away and untied Whisky. He never annoyed the goats again.

Pearl and I registered Trout Lake Farm as a partnership and opened a Trout Lake Farm bank account. I set up business accounting in a portable computer from my office, weighing eight kilograms and costing \$5,000.

I resumed MBA classes, sleeping on my sister’s floor twice a week. Pearl insisted I continue, despite the distance to the university and our projects on Bowen. To prepare for my encounter with Frank on the first night of the term, I brought the photo album of his work, but Frank had dropped out.

As the days grew cooler, the spiders multiplied. We developed the habit of holding an arm in front of our face while walking to the barn to break the cobwebs that the spiders had erected overnight—the “Bowen Island salute.” Mushrooms appeared overnight. The aromas of field and

Part II: Partners in Adventure

forest, horse sweat and manure, and even creosote—we loved all of them. Never did either of us need to encourage the other to do chores. Even in the rain, we enjoyed walking up the hill and down to the barn and climbing the ladder into the loft, breathing lungfuls of crisp air, and enjoying the companionship of our animals. We loved giving carrots to the horse and banana peels to the goats. We loved surprises like a deer in the field or an eagle overhead.

The cats learned that milk was associated with goats, but jumping onto the milking stand was associated with blows to the nose. So at milking time, they sat just beyond reach, their tails curled around them. We squirted streams of milk into their mouths, slowly raising the streams higher until the cats walked like Orwell's pigs.

We ate cheese with every meal. We ate *horiatiki* salads with cheese. We ate pizza, pasta, grilled-cheese sandwiches, and spinach-and-cheese pie. We made cheesecake. Yet our refrigerator slowly filled with cheese.

"We need to buy a freezer," signed Pearl. "If we don't buy a freezer, then I want a washer and a dryer. I don't like sitting in the laundromat in West Vancouver with strange people."

As the days grew colder, the goats produced less milk, and the tide of frozen cheese began to ebb. We bought the washer and dryer.

Pearl brought our mail home from the post office box. A letter to me had been opened.

"It's from my pen-pal in Madrid. She was helping me with my Spanish. Why is the envelope open?"

"I opened it."

"Why? It's in Spanish."

"I asked a woman at work to translate it. How can I know what you are doing if I don't check?"

"You have to *trust*. Without trust, no marriage can survive."

"But so many men can't be trusted. Every day, tell me what you did so I don't guess."

If Pearl had been hearing, I would not have forgiven her for opening my mail, but because she was deaf, I excused her occasional surveillance.

"Let's buy another TTY for my office so you can call me at work."

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Pearl kissed me. “That will help.”

As winter approached, the air became rich with the scent of fallen leaves. The rain grew heavier, the darkness grew blacker, and the wind grew stronger.

“Ugh,” Pearl mumbled in the kitchen. “I found mouse shit in the oven mitts! The cold weather is making the mice come inside. Please buy some mousetraps.”

I drove to the General Store and bought mousetraps. I baited them with cheese and scattered them around the basement.

“Keep Whisky inside our room tonight so he doesn’t eat the cheese,” signed Pearl.

“Good idea, but if he tries, he’ll only eat from one mousetrap.”

That night as we lay in bed, I heard the crackles and pops of the woodstove punctuated by mousetrap snaps. In the morning, I reported, “Six pieces of cheese eaten. One dead mouse.”

I called an exterminator, discussed the problem, and ordered a Katch-All from him. He delivered the mousetrap to my office, to the amusement of our staff. He placed a steel box on the reception counter and turned the key on its side a few times. “This is the best trap ever invented. No bait. Just wind it up. Mice like to crawl through this little tube. When they do, they get flipped into a cage, like this.” He touched the tube. The mechanism rotated like a revolver cylinder, and a new tube snapped into place.

I brought the Katch-All home and put it in the basement. That night, I heard the crackles and pops of the woodstove punctuated by *kaching! ... kaching! ... kaching!*

In the morning, half a dozen mice huddled inside. We did the chores. Then we put the Katch-All outside the barn door and opened the lid. The mice scattered across the field, screaming. The cats ran after one mouse, then another, but because they failed to focus on one target, all the mice escaped.

Each morning, I carried the nightly collection of mice to the barn and released them, to the delight of the cats. In a week, the Katch-All was silent.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Pearl brought home a book, *A Pictorial History of Boxing*. “I heard my great-grandfather was a famous boxer. I want to look at the pictures to find one that looks like my father.”

“Ask your mother what she knows about him.”

“Mother will not discuss him. And she doesn’t show my father’s birth certificate to me. I told you the police never decided who caused the accident. She doesn’t show me all his papers, so she is hiding something.”

“What do your brother and sisters know about this?”

“They’re not interested. They accept Mother’s stories.” Pearl opened the bottom drawer in the kitchen cabinet and pulled out some clippings. “This is all I have.”

“These are newspaper stories about that accident. I can’t believe your mother is a killer, but I will help you find the truth.”

“Will you help me with my research?”

“Yes.” I kissed her.

“Your kiss feels like shocks. Sometimes, I am worried about our relationship. We make love less often. I feel like you are in love with the house, not me.”

“I love you both. Without a house, there is no place for a family, and without a family, there is no need for a house. Maybe I should quit school.”

“Don’t quit. Your MBA will support the security of our family.”

It was impossible for me to come home on class nights, except on the expensive water taxi, so, twice a week, my sister gave me bedroll space on her living room floor while Pearl did double chores. Over the next two years, with Pearl’s constant encouragement, I would complete my MBA.

The power failed. I lit the kerosene lamp, and we warmed our hands from it as the kitchen filled with the homey smell of kerosene.

“Another wet day,” Pearl sighed. “We must clean the roof, but can we wait until the roof is dry?”

“We need to clean the gutters while the roof is damp. Dry cedar splits when stepped on. But wet cedar is slippery, so we must be careful when we go up.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

We put on our working clothes and water-resistant coats. I set the stepladder in front of the house where the roof was only one story high and steadied it on the uneven soil. Pearl climbed up, and I crawled up after her. We worked in opposite directions around the edge of the roof, sitting and facing outwards with our feet in the gutters. Scuttling sideways like crabs, we pulled handfuls of leaves, needles, and twigs out of the gutters and dropped them over the edge.

Two hours later, we were reunited. I held Pearl's hand as she lowered a foot over the eave and set it on the ladder. Gripping the gutter with the other hand, she put her other foot on the first step of the ladder and started to step down.

The ladder buckled and collapsed.

I looked down helplessly as Pearl crashed. She lay on the ladder on her back, motionless. After a minute, she sighed, "I broke my hip. Come down. Help me."

"How? I have no way to get down and no way to call for help. Check your spine—wiggle your toes."

"Jump down. Help me, please. Please!"

"I'll break my legs! How will that help?"

"If you love me, come down and help me."

"I can't! You need to go to the phone and call for help. We could sit for days in the rain before anyone comes."

Pearl glared at me.

"The ladder twisted slowly, so I don't think your hip is broken. Wiggle your toes!"

Pearl rocked one boot back and forth, then the other. She stood up and threw her cap on the ground.

"The sawhorses are there. Drag them below me. Put some wood across the top. I will try to climb down."

Pearl did so, and I lowered myself from the roof. We walked into the house and hung our soaking wet clothes by the woodstove. I added more wood and opened the flue and grate. We stood with our hands to the stove without communicating. When we felt warmer, we went upstairs.

Pearl sat limply in a kitchen chair. "Why do you always have to be right? Being right adds stress to relationships."

Part II: Partners in Adventure

I heard fum—*fum*—*Fum*—*FUM* thundering through the floor. I ran downstairs with Pearl. The woodstove was red hot, and through its open grill, flames flashed yellow light on the woodpile. The chimney was chugging like a steam locomotive, its flue thermometer pegged to the end of the scale. The sawdust on the dirt floor near the stove was on fire, ignited by the radiation. I shut the damper and grill while Pearl stamped out the embers. The heat scorched our legs. Pearl wiped the sweat from her face, her bruises temporarily forgotten. The stove groaned as it cooled.

“You could have burned down the house. Hearies are careless because they depend on hearing. Deafies do not make careless mistakes.”

Pearl’s prejudiced logic reversed cause and effect. We had just made a careless mistake together, and my hearing had saved our house.

“It’s not raining today, but water is running down the walls.”

I looked at the windows closely. “Frank installed half the windows upside down, so half the window drains are at the top instead of the bottom! We can’t fix this ourselves, but we have to fix it soon or the walls will be damaged.”

“I am so pissed off. I have to sort mail so we can build a house twice. Meanwhile, I get older.”

Ross was busy with other work, so I called Jesse, whom Rokus had recommended. Jesse arrived with his dog, tied his hair in a rubber band, rolled a cigarette, and followed Pearl and me on a tour of the house.

“No one ever hired me to rotate windows. I’ll need scaffolding. While it’s up, I should install your missing soffits and siding, or you’ll have starlings in your attic come spring.”

Jesse set up shop in the unfinished side of the house. He soon had more bad news.

“Frank didn’t stain your siding. I know he left it to you to stain the outside, but it’ll curl if you only stain one side. While I’ve got scaffolding up, I should remove the siding from your *entire house*, stain it on both sides, and put it back up.”

It was hard to imagine building a house more inefficiently than we did by trying to save money. While our windows were missing, and

Part II: Partners in Adventure

plastic was stapled over the holes, the woodstove burned firewood at a tremendous rate, yet the house was always cold. We wore T-shirts to bed instead of sleeping nude, and we brought our next-day's clothing into bed and slept next to it to pre-warm it.

The bathroom became our haven for warmth, relaxing, and signing. The baths we took together grew longer to delay walking out into the chill, but, gradually, Pearl started getting in after I got in, to let me warm up the bathroom. Little by little, I started getting out before she got out, for there were many tasks for me to do. Eventually, Pearl got in after I got out, recycling the hot bathwater, and our baths together ceased.

"You've changed," signed Pearl, in bed. "You don't sign as much. I don't know what you are thinking."

"Can you get day-shift again so we can commute together?"

"It's impossible because of union rules and my low seniority."

I lit the kerosene lamp and turned off the electric light.

"You have friends in the post office to talk to."

"We work with our hands—how to talk? We are only allowed to sign during breaks. Hearies can talk while they work."

"You need to make more friends here."

"Few hearies want deafie friends. When I have a baby and stop working, there will be no one to sign to me until our baby can sign."

Today, it is hard to imagine the time when most people had no electronic contact other than a fixed-line telephone.

"You will make many friends when our baby goes to kindergarten."

Pearl rolled over, buried her face in the pillow, and wept. I took her hand. She squeezed it and rolled back to face me. Tears were dripping from her nose. "I am lonely."

I ordered Whisky out of the bedroom. We made love and fell asleep with our hands together in the I-love-you sign.

Rich Couple's House

Stanley and Gertrude visited us, and we showed them our property. The

Part II: Partners in Adventure

men did the chores while the women cooked. While we ate, Stanley said, “I would have shot Frank.”

“I’ve dreamed of shooting him,” signed Pearl.

I sighed. “I don’t want to go to jail. Maybe I should walk up to him sometime and say, ‘I’ve decided not to shoot you.’”

Stanley asked to see my pistol, so I unloaded it and brought it from the bedroom. He examined it and passed it to Gertrude.

“I’ve never fired it.”

“Basements are for sports, aren’t they?” said Stanley.

After dinner, our basement became a shooting gallery. We put on coats and filed down the stairs, Whisky at our heels. Pearl carried a notepad and my rifle. I carried the pistol and the ammunition. Stanley carried a six-pack of beer and a bar of soap. Gertrude carried wine and glasses. We filed past the woodstove and through the door in the temporary partition into the unfinished side of the basement. Two light bulbs hanging from the ceiling failed to pierce the Stygian gloom. I plugged a fluorescent light into an extension cord. The air was so cold that the tube flickered.

Stanley drew circles on a piece of plywood and leaned it against some firewood. “Ten points for a bull’s eye. Minus ten for hitting the BMW.”

“Everyone gets two pistol shots—a buck each,” I signed and said. The shooter wore my chainsaw earmuffs while the spectators poked their fingers in their ears. My turn was first; I aimed and fired. Whisky leaped behind Pearl. I took a second shot and handed the gun and earmuffs to Pearl.

Pearl hit two bull’s-eyes; she was still an excellent shot. Pearl handed the gun and earmuffs to Stanley.

Stanley hit the target, then set the bar of soap in front of it and shot it. “See how the bullet pierced it? Soap cuts like flesh.”

Pearl grimaced.

Stanley passed the pistol and earmuffs to Gertrude, who took two shots. Then, we took turns shooting the economical .22. Dozens of brass casings soon sparkled in the dirt. From time to time, we moved to the other side of the temporary wall to warm up. During one of our thawing breaks, Stanley lifted an old magazine from the tinder pile and flipped

Part II: Partners in Adventure

through it.

“Why don’t you get this for Frank?” Stanley pointed to an advertisement for *Get Even: The Complete Book of Dirty Tricks*.

Pearl looked at it. “Frank needs to learn that what he did is not fair.”

I remembered that the sign for “revenge” was one of the first signs Pearl taught me.

Get Even arrived a few weeks later, along with a catalog from the publisher, Paladin Press. The book was 200 pages of double-spaced trivia—a dirty trick.

“Did you see the big tree at the top of the field? The goats ate the bark, so it’s dying. We should have put wire around it.”

“I will cut it down and chainsaw a chair into the stump so we can enjoy the view from there.”

I did so, and it became our favorite spot on the property. From our stump-chair, we could see the upper field and barn, the roof of the house, and, in the afternoon, sunlight reflecting off the lake and glinting through the trees.

I cut a tree for our first Christmas on Bowen. Perhaps that tree, its aroma, and its cheerful lights helped us reach a milestone: although we had been engaged for a year, we had never set a wedding date. I thought recommitment might help Pearl to release any residual insecurity, such as the paranoia that caused her to open my mail.

In the glow of the Christmas tree, with glasses of wine, we sat down on kitchen chairs, the only chairs not covered in polyethylene sheets against the dust.

“We’ve been engaged for one year. Will you marry me on your birthday?”

Pearl kissed me. “I ask you again: When do you want children?”

“As soon as this side of the house is finished. A year, maybe a few months longer if Frank wins.”

“Why not marry after the house is finished?”

“Why should our wedding depend on house construction? Also, that would be more expensive. If a couple marries at the end of the year, one

Part II: Partners in Adventure

taxpayer can deduct the other for the whole year and get a \$4,000 tax refund. That's two months' salary. But the tax rules change next year."

"Our wedding day, my birthday, and Christmas Eve, all on the same day! I prefer not to invite Mother."

"For second weddings, couples can do what they want. Let's keep it simple. I will find a Justice of the Peace to marry us here. The minimum is two witnesses."

"Stanley and Gertrude, Rokus and Jenny, or Alan and Rose?"

"Stanley and Gertrude."

"Under the Love Trees. Perfect!" Pearl signed the name sign she invented the night we became engaged. "*Pearl King* ... I love it."

After calling several Justices of the Peace listed in the Yellow Pages, I found one who would work on Christmas Eve. We had wedding portraits taken and drove to her home to plan the ceremony.

She was startled to learn the bride was deaf.

"I have experience with the deaf. You don't need an interpreter, do you, dear? I know you can read lips."

"What?" signed Pearl, even though she had understood.

The Justice of the Peace leaned closer. "You *do* understand me, *don't* you, dear?" she said rudely, a foot from Pearl's face, breathing into it.

I was disgusted. Pearl pulled back. "What did she say?" she signed.

"Honey, either you read my lips, or you pay for a certified interpreter—if you can find one at Christmas."

Pearl agreed to lipread.

Mid-morning on Christmas Eve, the Justice of the Peace, Stanley, Gertrude, Pearl, and I stood under the Love Trees as the sun sparkled on the frost. Pearl and Gertrude wore their best dresses; Stanley and I wore our best suits. It could not have been a more beautiful day to be married except that the temperature was just above freezing. We were married as quickly as possible and rushed into the house to thaw.

After toasts, we left for our two-day honeymoon. Alan and Rose cared for the animals while Pearl, Whisky, and I spent Christmas Eve in the Vancouver Bayshore Inn and Christmas Day with my parents.

Another horse arrived. Wendy rode Senator, a chestnut quarter horse

Part II: Partners in Adventure

gelding, up to the barn. I engraved *Mouse* and *Senator* signs from cedar and hung them over their stalls. Mouse already knew his place, and soon Senator knew his.

Alan called. “Could you two please help us to herd the sheep to the barn for lambing? On foot—our Volvo is only now free of sheep urine odor. We can walk them up the gravel side of your driveway. We’ll open the wire gate and let them into the upper field via that back route.”

Alan and Rose parked across the driveway, blocking it. I parked the truck at the top of the circular driveway to keep the sheep from walking back down the paved side. We opened the gate and walked into the lower field. The sheep huddled and moved away, bleating. Rose offered grain from a pail and tried to lead them, but they wouldn’t follow, so we all moved behind the flock. Pearl and I stayed behind them while Alan and Rose herded each side, beating the ground with sticks. It took half an hour, but our shepherding worked.

As I walked onto the ferry on my way home from work, I was surprised to see Stanley’s GMC Suburban. I waved, climbed in, and sat on the blanket covering the holes in the seat. It reeked of mildew.

“What happened to your Mazda?”

“I got fired. I lost my salary and perks. My boss was monitoring my calls. He heard me say, ‘Mrs. Rottweiler, you haven’t made your card payments for seven months. I understand your husband was laid off a year ago, and you have to stay home with the children. That means you knew when you used our credit card that neither of you had a job, so why did you use our card, Mrs. Rottweiler? Can you work while your husband cares for the children? Have you thought of eating and drinking less so you can set aside money to pay your bills? Could you pay, say, ten dollars a month?’ She told me that she’d had many collection agents call her, and she liked to talk to them—except me. What was I supposed to say? ‘That’s fine. Pay whenever you like?’ I’m now as unemployed as Mr. Rottweiler. Fortunately, our house is coming along. We’ve moved out of the trailer! Please be our first dinner guests.”

A few days later, Pearl and I parked at the bottom of Stanley’s hill and hiked up the access road. I carried a bottle of Liebfraumilch while

Part II: Partners in Adventure

she held the flashlight. The freezing dew made the asphalt slick, so we walked without signing, our gloved hands poised to break a fall. It was easier to walk farther up the hill, on the gravel. We walked past the dark trailer. Near the top, light glowed from two windows in the corner of the house.

Gertrude and Stanley greeted us. Behind their front door, it was like a frozen dungeon. Sheets of plastic stapled to rows of studs defined the rooms. We walked between two loose sheets and into tepid warmth.

“We’re only heating the kitchen and half the living room because our stove is too small,” said Stanley. “We don’t have a fridge, so it’s handy when half your house is a walk-in freezer.”

“Where do you sleep?” signed Pearl.

“On cots. We put them near the stove at night.”

We took off our coats and slid onto benches on either side of the kitchen table. All of us wore quilted lumberjack shirts. Our bedroom was a resort compared to these Boy Scout conditions.

Stanley opened the wine, and I proposed a toast.

Pearl squeezed close to me. “I’m freezing.”

I put my hand on the window. “The glass is freezing! Where did you buy single-glazed windows?”

“I made them!” Stanley said proudly. “They’re cheaper than commercial windows.”

“Stanley, your heat is flying out the window! You’ll spend all summer cutting firewood. And single-glazed windows aren’t up to code, so you can’t get a Certificate of Occupancy, and you can’t connect electricity.”

After eating beef-and-potato stew, Pearl helped Gertrude wash the dishes. Stanley walked through the plastic sheets, and I followed him. We stood at the top of the stairs, under the stars, and urinated onto the ground.

“Derrick, to understand what you see, you need to know I’m bankrupt. When the garnishee order arrived, Eaton’s sacked me; Mrs. Rottweiler was their excuse. Now I, a debt collector, have no means to settle my debts, let alone finish our house.”

Pearl saw that although Frank had done a bad job and delayed us by

Part II: Partners in Adventure

a year, it was possible to do worse and for a wife to suffer more hardship with no end in sight. Frank had spoiled our house to make more money, while Stanley had spoiled his house because he had no money. Our best man and maid of honor were building an illegal, oversized shack.

We awoke to a white-and-green winter wonderland; a foot of snow had fallen during the night. The view in every direction, from every window, was majestic. Pearl looked at our frozen clothes on the clothesline and laughed; they looked like ghosts.

I walked to the barn to do the chores, savoring the morning air as the snow crystals sparkled. But the drinking water had frozen, splitting the pails, so the horses were thirsty. No water came from the barn tap, now frozen. I fed the animals and walked back to the house.

“The barn has no water. The barn pipes need electric heat, a new project. Now, we have to carry water until the ice thaws—two pails, fifteen kilograms each, twice a day. It’s good we have hay and grain in the barn and firewood in the basement because the truck can’t drive up the road now.”

“My uncle used to put ‘mol—’ in the water to keep it from freezing.”

“Molasses. I read about that. Let’s try it.”

Molasses didn’t work; the water still froze quickly. Each day, we watched the barn thermometer go lower, down to -15 Celsius. For weeks, we carried our groceries up the driveway in backpacks. We walked flashlight-in-hand, or when our hands were full, flashlight-in-teeth, for winter commuting was always dark. Sometimes, we slipped and slid down the driveway and slogged up again with snow in our boots.

Whisky loved the snow. When we threw sticks, he would chase the stick as fast as he could, then spin and slide while struggling to stop. We felt grateful to live so close to nature.

A week later, the pipes in the house froze.

“Ross was right! The pipes froze because Frank put them in the attic. We must warm them, or they will burst and water will ruin the house. And no water means no fire insurance.”

Pearl was livid. “Frank is preventing me from living like a woman!”

All we could do was heat the house to tropical temperatures, so hot

Part II: Partners in Adventure

that we could walk through it nude in the middle of winter, and our lips cracked from the desiccated air. After days of burning firewood at a stupendous rate, water returned to our taps.

The *Undercurrent* reported it was the coldest winter in a decade.

“Hello,” I said to two newborn lambs. An ewe looked up from the straw, her fleece thick with lanolin, the greasy smell hanging in the air. I ran to the house, told Pearl, and called Alan.

The driveway was impassible, so Alan and Rose parked by the road and trekked up the hill. Rose cleared the ewe’s teats by milking with two fingers while Alan disinfected the lambs’ navels with iodine. He took a tool from his pocket, put a rubber ring on it, and squeezed the handle to stretch it open. “This is an Elastrator, for docking and castration. It is painless.” He pulled each lamb’s tail through the tool and pressed a lever, so the rubber ring snapped tight. “The tail will fall off in two weeks. I’ll leave this with you to castrate your kids.”

Unlike sheep, which lamb at night, Mothergoat kidded on a spring afternoon, bellowing. She delivered one kid, a buck. Daughtergoat soon gave birth to two more bucks.

The barn and its paddock were like a petting zoo, with eight lambs, four ewes, three goats, three kids, two horses, two cats, a kitten, and a dog. We were a family, and we loved it, not least because it took our minds off the house. Alan or Rose, often with their children, visited the lambs frequently even though we had taken over all their daily feedings in return for vacation relief. It was an ideal arrangement.

Virgil drove to Bowen Island for what would be his only visit. At Trout Lake, he gazed at the vista and drew a deep breath. “You got a lake, and I got a river. You son of a bitch, man, this is great! Did you see that trout breach?”

We collected handfuls of fiddleheads, the greens of spring, from around the lake and walked back up the hill. Pearl threw a stick from the woodpile over Whisky’s head. He caught it and dropped it at her feet.

“This is a rich couple’s house,” said Virgil. “The windows face the sun, and the skylights face the stars. Perfect peace.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

Pearl pointed to the unfinished west wing. “But wait until you see inside. We have peace, but I get lonely.”

“But you work, don’t you?” said Virgil.

“Yes, but I have few friends at the post office. They only gossip.”

“When people don’t have much to talk about, they gossip,” I signed and said. “Not only deaf.”

Virgil took his vial from his pocket and passed it around. “A guy on a BMW was on the ferry, a bike like yours but with a green tank. Get to know him, Derrick—he’s your neighborhood dealer.”

“How do you know?”

“His bike! The bugs were like a yellow-and-black paint job. I asked if he was coming back from Mexico. He said from California—but his bike was too dirty for that, the way a bike gets when you are too busy to stop. I know he was lying.”

“Great analysis. Would you like a tour?”

We sat three abreast in Virgil’s F250 pickup. He popped a cassette of Cuban music into the stereo, and I gave directions. After touring the island, we returned to the house.

“Help us with chores. We need to castrate and disbud the kids. You can help by holding them.”

Virgil took a joint from his pocket and lit it. “I like to smoke a joint before I castrate.” We passed the joint around.

I lit a propane torch and propped a piece of copper pipe over the flame. While the pipe warmed, Pearl and Virgil cradled each kid while I pulled its scrotum through the open rubber ring of the Elastrator and pushed the lever to close it. The kids felt nothing, but after a few minutes, they hopped silently in circles, in some discomfort but not in pain.

While Pearl and Virgil held a kid, I pressed the red-hot pipe onto one of its horn buds. Smoke curled up as the kid cried out, the bud charred, and the stench of burned hair filled the barn.

“I’ll go and cook dinner,” signed Pearl, leaving the barn.

Virgil and I cauterized the other bud. The kid ran to its mother and suckled, now silent. We disbudded the other kids.

In the house, I opened some beer, and Pearl served pasta with goat

Part II: Partners in Adventure

cheese.

“You steamed the fiddleheads perfectly, just like asparagus,” said Virgil. “Pearl, how do you like living in an unfinished house while your animals live in a finished barn?”

“I like it here. Many oral deafies prefer city life, but many signing deafies prefer a country life because city life has too many problems.”

“Like what?”

“I went into an elevator. It moved and stopped but didn’t open. I pounded on the door. Then someone tapped my shoulder! That elevator had doors at the back, too, but I didn’t hear the door open behind me. Sometimes, stores give you a number and call that number over the speaker. The deafie-hearie difference is smaller in the country.”

We enjoyed an evening of conversation, marijuana, cocaine, and laughter. Virgil left on the last ferry.

The days grew longer. As the kids were weaned, our milk and cheese production peaked. Pearl sold goat cheese to her colleagues. I sold it to a delicatessen. It was illegal to sell it, but we didn’t care.

We spread pasture seed with a Cyclone spreader. I installed electric heat tapes and automatic watering bowls for the barn, ending the need to carry water in winter.

The farrier came to shoe Mouse and Senator. Pearl and I watched him remove the worn horseshoes and heat new ones on a forge. When the new shoes glowed red hot, he pounded them to size on his anvil, reheated them, and nailed them to the hooves. I complimented the farrier on his medieval performance.

“I wouldn’t do anything else,” said the farrier. “Coming here doesn’t pay, though.”

“Where do you earn money?”

“At the racetrack. The owner of a \$100,000 horse doesn’t care what horseshoes cost.” He handed the old horseshoes to Pearl. “For good luck. Hang them pointing up because if they turn down, your luck will spill out.”

“Tom and his family are coming,” I signed as I hung up the telephone.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“They’ll stay a week while they visit Expo ‘86.”

“You didn’t tell me about Tom.”

“He is a BMW-riding friend from Saskatchewan. They are coming on two motorcycles: Tom, with his fifteen-year-old son, and his wife, with their fourteen-year-old daughter. They can take the water taxi to Expo. That will be fun for them.”

“You take them to Expo. I will go with Jodi so you won’t have to interpret.” I was disappointed Pearl didn’t want to join us.

Our visitors visited Expo nearly every day, once with me and the rest on their own. They loved Bowen Island. The children were fascinated by signing, especially by how Whisky obeyed sign language commands. They enjoyed writing to Pearl, and they loved the barn.

Tom said, “What could be finer than living in a forest by a lake, working in an office, and commuting on the sea? I walked to the lake, and I saw a naked woman dive into the water! What a place you have. Don’t ever give it up.”

“It is our dream home, except for the construction problems,” signed Pearl. “It is safe and peaceful.”

“Peaceful? Surely, noise never bothers a deaf person.”

“That’s true, but I will tell you a story. A deafie was cleaning her house. When she got to the attic, she cleaned an old lamp. A spirit popped out and signed, ‘You have three wishes. What do you want?’ The deafie signed, ‘Clean the house.’ The spirit blinked, and the house was clean. ‘You have two wishes left.’ ‘Give me hearing,’ signed the deafie. The spirit blinked, and the woman could hear. ‘You have one wish left.’ ‘Wait,’ she said, amazed to hear her voice. She shouted, ‘I can hear!’ She heard her kids fighting and yelling. She called to them, but they ignored her. She heard the TV blasting and her hearie husband’s friends shouting and swearing as they watched football. She walked to the store and heard traffic, music from the ceiling, people, machines, everything! She went home and saw the house was a mess again. ‘I wish for a peaceful house,’ she said. The spirit reappeared, and she was deaf again. ‘Thank you,’ she signed. Sometimes it is better to be deaf.”

Tom smiled. “By the way, did you know your kids are ready to eat? They can grow larger, but the feed will cost more than the meat is

Part II: Partners in Adventure

worth.”

“Shall we slaughter them together?”

“I’d love to! My friend and I do a hog every year. We collect scraps from the Co-op and feed our hog for nothing.”

The next day, while Pearl and Jodi went to Expo and Tom’s family went swimming in Bowen Bay, Tom and I slaughtered the kids. He taught me what to do. He skinned the first kid as if he were undressing it, removing the whole skin in one piece. I killed and slaughtered the second kid while Tom coached me. We hung the carcasses next to my BMW.

The next day, while Tom and his family began their long ride home, Pearl and I butchered and wrapped the meat.

Shooting Pigs in a Sty

We were astonished to see a mobile home appear next to Trout Lake, barely visible from our property through the trees.

The next day, when I returned from work, I saw a pink extension cord crossing our driveway.

Pearl was anxious.

“Whisky ran to the bedroom window, barking. A man was walking through the forest, unrolling wire. When he reached our door, he knocked. I put the gun in my pocket. I held Whisky back and opened the door. It was Wayne!”

Pearl handed me her notepad. It said:

“We need power for a few months. We will pay.”

“I must ask my husband.”

“Fran is developing her property around the lake.”

“Derrick will talk to you.”

“We need power tonight.”

“Wayne pointed to the power outlet by our front door. Then he left. Say no! If we start, it will be impossible to stop.”

I changed my clothes. Pearl gave me the gun, and I put it in my pocket. I dragged the wire back to the mobile home. Bear barked inside

Part II: Partners in Adventure

it, but no one was home.

A few days later, we found surveyor's tapes nailed to our fence, so I called Laurent.

"Fran and Wayne are living in a trailer by the lake. A few days ago, they asked to borrow power through a hundred-meter extension cord. Now, surveyor's tapes have appeared along our property line. What's up?"

"I can't tell you that. But, because the bids were published in the *Undercurrent*, I can tell you that Fran won the Bowen Island garbage collection contract. Her bid was by far the lowest. Did you hear a bulldozer across the road?"

"Yes. I was wondering what a bulldozer was doing over there."

"You know garbage must be trucked off the island, by law. You might guess that Fran has been burying garbage on her property with her bulldozer, just 200 meters from the reservoir and in breach of environmental laws."

"Might I guess that our former neighbors are squatters?"

"Tell Pearl to relax; they won't be there much longer. The survey tapes around the lake are a red herring."

Pearl and I set up a sty with automatic water and an electric fence, and we drove to the Fraser Valley Livestock Auction. Even though Pearl couldn't hear the auction, it was entertainment for both of us. The only piglets at auction that day were unneutered males, so we bid on two even though we would have to castrate them. They were cute, and we could carry them like puppies.

Before releasing them into our sty, we touched them to the electric wire to train them to avoid it, and we held their snouts to the watering nipple to show them where to drink. The piglets trotted into their shelter, our decommissioned outhouse lying on its side, and lay down to rest.

The power failed a few minutes later. Pearl and I ran to the sty. The piglets had walked out through the disabled fence.

We searched for half an hour. We didn't know what to do except to report their loss to the police; if they weren't captured, there would soon

Part II: Partners in Adventure

be two feral boars on Bowen Island.

“Are they pink? Do they have four legs?” Laurent howled with laughter. “Thanks for calling. I’ll call you back if anyone reports them.”

The power had come back on. Pearl and I went out to search again and, to our astonishment, found the piglets with Mouse and Senator in the paddock, rolling in horse manure. We were thrilled when they allowed us to pick them up and carry them back to their sty. We were not thrilled that our clothes were covered in mud and manure.

I called Larsen back, and he laughed. “You made my day. I love Bowen! I’ll rue the day I’m ever transferred to Toronto.”

The pigs never approached the fence again, even when the power failed. In addition to Buckerfield’s feed, we fed them the whey from our cheese-making. When we poured it into their trough, they sucked it down in seconds, competing with each other in pure primal greed.

We studied the castration procedure in *Small-Scale Pig Raising*. The Elastrator couldn’t be used; we had to do surgery. It had to be done; otherwise, the boars could become aggressive, and their meat would taste gamey.

Pearl sat on the milking stand, braced her back against the wall, held a piglet on its back with its head in her crotch and a hind leg in each hand, and nodded. Our hands were full, so we couldn’t sign.

As soon as I dripped iodine on its scrotum, the piglet started kicking. Pearl’s arms were no match for the strength of its legs, and there was no way I could operate on a moving target, so we swapped roles.

The piglet screamed as I struggled to hold it still for Pearl. She cut with an X-Acto knife to expose a testicle. The pig shrieked so loudly that Pearl heard it, too. She pulled out the testicle and held up her hands to show me they were trembling. She excised the second testicle and sprinkled blood stopper powder on the wound. The piglet stopped screaming. I put it down, and it trotted about the barn as if nothing had happened.

Pearl was crying when I brought her the second piglet.

Rokus knocked on the barn door while Pearl and I were doing Sunday

Part II: Partners in Adventure

morning chores. “Could you give us a hand next weekend? We bought piglets three months ago, so now we have 200 kilos of pig. Bring your gun. Bowen Island’s closed to the discharge of firearms nowadays, but two shots an hour apart shouldn’t be a problem.”

When we arrived, a fire was crackling underneath a drum of steaming water.

“The first pig should be an easy shot,” said Rokus, “but the second will be terrified.”

Rokus dropped a handful of grain on the ground next to the fence, and the pigs ran over to eat it. I fired straight down into the center of the closest skull. Behind a cloud of blue smoke, the pig screamed and staggered, blood pouring from its jaw. Rokus was furious that the pig was suffering, so I gave him the gun. He jumped over the fence and shot it again. It collapsed and began its death throes.

Rokus’s neighbor walked over. “Two shots for one pig?”

“Give us a hand,” said Rokus.

He, his neighbor, and I dragged the carcass to the drum. Rokus stabbed both hind trotters and pushed a pipe through them. Jenny and the neighbor steadied the drum while Rokus and I each gripped an end of the pipe and hoisted it. We lifted our arms straight up, but we couldn’t raise the carcass high enough for its head to clear the drum. We lowered the carcass to the ground. Rokus asked his neighbor to bring his backhoe.

His neighbor returned in his vintage backhoe. The machine hoisted the carcass into the air and down into the drum. After a few minutes, the backhoe lifted the carcass onto a bench. Rokus scraped it with the back of a knife.

“The water’s not hot enough to loosen the hair!”

The backhoe hoisted the carcass into the air, and the neighbor shut off its engine. While the carcass hung, Rokus used a propane torch to burn the hair away; then, he slit the neck to bleed it. He rolled a wheelbarrow under the carcass and gutted it, showing Pearl and me how to do it without soiling the meat. He dropped the entrails into the wheelbarrow and tossed the spleen to his dog. He turned the intestines inside out, for sausage casings, and rinsed them and the organ meats. He

Part II: Partners in Adventure

sawed off the head, sawed the carcass in half, and rinsed the sides, explaining everything as he worked. We hung the sides in his shed to cool overnight.

Rokus shot the second pig.

After the scalding failure at Rokus's, we prepared carefully for the work we would do three months later. We bought a freezer. I bought a cast-iron bathtub from a scrapyards, a better scalding bath than a drum because the carcass could be lifted horizontally. It was so heavy it took four men to lift it onto our truck. Halfway up the driveway, the tub slid back and bent the tailgate, almost smashing it open.

Pearl was furious. "You didn't tie it down! Are you an idiot? Look at our truck now! Bent!"

We ate dinner without signing, and Pearl watched TV alone.

At bedtime, she climbed into bed on her edge of the mattress. I turned off the light and put my arm around her shoulder. She rolled over and punched me in the chest. I jumped out of bed and turned on the light.

"Hit me! Hit me hard! Come on, I dare you! You don't want to give me a bruise I can show to the police!"

I stared at her.

She relaxed and smiled serenely. "Are you going to hit me or not?"

"No."

She lay down and closed her eyes. I turned off the light. I heard her breathing settle into sleep, and only then could I sleep. I couldn't understand why she had become violent and had then forgiven me. I sensed that her overreaction was part of a bigger problem I didn't understand.

On the last day of June, I stared at the ATM screen:

*Transaction declined.
Insufficient funds.*

It was right after payday, yet my balance was zero. I rushed inside and was told the bank had received a court order to transfer all the money in

Part II: Partners in Adventure

our account to a lawyer representing Frank Schutt. I called Clifford.

“Frank will do this again unless you add someone who isn’t a party to the suit, such as your mother, to your joint account. Your problem is that there are more homeowners who don’t pay than there are contractors who don’t deliver, and courts like simple explanations. Arguing *quality* is useless. Pay him to get rid of him.”

Pearl was furious when I broke the news. I apologized for hiring an amateur, trusting Frank, and not taking the contract to a lawyer. But neither of us could accept that Frank deserved full payment, so we paid Clifford a \$1,450 retainer to defend Frank’s claim, and we added my mother to our joint account.

We continued to avoid touching Frank’s work. We improved the drainage in the upper field. I installed gutters around the barn so the paddock would be less muddy. We had a pole erected for the barn’s electrical cable, lifting it off the ground. Our improvements added value to the property, but they brought Pearl no closer to her dream of having a family.

“Let’s whitewash the barn to make it bright,” signed Pearl. “My uncle said whitewash is cheaper than paint.”

We bought lime and salt, mixed a batch, and whitewashed one stall. It looked good. We admired our work and smiled.

“I told you so,” signed Pearl. “Let’s mix more, and paint when we have time. Slowly, we will cover the inside of the barn.”

A few days later, my secretary shouted. “Derrick, telephone, quick!” I heard a noisy radiotelephone connection.

“This is the Bowen Island Water Taxi. Your wife is on a stretcher. The ambulance crew is bringing her to Lions Gate Hospital. She’s blinded herself with whitewash.”

I was horrified! I borrowed my boss’s car and rushed to the hospital. Pearl lay on a gurney, her eyes closed, wearing overalls and gumboots. Her clothes were soaked.

A paramedic held a bag of saline solution over her head and was dripping it into her eyes.

“Is she is deaf?”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Yes. How is she?”

“We don’t know because we haven’t been able to open her eyes.”

Pearl’s hand, strong from milking goats, clamped mine like a vise. I kissed Pearl on her salty lips, and she relaxed. She raised her other hand and signed, “I love you.”

“The doctor will see her now,” said the nurse, wheeling her away. I took care of the paperwork while Pearl was being treated.

The doctor called me into the examination room. Pearl lay with her eyes open but with plastic tubes sticking out of them, so she couldn’t see anything. Each tube ran to a bag of saline solution.

“We’ll leave the irrigation contacts in for an hour. Please tell her.”

I fingerspelled on Pearl’s hand.

“It’s too soon to say if her corneas are damaged. No eye protection! If you lost your eyes, it would be tragic, but if she lost hers, it would be a catastrophe!”

I held Pearl’s hand for an hour. The doctor removed the contacts, examined her cherry-red eyes, taped patches over them, gave me a bottle of eye drops, and told me to remove her patches in the morning. For one night, Pearl was deaf-blind. I helped her to her feet, guided her to a toilet, and helped her to use it. Our journey home took more than an hour, and all while she was soaking wet. I undressed her, washed her, fed her, and put her to bed.

I changed and walked to the barn in my overalls. The horses stood outside and pawed the ground, thirsty and hungry. The doors were closed. The area around the sink was wet. A pail of whitewash stood on a ladder, and a brush lay on the floor. I looked up and saw that the ceiling around the light had been whitewashed. Pearl had been painting directly over her head without any eye protection! I cleaned up and did the chores.

In the morning, I removed her eye patches. Her eyes and eyelids were red and swollen.

“I see through a fog. I can’t go to work today.”

“You were lucky. How did you call the ambulance?”

“I stumbled to the house. My eyes were on fire. I had to feel the number-holes on the telephone dial. I dialed 911. Then I talked.” She

Part II: Partners in Adventure

mumbled, “*Elp ... ‘o-oor ... ‘ole 643 ... I am ‘eaf ... ‘elp ...*” “I hoped someone was listening. I didn’t hang up. I talked and talked. Whisky barked when they came. I held his collar and walked to the door with my eyes closed.”

The incident made us talk about future emergencies. What if she had another accident? What if the house caught fire? What if there was an intruder? I bought a Radio Shack dialer and programmed it to call the police, fire department, and ambulance by pushing one button. The cassette would play: “*This is an emergency. Pearl King is calling from Trunk Road pole 643. I am deaf. I need help. This is an emergency.*” We kept it in the bedroom.

In August, we ordered hay for our animals and to resell at a profit. I ordered a semi-trailer full, seven tons. A motor-escalator lifted the 150 bales into our hayloft. We built bridle racks and saddlehorses in the tack room to be ready for four horses, and a hitching post, too.

To make the saddlehorses, Pearl helped feed planks into the saw while I guided them through the blade. I milled the edges with a router while Pearl swept the chips into paper bags to burn as fuel. She pointed at the Black & Decker Workmate, a woodworking vise. “Where did you get that tool?”

“Father left it here after we made the barn doors.”

During dinner, Pearl startled me by signing, “You bought that tool.”

“It’s my father’s tool. I am borrowing it.”

“You are spending our money secretly! Admit it!”

I was astonished. “Call Father through the MRC. Ask him.”

Pearl sneered. “You lie! Your father will repeat what you said because you told him to tell me that. You lie! *You lie!*”

I brought the well-worn tool into the kitchen. “Look closely. Is it new?”

“You made it look like that!”

“You sound like Frank. Why are you arguing about a stupid tool?”

She glared at me. “Because you lie to me! *Fuck you!*” She gave me her “middle finger” the deaf way, horizontally instead of vertically.

I lost my self-control. I grabbed her shoulders and screamed, “It’s not

Part II: Partners in Adventure

my fucking tool!”

Pearl held out her hands to show me they trembled. “I’m shocked!” She put her hands on her face. “My face is hot. I know you wanted to hurt me. Tonight I will sleep alone,” she signed calmly.

At bedtime, Pearl calmly pulled the plastic sheets off the sofa and slept in the living room for the first time. I listened to the rain on the bedroom skylight and wondered what had happened. I was alarmed and confused. I couldn’t see a pattern in her behavior; I saw episodes, and I rationalized each one.

After weeks of repairs, the walls and ceiling were ready for repainting. I bought five recessed light fixtures for the kitchen. We needed to install them before we painted the ceiling.

“It’s a two-man job, so you need to help. You work in the attic and pull the wire to each hole. I’ll stand here and wave a light through each hole so you can find it. You push the wire to me. I’ll pull it down, and push another wire up. You pull that wire to the next hole, and push it down. Then I give you another wire, and so on to the last hole.”

“You should work in the attic because you know where the wires go.”

“But the attic over the kitchen is low. I will wreck the ceiling if I slip. This wiring should have been done before the ceiling was installed. If you need to communicate, then sign through a hole.”

Pearl put on her overalls and gardening kneepads, and she climbed the ladder in the bedroom into the attic hatch.

A few minutes later, she reached the kitchen and lowered her hand through the first hole.

“Turn off the electricity.”

That wasn’t planned, but it was difficult to reply. I shut off the circuit, and the kitchen went black. I looked up into the lamp-hole and saw her face illuminated by the utility lamp. I passed the next wire up, but Pearl didn’t take it. A few minutes later, she climbed down from the attic hatch, livid.

“You tried to kill me with electricity! I pushed the end of the wire against a metal box, and I saw *sparks!*”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“The power was on inside the first wire because it is connected to the kitchen, and I wanted to have light. Now the kitchen is dark. You were safe. The insulation protects you.”

“No, I tested you! What if I touched the wires inside?”

“Nothing. You were on dry wood. You were safe.”

I tried to hug her, but she pulled back. We continued the project with our locations reversed; now, I worked in the attic, banging my head on the rafters. Pearl was as calm as if she had not just had a terrified outburst, and again I assumed that was the end of it.

Alberta School for the Deaf

“We need a vacation. Alan and Rose can care for the animals,” signed Pearl.

“We do need a vacation. Where do you want to go?”

“Alberta by motorcycle. I will show you where I grew up. We haven’t ridden the motorcycle since Mexico. I love the way people stare when we climb off your big motorcycle in our leather suits, and then we surprise people by signing.”

We visited Pearl’s sisters, her brother, and a few deaf friends. Her deaf friends usually signed very swiftly, so I often spent my time speaking with their children. Most nights we saved money by sleeping in sleeping bags on our hosts’ living room floors. We visited all her aunts and uncles on her mother’s side during our years together, but we never visited any on her father’s side.

We visited her uncle’s ranch in the Rocky Mountain foothills. His dogs chased the motorcycle as we rode to a mobile home at the end of a gravel road. We dismounted beside a Dodge pickup truck; firewood, timber, a come-along, a shovel, and a bucket of wrenches lay in the back of it. Farm equipment and scraps of steel lay about. Barbed-wire fences led to the horizon.

I took off my gloves. “This property is huge!”

“Here is where I spent my summers, playing with animals and helping my uncle do chores,” signed Pearl, grinning.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

The sliding door opened. A handsome, rugged man with a tanned face and a cowboy's mustache beckoned us into his home. "I'm glad you could make it." He hugged Pearl, and we introduced ourselves. We took off our boots and went inside. Like the rest of Pearl's family, her uncle, Ernie, used only oral communication.

Ornate cowboy boots, worn workman's boots, and mud-covered rubber boots stood in a row next to a boot-jack welded from horseshoes. The living room was decorated with glittering trophies and photographs of draft horses. Pearl and I took off our leathers while Ernie made coffee and tossed pieces of firewood into the stove.

I looked at his photographs. "Horses as far as the eye can see. How big is your land?"

"It's 160 acres."

"How many horses do you have now?" signed Pearl.

"Five hundred, plus six Belgians. I race my Belgians in the draft horse competitions in the Calgary Stampede. I do hayrides, too."

"Five hundred! But what do you do with them all?"

"He raises and sells them," Pearl signed.

"This is as close as you can get to Marlboro country," he said.

Later, when Pearl was walking in a paddock, I asked Ernie where the horses came from, how much they cost, where they went, and why they seemed to be feral.

"Horses are my life. I love them more than anything. I buy them from Manitoba PMU farms and sell them to Alberta slaughterhouses. PMU stands for Pregnant Mare Urine. The farms breed mares and collect urine while they're pregnant. It's made into hormone pills; that's where the brand Premarin comes from. I buy the stallions and retired mares, fatten them, and sell them for horsemeat. I could never bring myself to tell Pearl the truth."

That evening, we listened to Ernie's cowboy tales. Then we climbed into bunk beds in his spare room for the night.

For me, the highlight of our trip was our visit to the Alberta School for the Deaf. We walked inside dressed in full leather, carrying helmets, goggles, and gloves and looking like World War I pilots.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

A woman approached. She did a double-take. “My God!—it’s Pearl!” she signed and shouted. “I didn’t think I’d *ever* see Pearl again.”

The women hugged and laughed. “Meet Joan, the only teacher I ever liked. She didn’t have a negative attitude like the other teachers.”

“Can we look around the school?” I signed.

“It isn’t allowed. It’s a rule here,” Joan signed and said.

“But we rode from Vancouver,” signed Pearl. “When I graduated, I had spent most of my life inside this building.”

“Then I’ll escort you. The term doesn’t start until next week, so you’re lucky.”

We walked down a corridor and peered in an open door. The room was empty but for a woman and boy. The woman wore a microphone-headset and was talking and signing. The boy listened to her through headphones. Then a bell rang, and a red light mounted over the door spun. The teacher and student left the classroom together, smiling and signing.

“That light looks like it came from a police car,” I signed.

“It did,” Joan signed and said. “Usually, there are ten students, but this is summer school.”

“I had to sit in a group wearing headphones while the teacher talked without signing,” signed Pearl, as Joan interpreted. “I couldn’t understand anything, so I didn’t learn anything except from the blackboard and books.”

“Signing wasn’t allowed. If parents chose to sign at home, that was their choice, but we told them that they were hindering their children’s language development.”

“I had to wait until the teacher wrote on the blackboard before I could learn. It was like reading a book word ... by ... word. It made me fall asleep! I’m not good at lipreading. Does that mean I’m not allowed to learn? Teachers hit students who signed, but we dared to sign behind the teachers’ backs to avoid going crazy in class.”

“Now we communicate every way we can. In 1964, the Babbidge Report on deaf education concluded that oral education was a failure, but it took ten years before the USA passed a mainstreaming act. Canada followed. Pearl missed it.”

Part II: Partners in Adventure

“Does the new system work better?”

“There are pros and cons. It’s hard to promote reading and writing in a signing environment. In childhood, the hassle of English is reduced, but although it’s easier to learn *other* subjects than before, it’s harder to learn *English*. Few graduates reach grade nine reading because English is their second language. ASL is useless outside, so the tradeoff for using it in the classroom is further isolation of deafies and limitation of their opportunities. Limited reading spells limited thinking, and that means immaturity whether you are deaf, blind, hearing, or sighted.”

We entered a dormitory. “Look at those beds in a row. We were punished if we didn’t make our beds perfectly every day.” We went into a white-tiled bathroom lined with washbasins at child height. “See this row of hooks? Our facecloths had to be hung by their corners in diamonds. The towels went on those racks and had to be in squares.”

Pearl laughed and pointed at the bathroom door. “We had a lot of fun. One time we were furious at the supervisor, so we soaped the floor. Then we started shouting and banging things. She came running through that door, slipped, and fell flat, sliding along the floor.”

“She was lucky she wasn’t injured,” I said.

“I remember. You were the leader,” said Joan.

“Several of us were punished, but I got the most punishment.”

“How did she punish you?” I said.

“She put chairs next to each other and lay a stick across them. We had to put our hands on our heads and balance on our shins on the stick—we got bruises! Sometimes, we had to kneel on salt or be spanked in front of the other students.”

“Pearl arrived a few years after we opened, and she left a few years before we disallowed corporal punishment and allowed sign language.”

“Why didn’t you report all this to your parents?”

“The school never punished us near the end of the term, so we didn’t come home with bruises. And we wanted our parents to think we had been good. Punishments made me tough. When someone asked if I was oral or deaf, I would answer, ‘I’m a rebel.’”

“Pearl *was* a rebel,” Joan signed and said.

“One time, my school friend and I were looking at dresses in a store.

Part II: Partners in Adventure

The woman saw our signs and told us to leave because she thought we had no money. So we threw a rock through the window and waited for the police. The policeman did nothing. That was our revenge on her. Some students were mean to me, too. Now when they see me, they say, 'Remember me at school?' I laugh at them and say, 'I forgot your name.' That lets them know that they are not important to me."

I had an idea. "Can Pearl see her files?"

"Yes! I want to see what they said about me twenty years ago."

Joan found her files in the storeroom. She untied the string around a manila folder, and we watched over Pearl's shoulders as she flipped through thirteen years of her history. Her report cards were normal. She was intelligent, according to an aptitude test, but I didn't see any achievement awards. A memo between a psychologist and the school mentioned something about counseling. I didn't see any reports of incidents and punishments like the one that Pearl and Joan had just remembered.

Pearl closed the file. "I know all this."

"I'm glad you visited. I may not have a job soon. We had ten kids in each grade at one time, but we are down to half of that now. Nowadays, parents view institutional schools as a last resort and mainstream their children if they've got any hearing at all."

"Mainstream with interpreters?" I said.

"Yes. Residential deaf schools cost four times as much as living at home while mainstreaming in public schools with interpreters. And mainstreamed deafies are less likely to end up on welfare. They live with their families. They get a real-world education in a real-world environment, so they learn to compete in the real world. The deafies are interacting with hearing kids, and the hearing kids are interacting with deafie kids. That gives the hearies and the deafies respect for each other, and it gives the deafies self-respect. It's difficult to help children mature inside an institution."

Alan and Rose bought a mare named Yarby and boarded her with us. Pearl taught me how to saddle and ride, at first in our fields and then on the trails near the lake. I rode Mouse while she rode Yarby, her ponytail

Part II: Partners in Adventure

bouncing. We would pause on the trail to pick the salmonberries from places higher than the deer could reach. I kept a photo of Pearl riding Yarby on my desk.

Pearl and I prepared for winter. We seeded the pastures with rye. We wheelbarrowed rows of firewood into the basement lest snow, injury, or illness prevent it when it was most needed. I installed floodlights atop our new barn power pole, ending the need for flashlights at chore time but also ending the magic of the night.

Pearl dropped our mail onto the table, all of it opened. She held up a brochure for *Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Education*, the course required before applying for a hunting license.

“What is this?”

“I was thinking of getting a hunting license so we can have venison. Ralph suggested I buy a bow but shoot the deer by the barn.” I picked up another letter. “The Elks are inviting me to join.”

“The Elks are against signing. They say they support the deaf, but they only support the Hearing Resource Centre for oral deafies.”

“I won’t join. We are too busy, and it’s all old people.”

It was a mistake—I should have seized the chance to get to know Pearl’s family.

Clifford urged me to pay Frank the rest of our holdback, now with Frank’s legal fees added to it. We surrendered and paid Frank the \$10,000 holdback plus \$3,000 for both lawyers. We had lost a year, and we still had to repair more of his work.

So the water wouldn’t freeze, I bypassed the plumbing Frank had put in the attic with new pipes in the basement. We patched Frank’s dozens of drywall faults. I resumed MBA classes. The long joint baths that Pearl and I took became separate quick showers as my classes, her post office shift work, and our renewed home construction projects gently brushed our romance aside.

Father helped me to slaughter both pigs. It was physically demanding work, and slaughtering each pig took hours.

The next morning, Pearl and I began to butcher the sides by

Part II: Partners in Adventure

following Morton's book, *Meat Curing Made Easy*. I sawed and trimmed; Pearl wrapped, weighed, labeled, and kept the records; and we carried armfuls of brown packages downstairs to the freezer. We put the bacon in trays for curing and the remainders in pails for sausages.

After twelve hours of butchering, I signed. "My arms are falling off."

"We made 100 kilos of pork—that's 500 servings!"

Every evening for a week, we made bacon and sausages. We rubbed curing salt into the bellies and back bacon. We ground the remainders with goat meat, garlic, pepper, salt, and spices. Pearl fed handfuls of meat into the electric grinder while I twisted the casings off the spout, sausage after sausage.

Even though we were exhausted, we knew it was worthwhile when we ate leek-and-potato soup, pork tenderloin stuffed with chèvre, and the last of our home-grown vegetables.

"Everything was made here: pork, milk, cheese, vegetables, pickles, and even our water. And we are warm because of our firewood," I signed.

"I ache, but it is hard for me to explain how wonderful I feel. Frank is gone, and the pieces of a good life are coming together."

I cut a Christmas tree for our second Bowen Island Christmas. Pearl gathered holly and made a wreath for the door. Our dusty home looked cozy.

At the company Christmas party, my boss's boss, a Dutch aristocrat, met Pearl and liked her immediately. He was so taken by her that he made an exception to the couples-can't-sit-together rule and asked Pearl to sit beside him, with me on the other side of her to be their interpreter. Sometimes, they wrote notes so I could eat.

At the end of the evening, he wanted to keep the notepad, but Pearl yanked it from his hands—she never liked others to keep her notes. He was startled that the pleasant guest, whose company he had enjoyed all evening, had two sides. I'll never forget his sarcastic remark: "What a *charming* guest."

"Look at this advertisement in the *Undercurrent*," signed Pearl. "A new king-size futon for twenty-five percent off. We can keep our old bed for

Part II: Partners in Adventure

visitors.”

I called the advertiser, and we drove to her house at the end of a lane behind a paddock with two sheep. A huge beige cylinder lay across her living room floor. We offered the owner, Arlette, half the new price. She declined, and we left. A week later, we bought a new futon from the store where Arlette had bought hers, and I built a storage box underneath it.

24 December 1986 was Christmas Eve, Pearl’s birthday, and our anniversary. I added two diamonds to her wedding ring, even though it was money that would have been better spent on the house. Pearl was proud of it. I built a television into the dashboard of the truck, something unheard of in those days.

The telephone rang. “Derrick, this is Donna at the Bowen Building Centre. Pearl won our Christmas raffle—a clock radio! Should we put her ticket back in the bin?” She giggled crassly.

“Pearl wants her prize. We’ll be right over.”

We drove to the store, and Donna handed Pearl her radio.

“I enter every contest I can. Deaf people have hearing friends, so we need radios. Should blind people have no TVs?”

While we were talking to Donna, a Toyota pickup parked next to our Nissan, and Arlette walked in.

“You can have our futon for half price. No one else was interested.” Arlette grumbled, as if we were ripping her off.

“It’s too late. We just bought a new one.”

“What? Why didn’t you call me first?” Arlette glared at me as if I had disrespected her by declining her first offer.

I tried to be friendly, but Arlette had taken a dislike to me. Our paths would cross later on.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I Want a Baby

Blaze arrived, Gus's family's second horse. Mouse, Senator, and Yarby knew their stalls, so within a day, four horses entered the barn in single file at feeding time, each going to his stall as if he could read the name sign I put over his manger.

"Trout Lake Farm is now profitable even *before* tax refunds," I signed.

We continued to finish the house out of our cash flow. I installed a central vacuum cleaning system. The house wasn't yet carpeted, but now it was easy to vacuum the dust.

Snow covered Bowen Island in white. With snow on the ground, we had to walk up and down the hill with backpacks and flashlights twice a day, but no pipes froze, and there was plenty of firewood in the basement. The floodlights on the trail to the barn made the chores easier, but because they obliterated the stars, we often left them turned off on clear nights. We felt like we were living in a fairy tale.

In February, I left for a one-week business trip. Pearl drove me to the airport, and she promised to pick me up when I returned.

I arrived at the Chicago Hilton at midnight. As soon as I fell asleep, the telephone rang.

"This is the Vancouver Message Relay Centre. Pearl King is calling for Derrick King."

"Go ahead."

"Why didn't you call to tell me you arrived?"

"I told you, I will not call from the hotel telephone. It is too expensive. I said I would call you from the office tomorrow. It is three in the morning, and you woke me up."

"You didn't tell me your room number. The receptionist had to ask."

"I told you my flights and my hotel. Rooms are assigned after you arrive. You've stayed in hotels before. You know that."

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“I will find out.” She hung up.

I waited for Pearl at the airport when I returned. I waited for an hour, but she didn’t arrive. I took a taxi to Horseshoe Bay, walked onto the ferry, and walked two kilometers up the hill to the house wearing a suit and Oxford shoes, carrying my briefcase and suitcase. My feet were wet, I was chilled to the bone, and my arms were aching.

I was furious, but the moment I saw the woman on the sofa who was watching TV, munching potato chips, and ignoring me, I calmed down—I realized a new Pearl had replaced the old, and I knew better than to get angry.

“I waited at the airport for an hour. I walked from the ferry. It’s cold. Why didn’t you come?”

Pearl pointed at the TV with a supercilious look. “I ordered cable TV while you were away. It’s your turn to do the chores.”

Pearl slept on the couch for the second time since we met.

Pearl pointed to an advertisement in the *Undercurrent*. “A businessman announces he will build a pub. He is offering a prize for the name. I will enter the name Bowen Island Pub.”

“That name is too obvious. I think he is looking for a special name.”

“What’s wrong with Bowen Island Pub? What would you name it?”

“I don’t know, but Bowen Island Pub sounds too ordinary.”

Pearl didn’t enter the contest. A few weeks later, the name of the pub was announced: Bowen Island Pub. No one had entered it, so the pub saved itself the prize expense.

Pearl was furious. “You didn’t want me to win!”

“I *wanted* you to win. That’s why I wanted you to enter a special name. I didn’t say you couldn’t enter Bowen Island Pub.”

“You want me to lose! You hold me under your thumb!”

I groped under the truck seat for something to read while waiting in the ferry lineup, and I found a copy of *Cosmopolitan*. The quiz *Rate Your Husband’s Sexual IQ* had been filled out. I was stunned to see that Pearl had ticked the boxes for “*I suspect he has homosexual relations*” and “*I know he masturbates*.” I thought about what I had seen.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Sex with Pearl had been affectionate but little more, partly because it was usually in positions where we could see each other's faces. I couldn't see how our sex life could lead her to think I was having sex with men. Worse, seeing her first husband in a gay bar was her *only* justification for abandoning him; if she now thought I was gay, then maybe he wasn't gay. Not everyone in a gay bar is gay; not everyone in a straight bar is straight. I didn't tell Pearl I had gay colleagues and friends, and sometimes we drank in a gay bar near my office.

"Sometimes, I become so frustrated with hearies that I want to cry. My elbow hurt, so I saw the doctor. She sent me to a specialist, but I went to the wrong office. I wrote a note to the receptionist to call the doctor to get the directions. She handed me the telephone!" Pearl slapped her forehead in frustration. "So I went next door, and that receptionist called for me."

The report said Pearl had repetitive stress injury and needed to change her work or have surgery to relocate the nerve in her elbow.

"I want that surgery. If my elbow gets worse, I won't be able to sign. I will get sick leave. Then I want to stop the Pill and have a baby. I want a child at the table to talk to you and sign to me. Then I want to quit."

"We need time. If you quit now, we won't be able to finish the house. Do you want a baby to crawl in the dust on plywood?"

"My parents were twenty when I was born. I'm thirty-three! A woman can't wait like a man. Think of ideas. Rent the basement and the other side of the house for storage, or borrow money to finish them and rent them for living. A baby will not come for nine months. Then I will sell jade."

"No one rents damp storage, and we have two mortgages already. My mother was thirty-four when she had me and forty-two when she had my sister. We need two salaries for a year to finish this half of the house."

"Don't tell me Frank has stopped me from having a baby. He can go to hell! Jodi is pregnant. What is your goal?"

"To enjoy our life and finish the house, then have a family. Let's do this: you have the operation and take recovery time off work. You work for a year while I finish my MBA. Then, I get a better job. We have a

Part III: Divided by Destiny

baby, and you quit. Can you get lighter work after the operation?”

“No. All deafies at the post office sort mail. I have decided to stop the Pill. What do you say about that?”

Disagreeing was not an option because I had no way of knowing whether Pearl took the pills; now I wondered if she had already stopped. It dawned on me that neither of us now trusted each other; so much had changed so quickly.

“OK.”

Pearl was elated. “This is my only chance to have a child. I know it.” She kissed me.

Although I loved Pearl, I knew something wasn’t right. It was wrong to lie to her, but I decided to try to delay making her pregnant until our situation improved. Our sex life would have to suffer—Pearl’s questionnaire response “*I know he masturbates*” would be prophetic.

Pearl stopped taking the Pill and had the elbow operation, an outpatient procedure. She was granted leave while she had physiotherapy for two months. I did the chores while she recovered. She began to sign, “Swim, swim!” to her belly after we made love.

Mothergoat had three kids: two bucks and, at last, a doe. We named the doe Scapegoat, put her in her own pen, and bottle-fed her, so she became as affectionate as a dog.

As I climbed into the truck on my way to the Fraser Valley Livestock Auction to buy piglets for the year’s pork, Pearl signed, “Buy a duck for the garden.”

I returned with three piglets and a dozen ducklings. I put the piglets in the sty and made a cat-proof cage for the ducklings.

Pearl was livid. “I wanted a duck in the garden, not ducklings in a box!”

“Ducklings cost almost nothing, and you can’t buy one duck. In two months, you can pick one, and we’ll eat the others.”

“You ignore me!”

Pearl ignored me for the rest of the day and slept on her edge of the bed that night.

Her increasing volatility did nothing to kindle the flames of passion,

Part III: Divided by Destiny

but this was fine with me now: it meant another night when she wouldn't become pregnant. And she couldn't get pregnant during her periods and on MBA nights twice a week when I slept on my sister's floor. I was playing Vatican Roulette. Because Pearl never initiated sex, it was easy to avoid making love on fertile days, and when it could not be avoided, covert *coitus interruptus* was my frustrating friend.

My MBA class was interrupted by a knock on the door. A woman called me into the corridor.

"Your wife's had an accident. She's in Lions Gate Hospital. She broke her foot."

I drove to the hospital. When I arrived in the emergency room, Pearl was sitting in a chair in whitewashed overalls with her left foot in a gumboot and her right foot in a sock on a stool.

"How do you feel? What happened?"

"I feel ... mellow. I had a painkiller shot. I was trying to pour the food into the trough, but the piglets kept pushing. I kicked one on the head, and I broke my toe."

Pearl told me she had used our emergency autodialer, and the ambulance, police, and volunteer fire department had all arrived to find her hopping around the house on one foot.

The other patients stared at us. I couldn't help but laugh. I was in a pinstriped suit, while she looked like a hillbilly, and we were talking in sign language.

"She kicked a pig," I said, as if only the kicking was unusual.

Crows soon discovered the pig trough and ate the feed which the piglets did not immediately consume, so we made a scarecrow. We soon found crows perched on our scarecrow.

"Can you shoot the crows?" signed Pearl.

"I will ask Laurent for permission."

Laurent was parked at his usual spot, where his presence calmed traffic. I explained our crow problem.

"I hate the filthy scavengers. Shoot one—no one's going to report one shot. You only need one because the best scarecrow is a dead crow.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Would you eat at a restaurant with a corpse at the table?”

At evening chore time, I brought my rifle with me. Crows roosted in the trees and on the scarecrow, waiting for their banquet. I fed the piglets last. Then I leaned against the barn, ready to fire, but the crows did not move. I walked inside the barn and stood behind the open door, but the crows did not move. I climbed to the hayloft, found a knothole facing the sty, and peered through it. A few minutes later, the crows flew down to the trough. I fired through the hole. All but one crow took flight. The casualty staggered onto the electric fence and lay twitching with each electric pulse, like Galvani’s frog.

We had no more problems with crows.

“It’s the middle of summer,” signed Pearl. “We need a holiday. We could buy a camper. It can pay for itself, and we can also use it to sleep downtown.”

We bought a mildewed, wood-frame camper with no shower or toilet, and we cleaned it up. A few days later, when Pearl arrived home from work, she was delighted to find me inside it preparing a propane-cooked dinner under its battery-powered lights.

I soon learned we needed to buy booster springs, extra-wide truck mirrors, and tie-down bars. If we had known the expense of modifying our truck, we would not have bought the camper. To save money, I had a tie-down bar installed only in the front.

Alan and Rose relieved our chores for a week while we drove north to visit Pearl’s other uncle and her grandparents. The heavy camper on the back of the light pickup made driving hard work. Our tempers flared as the overloaded truck swayed on the highway.

I turned on the stereo. Pearl turned the volume all the way up. She closed her eyes and listened to *Sultans of Swing* while Whisky cowered behind us at the deafening blast. When the song was over, I reduced the volume.

“I dreamed I was dancing,” Pearl signed, as she turned the volume all the way up and blocked the control with her hand.

I turned the stereo off.

“Why did you do that? I want to listen. I can’t watch TV because

Part III: Divided by Destiny

there are no TV stations here. It's my right to listen!"

"I will turn on the stereo. Turn it up until you can hear it."

Pearl turned the volume until it was all the way up.

I turned it off. "I don't want to become deaf or have an accident."

A patrol car's lights flashed, so I pulled over. I rolled down the window as the policeman approached. Whisky barked as Pearl held him back.

"Your license, registration, and insurance, please," said the constable. "I clocked you at fifteen over the limit going down the hill."

I opened my document wallet and handed it to him; my Reserve Police ID card was opposite my driver's license. The constable returned my wallet, made small talk, and drove away.

"No ticket! Before I quit the reserve police, I got a replacement card. I handed in the new one when I quit, and I kept this old one because policemen don't ticket policemen."

Pearl seemed unnerved by my subterfuge.

At the end of each day's driving ordeal, we looked for a clearing at the end of a dirt road, and we hid from the world. We never stayed in public campgrounds. For security, we kept my shotgun under the mattress, which was legal in those days. I mixed margaritas from the icebox; Pearl cooked dinner on the propane stove; we played with Whisky; we panned for gold in the Cariboo creeks. After dinner, Pearl read *Cosmopolitan* and *Silent News* while I read books and listened to the plaintive call of loons. Fortunately for covert family planning, it wasn't easy to have sex in the low cab-over bed.

The highlight of our trip was our visit to Fort St. John to see more of her relatives, sleeping in our camper in their driveways. All were happy to see Pearl's life going well.

Her maternal grandfather was one of the first farmers in the area and a fundamentalist Seventh-day Adventist. He was the co-founder of the World Invitational Gold Panning Championships, the Dorse Prosser Adventist Elementary School, and the Fort St. John North Peace Museum. He showed us the museum, and his home had even more settlers' artifacts. As a going-away present, he gave us the oak hand-

Part III: Divided by Destiny

cranked telephone, which had hung on his kitchen wall for thirty years to communicate with friends and family twenty km away.

Her uncle Karl's living room displayed a framed copy of the 1979 entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the "Jade boulder Karl discovered in 1977 in Watson Lake. It weighs 63,307 pounds." A green boulder stood next to a rock saw and piles of jade pieces in his back yard. He gave us a fist-sized piece. Karl told us that he had been prospecting and carving Yukon jade and selling it to Alaska Highway tourists for years. Pearl reminded him that she was keen to sell his jade.

As we were leaving, Karl revealed to me that he hadn't discovered the jade; a metal mine had found it, and he'd bought it. He'd reported his "discovery" to Guinness as a marketing ploy. Karl's jade was like Ernie's horsemeat: everyone in the family knew the truth except Pearl, and I'm sad to say I kept their secrets, too. Our collective silence only served to make the complex reality of life more difficult for her to see.

On the last day of the trip, we took a gravel road. Because I had bought only one tie-down bar, when the truck pitched on a bump, the loose camper dented the roof of the cab. Pearl was furious at me, and I became furious with her. I had done all the planning, preparation, and driving, so I parked and told her to drive home or to shut up. She refused to do either; instead, she complained bitterly that I was controlling her.

Pearl signed, "We should see a marriage counselor."

"First, you should see a doctor about your sensitivity and anger. If your doctor asks me to come, I will come. Then, after you feel better, we can see a marriage counselor."

"We can't waste any more time. It's month four without the Pill, and I'm not pregnant, so you need to be tested."

"Me? Let's be logical. You had womb surgery; how do you know there was no damage? You should get tested first."

"We will not have sex until I see a report about your semen."

"If you are sure you can get pregnant, then you must have been pregnant before. You have no stretch marks, so you had an abortion."

Pearl was startled. "I got pregnant when I lived with Eddy. I didn't want to marry him, so I had an abortion."

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Pearl told me this dispassionately. She had withheld her abortion from me—but I was no better because I was concealing my clandestine birth control from her.

“I told you he is an alcoholic with bad genes.”

I began to wonder if Eddy really was an alcoholic. My concern about Pearl’s mental health increased.

“No sex until your test. Your balls must be full.”

“What if I fail the test?”

“We will adopt a black baby. White babies are not available.”

“I will take a test.”

I was happy to take a test because “we will not have sex until” would delay pregnancy. The first step was for us to see our family doctor. I booked an appointment for two weeks later.

The doctor told us we should wait nine months before a semen test because the odds at our age after four months were only fifty percent, but Pearl talked her into authorizing it.

I stalled for two weeks before taking the test, then I waited a week to inform Pearl after the doctor called me to tell me my result was normal.

“The doctor must tell me,” she signed.

I booked another appointment. Two weeks later, the doctor told us the result and urged Pearl to relax and be patient.

That night, Pearl signed. “The lab didn’t see you shoot into the bottle, so you borrowed semen from a friend to hide your vasectomy.”

“Leo, would you jerk off for me? No man would do that!”

Perhaps she believed me, because she didn’t mention infertility again. I’m sure we both knew we couldn’t go on like this, yet we both went on.

The ducks had grown up. Pearl no longer wanted a duck in the garden. We killed and cleaned them together. Decapitation was easy; the hard work was holding the duck to avoid being bruised while the headless duck flapped violently. Pearl didn’t want to swing the ax, so she was the one to hold each duck and get bruised. We didn’t know the technique of stuffing a bird in a sack with its head sticking out of a hole. It took us a dozen hours to clean and pluck a dozen ducks. We never did it again.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“Where is your elbow report from the doctor? I need it for the insurance claim.”

“It’s in my bag.”

I looked in her bag for her medical report, and I found it. I also found a letter:

Dear Mrs. King:

Re: Your Letter

Thank you for your interest in cochlear implants and your kind offer to be a research patient. We appreciate your confidence.

Please be advised that the procedure is still experimental and could result in total loss of hearing; therefore, we do not consider for experimental surgery any patients with any residual hearing, however minimal, such as yourself.

Cochlear implants are being improved in both efficacy and safety and we hope in the future to be able to aid you.

Sincerely, Dr. H S Smith

The letter was a month old. I put the letter and the elbow report on the table. When Pearl saw the letter, she became angry.

“Why did you take that letter?”

“Why did you keep it a secret?”

“Because you would try to prevent my implant. You prefer I stay deaf.”

This was the most painful thing Pearl had ever said to me. Cupid’s arrow was a distant memory now.

“What can I say? If I say I prefer a deafie, you will think I love you because you are deaf. If I say I prefer a hearie, you will think I don’t love you as you are.

“I often lie in bed wishing I could do what my sisters did when they heard something—hear that sound and know what it is. I think hearing would be convenient, that’s all.”

Pearl invited a dozen guests to her Labor Day long weekend deaf party. I invited Stanley, Gertrude, and Ralph, but Stanley and Gertrude couldn’t

Part III: Divided by Destiny

come.

Ralph was the first to arrive. He came up the driveway in his jeep and, to my surprise, escorted a brunette to the door.

“Adele, meet Pearl and Derrick.”

Adele offered her hand for a handshake, and I realized she was blind. Pearl shook her hand, too, and we invited them inside. Ralph guided Adele by the elbow into the kitchen. A flashlight hung from his belt.

“Don’t you trust my electricity?” I signed and said.

“I’d wear one if I were you—for when the time comes.”

“You said Ralph was single,” signed Pearl.

“I *was* single, but we met on a blind date.”

“I was Ralph’s Braille teacher,” said Adele. “I moved in with Ralph last month when my youngest child moved out.”

“You guys talk while I unload the jeep.”

Ralph returned with two suitcases and a carton labeled Baxter-Travenol. Pearl went to pick up her guests while I did the chores, and Ralph and Adele walked around the property.

Pearl returned with her guests in the back of our truck. Jodi greeted me as I lowered the tailgate. The guests jumped down, each with booze and a sleeping bag. Whisky was delighted to make new friends.

As evening fell, we started a bonfire and roasted wieners. I baked potatoes on Pearl’s propane barbecue. We laughed, signed, ate, and drank.

Then Ralph, Adele, and I went inside to talk.

“It’s better for us inside. The deafies don’t have to slow down their ASL for me, and I don’t have to interpret you for them.”

“You can sign,” said Adele, “so why don’t you like to do it?”

I nodded without speaking, then, realizing my mistake, spoke without signing. “Even though I know enough sign language for her friends to talk to me when they want to, we don’t have much to talk about. And if they slow down for me for too long, I know I’m imposing, like at a cosmopolitan party where the foreign guests are speaking English just to be polite.”

“If you have no mutual friends, there will be no one to help you stay as a couple through tough times,” said Adele.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“I know, but it’s hard. Pearl lives with one foot in the Vancouver deaf world and the other foot in the Bowen Island hearing world. She’d get lonely if she didn’t work downtown, yet she wants to have a kid and quit.”

Bursts of laughter, clinking bottles, the smell of marijuana, and the crackle of burning wood came through the open windows and door—but not a single human voice, like a movie sound-effects track. Now and then, the plywood floor thundered from the impact of boots as revelers went to the refrigerator for a beer. The sky turned purple.

“Adele, did you know Ralph is looking at the girls?” I said.

She laughed. “If I worried about things I can’t see, I’d go crazy.”

“Pearl worries about the things she can’t hear, and she goes crazy.”

“You said she wanted to start a business. What sort?” said Ralph.

“Selling her uncle’s jade. Renting unfinished space in the house.”

“I have another idea: build a shooting range, and start a gun club. Many people here shoot. I’m sure you can get permission for an underground range. Bury sewer pipe, add lights and ventilation, and there’s your business! You can stock it with provisions, and there’s your banker bunker! And you can rent it out for birthday parties.”

Ralph laughed, but he wasn’t joking. The Soviet Union was collapsing, and it felt like anything could happen. Pearl had no interest in survivalism, but she loved the back-to-the-land life to which it was related.

“You can get an ultralight plane, store it in your barn, and use your field as an airstrip. There’s *so* much you can do.”

“First, I’d need to clear the stumps from the upper field.”

“Get a copy of the *Blaster’s Handbook* and a blasting license; you just fill in the forms. After the reference check, buy dynamite, caps, and fuses. Bring them over on the weekly ‘dangerous goods’ ferry. You’ll meet interesting people on *that* boat! You’ll need an auger, some old carpets, and some old tires to keep the rocks from flying.”

“That sounds like fun. Let’s do it together.”

Ralph looked at his watch. “It’s time for an exchange.” He went to the bedroom and returned with a suitcase, a handful of metal rods, and two plastic bags, one full of liquid. The suitcase was packed with hoses,

Part III: Divided by Destiny

valves, and connectors. Ralph put the bag of liquid in the microwave and, while it warmed, assembled the poles into a stand. He hung the bag from the pole and pulled up his shirt to expose two catheters.

“I’m on Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis. Diabetics are prone to kidney disease, and I drew the short straw. If I change the fluid four times a day, take vitamin supplements, and eat bananas, I feel fine. If I don’t, I’ll die.”

Ralph drew insulin into a syringe and injected the bag of liquid. He disinfected his catheters and connected them with hoses to the bags. He put the empty bag on the floor and opened a valve; straw-colored liquid flowed out of his belly. Everyone who passed by on the way to the refrigerator stopped to stare.

Half an hour later, he closed the first valve and opened the second. Clear liquid ran from the bag on the stand into his belly.

Pearl walked in. “What is Ralph doing? All my friends are asking me.”

“He has kidney disease. He has to do this four times a day.”

Ralph disconnected the tubes, disinfected the catheters, closed his pants, and washed up. We walked outside and joined the party. Sparks from the bonfire rose like fireflies. A man handed his joint to Ralph. He took a toke and passed it to me.

Adele, Ralph, and I went back inside. I put a Moody Blues cassette in the stereo and lit the kerosene lantern. We listened to “Melancholy Man.”

“Do you have a TV?” said Adele, who was sitting in front of it.

“Pearl has a TV. I don’t like it. There’s too much noise and violence,” I replied.

“I disagree,” said Ralph. “There isn’t *enough* violence on TV. There would be less violence in the real world if the imitation world were more realistic. What happens when you kill on TV?”

“The victim falls over. Then blood dribbles out.”

“Exactly! That’s not realistic! When a man is shot, he pisses, shits, convulses, and gets a hard-on! If TV did a better job of presenting death, there would be less killing in real life!”

In the morning, Adele sat with Ralph while he exchanged his fluids.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I did the chores and woke the deafies sleeping in the hayloft. Pearl woke the deafies sleeping around the house and cooked a delicious breakfast of grilled chèvre with our homemade back bacon. Pearl drove her guests to the ferry. Then the four of us sat down to talk.

“Did you talk to a blind woman before?” Ralph asked Pearl.

“I talked to deaf-blind using hand-spelling, but not blind.”

“Me, too,” said Adele, “deaf-blind, but not deaf-only. You and I could talk using hand-spelling, but it is faster to have Derrick interpret. It is hard for me to imagine life without ears. What do you feel when you hold a cat that is purring?”

“When I hold a cat that is purring, I hear it purring in my mind. When I take my hands off, then I don’t hear it purring. This morning, I heard the bacon frying in the pan, but when I looked away, I didn’t hear it. If I watch a television show that’s captioned, I hear the words, but if I look away, I hear nothing. Get it?”

“I think so. When people are talking, I see them in my mind, but when they are silent, they disappear. Can you speak?”

“A little, but I gave up. It frustrated me that most hearing people can’t understand my speech after I learned it in school. It is hard to talk when you can’t hear what you are saying.”

“Deafies believe deafness is only an inconvenience,” I signed and said.

“Yes. For example, I can drive, but I can’t use the telephone,” signed Pearl.

“I can use the telephone, but I can’t drive!” said Adele.

“Could you ever see?”

“I had a normal childhood, but I went blind through illness. My ex-husband was sighted.” Adele held Ralph’s hand. “The kids helped me after he left me. I don’t know what I would have done without children. Do you love Pearl because she is quiet?”

I laughed. “No! She doesn’t realize how much noise she makes.”

“Why didn’t you join us outside for a longer time?”

“You enjoyed looking at the fire, and we enjoyed listening to music. We enjoyed ourselves in our own way,” Adele said.

“Say, since you have only a two-wheel-drive truck, why don’t you get

Part III: Divided by Destiny

a four-wheel-drive jeep, too?” Ralph said. “I know where two grand will buy you an ex-military jeep that will climb a seventy percent grade, pull stumps, and haul logs.”

“That’s a good idea,” signed Pearl. “No more up-and-down trips to pick each other up. No more hitchhiking. Let’s see one.”

I came home while Pearl was doing chores and saw the lamp flashing on our answering machine. I pushed the button and heard a missed-call message, so I reset the machine.

At dinner, I took a book from my briefcase. “I got this at the used bookstore: the *Blaster’s Handbook*. Ralph and I are going to blow up the stumps in the field with dynamite.”

“What was the message on the answering machine?”

“There was no message on the answering machine.”

Pearl exploded. “You lie! I came home, and I played it. No words appeared on the TTY, so I put my hand on the speaker and felt a voice. I felt it! I demand to know your message!”

“It said, ‘*This is a recording. Please hang up your set. If you need assistance, dial your operator. Please hang up now.*’ Why? Don’t you trust me?”

I was always looking for gifts for Pearl, so when I was flipping through the Paladin Press catalog that came with *Get Even*, I read an advertisement for *Slash and Thrust*, a book. The catalog recommended it for self-defense for women. Pearl had a dog, a gun, and an autodialer, but these only protected her when she was at home, and her past assaults had all taken place away from home. If she felt less vulnerable, then she might feel less paranoid. I ordered it, along with a survivalist book Jeff had suggested, a book on how to make a silencer as Ralph had suggested, and a first-aid book.

Pearl bought a children’s ice-cream maker shaped like a penguin. *Age three and up*, it said on the box. I was astonished when Pearl told me it was for our children. I smiled and said nothing.

A few weeks later, I discovered Pearl had changed her dentist. I showed her the charge on our credit card bill and said that if she had

Part III: Divided by Destiny

found a better dentist than the one we were both using, she should tell me so I could change to the best one, too.

“I have the right to have my own dentist,” was all she said.

I wondered if Pearl was planning to leave and hide, as she had done before, and she didn’t want to share suppliers lest they leak her whereabouts to me.

Summer faded into autumn. I hired a helper to help me slaughter our three pigs. Then Pearl and I butchered 200 kilograms of pork. After sixteen hours of cutting and wrapping, our freezer was full and our arms and backs were sore. For the rest of the week, we made bacon and sausages.

Alan took the lambs to be slaughtered and butchered. Pearl spread rye seed in the fields while I stacked ten tons of hay delivered by semi-trailer into the hayloft. Working on our property minimized the growing tension between us, for every conversation seemed to end in a quarrel. Our sex life was fading away. I knew something was going to happen but didn’t know what to expect. We lived from day to day.

Pearl and I met Ralph and Adele at the four-wheel-drive garage and test-drove army jeeps. All had open sides, canvas tops, and camouflage paint. We bought one. I drove it home, laying a trail of blue smoke, and Pearl followed me in our truck.

I was astounded when Pearl refused to drive it.

“A jeep is not for a woman.”

“Why didn’t you say you would never drive it *before* we bought it?”

“I will drive the truck while you drive the jeep.”

“I need the truck to go to classes. I can’t drive a jeep in my suit.”

“I will hitchhike when you go to class, the same as now. This is your last MBA year.”

The way Pearl wanted us to buy a second vehicle with no intention to drive it herself reinforced my concern that she was planning to leave—with the truck.

“Then we should not have bought the jeep. I think we should have the marriage counseling you suggested.”

“It won’t help. You have to be honest. You were not like this before.”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“You wanted marriage counseling, but now you say no. Why?”

“We can only go after you are honest with yourself. I am watching you.”

We drove our jeep to my parents’ house on a cold afternoon. Its heater warmed only our feet, and we were shivering by the time we arrived. Father offered to lend us his spare car for the winter, a rusty, twenty-year-old Oldsmobile. We now had a pickup, a jeep, and a two-ton tank. Pearl drove it home behind me.

Alan sold Yarby. With only four sheep, three horses, two goats, and a cat in the barn, and all the pigs, lambs, kids, and ducks in our freezer, our farm chores eased for the winter.

I was astonished again when, on Halloween, Pearl brought a pumpkin and candies home. “You empty the pumpkin. I will carve the face. We will put it by the driveway next to the road. Children will ask for our candies if we have a good pumpkin.”

“No kids came for trick-or-treat in the past two years. The driveway is steep and dark with *Beware of Dog* and *No Trespassing* signs.”

Pearl carved a Jack-o’-Lantern and put a candle in it. I carried it down the driveway and put it next to the road. It looked wonderful, but no children paid us a visit. Pearl ate the candies.

While doing morning chores, I heard the Oldsmobile rumble into life as Pearl left to go to work. An hour later, I drove the truck to the cove, expecting to park it by the Oldsmobile, but I didn’t see the car.

That evening, during dinner, Pearl signed impassively, “The car broke down this morning near our driveway. I hitchhiked to the cove and asked the gas station to tow it there. They fixed it. I am telling you so you are not upset by the credit card bill.”

“What was wrong with it?”

“The battery wires touched together.”

“A waste of money! I could have fixed it. Why didn’t you walk back and get me?”

Pearl stared through me. “It was dark.”

“It’s always dark. That’s why we have flashlights!”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

On the weekend, I drove to the gas station in Snug Cove. “Don, on Wednesday, Pearl had the Oldsmobile towed here and repaired. What happened?”

“Your battery cage rusted, so the battery tipped and shorted. I welded a new cage and charged her seventy-five bucks. That’s what I reported to Laurent. Pearl didn’t have enough money, so she charged it.”

“What did the police have to do with this?”

“Laurent asked me to do a safety check.” Don lowered his voice. “He asked me not to tell you, but you need to know: Laurent wanted your car checked for sabotage.”

“Sabotage! What did you say?”

“No sabotage, but only God knows what rusty part will fall out next.”

I saw Laurent’s jeep near the store and parked beside it. He asked me to get in. “Derrick, Pearl’s car broke down. She saw sparks under the hood, the headlights went out, and the engine stopped. A commuter saw her waving a flashlight. He stopped to give her a lift and then saw the car blocking the road. With help from another car, they pushed it out of the way. He gave her a lift to the first ferry but, instead of walking to it, she came to me to report the breakdown and asked me to have it towed. Then she went to work on the second ferry.”

“I was on the second ferry! She must have been hiding.”

“She asked me not to tell you, but you need to know: Pearl wanted your car checked for sabotage.”

Pearl put our mail on the table, opened. There were the paperbacks I had ordered—postmarked a month ago.

“You didn’t tell me you ordered these books.”

“You spoiled my gift. *Slash and Thrust* was for you, for Christmas. It teaches you how to protect yourself with your pocketknife if a man assaults you. *Home Workshop Silencers* is for shooting deer by the barn; I told you about Ralph’s idea. Jeff mentioned *Life After Doomsday*, and it looked interesting. The *Medical Handbook* is first-aid.”

Except for the *Medical Handbook*, they turned out to be mail-order swindles like *Get Even*.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I drove the truck to work so we could buy groceries and grain on our way home. Although her behavior was increasingly odd, I continued to speak to her normally, as if speaking normally would guide her to thinking normally.

“Shall we eat dinner in Horseshoe Bay tonight?” I signed. “It’s so cold that the ice cream won’t melt in the truck.”

“We can eat out if you want.”

We ate in the upscale Bay Moorings restaurant, at a table with a view of the marina. I ordered margaritas.

“How did you know about this place?”

“Leo and I used to eat here for half price when we were on patrol. Is something bothering you?”

“Your ASL does not improve. Your eyes wander. When you look away, I look there too, thinking something is happening over there. You never ask me, ‘How was your day?’ You don’t take the time to explain to me why you are doing things. You expect me to follow you.”

“I am avoiding arguments. We need to sign like we did before we got busy.”

“I often wonder what you are thinking.”

“I will try to communicate more, but we have to love each other as we are.”

“Why didn’t you choose a hearie wife who can communicate with you in big words? It makes me suspect why you chose a deafie wife.”

“Because I love you, not big words.”

Pearl watched a ferry disappear around the point. She was still gazing at the ripples of water when the meal arrived.

“Is something bothering you?” I said again.

The question hung in the air, and we ate without signing. When our ferry rounded the point, she signed. “Let’s go. We must unload the truck and put wood on the fire.”

On the way home, I paused at the Oldsmobile parked in the cove so Pearl could drive it home. I drove the truck home, changed, did the chores, and unloaded the sacks of grain in the barn. It was just above freezing.

When I walked back to the house, Pearl wasn’t home, so no fire was

Part III: Divided by Destiny

burning, and the house was cold. I worried that the Oldsmobile had broken down again, so I drove to the cove. The car was gone. I drove home slowly, looking for it at the sides of the roads. There were no streetlights on Bowen Island.

Suddenly, the flashing blue lights of the RCMP jeep came up behind me, and it rocketed past. I wondered where Laurent was going so quickly on a Friday night. I drove slowly, looking for Pearl, on my way home to call the police.

As I crested the driveway, the headlights came down on Laurent's jeep.

Pearl stood in the kitchen, Laurent at his side. She looked wild and dangerous.

"Laurent, what's up?" I said without signing.

"Interpret!" demanded Pearl.

"Laurent. What's happening?" I signed and said.

"Your lips said something different! Interpret exactly!"

"Laurent. What is up?" I signed exactly, pointing up.

"Pearl asked me to arrest you for trying to kill her."

My head started spinning. "Why?" was all I could say.

"Interpret!" signed Pearl. I was the interpreter at my own inquisition.

"Are you trying to kill Pearl?" said Laurent.

"Don't be ridiculous," I signed and said.

"She is convinced you are."

"Arrest him!"

"Pearl, I need reasonable and probable grounds to believe Derrick threatened you. When did he try to kill you?"

"Many times!" she screamed silently through wild signs. "The first time was firewood. He rolled the wood down the hill to the truck. Firewood rolled into me and hurt me and bruised me."

"I wasn't aiming at her. It was easier to roll the wood than to carry it."

"Rolling firewood isn't going to kill anyone," said Laurent.

"Derrick made me fall off the roof!"

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“Did he push you off the roof?”

“No, he is too clever. Derrick made the ladder break!”

I told the story of the ladder collapse two years ago. “That’s the ladder, over there. Look for yourself. After it buckled, I reinforced it with wood, and we have been using it ever since.”

“Derrick was on the roof when it broke, so it wasn’t deliberate. If he wanted to kill you, he would have shoved you off and climbed down the ladder.”

Pearl shook her head violently. “No! No! No! He tried to kill me with electricity! He told me to hold wires when the power was on!”

“Is that so?”

“Insulated wires. The kitchen lights are on the same circuit, and we were working at night, so I needed to leave that circuit on. Pearl was in the attic on dry wood. She was perfectly safe.”

“And the car? You know about that!” She was hysterical.

“It’s falling apart. Did you tell Derrick about your concerns?”

“No! I didn’t want him to find out that I discovered his plan!”

“Pearl, *why* do you think Derrick is trying to kill you?”

“I don’t know! Look at these!”

She went to the bookshelf and brought back *Get Even*, *Slash and Thrust*, *The Blaster’s Handbook*, *Life After Doomsday*, and *Home Workshop Silencers*.

“What are you going to do with a silencer?”

“Shoot animals.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t for Frank?”

“*Get Even* was for Frank. *Slash and Thrust* was supposed to be a Christmas gift, for her self-defense, but she opened my mail.”

“Now I understand why his first wife left him. She was afraid!”

“Afraid of *what*?”

“You know!”

Laurent rubbed his hands. “You’d better get some firewood burning.”

Laurent and Pearl were scribbling notes when I returned from stoking the stove.

“Pearl says you and Ralph talked about killing.”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“You never talked to Dibs, so you didn’t know he is hard-of-hearing. He listened to you when he was getting beer. Everyone was shocked when he told us about your idea to show death on TV. I was so embarrassed!”

“Ralph wanted to make the world *less* violent because if people knew about death, they wouldn’t want to kill. Why didn’t you say so when we talked with them the next day?”

“Ralph carries a gun in his jeep! Derrick told me.”

“His gun is legal. I approved his permits.”

Pearl showed Laurent my Pocket Day-Timer. “It’s in code!”

“I abbreviate. Do I need to write everything in full?”

“Hundreds of dollars come into our bank account, but where does the money come from?”

“From my expense claims. You can see the same money going *out* one month before, in the credit card bill.”

“I caught him listening to messages on the answering machine and then erasing them.”

“Messages like *This is a recording.*”

“Derrick doesn’t wear a ring. He rides with Leo, and he goes to the YMCA. I think he’s gay. His glasses make him look like a drug dealer. His friends are weird. Ralph, Leo, Virgil, Stanley, Rokus, all weird!”

“All weird, except *Pearl.*”

“Derrick is a capable man. If he wanted to kill you, you’d be dead by now. I can’t arrest him; all I have from you is innuendo.”

“What is ‘innuendo?’”

I had had enough. “Look it up in the dictionary.” I crossed my arms.

Laurent looked at his watch. “The water taxi leaves in thirty minutes. I’ll drive you to the dock. Can you stay with friends in town?”

Pearl nodded. She ran around the house, tossing items into her backpack.

As she turned to leave with Laurent, I signed and said, “Get help—you need it.”

“Nothing is wrong with me!” Pearl burst into tears.

They drove away, into the night. I stood in shock. Pearl ran away on 4 December 1987, twenty days before our second anniversary.

Where Are the Bullets?

I tried to call Jodi, who lived with Gavin, but his number was unlisted. I called Jeff, told him what had just happened, and asked for Gavin's number. Jeff refused to release it and seemed to give up on her; his last words to me were, "It's time for me to hang up my Pearl connection."

I remembered Fanny, an interpreter friend of Pearl's whom I had met four years ago but hadn't seen since. I found her number in the phone book and called her.

"Pearl is paranoid. I am one of the few hearies she sometimes trusts. I hadn't seen her for a year, but when your new books arrived, she came to show them to me. She was in shock! She thought you planned to kill her, and your books were your research."

"*Slash and Thrust* was to be her Christmas gift."

"If you had told her beforehand, those books might not have been a problem, but in her mind, *surprise* equals *secret* equals *danger*. When she lived here, she accused me of stealing her tax refund. When her check arrived in the mail, she said she trusted me again—but did she? She might have thought I waited to see if she would notice it before I cashed it myself. That's the way Pearl's mind works. Earning her trust might take more time than you have left with her."

"Can you see her? If anyone can help, it's you."

"There is nothing I can do until she calls me. If I call her, she'll know you called me, and that will be the end of her trust."

I called Eugénie and told her what happened.

"Well, I'll be damned." Eugénie had a way with words.

"Pearl liked you. Could you have a heart-to-heart talk with her? I think she'll be at Jodi's tonight, around the corner from you. You'll remember her from Wreck Beach." I gave her the address. "Tell Pearl, or Jodi if she isn't there, why you left me. Please do it for her."

"All right, but she might not recognize me in clothes."

I called Father. "Let us know if there is any way to help. And thank God she isn't pregnant."

Eugénie called back. "I saw Pearl at Jodi's."

"Thank you! What did she say?"

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“She was wound up as tight as a drum. At first, Jodi didn’t want to let me in, but I talked her into it. Pearl wasn’t interested in discussing anything. I think your ability to influence her life even after she walked out, like sending me there, distressed her. I told her that my leaving you had nothing to do with you and everything to do with me. Pearl said only that she doesn’t want to see you again.”

“I see. I’m not going to tell anyone what happened. Otherwise, if she returns, it will make recovery harder.”

“I thanked her for signing for our divorce. Lunch on Monday?”

That weekend, I kept myself busy, with tools in my hands and Whisky at my side. I hoped that Pearl would discuss her feelings with her family. I knew I would be taking a risk if Pearl returned without accepting that she had a problem and agreeing to therapy—it was only a matter of time before she had more delusions and disappeared or became dangerous; she had spoken about revenge as if it were justified whenever hearies wronged deafies. Nevertheless, I resolved to take her back unconditionally.

I was still so stunned by her accusations that I couldn’t feel how much Pearl must have been suffering in order to develop, live with, and act on her bizarre thoughts. Why had Pearl’s friends been neutral? Did they believe her stories? I thought of calling her mother, but I worried that if I did, Pearl would never trust me again.

On Monday, at work, I could hardly function. I called our doctor, who gave me an immediate appointment.

“I think the world of Pearl,” she said. “But this episode doesn’t surprise me, after your fertility test episode. Try calling Dr. Foreman, a signing psychiatrist. If Pearl calls me, I’ll help, but I doubt she will because I’m also your doctor and therefore part of the greater conspiracy.”

I telephoned Dr. Foreman. “I can hear the lump in your throat through the telephone. I am booked for two months, but I will ask my colleague, Dr. Sholokhov, to see you.”

Sholokhov agreed to see me immediately. In his office, I told him what I knew about Pearl.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

He said, "I won't diagnose Pearl without meeting her, but it sounds like she is responding abnormally to normal situations, and so she is struggling with a personality disorder. Dr. Forman's research for Gallaudet has shown that deaf children are far more likely than others to develop behavioral problems, and one in four has moderate to severe psychiatric issues. If her delusions and volatility are caused by past traumatic experiences, then therapy might help her to reconnect with reality if she is willing to try it. Does she chew her nails?"

"Yes! I have *never* seen her with full fingernails. We've tried Tabasco, garlic, manicures, and gloves. Nothing worked,"

"That's a sign of anxiety. Most deaf people enjoy their lives as much as anyone, but those who are anxious are more likely to develop paranoia because the communication gap makes it hard for them to trust hearing people. If she is paranoid, she views your love as an attempt to exploit her. New experiences reinforce old beliefs. However, as long as her conscious mind was focused on a powerful goal, such as having a child, Pearl could suppress her subconscious. Perhaps the question is not why Pearl ran away but why she was able to give you three years."

"She gave her last two partners three years, too."

"There is another possibility: schizophrenia. I don't think she has schizophrenia because she is able to work, and she hasn't been violent. How old was she when her delusions began?"

"In her teens, Pearl starting thinking her mother killed her father. That's all I know. Her family hasn't said anything about her history."

"I'm sorry to say, but family silence is a schizophrenia indicator."

"What is schizophrenia?"

"It's a brain disease characterized by a distorted perception of reality that leads to life-disrupting behavioral problems. It is biochemical with an inherited foundation, but it also takes environmental factors to launch it. Sufferers usually develop it in their teens. It changes their personalities, reduces their abilities, and shortens their lifespans. Have any family members ever been diagnosed with a mental illness? Or convicted? Most prisoners have at least one mental illness."

"Not on her mother's side, but I know nothing about her father's side."

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“Congenital rubella—German measles—deafness, discrimination, loss of a parent in childhood, trauma, and family dysfunction are environmental factors.”

“Pearl has most of those. Could you help her if she saw you?”

“Not until she accepts she has a problem that is damaging her life. A good psychiatrist with willing patients can make a significant improvement in a third, make some improvement in a third, and make no improvement in the other third. The patient’s willingness and trust are the keys, but paranoid people are hypersensitive to what they can’t help but think are lies. If she has schizophrenia, we have drugs that should stabilize her thinking, but they have side effects and will have to be taken for the rest of her life. She is unlikely to take them voluntarily. In the meantime, I suggest you take care of yourself.”

Pearl’s behavior made more sense to me now, but I began to feel less hope for Pearl and our relationship. I tried to help make things right, so I booked a series of appointments for us with Dr. Foreman starting in two months, his earliest available slots.

At lunchtime, I bought a dozen red roses and wrote on the gift card:

Pearl, I love you.

Please, get help.

You need it.

Love, Derrick.

I cared enough for Pearl to say what had to be said, and no one else seemed to say. I drove to Jodi’s. She opened the door, magnificently pregnant.

“Congratulations! Is Pearl here?”

“Pearl is not here,” said Jodi.

“I need to see her. Please give her these flowers.”

Jodi smiled. “Pearl doesn’t want to see you.”

“Tell Pearl I love her.” I handed the bouquet to Jodi and left.

That weekend, I drove the jeep to my parents’ home.

Over dinner, my mother said, “I wanted to help, so I called Pearl’s

Part III: Divided by Destiny

mother today. I'd never called her before. She would only say Pearl's first marriage ended the same way. It was the shortest call I ever had."

I was stunned—none of Pearl's family members had warned me about her past behavior. I accepted they didn't want to cut off any opportunity for her, but their failure to advise me only made life worse for everyone, including Pearl.

Two weeks after Pearl left, on Friday night, I received a TTY call:

```
DERRICK HERE GA  
PEARL HERE HA GA  
I LOVE YOU GA  
PLEASE COME AND GET ME GA  
YES WHERE ARE YOU GA  
AT MOTHERS HOUSE I MUST LEAVE TONIGHT PICK ME UP GA  
THE LAST FERRY IS ALREADY GONE I WILL ASK MY FATHER TO  
PICK YOU UP YOU CAN SLEEP WITH THEM OVERNIGHT AND THEN  
COME HOME TOMORROW GA  
OK I WILL WAIT FOR YOUR FATHER GA  
WONDERFUL I LOVE YOU  
SK
```

I was overjoyed! I called Father. He was happy to collect Pearl. After two hours, my mother called.

"Pearl's here! Your father drove so fast, he was stopped for speeding. He told the cop he was rushing to help a mentally-ill woman, so he let your father off!"

"Did he speak to Pearl's mother?"

"No. Pearl was standing outside in a leather jacket on a winter's night. She was still shivering when she arrived here. I made her some Ovaltine, and we had a short conversation. 'Why are you doing this?' I said. 'I don't feel safe,' she said. 'Derrick loves you,' I said. I said you aren't dangerous, but she didn't believe me."

"If she thinks I'm dangerous, then why did she call me tonight?"

"Because her mother threw her out! I said you're like us; we can't hurt anybody. She started to cry, so I hugged her. I lent her a nightgown,

Part III: Divided by Destiny

and when she came out of the bathroom, I kissed her and tucked her into bed. She seemed relaxed.”

“What was the look on her face?”

“Distant.”

In the morning, Father called to say he was about to drive Pearl to the ferry terminal, and she did not want me to pick her up when she arrived on Bowen Island. I tossed all the Paladin books into the stove.

Two hours later, Pearl walked in the door. I hugged her, but she felt limp. She was wearing a new, expensive sheepskin bomber jacket. Despite her haggard face, I told her how beautiful she looked.

“Gavin told me to leave. Then Mother told me to leave. I was curious if you would help me.”

Curious! Her words hurt. I realized that she had come home because she had nowhere else to go, and it was free.

“Are you back home to stay?”

“I need to think about it. It is my turn to do the chores.”

My office Christmas party was the next day. Pearl came with me, but she ignored me except when she needed an interpreter, and she avoided having her photo taken. Everyone could see our marriage was on the rocks, even though I had told no one.

We worked on the house with renewed vigor, especially Pearl.

I did my best to calm her and show my love. I sat next to her while she watched television. I held her hand while walking. I took her on a Bowen Nature Club cruise to see the seals, puffins, and whales. But her behavior had changed. She slept with her purse and kept it in view at all other times. She delayed depositing her paycheck into our account until the day before the mortgage was due. She removed the telephone bills from our mailbox.

Pearl mentioned casually, as if it were none of my business, that she had an appointment with “a counselor” that her friend had recommended. I needed to drive to Vancouver, so I offered to drop her off. She wouldn’t give me the address, only an intersection; then she stood on the corner until I drove out of sight.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

The telephone rang. I picked it up, heard a TTY, and signed that the call was for her. I put the handset on the kitchen counter because she had to pick up the second phone before I hung up the first phone, or else the connection would drop. Pearl walked to the visitors' room to use the TTY, and, for the first time, she closed the door. Her purse lay on the counter. I had only to glance in it to see a card for a Resource Centre for Abused Women along with the missing telephone bills.

When Pearl came back after her call, she saw me sitting at the kitchen table and looked at the counter.

"Why didn't you hang up the telephone?"

"I forgot. Please hang it up now."

"You were listening to my conversation!"

"No one can understand TTY tones. You need a machine."

"I know you listened to me! How much did you understand?"

"Call your interpreter friends. Ask if they can understand TTY tones. Do it now!"

Pearl took her purse to the visitors' room and returned a few minutes later, now calm. "I called the Message Relay Centre. They said normal people can't understand TTY tones. But you are not normal."

The telephone rang again. "May I speak to Pearl?"

"No, you can't. She's deaf."

"I'm *so* sorry. I'm calling about the house for rent."

"A woman is calling about a house for rent."

"I'm not interested," signed Pearl.

"She's not interested." I hung up. "What was that call about?"

"That is my business." Pearl crossed her arms.

Pearl surprised me with a visit to my office. She didn't come to my desk, as usual, but stood at our reception counter.

"Why did the bank downstairs refuse to talk to me about our time deposit?"

"Our deposit certificate is at home. What do you want to know?"

"I wanted to discuss it with them, but it is in your name only."

"Of course. Otherwise, you would need to come to the bank to sign a new one every time the old one matured. We're married, so it doesn't

Part III: Divided by Destiny

matter whose name is on anything.”

“You must prove it. Come to the bank with me now!”

I went to the bank with Pearl to satisfy her that our deposit, worth less than her ring, was there. It was obvious she was preparing to separate.

On her thirty-fourth birthday, I took Pearl to the sushi restaurant near my condo, where we had eaten when our adventure began.

She rubbed her hands together.

“It is so cold outside, the streetlights have halos like angels.”

“This restaurant reminds me of past happiness. Remember when we ate here, motorcycled, scuba dived, and made love on the carpet?”

“Everything is different now.”

“I don’t understand why everything is different.”

“Yesterday, I was shocked when I discovered everyone in your office knew we had a marriage problem. Everyone was staring at me to see which hand I was wearing my wedding ring on.”

“I told my boss, but no one else. I’m sorry I didn’t buy you a birthday gift, but you didn’t deposit your paycheck, and you bought \$2,000 worth of clothes.”

Most of the expense was one purchase at a leather boutique five days after she ran away, probably for the jacket she was wearing.

“I accept the clothes I bought for myself as your gift. You can buy me matching shoes and chocolates.”

After dinner, we drove to Robson Street, but we had to park far from the shopping area. We walked back in the icy air, holding gloved hands as we wandered from shop to shop, gazing at luxury goods we couldn’t afford.

I bought Pearl a box of chocolates, and she took me to the boutique where she had bought the jacket. She chose a matching pair of shoes. I paid with our credit card and told Pearl to wait while I fetched the truck because it was far away, it was freezing, and we had a ferry to catch. When I drove back to the shop, Pearl climbed in and slammed the door.

“You are clever. Fuck—*Fuck*—*FUCK!*” She was livid.

I couldn’t understand what I had done wrong. Everything I did caused conflict.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“I’m trying to be nice. I wanted you to be warm.”

“You can’t fool me. You set this up to search my purse!”

“You always have your purse with you.”

“I left it under the seat so I could walk with my hands in my pockets to keep them warm.”

“That’s a stupid place to leave a purse! Your car was broken into before. You’re not thinking straight.”

Pearl turned away from me and crossed her arms.

“Do you want to go to the Bowen Island New Year’s Eve party? Let’s try to be happy on New Year’s Eve.”

“I already bought tickets for Jodi and me.”

I was stunned. “You bought tickets without your husbands, and you didn’t tell me?”

“Gavin’s busy. And you won’t understand us when we sign fast.”

“I want to be together on New Year’s Eve. I’ll buy tickets and invite my sister Lydia and her husband, Shawn. They can stay overnight.”

“I don’t care what you do.”

“Can we dance?”

“We can decide later.”

On New Year’s Eve, Pearl picked Jodi up from the ferry and drove directly to the party. I picked Lydia and Shawn up from the next ferry. The ferry, dusted white by snow, sparkled in the dock’s floodlights.

By the time we arrived, there were no empty tables, so we sat down with Pearl and Jodi. They ignored us and signed in high-speed ASL at one end of the table while we talked at the other end.

“This is how Pearl looked the night Dad rescued her,” shouted Lydia over the din.

“Be careful talking when you face that way. Jodi lipreads.”

“Did you know Mom and Dad signed up for a sign language course?”

“That’s wonderful!”

Lydia leaned her head on her hands to cover her mouth. “Does she still think you are trying to kill her?”

“I don’t know. Ask her tomorrow, woman-to-woman. I’m sure she won’t talk to you tonight.”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

At midnight, to the song “Auld Lang Syne,” I hugged Pearl and Jodi, but they pulled away and danced together. Lydia, Shawn, and I left first, Pearl and Jodi a few minutes later. We had to park at the bottom of the driveway and walk up through the snow with flashlights. Lydia and Shawn slept in the visitors’ room. Jodi slept on the sofa.

New Year’s Day was beautiful. While Pearl and Jodi were in the barn doing the chores, Lydia and Shawn walked into the kitchen.

“Shawn jammed a chair under the doorknob for security and stayed awake half the night,” said Lydia.

His eyes were bloodshot. “I don’t mind meeting the reaper, but I want to see her coming.”

Pearl and Jodi ignored us, so Lydia and Shawn left without ever talking to them. Pearl invited Jodi to stay another night and asked me to sleep in the visitors’ room so they could have the king-sized bed.

At bedtime, while they watched TV, I took Jodi’s coat from the visitors’ room and put it next to her. Pearl exploded.

“Look how he controls me! You are my witness!”

Jodi, like all Pearl’s friends, did nothing to help us as a couple. We had no network of common friends, so we had none to help us through tough times as a couple but plenty to help us survive on our own.

The telephone rang the next morning. “Are you alone?” said Father.

“Jodi and Pearl are in the bedroom,” I whispered.

“Lydia and Shawn filled me in. Listen, Pearl could shoot you with your gun and say it was in self-defense. She’d have a good story after the allegations she’s made. Your mortgage and insurance would pay out, and she’d have it made. Get rid of your guns!”

“I never thought of that. But if Pearl notices the guns have gone, she might think I’ve disarmed her as the next step in my evil plan and try killing me first.”

“Then unload them, and hide your ammunition.”

Snow fell upon snow. The weight of the snow pressed the boughs down like arches, turning the driveway into a tunnel of white. I put chains on the truck tires and parked it at the bottom of the driveway next to the road. For two weeks, Pearl and I commuted, on our separate shifts, by

Part III: Divided by Destiny

walking up and down the driveway in the snow, with groceries in our backpacks and flashlights in our hands or teeth.

“I’m going to the store,” Pearl announced one evening.

She dressed warmly and walked out into the night, down the driveway to the truck. An hour later, she returned with a carton of milk.

“We don’t need to buy cow milk. We have goat milk.”

“I wanted to rent a movie, but no players were left. I saw Arlette in the store, and we talked.”

“We also need to talk. Would you like a margarita?”

Pearl nodded. I mixed the drinks. “Cheers. I think we have three choices. One: we continue to live like we are living now. We share our house but live separate lives.”

Pearl shook her head.

“Two: we separate and divorce.”

“Do you want a divorce?”

“No. Three: You see a doctor. I can go with you if you want. You can’t live with suspicion about everyone. You will never be happy. You will never have a family.”

Pearl finished her drink in one shot. “I want children!”

“Then you must see a doctor.”

Pearl burst into tears. “I’ll kill myself.”

“No!” I tried to hug her, but she sat as if paralyzed.

“I have a counselor.”

“Sometimes, we should see her together. May I call her?”

Pearl nodded and gave me a card from her purse. The address was far from where she had asked me to drop her off.

At bedtime, I walked downstairs to stoke the stove and saw Pearl poking pages from a notepad into the fire. I retreated before she saw me.

In the morning, I called the old counselor on the card Pearl gave me. She would only say that Pearl was no longer her client. I thought Pearl had much to gain by my calling the new counselor at the Resource Centre for Abused Women whose name I had seen on the card in her bag, so I called her, too.

She was indignant I had called and became rude when I told her Pearl’s mental health was deteriorating and she needed care. When I said

Part III: Divided by Destiny

she didn't need to take my word for it, but she did need to call Pearl's mother and the RCMP, she hung up on me.

If I told people that my wife had tried many times to kill me, they would think I was mentally ill, and if they cared for me they would refer me to a doctor. But when Pearl told people that her husband had tried many times to kill her, they thought she was sane—and someone had referred her to a center for abused women. In the 1980s, there had been a backlash against abuse of women by men, so whenever a woman said she was being abused by a man, she was invariably believed—and if there was no physical abuse, then there must be psychological abuse. This was ideal for women who really were being abused and who needed emotional support and separation from their abusers, but it worked against Pearl, who was not abused but mentally unwell and needed diagnosis and treatment: because I was male, I was silenced, and Pearl's delusions were reinforced.

Pearl was furious I had called her counselor. "I'm shocked! I said you could call my old counselor! My new counselor is private!"

"That means she can't help you. You need a counselor who talks to your family."

"How did you find out about my new counselor?"

"Your calls to her were on the telephone bill."

"But I didn't bring our telephone bill home."

"I asked the telephone company for copies, to pay the bills."

I asked Pearl for the bus schedule. I saw *S. Sgt. Zaharia* written on it in unfamiliar handwriting. "Who is this?"

Pearl looked embarrassed. "He is Laurent's boss. Laurent refused to arrest you, so I complained to his boss."

I telephoned Staff Sergeant Zaharia from my office.

"I'm glad you called. Your wife keeps coming to our counter making allegations about you, Laurent, the RCMP, and the West Vancouver Police. She's been in here four times, each time more agitated. Can you call her off?"

"What allegations? That I'm trying to kill her?"

"That was the first time. Now she says you're running drugs from

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Mexico by motorcycle, but we know you haven't crossed the border in three years. Something is wrong with her. She needs help."

"I don't know how to help. She pushes back everything I try."

"When we suggested she see a psychiatrist, she became hysterical and had to be escorted out the door by two constables. I see a pistol is registered to your address. I recommend Laurent store it, for your safety."

I called Laurent. "I just spoke to Staff Sergeant Zaharia. He told me what Pearl's been up to. Can you store my guns?"

"Sure. You'd be surprised how often I store guns for couples."

"I'll bring them tomorrow after Pearl gets on the 5:30 ferry."

"I'll have coffee. Don't forget to wrap them; if you walk in here with a gun in your hand, I'll have to shoot you."

That night, Pearl elbowed me in bed because she wanted to talk. "Where are the bullets?"

I stared at her, dumbfounded.

"The gun has no bullets. Why did you remove them?"

"For our safety. How did you know?"

"I tried to shoot a tree, but nothing happened. Why did you remove my protection?"

"We have too many arguments now. We might fight."

Pearl nodded weirdly. I was terrified. I waited until I heard her sleeping before I allowed myself to sleep.

I called Laurent from work the next morning.

"Where the hell were you? I waited an hour, so I was late going on patrol."

"While I was talking to you yesterday, Pearl tried to test-fire the gun, but I'd already unloaded it. She's probably more paranoid now. The tension at home is driving me nuts!"

"Derrick, I used to admire you, but I feel sorry for you now."

I called Arlette. "I'm calling to ask for your help for Pearl. Can we talk?"

"What *right* do you have to call *anyone* about *Pearl*?" she hissed.

"She's my wife. She needs to see a doctor, but I don't know how to get her to one. Did she tell you about the RCMP? Can you help?"

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“What *we* talk about is between *us!*” Arlette hung up on me.

The telephone rang. “Derrick, this is Franco, the drywaller. I heard you were selling your house.”

I felt like I was being gaslighted. “We’re not selling our house!”

“That’s not what I heard, but if you change your mind, call me.”

The atmosphere at home was explosive. When the telephone rang a few days later, I heard TTY tones and signed, “For you.” Pearl went to the visitors’ room and closed the door.

After Franco’s unnerving call, I wanted to know if Pearl was selling our house, so I put an office Dictaphone next to the kitchen telephone and recorded the tones.

When Pearl came out, she signed, “Please call my dentist to make an appointment for me. It is hard to make appointments through the MRC.”

Later, I played my recording into our TTY and could read every word. Her call was from a deafie in Los Angeles with whom she was planning to stay for a month.

Pearl was planning for life on her own.

At morning chore time, I left the footpath floodlights off to enjoy the moonlight bathing the snowy landscape. I stood at the top of the hill and looked down. The barn looked like a spaceship on a chalk planet, a life-support vessel under the stars. I walked down, turned on the lights, and squinted until my night vision left me. I did the chores, but Mouse ignored his feed.

I called Gus. “Mouse won’t eat. He’s standing in front of his manger and shifting back and forth.”

“Damn serious. I’ll be right there.”

“I’ll leave the barn lights on. We’ll be at work when you arrive.”

When I returned home, Gus’s Subaru station wagon was parked next to our truck at the bottom of the driveway.

Pearl was cooking. “Something is wrong. Gus’s car is here, so I didn’t do the chores. I waited for you.”

I put my overshoes back on, Pearl put on her farm clothes, and we walked to the barn. I was still in my suit and overcoat.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Gus and Donna were watching their daughter walk Mouse around a brown circle trodden into the snow. Cigarette butts lay everywhere. Country music on the barn radio added to the surrealism.

“How is Mouse?” I signed and said.

“We brought a vet from the mainland. It’s colic. What did you feed him?” said Gus.

“The same as always: alfalfa-timothy, Buckerfield’s horse mix, vitamins.”

“The vet put his arm up his ass,” said Donna. “He gave him an enema. He poured oil down his nose. He gave him drugs. No difference. Walking him is all we can do.”

“He’s hurtin’,” said Gus. “Appaloosas are tough, though. Maybe he’ll pull through.”

“Poor Mouse!” cried their daughter, massaging his belly.

At morning chore time, I found Donna walking Mouse. A thermos bottle stood atop a fencepost. “He keeps lying down and kicking. Next time he goes down, I don’t know if he’ll get up.”

When I arrived home from work, Gus was sitting in our kitchen, drunk. Pearl leaned against the counter, frustrated and furious, not knowing what to do with him.

“Dead!” Gus shouted, his voice slurred.

“I’m sorry.” I felt like an undertaker with a bereaved family member.

“Gone to the great Trout Lake in the sky. I need another drink.”

“Don’t give it to him,” Pearl signed. I didn’t interpret.

“I have only two beers left.” I opened them both, taking one for myself. “To Mouse,” I signed and said, holding up my can.

“He’s lying in your field. Tomorrow he’ll be frozen solid. I wanna bury him there. I’ll make a deal with Eddie for his backhoe.”

When I did the chores the next morning, I saw a gray mound dusted with snow in the corner of the field. Mouse rests under Trout Lake Farm today.

“I decided to move out. I work on Saturday, so I will leave on Sunday.”

I knew it was futile, but I signed, “Don’t go. Stay with Whisky and me.” I hugged her.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

She stood stiffly and didn't hug me. "I am sorry. It will be hard for you in winter. You must care for the animals and keep the fire burning every day. Please stay away when I move. Arlette will come at four o'clock to help me."

"I will stay here while you are moving out because we must agree on what you take. Will you return?"

"I need to think. Everything changed after I discovered who you are. It is hard for me to explain my feelings to you."

"Let's see Dr. Foreman together. He helps couples. He signs, too."

"You go. There is nothing wrong with me."

"Will you stay at Arlette's after you leave?"

"That is my secret. I am taking the truck. I need to be independent."

"Is that why you wanted me to buy the jeep? Were you planning to leave four months ago?"

Pearl walked into the visitors' room. I heard the tapping of keys, so I put the Dictaphone next to the kitchen telephone, lifted the handset, and tape-recorded the TTY tones. When I was alone, I played the recording into the TTY and learned that Pearl would move in with Arlette, but she would store her furniture with Arlette's friend, Bruce.

On Saturday morning, the alarm clock rang at 5:25 a.m. I tapped Pearl on the shoulder to wake her up for work and changed the alarm time for me to wake up for the morning chores. As I rolled over, Pearl tapped me on the shoulder.

"Why do you look sleepy? What were you doing while I was asleep?"

Even though it was our last full day together, I worked on the house as I had done every Saturday for three years. Saturdays were important because the Building Centre didn't open on Sundays in winter.

Pearl brought home a dozen empty cardboard cartons. She made dinner, and we ate in silence. While she packed her life into boxes, I followed her, both to spend a few more minutes together and to see what she took. She rolled back the futon and browsed through the boxes stored under it.

After Pearl packed her articles, including her conch, she took some of my electronic items out of a box and set them aside.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“You bought these during our marriage.”

It was as if she had been briefed on how to divorce.

“I bought all those when I was a student.”

I found a note she had written to me when we first met. As I began to read it, she snatched it away.

“All writing is mine!”

“The notes I wrote to you are yours. The notes you wrote to me are mine.”

I insisted on keeping that treasured souvenir. I grabbed her arm, snatched back the note, and put it in my pocket. Pearl shattered the silence with a scream.

“I’ll call the police!”

“Shall I call for you?”

“I will push the button on the emergency dialer.”

“Then the ambulance and firemen will come, too.”

“I will call Laurent myself.” She sat down at the TTY in the visitors’ room but didn’t bother to close the door. I watched her type:

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MESSAGE RELAY CENTRE GA  
THIS IS PEARL KING PLEASE CALL 5555212 AND GIVE MY  
MESSAGE TO RCMP LAURENT GA  
WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE GA  
COME NOW BERRICK HURT ME GA  
PLEASE WAIT MESSAGE RECEIVED BY PAGER 5555212 GA  
THANKS SK
```

“Laurent gave me his pager number.” With a smirk, Pearl resumed packing, calm again.

I put *The Joy of Signing* in her box. She handed it back to me. “Maybe you will need it someday.”

“I will never sign again.”

A tear ran down Pearl’s cheek.

She went to the family room and stared at the pictures leaning against the wall. “Some pictures are missing.”

“That’s impossible. You can see three years of dust.”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I lifted a picture, exposing a brown line of plywood surrounded by telltale white.

“Where you took one away, you put new dust to cover the line.”

Pearl browsed through the other rooms and took her fair share. We went downstairs to the workbench. She turned on the fluorescent lamp and shivered. She searched my tools and the rows of jars filled with nails and screws. She packed the antique telephone her grandfather had given us. She inspected the motorcycle, its tires long flat.

“You bought new tires!”

“They’re worn out! I bought those in Tucson. Do you want them?”

“No. Where is Laurent? I called him a long time ago.”

“He knows I won’t hurt you, so he’s giving us time to stop arguing.”

Our last night was like any other. Pearl slept beside me, giving me false hope that, after spending time in her deaf world and thinking things over, she might want to make things work.

How Did You Find Me?

On Sunday, 17 January 1988, Pearl left for good. I woke up at 6:45 and did the chores.

When I returned, she was stacking cartons by the door.

She packed her clock radio and started dividing our pens, paper clips, and erasers. She stared at the little piles.

“Where is my roach clip? I demand to know where you put it!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. You never smoked pot here.”

“You lie!” Her hands were shaking with anger, and she started to babble incoherently. “You hid my roach clip ... I see ... *now* I understand ... your goal ... *aha!* ... later, we’ll see.” She sneered and took three computer diskettes from the drawer. “I will take these to be sure you cooperate. I don’t want you to make trouble.”

“Keep them. I have copies. You are blackmailing me. I don’t like it.”

Laurent arrived, in civilian clothes, twelve hours after Pearl paged him.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“Pearl paged me last night.”

“Derrick twisted my arm.”

“It looks fine. I see you’re moving out. Where are you going?”

“To Arlette’s,” she signed. She took some paper and scribbled on it.

Behind her back, I said, “She’s going to Arlette’s, but her stuff is going to Bruce’s. Is he OK? I don’t want her to have trouble.”

Pearl turned around before Laurent could answer and handed her note to him so I couldn’t see it. Laurent read it.

“Derrick already knows. He said Bruce’s name.”

My discovery made Pearl erupt. “Virgil is a cocaine dealer!”

“Derrick, is Virgil a cocaine dealer?”

“He was, but he retired many years ago.”

“Derrick searched his house with a detector! We rode to Mexico to bring cocaine to Virgil. I flew back, but he rode home alone.”

“If he hurts you, call me.” Laurent had had enough. As he walked out, he said over his shoulder, “I don’t respect betrayal!”

Pearl had lost her credibility because of her distorted view of reality, but until now she had kept her integrity and Laurent’s respect. Now she lost both by snitching on my friends—irrespective of whether her statements might be true. Police look down on turncoats even if they find their information useful.

Whisky barked, and Arlette walked in. I put on my coat and sat by the door like a customs inspector while Pearl and Arlette walked back and forth carrying cartons to our Nissan and Arlette’s Toyota. It was just above freezing. I didn’t help—I didn’t want to feel responsible for what might happen next.

“I hope Pearl will thank you for helping her out of her marriage and her future,” I said without signing. “I’ll help if she *returns*.”

Arlette said nothing. All of us had grim looks on our faces. The women piled the sofa sections on top of the cartons, tied down the loads, and left without a thought for Whisky and me. The way people treat their pets speaks for them; Pearl abandoned Whisky as easily as she abandoned me, as if she had never loved either of us.

The house was silent except for the refrigerator. I put a Bach cassette in the player—now I could enjoy music without guilt.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I telephoned my father.

“Pearl’s gone,” I stammered.

“I can’t tell you how much it hurts to hear those words. Do you want us to spend the night there?”

“That would be wonderful.”

“Is there anything we need to bring? Did she take the TV?”

“Of course, she took the TV, but I don’t want a TV.”

“Don’t do anything. We’ll get the next ferry.”

I had planned to attend a performance of the Purcell String Quartet that evening, but I called Hans, the island’s impresario, to say I couldn’t attend, and I told him why. He suggested I read the Psalms, starting with Number 23, *The Lord Is My Shepherd*.

My siblings phoned me one by one to offer their support. I reloaded the gun in case a posse of deaf vigilantes like those in Pearl’s stories paid me a visit. A few hours later, my parents arrived with groceries and a portable TV.

Mother hugged me. “It must hurt. Your eyes are red.”

“I can’t believe she’s done it! Pearl’s flushed her future down the toilet!”

“Do you think she was frightened by killing your own meat?”

“No. She’s a country girl.”

“You are better off without her unless she gets treatment,” said Father. “And even if she *gets* treatment, you are better off without her. Her mother said her first marriage ended the same way, so now we know she’s been seeing things her own special way for a long time. *Don’t* try to get her back. *Don’t* give her anything.”

My mother looked out at the moonlit landscape. “It might’ve helped if you’d installed curtains.”

In the morning, I filled the stove and lit the tinder with one flame from the lighter. I looked through the grate at the flicker of light on the corner of a newspaper, gliding across the paper, devouring the kindling, snapping through the sticks, and then roaring over the rounds of hemlock and alder. The flue thermometer rose as the stovepipe moaned. I remembered the first time Pearl and I had built a fire in that stove,

Part III: Divided by Destiny

assisted by a cup of paint thinner.

I walked through the fresh air to the barn to do the chores and enjoy the friendship of the animals that Pearl would never see again. When I returned, my mother had made breakfast and MJB coffee and was busy organizing the kitchen.

I called my boss to ask for a day off, and he gave me a week. “I thought Pearl might go because, at the Christmas party, she asked if she could visit us alone. I’ll let you know if she ever comes.”

I called Clifford. He advised me to cancel our credit card, take half the money out of our joint account, open a new account in my name, deposit my paychecks to my new account, change my life insurance beneficiary, change the locks, and get receipts for everything I give her.

I canceled the appointments I’d made with Dr. Foreman; we’d missed the first one by two weeks. I redirected my mail. I wrote to Virgil and asked him to call my parents’ telephone on a specified date and time.

I passed my bereavement week cleaning, repairing, taking sympathetic telephone calls, throwing sticks for Whisky, and listening to the Moody Blues. I did the evening chores with a beer; cans stayed cold in the frigid air. I sat with the animals and wondered how much longer I could be with them. I listened to the cat scratching in the loft. A barn is always restless, even at night. I returned to an empty house.

The telephone rang. “Derrick, this is Arlette’s husband. I’m trying to set up Pearl’s caption decoder. Which connector is the input, and which one is the output?”

I told him I couldn’t help without seeing the decoder, which was true, but he told me to stay away.

Sister Nadine visited, and I took her on a scenic gravel roads tour in the jeep. When we stopped at the General Store, Arlette walked out and stared at her as if we were dating. I wondered what she would tell Pearl.

I drove to my parents’ house to take Virgil’s call. I updated Virgil on the recent events.

“Another one bites the dust. You *do* have trouble with women,” Virgil laughed. His laughter was one of the reasons we had remained friends for half a lifetime, and it drained the strain of the past months

Part III: Divided by Destiny

from me. My parents stared as I laughed with him.

“Pearl told the RCMP you are a dealer. That’s why I thought you’d better not call me at home. My address book, with your name in it, has disappeared. Pearl must have stolen it.”

“I got nothin’ to hide. When are you coming to Snowslide? We could do some drugs, have a party.” Virgil burst into contagious laughter. “Life’s too short to be paranoid. I used to be paranoid, too, but I got over it when my cocaine was all used up!”

I received a call at work. “This is Sheehan, solicitor for Pearl,” said a raspy voice. “What is the name of your solicitor?”

“I can’t afford a solicitor.” Eugénie and I hadn’t used lawyers when we divorced, and I didn’t see why I needed one now.

“Mr. King, I advise you to retain counsel. It is against professional ethics for me to talk to another lawyer’s client. I need to know his name so that I can set up an exploratory meeting to try to resolve any issues we may face in drawing up a separation agreement. An interpreter will be provided by the Western Institute for the Deaf.”

“Pearl wants this done after just two weeks? I will represent myself.”

“My client wants a separation agreement as soon as possible because there is a ... lack of trust.”

“Is that because I’m trying to kill her or because I import drugs?”

“I didn’t hear that! You will hear from my secretary shortly.”

A storm battered the island. Rain machine-gunned the windows and skylights. Wind rubbed the trees together, so they moaned like cellos, pushed the warmth out of the house, and flipped the doghouse on its side. Sleep was impossible. The next morning after chores, I changed into my suit, overcoat, galoshes, and gloves and rattled down the hill in the jeep just before dawn. The steering wheel jerked back and forth as the tires rolled over debris. A fallen tree blocked the driveway. I abandoned the jeep and hitchhiked to the ferry.

That afternoon, sleep-deprived, I walked from work to Sheehan’s. Pearl, Sheehan, and an interpreter were waiting.

“This is the first time I’ve had a certified interpreter to talk to my wife,” I signed and said.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Pearl's eyes alternated between my hands and the interpreter's hands. "Only talk! Your signs are confusing me."

I had to sit on my hands to stop myself from signing.

"Pearl wishes to be separated," said Sheehan. "As you are both working, have no children, and have been married only two years, there is no alimony. You take back your premarital assets and divide any property acquired during the marriage."

"I don't want to be separated. I want Pearl to come home."

Pearl was still for a moment. "No."

"I love you. There is no need for you to run away." I pulled my hands out from under my legs and held them out to her.

Pearl turned away from me. "You know why I can't return."

"No, I don't know. It doesn't make sense."

"Mr. King! The purpose of this meeting is to agree on a separation agreement. What you two do *with* it is not my concern. Pearl proposes that you keep the jeep, and she keeps the truck. The difference in value will be taken into account."

"I need the truck! I have to carry feed and firewood, tons of it."

"My client is willing to transfer the title to the house provided she receives half its equity. The question is: how much is an uncompleted house worth?"

"I updated our appraisal last month, for insurance. \$118,000. Pearl knows that."

"My client arranged her own appraisal: \$112,000."

I was astounded by how difficult Pearl, or perhaps her advisors, was making her own life. "I accept Pearl's valuation."

Pearl started to cry. "You know all about business, so I have to protect myself."

"Let's take the average. Finally, my client would like to split her legal fees and costs with you. She wants to remain friends."

I threw my hands in the air and laughed.

Pearl had been avoiding the ferries I usually took, so I left work early to catch the ferry that she usually took. I found her sitting in the passenger lounge.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I sat down beside her and smiled. “Hello.”

“Hello.” Pearl did not smile.

Passengers glanced at us.

“You are beautiful, but you look exhausted.”

“You look tired, too.”

“There are things we should discuss. Will you come to the pub with me?”

Pearl shrugged. “OK.”

It was raining when the ferry docked. Pearl followed me to the pub, keeping her distance.

“What do you want to discuss?”

I took a bank draft from my pocket. “I cashed our time deposit. This is all of it—\$3,000. Take it. You need it. Please initial the receipt.”

“Quinn told me not to sign anything.”

“Quinn? The fingerspelling lawyer who made our wills?”

“I changed lawyers. I don’t like Sheehan now.”

“Take the check. You need it because I must cancel our credit card.”

I took my credit card from my wallet, broke it in half, and put the pieces on the table.

Pearl stared at me, eyes like plates. “You can’t do that!”

“Take the check. I love you, and you need it. I am trying to help you as much as I can, but I have to protect myself.”

“That’s awful! You are mean!” Pearl burst into tears.

I pushed the draft across the table. “Then take it without initialing the receipt. Fuck the lawyers.”

She pushed the draft back and stared at me with piercing eyes. “You told Laurent that I smoke marijuana and I need to see a doctor!”

“I only told him you need a doctor.”

“Now I see why you took my roach clip. You gave it to Laurent to prove I smoke marijuana!” Pearl shook her head violently, tears pouring down. “You told Laurent I need to see a psychiatrist.”

“It’s true. Did he talk to you about it?”

Pearl trembled like a boiler about to burst. “I know you told him because when I went downtown, all the policemen were staring at me!”

Pearl ran to the counter, threw some money down, and ran outside.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“Is something wrong with Pearl?” said the barmaid.

I nodded. “Things haven’t been right for a long time.”

Alan sat next to me on the ferry and put his hand on my shoulder.

“Rose invited Pearl for dinner. During dinner, we were stunned by the depth of her hostility toward you, and even Laurent. We told her it is inconceivable that you are dangerous and preposterous that Laurent is crooked. But nothing we said made any difference.”

“I hope that if she gets the right help, she’ll recover. But Pearl’s problem is that she won’t seek the right help, and she won’t trust anyone whom she hasn’t chosen herself, a Catch-22.”

“Did you know she moved out from Arlette’s?”

“Already? Why did she leave so soon?”

“They realized Pearl has a problem, a nervous breakdown, they think, and her husband refused to have anyone unstable around their kids.”

“Where did she go?”

“She’s renting a room in a bloke’s house. Rose worries he won’t be able to keep his hands off her, but we promised not to tell you where they are.”

“Don’t tell me. Hint.”

Alan looked out the window. “Such blue water today.”

I smiled. “Thanks.”

Each month, a truckload of grain passed through the animals, and a truckload of firewood passed through the stove. By March, the feed and the firewood had run low. Pearl had taken the truck, so my father helped me to buy a cheap GMC pickup with a failing transmission. With Whisky in the back, I looked like a redneck.

On my way to the barn for chores, the cat blocked my path and meowed. She led me into the forest to a rotten log where four kittens were nestled inside, squeaking like mice. The cat curled up around them and purred like a motor, proud to show them to me. I picked up each kitten one by one, savoring the magic of a Bowen Island morning.

Leo came to visit while Maria was in Mexico. I picked him up from

Part III: Divided by Destiny

the ferry on a cold, clear day, walked him around the property and lake, and took him on a jeep tour of the fire roads up to the Mount Gardiner summit with its view of Point Grey. As we stopped beside the microwave station, Leo pulled a joint from his pocket and lit it. An eagle circled over us so closely that we could hear its feathers slicing through the air. I folded the windshield forward and started the jeep. We drove back to the house, enjoying the wind in our faces. We did the chores together and listened to music from the old times.

In the morning, I drove him to the ferry. Pearl walked off the ferry as he walked on. As she passed my jeep, she signed, “For years, I never saw Leo—now he comes! Why?” She didn’t pause for an answer.

I found Pearl’s first divorce documents in the kitchen; she had overlooked a drawer when she packed. I became curious about what Pearl’s mother had meant when she told mine, “Her first marriage ended the same way.” I still had our second TTY, so I could use it to talk to her first husband if I could reach him. I called his divorce lawyer, outlined our situation, and asked him for his former client’s telephone number.

He soon called me back and told me he had just called his number to get permission to give it to me, but his mother, who was hearing, had taken the call and said, “It is in the best interest of all parties if my son has no contact with Pearl whatsoever.”

I heard a truck coming up the driveway. Whisky didn’t bark, so it had to be Pearl. I opened the front door. Pearl climbed out of the truck, ignored Whisky, walked halfway to me, and stood in the rain.

“I need my old telephone. The telephone where I live doesn’t fit my TTY.”

“The old telephone was in my condo before you met me, but you can have it. Come in! I love you!”

“You lie!” Pearl burst into tears and ran back to the truck. “You are awful!”

The tires sprayed gravel as she drove away. I looked down the hill and watched her turn west, toward Bluewater.

At twilight, I put my old telephone in the GMC and drove to the

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Bluewater neighborhood. I cruised up and down the lanes in the mist in a truck Pearl wouldn't recognize. Before long, I caught a glimpse of blue at the crest of a driveway. Pearl had parked the truck behind some trees but had not been able to hide it.

Pearl was looking out from the basement through a sliding glass door as I approached. I offered her the telephone. She took it, cringing, the way an abused dog recoils when touched.

I reached out to hug her, and she froze. She let me hug her, but she was limp.

I stepped back.

"Come home. I love you."

"You know why I can't do that." She was trembling.

"I don't know why. You are safer at home than you are here."

"Go!" Pearl stepped back and locked the door.

Scapegoat kidded, and the sheep lambded. Alan and I disinfected, docked, disbudded, and castrated. A few days later, I arrived at the barn for morning chores to see Mothergoat standing with a leg sticking out of her vulva. I called Alan. He rushed over to help me try to save her life.

"Crikey!" exclaimed Alan. "She's exhausted."

We used Scapegoat's kid as a model. Alan oriented the bleating kid behind Mothergoat until it matched the protruding leg. "I think we are looking at a foreleg."

Alan wrapped a rope around Mothergoat's neck, forelegs, and ribs to improvise a harness. I took off my coat, rolled up my sleeve, poured cooking oil on my arm, and slid it into her womb past the protruding leg. I reached in past my elbow, groping, trying to visualize what I was feeling. Mothergoat bawled and squirmed, and Alan struggled to hold her still.

"The pressure in here is *unbelievable!* If I stop pushing, my arm will pop out like a cork. I can't figure out where the head is."

"Hurry before she dies and we lose our jobs. My colleagues are beginning to think I'm eccentric."

"Shit, I just poked out an eye!"

"A landmark! Good show! Carry on!"

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“The mouth must be here somewhere. Ow! Teeth—I cut my finger! The tongue! ... I’m pulling the mouth. Look!—her sides are widening. He’s turning around. Easy ...”

My arm slipped out, followed by the head of the dead kid. Mothergoat delivered the body onto the floor. I cut the umbilical cord and carried the corpse into the forest.

An old friend, Oona, came to visit. I picked her up at the ferry, treated her to lunch at the Snuggler, and took her on a tour in the jeep. I showed her the house, and we walked the trail to the lake. We skipped stones across the lake and watched the trout breaching.

When we walked back to the house, a car was parked in the driveway. I hadn’t locked the house. Pearl was standing in the kitchen with a real estate agent. Pearl glared at Oona; she had no idea who she was. Oona covered her face with her hands, embarrassed.

“Pearl asked me to look around,” the agent said.

“This house is not for sale,” I said without signing.

“What did you say?” signed Pearl.

“Nothing,” I signed.

Pearl stormed out with the agent.

I flew to Amsterdam for a three-week business trip. I left the farm under Alan’s care and left Whisky with my boss. Whisky jumped for joy when I picked him up after I returned.

“Whisky was a good experience for the kids,” my boss said, “but we’ve decided not to get a puppy.”

“I’ve accepted a transfer to Holland, a two-year contract. I’ll clear my head. My parents will rent my house.”

My boss smiled. “I knew. You impressed some people there.”

“I’ll start in November. That will give me time to complete the west wing, but I’ll need another loan.”

“I’ll authorize it. It will be good for you to leave. Pearl came for dinner last week. You should have seen the look on her face when Whisky greeted her! She spoke his name, the first time I’d heard her voice.”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

“Good! Were you able to help her?”

“No. And because Whisky was here, I couldn’t avoid telling her you were away. She asked when you would return. I said you’d be back tomorrow, to avoid her taking advantage of your absence. She revealed nothing of how she feels or what her plans are. Before she left, she came to what was surely the purpose of her visit: she asked me how much money you could borrow! I said you are already borrowing the maximum.”

I began the countdown to my departure. I worked at my job, finished my MBA, and did what I could to finish the house. At night, I enjoyed time with my four-legged friends in the barn.

While painting the ceiling, I fell and broke my left arm. I called the ambulance and was ferried to the hospital. When I woke up, I had a cast from my hand to my shoulder. I had horses, sheep, goats, a dog, and a cat to care for, a house to finish, a woodstove to feed, and a job to do—with one arm. I was back at work the next day, wearing short-sleeve shirts and no tie. Groggy from opioid painkillers, I did the chores and continued finishing the house with my right arm, carrying tools in my belt pouch and holding nails in my teeth.

A few evenings later, I saw Pearl on the ferry. I sat down opposite her, my arm in a cast in a sling.

“Let’s have hot chocolate,” I signed as best I could with one arm.

“Only if you promise no arguing.”

When the ferry docked, she followed me off the gangway and up the hill to the pub.

Pearl sat as stone-faced as a statue. “You sign first.”

“I broke my arm. It hurts. I have to steer the jeep with my legs while I shift gears. It’s hard to climb the hayloft ladder with one arm.”

“Everyone is looking at me. Why don’t you sign the separation agreement?”

“After you refused to take the \$3,000 draft, I gave it to your lawyer, Quinn. I told him it was all we had. Now he says I told him it was only *half* the money. That’s why.”

Pearl sniffed back a tear. “I don’t trust hearies anymore.”

Part III: Divided by Destiny

I paid the bill. We walked out, followed by curious eyes. As we stepped into the cold, I asked Pearl if I could kiss her goodnight, but she ignored me.

She walked to her blue pickup truck and drove away.

Laurent sat down next to me on the ferry.

“I’m being transferred to Toronto,” he said with a sigh. “By the way, Pearl’s accusing me of stealing her little black address book.”

“That’s *my* address book! I don’t have a copy, so I’ll lose some of my friends.”

“She used to wave it around in the detachment. She thought it supported her accusations. Then, she couldn’t find it anymore. She thinks I swiped it. Imagine that!”

I smiled. “Thanks, Laurent. I saw her walk off the ferry and into Luisa’s car. She’s the agent who sold us the house. I went for a drive and saw her truck parked in front of Luisa’s. That’s her third home in five months! Her wandering is heartbreaking.”

“I feel bad about Pearl. There is no way forward for her. Either she recovers, realizes what she lost, and becomes depressed, or she doesn’t recover, remains delusional, and thinks she’s a survivor.”

“Imagine how she must feel, thinking everybody is against her, even those who love her. Terrified? Betrayed? Revengeful? And to have the urges—and the advisors—that tell her that the best solution is to run away from those who love her, even though they are the people who most care for her.”

I wrote a letter to Quinn offering a fair split. He ignored me, so I paid Clifford to contact him. Clifford reported Pearl was now convinced I was hiding money, so she wanted, beside her previous demands, \$20,000 plus half the meat in our freezer. Her demand for money was outrageous because she knew that if we had money, we would have finished the house.

Clifford urged me to settle because there was no telling what she would do next. He promised to include a non-molestation clause in our agreement wherein we each promised not to disturb the other, the

other's friends, family, and colleagues, and the RCMP.

Down the Road

I sold my condo to raise the money to meet Pearl's demand and to complete the house for my parents to rent.

At the end of June, I signed two documents: our separation agreement and a petition for a no-fault divorce to be used in one year if Pearl hadn't returned. The law had changed to permit no-fault divorce after one year, not three, as from Eugénie. I paid out Pearl. I was separated and insolvent.

I sold our camper, used once. To clear Pearl's items from the basement, I called Bowen Freight. Two movers came. I gave them a packing list, pointed to the items, and asked them to deliver them to Pearl at Luisa's house.

"Is this all? Do it yourself, and save fifty bucks."

"I can't. Our separation agreement has a non-molestation clause, and I need a receipt or a witness. Please deliver her stuff to her personally, and ask her to initial the packing list. If she refuses, be my witnesses."

The movers took Pearl's goods and left. A week later, I called them because I had heard nothing about the delivery.

"Where is Pearl's stuff?"

"At Luisa's. Pearl didn't sign the receipt."

"Was Pearl home when you delivered the goods?"

"Maybe. Her pickup was there, so we put her stuff in it. It was raining, so we put a tarp over it. No charge for the tarp."

"Do you mean Pearl found her stuff sitting in the back of her truck in the rain? She'll think I dumped it there to say, 'Fuck you.'"

"Sorry, but we didn't want to see her. We've been hearing strange stories."

I borrowed as much as I could to finish the house. I hired the best contractor I could find to do the framing, walls, ceilings, fireplace, and concrete floor. I did the wiring and plumbing, installed electric heating,

Part III: Divided by Destiny

and installed a Jacuzzi. The work took four months, but everything was on time, on budget, and done well. I was getting the job done, but without Pearl, my heart was no longer in it. We had learned from our mistakes, but Pearl would never benefit from our expensive education.

As I leaned over the ferry railing, Luisa brushed past me. “Go to the smoking lounge. Wait for me.” She walked away without pausing. I walked upstairs and entered the smoking lounge.

Luisa lit a cigarette.

“Pearl was living with me. I wanted to help her, and she could babysit my kids for free. But she’s out of her goddamn mind!” The others in the lounge pretended not to listen. “Holy *Jesus*, she’s nuts! She threatened my kid’s eye with a pencil! I shouted at her to get the fuck out of my house. I don’t want her crazy shit near my kids. I told her to take all her crap and go.”

It hurt me to picture the scene and hear Pearl was so lost, always running down the road, always away from danger, never finding sanctuary.

Gus asked me to join his Bowen Island Pentathlon team in a relay race for riding, running, swimming, canoeing, and cycling. He was the rider; I was the runner. I called Eugénie and invited her to Bowen Island to see the race. Our team came in last. Eugénie enjoyed the event and my jeep tour and was impressed by the property. The woman I once loved was visiting me, yet the woman I still loved was avoiding me.

The Bowen Island Country Fair marked the end of summer, and it was my father’s sixty-fifth birthday. My parents, brother, sister-in-law, and their baby visited for the occasion. It was a perfect, sunny day. Children had their faces painted while adults browsed stalls and played tug-of-war.

We were eating at a picnic table when my mother shouted, “Oh, my God! Derrick! Look behind you!”

I saw Pearl in the distance, alone. When she saw me, she stopped and stared at me with a faraway look on her face.

“I haven’t seen Pearl since she moved off the island a few months

Part III: Divided by Destiny

ago.”

My mother waved to her. “I *must* talk to her.”

Pearl walked toward us but stopped several meters away.

Mother walked to Pearl and hugged her. “Don’t *do* this,” my mother signed and said, struggling to remember the ASL she studied. “Derrick loves you. We *all* love you. Come back *home*.”

“Stop!” Pearl shook her head and walked away.

Mother returned to our table. “That’s not the Pearl I knew.”

“What’s she doing here?” said Father.

“I haven’t a clue. She has no friends left on Bowen.”

About an hour later, as we were standing by the bandstand listening to a jazz quintet, we saw Pearl in the crowd, still alone. None of us dared to wave. She walked toward us and, as she passed by my brother’s stroller, leaned forward to see her first niece. For her baby’s safety, my sister-in-law instinctively shoved the stroller beyond Pearl’s reach.

Pearl became manic.

“Psychological abuse! You gave me psychological abuse! I understand what you did to me! I’m so *mad*!”

We stared at her, as did other fair-goers. We were, for the first time, afraid to be near her.

Pearl turned and stormed off.

It was 27 August 1988. We never saw each other again.

The police called. “This is Corporal Argue from North Vancouver RCMP. Your wife is still coming in and harassing us about being in the drug trade. She never mentions you anymore; now she’s after us. We’d like to help her. Do you know anyone who can guide her to a mental health practitioner? Her doctor, a friend, a relative? How can we contact her parents?”

“Her mother lives on East Fourth, around the corner from you.”

“She told us her mother lives in Alberta!”

“She’s lying. Call me if there’s anything I can do.”

A couple of weeks later, I called Leo and asked him to search Pearl and me in the police databases.

He reported, “You have two records: when your dog was impounded

Part III: Divided by Destiny

and your wife tried to have you arrested. Pearl has a large file. She was recently arrested under Section 27.”

“What’s ‘Section 27’?”

“Section 27 of the Mental Health Act is for involuntary admission to a psychiatric facility for up to three days. Pearl accused her neighbors of theft and threatened them. The RCMP decided she was a hazard to herself or others, so she was admitted for examination. The record doesn’t say what happened after that because the police were no longer involved.”

“What impression does her file make?”

“Loony but harmless, not to be taken seriously. I saw her in the gym last week. Gold’s Gym is expensive—how can she afford it? I smiled, but she scowled and ignored me.”

My departure day grew closer. I savored each remaining day as the damp autumn grayness returned and the clocks were turned back to winter time. Every time I drove onto the Howe Sound Queen, I tried to be first so I could park at the bow, where I had an unobstructed view of the mountains and the stars over Howe Sound on clear nights while the ferry gently rolled. It was magic. I hated to leave. Pearl should have been with me.

I drove to Eagle Cliff and walked up to Stanley’s house, but the house had vanished as if it had never existed. Their trailer had been vandalized and was surrounded by weeds.

Alan and Rose took the sheep and goats to auction. As they led Mothergoat and Scapegoat away, Dream smashed through the barn door and ran after them; only the electrified gate stopped him from following his beloved caprine friends.

Dream’s owner came to walk him away. In two years, she never rode him once. I refilled the cat food, switched off the fence, and swept out the barn, now deserted except for the cat. I stared at the *DE MAL EN PIS* sign over the barn door, *From Bad to Worse*; how prophetic it had been.

I gave Whisky and the kittens away and sold the surplus fodder. Trout Lake Farm had earned \$12,000 from horse boarding plus \$5,000

Part III: Divided by Destiny

from meat and hay, less \$4,000 in expenses. It had consumed thirty tons of hay and grain, all of it handled by Pearl and me. It had been satisfying, unforgettable fun.

The finishing touch to the house was secondhand broadloom laid by a hippie who lived in a geodesic dome, drove a truck with a cedar-shake roof, and gave his customers marijuana.

My parents moved into the house and cared for it as if it were their own. They adopted the cat, had her spayed, and kept her on the porch near them instead of alone in the barn.

Bowen Freight shipped my goods. I walked around the property for the last time. I walked around the empty barn and listened to my footsteps on the concrete. I realized I hadn't heard my footsteps in the barn for years because the sound had been masked by bleating, neighing, and grunting, and by the clatter of horseshoes.

At the top of the upper field, I climbed up the chair I had carved into a stump, and smoked the joint the carpet-layer had given me. From there, I saw the grass grew greenest over Mouse's grave. I turned my collar against the wind and walked to Trout Lake.

In the house, I wandered from room to room, sad that Pearl would never see it completed. It was a wonderful house. The beast that had nearly swallowed us had, at last, been tamed.

My parents drove me to the ferry with my suitcases. The air was salty and crisp. Cormorants walked on the dock. Gulls and grebes floated in the marina. I took the ferry, then a taxi to the airport.

I arrived in Amsterdam like a sailor putting ashore after a storm, disoriented, unable to lose my sea legs. I dreamed of Bowen Island every night; I dreamed of Pearl every night. I had had the time of my life. After reaching the peak, one no longer needs to climb, so I lived to work now, instead of working to live. I lived the serial life Ralph had mocked.

I told no one about Pearl—who would believe our story? Every night, I bolted my apartment door to hide from the world. Dutch conversation excluded me as much as English conversation had excluded Pearl; I realized now how Pearl felt when I'd been too lazy to interpret.

I was miserable, hollow, unable to accept how our lives had blown

Part III: Divided by Destiny

apart; I was in denial. I wrote the first of three letters to Pearl, the longest and most passionate I had ever written.

I told her I wanted her to be with me, and I would stop the divorce if she wanted. I said I thought of her all the time and couldn't keep my hands still when I talked to people because the signs still came. I gave her my address and telephone number. I begged her to write or to call me via the MRC. I promised to send her a return ticket as soon as she asked me. I closed my letter with: Write or call me. Do it now. It's so important. I would marry you all over again because you were so wonderful for so long.

When my goods arrived, I watched my hands lift my former life from cardboard cartons. The first boxes gave up my stereo, music, and tequila. I poured a shot, then more. Memories flooded in as I unpacked. *There* were our whitewash-splattered overalls with barbed-wire holes. *There* was our meat grinder. I hung Pearl's overalls in my cupboard, cried for her, and collapsed.

I wandered the cobblestoned streets and looked for sign language, but the deafies in Holland were invisible. I saw Pearl's visage in every pretty black-haired woman. I would awaken in the middle of the night, worried I had missed her call. Never did I do the right thing: talk to people. All I could see inside a bar was acrid tobacco smoke and people who might make it necessary to talk about my past or to lie about it.

As Hans had suggested the night Pearl left, I read the Psalms, starting with Number 23, then the New Testament; but I remained a non-believer. I told no one about my past, except that I was divorced. Instead of talking to others about my life with Pearl, I wrote it down. From those notes, this book began.

Exchanging letters with Virgil comforted me. Our friendship had outlasted my marriages.

February 1989

Dear Derrick,

My spirits soared when I got your letter. You're off and running on a new adventure. Have at it. Don't go falling in love with anyone that isn't

Part III: Divided by Destiny

rich, and for that advice I expect to be supported for the rest of my life when you do marry a rich French woman. No reason for French except I like France and it would be great visiting your France country manor.

Don't worry about Pearl. Men are supposed to love and lose. Next time rich, nothing else—but if you get good looks with it so much the luckier. I don't take my own advice but Rhea does own a house of her own so she has someplace to go if it ends.

Winter has had its storms but all and all it's been fun and full of adjustments on both of us. One must have a city and country manor remember that Derrick.

I'm too stoned to write more. Soon I'll be down to one syllable words then Xs. Have fun and remember, Rich with a French accent, two homes, and good looks if it happens. Good luck.

Love, Virgil

The telephone rang in the middle of the night. I leaped out of bed and ran to the telephone, my heart pounding. She had read my letter!

"This is the Message Relay Centre with a call for Derrick from Pearl."

"This is Derrick."

"Where is the diamond ring appraisal? Go ahead."

"If I have it, I will send it to you. Go ahead."

"Someone switched the diamonds in my ring. Go ahead."

"That's impossible. Go ahead."

"Is there any other message?" said the operator, after a pause.

I felt devastated. I took a deep breath. "No."

In the morning, I found our appraisal, for \$9,325, but a pawnshop would offer much less. Her call meant that she tried to pawn her beautiful ring. I mailed the appraisal to Pearl with my second letter.

My second letter was shorter and more cautious. I told her I was waiting faithfully and there had been no woman after her. I urged her to write to me or visit me, and again I offered to send her a ticket. I told her I would always love her.

I didn't expect a reply. I felt guilty that it had taken me so long to see she was falling apart. Perhaps her Mr. Right had never existed.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Clifford mailed me a copy of our divorce certificate. Eleven days later, I received a letter from a lawyer stating Pearl was filing for divorce. Incredulous, I telephoned Clifford.

“Pearl’s lawyer doesn’t know she’s divorced! Now she’s asking that the separation settlement be amended to give her more furniture in return for the stereo in the truck, which she wants to mail to Amsterdam.”

“I’m not surprised. Your divorce was difficult. You didn’t know where Pearl was living, so serving documents by registered mail was impossible. A Process Server in uniform had to visit her place of employment, the post office, and ask the management to take him to her and to identify her. Then he had to confirm her identity from the photo you gave me. When he tried to serve her the documents, she became hostile, so he had to throw them at her feet. Imagine what her colleagues thought! Then he had to swear an Affidavit of Service. This is Pearl’s third divorce lawyer. I’ll call him now.”

Pearl had paid three divorce lawyers; Eugénie hadn’t paid even for one. Clifford called back to confirm we were divorced.

I wrote Pearl for the third and last time. My last letter was short. I told her we were already divorced, and that I had paid for it. I reminded her that divorce was not what I wanted; it was what *she* wanted. I told her I still loved her. I told her I wanted to hold her again, see her smile, and hear her laugh. I didn’t offer to send a ticket. I asked her to write.

November 1989

Dear Virgil,

I got a letter from Eugénie who said that Pearl had phoned her! She wanted to get together with Eugénie and discuss “all the awful things” I did to both of them. Eugénie hung up on her.

I went to Spain, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Norway, Sri Lanka, India, Maldives (12 scuba dives!), Nepal, and Pakistan. I wanted to look up my Spanish pen-pal, but her address was in my little black book that Pearl handed to the police, lost forever. In ten days I fly to Egypt and Kenya to spend Christmas alone. I’ll go overland to Tanzania and Uganda. I have a ticket to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and

Part III: Divided by Destiny

Burma in March.

I like being on the move. I like the sense of disconnection from the present, or maybe of leaving something behind. "He travels fastest who travels alone," said Kipling.

When not traveling I read, write, ride horseback, sail (a friend has a sailboat) and tinker with toys. I'd rather be cutting firewood or shoveling horseshit on Bowen, but that must wait.

Love, Derrick

My telephone woke me up; it could only be Pearl. The timing was surreal: just two months before her call, while traveling and lonely, I met the woman who would become my third wife. We had become engaged, and our wedding was set for next month.

If Pearl had called me before I had become engaged, I would have listened. If she had been asking for help, I would have given it. If she had been asking to reconcile, I would have sent her a ticket. I had never stopped loving her, but she called after I had given up. I couldn't talk to her now without being unfaithful to my fiancée. Why had Pearl waited so long to call me?

"Message Relay Centre with a call to Derrick from Pearl."

"How are you? I'm fine. Go ahead," said Pearl.

"I'm fine. How are you? Go ahead."

"I already said I'm fine. Why do you ask me again? Go ahead."

"Because it is four o'clock in the morning, and I'm sleepy. Go ahead."

"You did not call me. Go ahead."

"You never told me your telephone number. I wrote you many times. Why didn't you write me? Go ahead."

"You wrote me three letters. Go ahead."

"You wrote me no letters. I waited two years." If Pearl had been calling to ask for help or reconciliation, she would not have started the call by bickering. I had to estrange Pearl for my fiancée and our future children. I could never have imagined I would ever tell Pearl not to call me, but I said, "Please don't call me anymore." I hung up. I felt defeated by fate.

Part III: Divided by Destiny

A few minutes later, the telephone rang again.

“Message Relay Centre with a call to Derrick from Pearl.”

“Why did you hang up? I wasn’t finished yet. Go ahead.”

“Never call me again,” I whispered, and I unplugged the telephone.

Love for a Deaf Rebel

I reconnected with Pearl’s family thirty years later. We shared our knowledge of Pearl’s life and our independent research into her genealogy. Together, we learned the shocking truth.

Pearl had, most likely, inherited the foundation of schizophrenia from her father. There is evidence of dysfunction in almost every paternal family member over generations and similar traits in many of the women they married. Pearl’s bigamist, criminal grandfather, whose older brother died in jail, had at least eleven live births by four wives; one wife, married under an alias, was his half-sister. He had two wives pregnant at the same time. Four children died in infancy, and two drowned with him. Only four children outlived him. He gave up Pearl’s father for adoption and never saw him again. Pearl’s father was adopted by his great-aunt Ida, a blind Seventh-day Adventist.

Pearl’s deafness was, almost certainly, not from random chance but from her parents’ and grandparents’ rush to conceal her illegitimate conception from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of which her maternal grandfather was an elder.

In March 1953, Pearl’s twenty-year-old father, a salesman, made his nineteen-year-old girlfriend pregnant. Her family decided they must marry before the birth, but an Adventist pastor could not marry a pregnant woman. This prohibition was side-stepped by marrying before her pregnancy was visible.

Their large wedding was held on 29 June in the hamlet of Peoria, her hometown, when Pearl’s mother was three months pregnant—a “shotgun wedding.” That is when Pearl’s mother caught rubella—German measles—probably from one of the dozens of children at her

Part III: Divided by Destiny

wedding. There was now an eighty percent chance Pearl would be born with birth defects ranging from deafness to fatal heart disease.

After the wedding, Pearl's parents moved to tiny Bruderheim, 500 km away, for about nine months. Pearl was born there on Christmas Eve, 1953, deaf from congenital rubella syndrome. The family's hide-the-pregnancy ruse had succeeded, but Pearl's hearing had been destroyed.

Pearl's childhood was a happy, loving one, as Pearl and her family all attested, but she was always paranoid, accusing people of speaking or snickering about her behind her back.

As she grew up, she would lash out in brief incidents. Her minor episodes increased in frequency and severity. At about thirteen, she violently attacked her five-year-old brother.

Her father's death, when she was fourteen, was a terrible blow. Although he was a hard-working family man, he raced stock cars, drove recklessly, and was fined for speeding. At thirty-four, he was promoted, and for one year, the family's future looked bright. But at thirty-five, he killed himself and injured three of his children by racing against his wife's car. He was thrown out of his car, which crushed him. Despite a police report exonerating her mother, Pearl became convinced her mother had deliberately caused the accident.

At sixteen, Pearl threatened her mother that she was going to get a gun and shoot her. Her mother sent her to psychiatrists, but Pearl would only see those who didn't question her stories, so she didn't get the help she needed.

At seventeen, Pearl was raped. She and her sister had gone to a dance. Pearl had agreed with her mother that she would go home with her sister, but when it was time to leave, she said her friend, a hearing man, was going to drive her home. The RCMP called at 5:00 a.m. to report that Pearl was in the hospital after being raped and left on the road. Her mother picked her up a few hours later. The rapist was sentenced to five years. Pearl had been raped in an acquaintance-rape, not in a gang-rape as she had told me. There had been no abduction, no other men, no surgery, and no physical scar.

Deafie friendships bored Pearl. She would meet hearies, who would

Part III: Divided by Destiny

be intrigued because she was vivacious and pretty, and they would make her the center of attention. But as soon as hearies accepted Pearl as an equal, she would break off their relationship. Because her hearie relationships never lasted, her mother encouraged her to socialize with deafies.

At twenty, Pearl attended St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute (TVI), where she met her first husband. She enjoyed her time there, and she matured. She was in a hearing environment that was accessible, through interpreters, and she was surrounded by hearies accustomed to seeing ASL. Pearl earned a one-year certificate as a Medical Laboratory Assistant, one of dozens of vocational certificates offered.

Nine months after she married, Pearl came to believe that her first husband was gay. She abandoned him and returned to Canada. Later, he remarried and had a son.

Her volatility increased. She would explode and rage, destroying things and threatening to harm others. She sent her mother shocking letters and messages, discovered in a box after her mother's death, that blamed her for everything and threatened her with harm, even though her mother loved her and had supplied support whenever Pearl had needed it.

At twenty-seven, Pearl moved in with hard-of-hearing Eddy, who was decent and showed no signs of a drinking problem. A year later, she became pregnant. It appears Pearl desired Eddy's baby for several months but then came to believe he was an alcoholic, so she aborted their child in her second trimester and left him. A late-term abortion is the most plausible origin of what she told me was her "gang-rape scar." Whether she came to believe her fabrication is unknown.

At twenty-nine, a year before we met, Pearl suffered the most violent episode known to her family: she went berserk in her condominium and destroyed most of her furniture and possessions. She rented an apartment across the street from me, and our love story began.

At thirty-seven, three months before she called me for the last time, Pearl was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Her mother made a declaration to the Supreme Court that Pearl had become incapable of

Part III: Divided by Destiny

managing her affairs because of mental infirmity. She lost the legal capacity to make decisions about her treatment, finances, property, and residence, and the Court appointed a Public Guardian and Trustee to make these decisions on her behalf. Pearl began lifelong treatment, lost her job, and began living on long-term disability and government assistance. She lives in a group home for deaf people. Pearl never had children, and we had been lucky that Frank's fraud had caused us to delay pregnancy; I hate to think what the consequences would have been if we had started a family—especially for our child.

The Resource Centre for Abused Women, and other misguided helpers like Arlette, had been a disaster for Pearl, reinforcing her delusions, “helping” her to leave the best life she would ever have, and delaying her diagnosis and treatment by two years. By then, Pearl had lost two husbands, two homes, three chances at a family, her last job, and her independence.

A few years after her diagnosis, Pearl's brother was also diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. He is unable to maintain relationships, and he lives on the streets.

At forty-five, Pearl was spotted by my parents in McDonald's, “looking like a burned-out shopgirl.” She turned her back on two people who had loved her and had tried so much to help her.

At fifty-five, Pearl joined a class-action lawsuit against the Alberta School for the Deaf. In her statement, she said her teachers had fondled, raped, and sodomized her in primary school. Although she had liked going to school, had done well in school, and had never previously mentioned childhood sexual abuse, Pearl now claimed, “school destroyed my life,” and because of her school, “she developed schizophrenia.” The lawsuit was denied under the Statute of Limitations.

Pearl's family knew she was unstable, had seen psychiatrists, and had been violent, but her family decided to withhold her history from me because they could see how much we loved each other, and they wanted to give her a chance to have a family. We all shared a deep love for Pearl, and if I had been in their position, I would have given her that chance, too. The secrecy, intended to support her, gave Pearl three happy years of

Part III: Divided by Destiny

remission followed by three terrifying years of struggle before she was diagnosed and obliged to begin psychotherapy.

While Pearl struggled with schizophrenia, I left hobby-farming behind, pursued my career around the world, had children, and prospered. Decades later, after the fields had reverted to forests, I sold the property to Rokus's son.

Could I have had my career with a deaf wife? Absolutely. With a wife so disabled by mental illness that she was unable to manage her own affairs, even with treatment? It would have been cruel to make her change environments, friends, languages, and doctors every few years; and it would have been impossible because many countries require clear health and police records for long-stay visas.

At the time that my relationship with Pearl was unraveling, and I was struggling to deal with the consequences, I didn't understand that Pearl herself was unraveling. Now that I know the truth, I feel sorry Pearl suffered for most of her life, thinking that the people closest to her were out to get her.

Watching Pearl collapse was like suffering the slow death of a partner with no way to say goodbye. I cherish all our years together, no matter how painful some of them were. It was an honor to have been her husband. We packed a lifetime into those years, and I have reunited with Pearl many times in my dreams. I loved a deaf rebel. I hope she has found peace.

Epilogue

It is so great to hear from you. We always liked you and thought you were the best thing to happen to Pearl. We often wondered where you were and how you were doing. We were so encouraged when you and Pearl got together. Pearl seemed so happy with you and we had not seen that before. From what we could see, Pearl truly loved you and we were hopeful that the life you made for yourselves would be just what Pearl needed.

I remember your place on Bowen Island and how excited we were for you guys; we couldn't wait to see everything completed. I never would have imagined Pearl living and working on Bowen Island, and I am amazed and proud of what she accomplished. Pearl was happy and funny and we had some great times before her illness took hold of her. It makes me sad that schizophrenia robbed her of what would have been a good life with you.

We struggled to decide whether or not to have a conversation with you about Pearl's history and felt it would be disloyal to do so. We thought this was a chance for her to have a good life and the children she talked about ever since she was a little girl. We also worried, from past experience, that you would want to confirm anything we said with Pearl herself. We had no idea how bad things would get and the price you would have to pay. We are sincerely sorry.

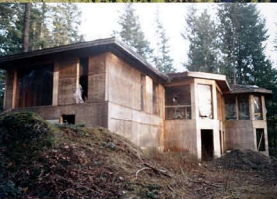
Pearl continues to struggle with schizophrenia, but as the years have gone by the doctors have been better at prescribing her medications. There were times when she was so heavily medicated there was no "Pearl" there. She acknowledges there's something wrong in her mind but not that her reactions or feelings are wrong, and she strongly believes she has been wronged from the time she was born. Sadly, the spark that was Pearl—the happy, joyful, funny Pearl—is gone.

About the Author

Derrick King was born in Newfoundland in 1954, a fifth-generation Canadian with a pioneer's gene for adventure. He earned his BAsC(EE) from the University of British Columbia in 1977 and his MBA from Simon Fraser University in 1988. He left Canada because of the events described in this book and never returned there to live. He lived in the Netherlands, Japan, Australia, India, and Singapore while raising a family. He studied at INSEAD in Fontainebleau and the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro and was seconded to the World Bank in Poland several times. He retired to philanthropy after 33 years with the same bank. He lives in Southeast Asia with his wife, where he motorcycles, scuba dives, and watches palm trees sway.

Also by the Author

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