Paradise Regained

or

"What Happened Next?"

by

Diana Hewett

The long-awaited sequel to *Owslebury Bottom*
by Peter Hewett

Contents

Since Peter published the book about his early childhood, *Owslebury Bottom*, many people have asked me what happened next. Peter had in fact planned a sequel to be called *Paradise Regained* and discussed it with me, but had not actually begun to write it when he died on January 11th 1992. I have been very reluctant to undertake the task, knowing that I have not the ability to write other than plain prose. I know what Peter would have said, but not how he would have said it.

Nevertheless, I have decided to do my best.

Diana Hewett
1998

Chapter 1

Childhood, early Oxford days

1922–1935

1922

Peter's father, Arthur Hewett was the youngest of a very large family and the only one of them to go on to any kind of education after the age of fourteen when he started at the Camberwell School of Art. He was very proud of being related to Charles Dickens, who was his great uncle. His father had been encouraged by relatives at the age of nine to write to his famous uncle, who wrote back to say it was a pity that at his age he had not learned to spell. Arthur married above himself. Florence's father Mr Jennings was editor of *The Builder and Decorator*, lived with his American wife Jenny and daughter Florence in an expensive house in Dulwich and kept a cook and housemaid. Arthur decided never to paint another picture but to make a fortune for his bride. Having been the runt of his own family physically, and beneath his wife socially, he was determined that his children should have a good education come what may, although being a totally incompetent businessman he was never able to provide his family with enough money.

After his demobilisation before the end of the Great War with suspected TB, Arthur got a job in London designing show cards, joining his family only at weekends. But by autumn 1922 they owed so much money that they had to flit – hence the move to London, leaving behind everything they could not carry.

1922–23

When the eight-and-a-half-year-old Peter found that his father had lied to him; that he was not on an unexpected holiday to London, but was there permanently, he was heartbroken. He had left behind everything he cared for – the Hampshire countryside where he had been free to roam – the butterflies, birds, flowers – his museum, his books, his dog. Peter didn't really forgive his father until he wrote *Owslebury Bottom* after retiring from teaching in 1974. Then, as he wrote, he began to understand why it had all happened.

At eight, though, he thought nothing could get worse. He was wrong. The family moved to a basement flat in the Hammersmith slums. At night there were screams and thuds as the man upstairs beat up his wife. Joan, Peter and Bill, the three children, were sent to Brackenbury Road Elementary School, where some of the big boys carried knives. Everything was dirty, rough and horrible. Peter was terrified.

In the dusty yard which was called a garden was a shed belonging to one of the upstairs tenants. Under it lived a feral cat whose front paw was permanently caught in its collar. It, too, was savage and no-one could approach it to release it from its torment.

Florence did what she could, but with hardly any money, and none of the fresh vegetables, eggs and fruit from Owslebury, she had nothing to cook, and they lived on faggots and chips from a shop down the road.

However, Joan did get her scholarship to a very good school, and in his turn Peter won his to Latymer Upper School. Meanwhile,

Arthur managed to get a slightly better job and they crawled out of absolute poverty, moved to a slightly better flat, and even had the use of a little garden. Peter and Florence shopped in the market for some bedding plants which Peter lovingly planted out. Each day he went out to measure them to see how they had grown...but the soil was so poor that they shrank over the weeks and eventually died.

Now Arthur received a regular wage they could afford proper food again. That Christmas, Arthur came home with an expensive paint box...for his boss's daughter. There was still not enough money for proper presents for his own children. Joan, who longed for just such a box, found his attitude difficult to understand.

For a while, Arthur worked reasonably well and life for the family was "ordinary". There was enough regular money coming in to allow a feeling of security. But he was not satisfied as he hated working for a wage. How could he make his dear wife a fortune that way? He began to spend much of the time when he should have been working playing whist with his friends. But to the family at home it seemed like the light at the end of the tunnel.

1928

Here is an extract from a diary Peter kept for a few days during a summer holiday in 1928 when he was fourteen:

August 28th: Up at about 7.50. Billy goes back to school today. Arthur *[not Peter's father, but a school friend]* arrived just before 9.30 am. We spent the morning partly in the garden making Japanese gardens on our rockery in the sunken garden. We made little paths, steps, etc. and grew tiny plants along the sides. We also made a pond of a dish-cover upside down with rocks all round the edge. Started making a long path of red brick. We spent the rest of the morning writing up the metal nickel in "The Book of Everything" (2 pages) after having made rough notes for the Universal Encyclopaedia, Donington Pears Encyclopaedia and "Chemical Arithmetic" by Sydney Lupton MA. After dinner Arthur rearrived and we continued the Japanese garden. It's looking jolly decent. Arthur did not stay to tea today. In the evening I drew a sketch of my father, from a photograph five years old. Mrs Pinnerch came over, but mum had gone to the pictures to see "The Unknown Rider". I started studying the Greek language and can already say the alphabet off by heart. Another fortnight before school. Got to bed pretty early 9.50.

September 4th: This morning I was up at 7.30 am. Arthur arrived at 9.30 am. We set off for Wimbledon Common at 9.45 am. We went by bus from Hammersmith and took our lunch. We arrived there (Joan, Arthur and I) at about 10.20 am and walked about a mile. We gave part of our egg sandwiches and 6d to some poor blighter who had had no grub for two days (so, at least, he said). Walked miles and miles through ripping country and woodland, and sat down several times to have some grub and fruit. I did a bit of sketching. We saw a windmill, fields and fields of heather and some splendid moss (some of which we took home to plant in our Japanese garden). Arrived home very tired at 6 o'clock and went to the Guild of Servers monthly meeting at 8 o'clock. After the short service ate refreshments, read "Humorists" and played whist with Mr Belcher, Mr Smith (the curate) and Brown. Got home at 10.45 pm and to bed, very tired.

Bill followed Peter to Latymer Upper, paid for by his godfather as he did not win a scholarship. I think Bill suffered all his life from being the younger brother of the pride of the family, Peter. Arthur and Florence were becoming convinced that Peter was special, and Arthur confidently began to expect that he had sired a second Dickens.

They had had a worrying shock when he was twelve and went down with rheumatic fever – Peter didn't remember all that much about it except the impression that his pillow was made of rock.

By the time he reached the Sixth Form Joan had left school and was taking a secretarial course. England was in the middle of a recession. Business was bad and Arthur lost his job. But a good friend of the family who was reputed to have become a millionaire in America came over on a visit. He was shattered to discover the straits the Hewetts were in, and insisted on making Arthur a large "loan" – just in time. After a long search they found a house in Bexleyheath behind which was a small single storey factory. To Arthur's delight he was to set up for himself again – the fortune was just round the corner. He bought two enormous machines with which to manufacture – print, colour and cut out – the precious show-cards which packed flat but could be assembled into a three-dimensional standing advertisement to go on shop counters – "Players Please" – "Stephen's Inks", or was it "Steven's Inks"? – and so forth.

Joan could work as the firm's secretary! Bill, at fifteen, was given the option – to stay at school and try for Matric. or leave and work as his father's salesman. You can guess which he chose! Peter was left behind in Hammersmith with friends to take his Higher School Certificate and try for university.

1929–30

Peter had been writing poetry since he was sixteen, although I don't know if he ever confessed as much to his school friends. Here is one written in 1930.

On a Tram-waiter

Roads sombres
smokeyness greys the yellow-grey heavens
shoddy clotheshops scarletrams brutal chrome-and-purple
posters gloomy sameness of passers by
women white faced and crimson-mouthed
men white jowled and crimson-pimpled
Lust and Greed struggling for supremacy:

horrors of overdressed sluts parading as humans
herding in vehicles, cattle-like, men ogling
bold-looks-returning, men arming their concubines
gripping their waists with dirty-nailed hands,
unshaven men jeering, hobbling of deformed monsters,
redolence of dust, grease, and fish-and-chips –

And in the midst, she lovelinessing.

He had obviously been reading Hopkins whose poems had been issued in a popular edition in that year.

Encouraged by his father, he had decided by then that he was going to write, and he filled notebooks with descriptions as he had tried to develop a style. I won't include much that he wrote during the next two years, as, like a pianist practising, he wrote similar descriptions over and over again until he satisfied himself.

1932

Here is one, written on July 11th 1932, aged 18:

A landscape of immense significance – expansive serenity its main virtue. The sky the palest blue-grey and extraordinarily wide, Hamlet's "wide and majestical canopy of heaven". A few fluffy swirls of feathery clouds thrown here and there – carelessly and unpicturesquely, but the main mass of evening cloud abreast. The sky edged on the horizon with a slightly greenish-blue wash – irregularly fitting into a nebulous watery suggestion of salmon mauve shading into an internally bright lemon-yellow. etc. etc.

It finished:

The first time I have felt mentally at ease and physically happy for two years. The whole of nature so immense and friendly that one both sinks and realises one's personality in touch with its entity.

It is easy to see the influence of his father on Peter's self-conscious work at this age. I have left out enough of the overblown description to make it possible to read – just.

Latymer sent Peter to try for an Oxford Scholarship at Christchurch and he was astonished but overjoyed to hear that he had been awarded one. It was for a small amount of money but Kent Education Committee agreed to top it up with a loan to be repaid after graduation. When he rejoined the family in Bexleyheath he found that, under Arthur's inexpert management, the new business was not doing well. The slump still meant that people were not spending money on advertising. Peter found it difficult to kit himself out with a few suitable clothes in which to go up to college, generally called "The House", where thirty-two members of his year had titles. Somehow, it was more or less managed, and in October 1933 he went up.

1933–34

He had been much influenced by his history teacher at schools who was a Marxist, and he soon joined the Student Communist Party – and fell in love with a St. Hilda's student two years older than he was, Peggy Moxon. Peggy was tall and also a Communist, sturdily built, well dressed, also reading English and blessed with a glorious head of red hair which she wore long. By her last year and Peter's first they were together, jointly leading the Student Communist Party and running the October Club. Life was almost perfect – but not quite. Arthur's business finally failed in 1934 and the family went bankrupt. Peter sent his scholarship money home to save their furniture. And Peggy was also being courted by

an older, richer and cleverer student, Arthur Wynn, who already had two first class honours degrees and was on his third. He had been studying in Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933 and had married the leader of the Young Communist League there so that he could bring her out of Germany and so save her life. Peter said she was a terrible woman who used to throw plates, and the divorce was going through. Peggy was quite unable to make up her mind which of the two, Arthur or Peter, she loved most.

1935

In 1935 she got her degree and went down, leaving Peter to start the next academic year as *the* leading Communist student. When the members of the Bullinger Club, an aristocratic drinking club at The House, wrecked his rooms and he complained to the authorities, he was told, "But that is what you want to do to *them*, isn't it?" Every Saturday, a gang of ex-public school boys at his college would get drunk and go round the college breaking windows, and every week the cost of repairs was put on the bills of all the students. Peter was not amused.

He missed Peggy very much and wrote her a poem *[see page 7]*.

I find it amazing that only three years separate the self-conscious juvenilism written when he was eighteen from this beautiful love poem written at twenty-one. I suppose now he was writing in the grip of real emotions rather than because he aimed to be a "WRITER"!

This Way Out

Times flash rush gush by us
tear gash our love in fragments segments
what crept, flies; dawdled, hurls; drawled, gabbles;
with our tiny joy in the midst of sorrow
love tonight work tomorrow
logic is pitiful thought no comfort
in the cracked world only us two
you, me; I, you.

So I can tell you nothing, give no help
sound no solution
the echo a blank
only this I bring
my love
love, my love for you
hare's love, lions love
is yours, this is for you.

Keep it for me, my only good
and hold it gently for a while
it is mine like my eyes
yours like your beauty
and when you go I shall go too
slip through the turnstiles while you look away
I shall be watching you and being there
long after I am gone.

Amputated I shall remain in woods or street
seeing you in the rain or sister's motion
for long and long
no choice.

So take my tiny signature as talisman
its will bound up with yours, and have your day
envy is superficial love is real
perhaps has found its way.

I see you as clear as tower in light
square on the skyline, solid where it stands.
I see my shivering, my hands
weeping for you throughout the summer night.

Chapter 2

Oxford, Party, Mosely meeting

1935–1936

1935

In 1935 I went up to St Hughs in early October to read Mathematics on an education grant. I had always wanted to be a teacher. How Peter coped with Peggy's absence and the fact that she and Arthur were both together in London, I don't know. She *did* visit him. That autumn there was a local election in Oxford and, as a loyal member of the Labour Party, I was helping out in one of the committee rooms – folding leaflets. Peter and Peggy swept in looking incredibly glamorous – much of a height it seemed – Peter with a shock of blue-black hair – Peggy a mass of glowing red hair piled high. They glanced round the room at us lesser mortals, asked if we were all right – and swept out again. I was dazzled.

One afternoon when I was drinking coffee in the Labour Club coffee rooms someone dashed in saying "Peter Hewett has had an accident on his bike!", but as I was not then aware of which Peter was which, I was not unduly worried.

It seemed to me that as I had attended an all girls' school and known mainly younger boys, my brothers' friends, I ought to find out what made men tick. The best way to do this, I thought, would be to accept any invitation to tea I was offered – after all, tea is a relatively safe meal and one can escape early. So, nearly every day I took tea with a male student. If he turned out to be as neurotic or boring as I suspected, I thanked him but must be back at St Hughs almost at once. If, rarely, he proved able to talk about something other than himself, I might stay a little longer, but we had to be back in college by 7 pm when the doors were shut – and anyway I needed to be in college for dinner. In those days I hadn't really learnt to talk much, but was a very good listener.

One student I found interesting was Andrew Filson. He had been a member of the University Communist Party but had defected and felt free to tell me a great deal about it, in particular about the underground members who kept their membership very secret. This got back to Peter and his comrades. I had been an object of suspicion from the first as my father had been a leading light in a conference in Oxford that summer and had taken a firmly anti-Communist stance. Our unusual surname, Spikes, made it inevitable that our relationship was noticed.

Then, at St Hughs, one of my friends, Ruth Kaye, said that she had been thinking of becoming a Communist but didn't know how to set about it.

"Don't worry" I said. "I can get a message to them". So I did.

From then on most of the daily party meetings seem to have been concerned with "What to do about Diana Spikes?" After a lot of consideration they decided I would be safer in than out.

Bernard Flood, son of the High Commissioner of Canada and a very beautiful young man, was deputed to approach me. I had, in

fact, already decided that this would be the next step for me, as no-one else, not even the Labour Party, seemed to be taking Hitler seriously. But I let Bernard take me for a long walk round Oxford to try to persuade me into agreeing to join. Actually, although tall and beautiful he was a very proper young man who would not ride a bike for fear of spoiling the crease in his trousers, so my eventual agreement had nothing to do with his charm.

I was asked to go to Peter Hewett's rooms in Peck Quad in Christchurch at four o'clock next day. I was playing in a netball match that afternoon and certainly had no time to go back and change my clothes, so I turned up, rather out of breath and glowing with health in my netball tunic.

There they were – half a dozen young men – lying back in armchairs, their long legs stretched out in front of them – and the most important was Peter.

"Would I join the Communist Party?" "It was a very serious matter, not to be taken lightly." "It could be dangerous." "Was I prepared to be shot for my beliefs?" "Was I prepared to work for the Party?" Finally I was admitted, on probation, subject to my attending weekly political education meetings and doing some research into political opinions in St Hughs. By the end of term there were four of us in college, Ruth Kaye, Sonia Mandlecorn, Peggy Tubb and myself.

We all decided to attend a Labour Club Saturday Hop in a church hall near Ruskin, the Trade Union College. Peter was there, looking important but not dancing. Sonia and I both fancied him and when a Ladies' Excuse Me was announced Sonia said, "Bet you a shilling to the Daily Worker Fighting Fund I dance with Peter Hewett first" and we both started off decorously across the hall; but Sonia was waylaid by a small Jewish comrade so I got there first.

Peter was very reluctant to dance but as I had to win the bet he had very little choice. I think he enjoyed it, as he spent the rest of the evening dancing with me and before the last waltz he had asked me out for dinner the following week. I would not have accepted had I known he had to borrow the money to pay for it.

He was honest, and told me he was still in love with Peggy but didn't know what the future of that relationship would be, and would like to see more of me.

The next day all the important members of the Student Communist Party called on Peter to warn him against me, but of course he didn't tell me this. I was used to men making play for me very early in an acquaintanceship and the fact that Peter did not made him different and more interesting. Peggy wasn't there so I decided to risk a broken heart and see him as often as I could.

He had no money at all – but before term ended we exchanged home addresses and telephone numbers, and I was pleased to find that he lived at Bexleyheath, only a few miles from my home at Blackheath.

After Christmas I invited him to tea. He turned up on my doorstep having cycled over Shooters Hill and refused to come in until I produced some dry tea – "or parsley will do if that is more convenient". He didn't at all mind admitting that he had forgotten he was coming to see me and had eaten a large raw onion with his bread and cheese lunch. Raw tea was available and, apparently, if he chewed it the smell of onions would be less noticeable – but as he didn't kiss me I couldn't see what all the fuss was about. Having got over that difficulty his visit was a success – my mother certainly seemed to like him.

The following week he rang up and invited me back to meet *his* family – a brave thing to do. They were still in the Bexleyheath house but as they were unable to pay the rent the landlord wouldn't do any repairs. The floorboards in the kitchen had rotted so we had to walk on the joists. Florence, Peter's mother, had just had all her teeth out and hadn't yet got replacements. The bare boards in the entrance hall were dusty and hanging on the wall was a sixpence-in-the-slot cigarette machine – the kind you used to find outside tobacconists: 6d bought 10 Players and they fondly imagined they were saving money.

Out beyond the dangerous kitchen, in the factory, Peter and Bill were working with chisels on an order for 5000 show cards which had been misprinted and cut; the small hole in all the @'s had been omitted.

After tea we played dictionary games around the cleared table, now covered in a plush table covering with tassels – but this was not something in which I was able to shine. Arthur was worried that I didn't seem to be enjoying myself and suggested a singsong round the piano. Florence played the accompaniment but as she never had time to practice it was punctuated by loud contralto curses when she hit the wrong note. Joan had a high, true soprano voice while Peter and Bill sang seconds. Unfortunately, I am tone deaf, as near as makes no difference, so had to resist Arthur's coaxing for me to join the group. They must have thought me very stuck up – but I wasn't – just astonished and inarticulate.

1936

During the Easter term 1936, I got more involved in the Student Communist Party so saw more of Peter Hewett. The Communist group in St Hughs was growing. The Labour Club and the October Club merged and membership rose to 1000 of the 4000 Oxford students.

I was invited to tea by Harold Wilson, whose mother knew my aunt, and we took a walk together – neither of us much impressed

by the other but doing our duty. He told me that he planned to be the next Liberal Prime MInister.

One of Peter's friends at that time was Francois Laffitte, the son of Havelock Ellis' partner. Havelock Ellis was then a famous psychiatrist who wrote widely, from a Freudian point of view I believe, on sex.

Peter was invited back for the weekend. Havelock Ellis was white haired and seemed very old, but impressive. His lady, Madame Lafitte, was much younger, foreign and glamorous – so Peter thought. When they had all retired for the night she came into Peter's bedroom in her negligée and, taking his hand in hers, explained in a seductive voice that she knew he desired her, but although she found him very attractive, she felt that it wouldn't perhaps be fair to Havelock were she to make love to such a young man.

After she had kissed him and left Peter was unable to sleep, so spent the night reading all Havelock's works, on bookshelves in his room.

This adventure had a formative effect on Peter. Thereafter he yearned for attractive women to to offer themselves freely for sex without his having to overcome his shyness to make the running. Sadly for him, most females believed then that men didn't like "forward" women.

This made life very difficult for him in later life. He felt that if *offered* sex without strings he must respond – yet as he grew older and women less inhibited and he *was* propositioned it was frequently by women he didn't find attractive. In theory he should have been willing and gratified, in practice he was just embarrassed.

I didn't particularly like Francois. He seemed to me to be very young for his age: he reported with great glee that he had sat next to a girl in the cinema who was wearing a *transparent blouse*!

That was a very political year. Mosely brought his Blackshirts to Oxford and we were unable to prevent him hiring an upstairs hall in Carfax for a meeting – to be ticket only. So we all bought tickets. We knew that the Oxford police were sympathetic to Mosely but that the Oxford bus drivers could be relied on. Town and Gown planned together. We were all asked to buy a copy of the Oxford Mail to take with us as we took our seats in the rapidly filling hall. An overflow meeting with loudspeakers was arranged downstairs.

Dons, lecturers and other important people occupied the front ten rows or so of seating – the rest of us sat behind. Uniformed Blackshirts wearing frighteningly large metal buckles to their belts stood, shoulder to shoulder, two deep all round the hall, while, in front of the stage, they were massed three deep.

Mosely kept us waiting. Each time we looked round, the Blackshirts had inched nearer, as if we were playing a terrifying game of Grandmother's Steps. The atmosphere became more and more electric.

At last and very suddenly, Mosely appeared in uniform from the back of the stage and gave the fascist salute. As he stepped forward to speak all the students raised and opened their copies of the evening paper and rustled them quietly. Mosely waited. As we lowered them he started to speak, at first quietly and seemingly reasonably – but soon he was shouting about "dirty Jews crawling from the gutter with knives between their teeth". Someone shouted, "That's a lie."

"Throw that man out," shouted Mosely – and his Blackshirts moved in.

I missed the next bit as someone behind me seized my metal legged chair from under me to use as a weapon and I found myself on the floor. By the time a very large bus driver in *his* uniform had helped me up a real fight had started using the chairs as weapons between the audience and the Blackshirts. I saw one little old lady who had armed herself in advance with a handbag full of coppers running round calling out "Show me a fascist!" and whenever one bent down to pick up a chair she would hit him over the head with her handbag. Someone shouted "Lead the audience out!" but the overflow meeting downstairs had heard over the loudspeaker what was going on and had decided to storm the stairs, thus adding to the confusion.

Meanwhile, Frank Packenham, now Lord Longford, had made his stately way to the platform and called out to Mosely over the three rows of his Blackshirt bodyguards still in position to guard their leader, "I am a senior member of this University. Call your men off and I will guarantee you a fair hearing" or words to that effect.

"Throw that man out" shouted Mosely, and several Blackshirts got Frank down and started rabbit-punching on the back of his neck. Frank went into that meeting a Conservative and came out a Socialist.

In order to keep the police busy, bus drivers who were on duty had begun, as soon as the meeting started, driving their double deckers round and round the roundabout in the centre of Oxford, thus stopping all the traffic from London to the West Country, and causing incredible confusion.

Phillip Toynbee (Polly Toynbee's father), a student at the house and a great friend of Peter's, came out of the meeting with his face covered in blood where he had been hit by a chair leg. "Don't wipe it!" we shouted at him, and dragged him into the hotel next door which contained a row of telephone boxes. "Ring the national

press! You take the *Times* – you get the *Guardian* – you ring the *Oxford Mail*. Tell them to send a photographer!"

Bernard Flood set off quietly but firmly to find a policeman of his own. His father happened to be in Oxford that day and mention of his name in a very cold voice persuaded a reluctant young bobby to go back with him into the meeting which had restarted with a very much reduced audience. Bernard demanded that someone be arrested for assaulting him.

"Oh yes, son," sneered the policeman, "and can you give me the name of which gentleman you accuse of hitting you?" The iron entered Bernard's soul. If, as some think probable, he spied for Russia thereafter, I think it probably the result of that evening. I have heard that he was about to be exposed when as a Labour Member of Parliament he committed suicide, but I think it much more probable that he couldn't bear to go on living after the death of his wife.

Mosely was still addressing the rump of his audience. Suddenly he caught sight of Phillip Toynbee's uncle, a mild, respectable Liberal, who happened to wear a beard.

"Throw that man out!" he bellowed again. He obviously imagined that anyone with a beard must be a Communist.

Meanwhile, while most of us milled around outside the hall waiting to catch Mosely coming out, a group of drivers and students went to the car park to find Mosely's armoured cars – removed the distributor heads and dropped them in the river. The rest of us were hoping to do the same for Mosely himself, but he slipped out a back way, and he and Diana Mitford swept past us in an open car accompanied by a large police escort.

Chapter 3

Indecision

1936

1936

Peter and I travelled back to London by coach together that Easter. His first book of poems had just come out, published by Laurence and Wishart, and he had been invited to have his photograph taken by a West End photographer (free) in case he later became famous. I went with him to give him moral support. The slight smile on his lips is the result of their just having powdered his nose to reduce the shine.

On March 31st, his 22nd birthday, we went together to a Labour Party meeting at Ladywell Baths, Lewisham, and, as he couldn't get home afterwards, he was to sleep on our very large sofa. Everyone else went to bed and we sat up talking. Eventually we made love, briefly. I guessed that he was feeling disloyal to Peggy, even though she still couldn't decide if she wanted him.

Probably one of the reasons I fell in love with Peter, as well as his being tall, dark and handsome, and having a wonderful voice, was that he had spent several months in getting to know me without trying to get me into bed. Most young men, then as now, seemed to have nothing but sex on their minds.

Of course, when we got back to Oxford, our relationship had changed. I took to leaving St Hughs very early in time to cycle to The House to wake up Peter at 8 am before his scout (a personal male servant who looked after the undergraduates on one staircase) brought our breakfasts under silver covers, having already lit the coal fire and cleaned the room. Peter was chronically short of sleep as he was engaged in political work for most of each day, from the daily Executive Committee meeting of the Party at 9 am in his rooms until maybe a public meeting in the evening – his record was 37 meetings in one week. When his college gates finally shut at 12.20 he and Phillip Toynbee generally played a fast and furious game of table tennis – then wallowed in adjacent deep hot baths in the dungeons. Only then would they sit down to write their essays, already overdue.

Although I probably saw quite a lot of Phillip Toynbee all the two years I was at Oxford as he was a Communist Party member and a great friend of Peter's, besides being in the same college, I didn't like him.

One of my St Hugh's friends, Joyce, a lovely gentle girl, and very beautiful, fell in love with Phillip and he soon became aware of this. He made an appointment to meet her in Peter's rooms in Peck Quad; she could hardly believe her luck and was overjoyed. When she got there the door was open but the room was empty. On the table, *open*, was Phillip's diary, in which he jeered at Joyce and sneered at her affection for him – left there on purpose for her to read. She was devastated and humiliated. I don't think she ever recovered while she was at Oxford. I was very happy to hear several years later that, soon after she got her degree, she married a Church of England clergyman and had five children. She must have made a wonderful clergyman's wife and mother.

Although I don't think I ever exchanged a word with Phillip until long after the war, we met almost daily and I think he knew I didn't think much of him, and he probably didn't like me.

Communist students in those days were very serious. "A Communist student must be a good student!" was our slogan. No-one must sleep around in an irresponsible manner. Each of us, if we found a mate, must be faithful, and no-one must get pregnant.

Not long before there had been a celebrated case of a fifteen-year-old girl who had been raped by half a dozen soldiers and made pregnant. Two wonderful women doctors had persuaded a surgeon to perform an abortion for her in hospital. Up to that moment it had been a crime to abort except in the case when the pregnant woman would die if the pregnancy continued. They were trying to change the law to make it possible also where the victim would suffer serious psychological harm if she was forced to give birth. This seemed to them a valuable test case. The surgeon performed the abortion in hospital, backed up by the women doctors. He was put on trial – acquitted – and this changed the law.

These two women doctors were special also. At that time it was impossible to get birth control advice unless you were married and probably unless you already had numerous children. But these doctors would see young female students, fit them up with a cap and ointment – then the safest method – and give them good advice.

So as soon as a couple got together that term, starting with ourselves, the female half would be sent up to Harley Street to be "fitted up". We knew that if anything went wrong, which was unlikely, we could go back for help.

Peter and I were now making love whenever we could. Luckily the authorities seemed to be under the impression that couple could only copulate late in the evening and in a bed, so no-one bothered about protecting us from ourselves in the morning, or in a punt, or on cushions on a floor.

Peter was now in his last term at Oxford. In those days students reading English had to take Responsions, a fairly easy examination, at the end of their first term, and then nothing more until the final examinations at the end of their three years. The result was that for about two years they lived a carefree life, reading a bit, and writing a weekly essay to read aloud to their tutor. No-one seemed to mind if they didn't work; indeed many of the richer and more aristocratic students didn't bother to take a degree at all. They had been sent to Oxford or Cambridge with plenty of money to get to know the right people so they could take their destined place in governing the country and the Empire.

But for Peter, finals now loomed. It came to him as a nasty shock that he had to sit one whole three-hour paper in Middle English, of which hardly any written examples remained, and that he hadn't even bought the large and expensive text book on which he was to be examined.

Now the time had come to go to the book shop and have the neglected tome put on his bill. So we did just that and took it on the river in a college punt – punted down the river until we came to a secluded spot under a willow tree – and both settled down to read.

After a couple of hours Peter shut the book. "I have left it too late," he exclaimed. "There is no way I can master this in the fortnight before the exam!"

So we took it back and exchanged it for a copy of M.R.James' *Collected Ghost Stories*, which he read to me on the river, and which became our favourite companion for the next fifty years.

In those days I didn't talk much, which left a lot of time for thought – and I began to think of the future. As far as I knew, Peter would be leaving Oxford in June and I would probably never see him again. I surprised him by opening the subject of *our* future. Was he still in love with Peggy? If so, it was hardly fair on me to continue our relationship. Several other students were interested in me and if our loving togetherness was to stop and he was going back to Peggy that summer, I should perhaps know.

So he rang Peggy and demanded that she should finally make up her mind between him and Arthur, explaining about me and how unfair it was to keep me dangling.

"Don't leave me, Peter. I love you! I am coming straight to Oxford!" she cried. So, on Friday she arrived. Oxford students were supposed to go away from the university for the weekend before their final exams started, to rest. We all three went out to tea.

Peggy was tall, confident, and very impressive. Her wonderful red hair was piled high on her head and made her look even taller. Four years older than me, with a private income of £7 a week, equivalent to £200 in 1998, as well as a job, she was elegantly dressed and assumed that Peter was her property. She patted me on the head, told me I would get over it all – and swept Peter off to London. All seemed lost.

"Well, I tried," I thought. The next day a group of us were having tea in Lyons, because one of us, Mike, son of the Principal of Goldsmith's College, being an inverted snob, insisted on wearing a flat cap and eating individual fruit pies while drinking rasberryade in Lyons. Suddenly, there was Peter!!

The nearer he had got to London with Peggy and the further from Oxford and me, the more he had thought that he was making a mistake. So when they arrived, he bravely told Peggy so. They spent a miserable night with Peter's family, Peggy weeping on Joan's shoulder most of it, and after tearful farewells Peggy went back to Yorkshire and soon to Arthur, and Peter came back to me.

Chapter 4

Oxford / Camp

1936–1937

1936

Peter was awarded an upper second. He had enough grade 1 papers to earn a first class honours degree, but his absolute fail in his Middle English paper cancelled out one of the grade ones, so dropped him a class. He had a session with his tutor, Blunden, and decided to stay up in Oxford to read for a B.Lit on *The Uneducated poets of the Eighteenth Century* and managed to arrange for a grant to last two years. Then we cycled to Pangbourne by the Thames to help with a Camp for Unemployed – half of them Welsh miners, the rest unemployed East of London clothing workers. We students were expected to sleep eight to a bell tent and of course strictly sex-segregated – so Peter and I huddled together in the enormous marquee which, having no ground-sheet, forced us to sleep under our sleeping bag on the cold, cold grass after the nightly camp fire.

In those days, before the war, the English were entirely unmusical, so while the Welsh sang nightly round the fire, the East Enders could only recite *Christmas Day in the Work-house* and similar pieces. One of them went mad suddenly, I presume he was manic depressive, and six of the students including Peter had to sit on him all night to prevent his running amok, until they could get a couple of doctors in to certify him. Peter said that he raved in half a dozen languages brilliantly, reminding him of James Joyce's *Haveth Childers Everywhere*. We had an interesting visitor, who was a refugee from Nazi Germany, incognito – a composer friend of Brecht. Peter managed to write down the words and music of two of his compositions – *The Comintern* and *The Miner's Song*. Much later we discovered that his real name was Hans Eisler.

I don't remember at what stage of that holiday we found ourselves camping in a small tent at Pangbourne again, having run out of money. We had company. A tent full of young men invited us to share food and drink with them and we finally got to sleep very late on that moonlit night. As a result, we slept until lunchtime and by the time we got ourselves dressed and packed our rucksacks the banks were all shut. We had sixpence, were out of fags and very hungry.

Hopefully, we went to the police station in the vain hope that they would cash a small cheque for us – which of course they couldn't. There was no such thing as cheque cards in those days. However, they did offer us inumerable slices of bread/butter and blackcurrent jam – nice doorsteps of slices – and several large mugs of very sweet strong tea.

We hadn't mentioned our sixpence, so were able to feed it into a cigarette machine for ten Players.

Now we had to get back to London! Our best plan seemed to be to walk out of town to find a lorry drivers' pull-up, to see if any of the drivers would give us a lift. It wasn't far and the place was full – but sadly they told us that there was a police trap just a few miles away on the London Road and it was more than their jobs were

worth to take us. Then a little man drinking tea in the corner piped up. "If you are stuck for a bed, come with me," he said, "I'll ask my wife." He led us back into town and round several streets of council houses, and stopped outside one which was particularly clean, painted and polished. He left us outside while he consulted. He had been told we had no money. Out he came to fetch us, and we were made welcome. After a late tea we were shown to a highly polished double room. The wife was obviously embarrassed and I wondered if she were going to ask me if we were married – but it was not that. She hated having to say that there was only a metal pot under the bed. Her husband wouldn't have a china one – not since their daughter had broken hers when she sat on it and got a nasty cut.

Once we had got over that difficulty we became very confidential and I was treated to sight of framed photographs of all her nearest and dearest. Finally, after large mugs of milky cocoa to help us sleep, we were escorted up to bed – a high double one into which one sank as if into a cloud.

After breakfast next morning Peter went into town to find a branch of Westminster Bank. His account, such as it was, was in Oxford. Years and years before the days of cheque cards, life could be very difficult. He had a great deal of trouble in persuading the cashier to phone Oxford to allow them to speak to Peter and cross-question him to make sure he was himself, before he was allowed to cash a cheque for £5. We were able to pay our kind hosts and get a lift back to London, the police trap having been cleared.

Most of the rest of that vacation we spent with our families. Students did in those days, unless they were rich. It was a time of very high unemployment and very low unemployment pay – Dole! Most students then came from well-off families and there were no opportunities anyway for them to earn.

Arthur and Florence, Joan and Bill had now moved to Bexley. Arthur was very firm. He didn't mind what his sons got up to as long as they didn't do it UNDER HIS ROOF. So we lived a very open air life, especially after dark. As we wandered from chuchyard to allotment, from allotment to the heath, Peter would tell me ghost stories, a practice in his family who liked to scare one another. This had absolutely no effect until he began to frighten himself in the middle of the mile-wide stretch of grass on Blackheath one very dark night when I became quite anxious to reach the lights of Blackheath village.

That summer too, I went to a League of Nations Conference in Switzerland. It was marginally interesting and I discovered Swiss ice cream – quite different from the watery English stuff. I wasn't sure why I was there and was very homesick for Peter. Bernard Flood was the only other Oxford Sstudent. After one social evening he kissed me, what, for him, was passionately – then

asked me how he could know I wasn't pregnant with Peter's child!! This left me even more speechless than usual. When I got my breath back I answered "Of course you can't," and left him. Thereafter I kept close to a father-like figure called Henderson, confided how much I was missing Peter, and showed him Peter's photograph. When I got home Peter was there to meet me. He had been working and sunbathing in his family's Bexley garden and was brown and healthy looking. We had a wonderful reunion.

That past term, as I have said, the Labour Club (Socialists) and the October Club (Communists) had joined together to form a United Front Labour Club with nearly 1,000 members. Now we returned to Oxford to attend an International United Front Student Conference. Peter was, of course, one of the organizers and often took the chair at the meetings. Meanwhile, I tended to be working on the Gestetner copier, the most advanced bit of office equipment in those days. First someone typed a skin to make a kind of stencil. The machine was then inked up – a very messy job – the skin was fitted carefully onto the machine and a pile of paper put into position. Finally, as the handle was turned, a sheet of paper was printed from the stencil, and then another, and another, until the ink ran out and had to be renewed.

Half way through that week Franco and his followers attacked the democratically elected Spanish Government, and the Spanish Civil War began. Of course, the delegation of students from Spain packed up at once and went home. A friend of Peter's, a Cambridge student called John Cornford, went with the Spanish to help defend democracy. Later he was joined by others to form the International Brigade. Germany and Italy supplied arms and support to Franco – Britain adopted a non-intervention policy and denied arms to the people of Spain and their elected Government.

For a while Peter felt he should go to Spain, but I persuaded him that he wouldn't be an asset to any army. We had a drink with John when he came home on leave that Christmas. A month later he was killed in combat.

When Peter and I had a few minutes free from politics, work and sex, one of our pleasures was to browse in a record shop. You were then able to take your chosen records into a little listening room to see if you really liked them. Every so often we felt that we should actually buy one as a kind of "rent" for our pleasure, but we had no gramaphone, so we had to give them to Tony, one of our friends, who did have one, and let us listen to them sometimes. One in particular that gave us a lot of pleasure was called "Little Buttercup".

I mustn't give the impression that we actually spent 24 hours a day together. I did attend lectures and tutorials and had long, late discussions with my friends in St Hughs. Peter was a member of

the Cole Group – a select group of undergraduates and graduates who met in GDH Cole's rooms for learned discussions to put the world to rights.

We went together to see Margot Fontaine dance Swan Lake, and a famous male dancer whose name escapes me dancing practically naked in the Rite of Spring. Cinemas in Oxford often showed foreign films. We saw "M" with Peter Lorré and "The Testament of Dr Mabuse" – brilliant but terrifying old German films (pre-Hitler). There was a great difference of opinion among students – should we sit down for "God Save the King"? Most of us compromised and either half stood, or rushed out just before the end of the film, thus missing the climax.

1937

From Peter's diary, 1937:

New Year's Resolutions

1. Write something every day.
2. Specifically, novel to be finished by March. Twenty poems to be ready by mid-February.
3. Refrain, under whatever provocation, from narking at all at D re men, because if wrong, unjustified: if right useless.
4. Manage money to enable me to give D occasional v. good time – e.g. splash dance in London, theatre
5. Pay off debts as soon as poss. esp. D.
6. Take up pipe again.
7. Start swimming soon, and play tennis in spring.
8. Make good start on thesis next term.

Pages from Peter's diary:

January 7th: Made a vague and probably useless decision to keep a sort of scrappy diary here occasionally. Main advantage is that it tidies the mind and promotes new growth, like clearing the sour round an old clump of perennials. Well, what has happened so far this year? I'll tabulate, not heirarchically, but as I think em up:

1. Spain getting more *serious* i.e. more finalistic every day. Many of my friends are there: Phillip is back, and Esmond Romilly, but Ralph Fox is dead. The new line-up, real democracy with communists as the keystone, v. fascist internationalism. No better justification of Stalinism and 7th Congress decisions has yet appeared. Democracy is nowhere more than a temporary concession provided by a prosperous capitalism. *I'm now quite convinced I should have gone*, though I would have been scared to hell; if I'd popped off it would have been a neat and sensible way out, and if not I'd have got things straight and felt completely solid and foursquare, without liquid intestines.

2. Finished last year apparently completely in love with D, with whom I went to a New Year's dance. There are still big sections of my life that she doesn't touch, but its not a position I can encourage; she insinuates herself into more and more of my affairs, and I find myself increasingly unable to make major decisions without taking her into account. This is a good thing, developing the essential link-up between

personalities and society, but I shall never allow myself to become dependent on her. She lacks some very necessary things: notably in my eyes προσαιτος *[see note]*: but she has a sweet understanding and a sweet nature. More important, I find the *mutualité* increasing, the

"we that were two are one"
or "l'egoisme à deux".

Note: I am a little unsure as to the Greek word as transcribed by my grandmother, but a Greek-speaking friend of a friend suggested this word meaning "approachable, welcoming". SW

I have always felt lust towards her, since I first met her, and she has a supremely lovely body, though I think her less *beautiful* than many people – her eyes and cheek-bones are the best – and a magnificent verve. But nowadays I want her about and need her friendship and presence always. Affection plus lust is the ideal in my view, and I think we're getting it. As to her line on me, I'm still not very certain. I'm pretty sure she's contentedly in love with me, but she is still pretty wild and irresponsible, and needs admiration so desperately that she risks certain intellectual reserves in providing herself with a circle of admirers. She thinks she has her money's worth out of the change-over, but she's very young indeed – it surprises me vastly every time I see her – and finds growing up very trying, and in a very secret way regrets the passing of the "super-sports-Spikes" days. Also my being poor as a church mouse has a considerable effect, partly psychological, because it makes her underestimate me, and partly physically, because she is a lively soul and likes good times, and I can't give them to her. I don't blame the poor kid a bit for this, and I think at her age she deserves a damn sight more gadding about and seeing people and things than I can give her, but it's here that there's likely to be complications. I hope I shall be wide-minded enough to understand them if they happen.

3. Re career, professions, etc: Present position:–

   a) £6 owed me by Lawrence and Wishart. Have written a strong letter demanding this, but it won't come in time for me to go to Oxford with my darling.

   b) Edgell Rickwood wants to see me re *Poems 1936*. I'm convinced he owes me some cash on this, and I'm a bloody fool not to have made some definite financial arrangements at the outset. The book is still selling, and Edgell has promised to bring it out in paper covers for 2/6d, which will sell another 200 or so, but I shan't let him until he agrees to pay me or make some arrangements. He's also apparently quite anxious to bring out another book of mine, even if it's only 15 or 20 poems. MUST GET THEM WRITTEN BY FEBRUARY. Think he must want to discuss money – can't think of anything else. Shall see him Tuesday, together with the Oxford–Cambridge Joint Party meeting.

   c) Pennay-Rowsell of Frederick Muller Ltd shows definite interest in my detective story, and wants a first look at it when its finished. If it's good I don't think I'll let them have them, but I'll try someone else – even Gollancz if necessary.

   d) I'm doing some articles, probably unpaid, for Eric Cook's General News Service: will spread me a bit anyway.

   e) Very shadowy – have met West, Day Lewis, Blumerfield, Goldman, Cook, Edgell, Madge, Randal Swingler and others at a meeting and want very much to start going to their wretched parties. I came down to Blackheath with Charles Madge.

f) Jack Cohen tells me I am fancied for the editorship of a S. African People's Front weekly nespaper – with a good wage. If it wasn't necessary to sign a long contract I believe I'd go tomorrow. But I'm not quite sure whether I've got pluck enough: and Diana, who seems to be my only really important link with England, comes into the picture rather insistently.

g) Very shadowy again: Old Spikes is trying to push me into a proleptic job in a new school's sort of Left Book Club – which would be a peach if it came off, but I feel pretty certain it won't.

That's all for now. The novel is beginning to recover, and I think there's some life in it. Only wish I could find more time to write big chunks of it. Diana regards it as an almost dead horse, which is a pity; in an obscure way I respect her judgements quite a lot.

Must be lurv.

January 9th: Very Late. Must go to bed. Had a very pleasant two days at Diana's place. Saw a nice film and wrote quite a spot of the magnus opus, but tragically had to get up at 5.45 to see D off to Oxford which I loathed, wanting very much to go with her, and I don't think she liked it very much, poor kid. I love her.

January 16th: Came up last night. Last week strange in many ways, mainly re. D who holds some strange intellectual inferiority complex – a development of "sic transit gloria mundi" into rationalist channels. Think I've helped clear them up or at least to make her examine more clearly the logical basis of her assumptions. Very tragic scene – which somehow drew us much closer together. There are all sorts of unplumbed depths in Diana. I get fonder of her every day. For the rest, had a tiff with L and W over the booklist job and got paid for it by post this morning. Also saw Emily Barns and got detailed information i.e. South African editorship. £20 a month, passage paid, no contract. Looks jammy but I'm very dubious about it.

January 18th: Several things though nothing of tremendous importance. My Party jobs this term are Cole Group fraction, Colonials, secret members, Org. Com and a few odd jobs – much more free than ever before since I joined the student Party. There is a faint chance of getting digs belonging to a fresher who has been given rooms in college, in which case the coll who would have to pay compensation would subsidise me to take them (Oriel St).

D in the news again. Phillip Toynbee and Bernard Flood made a shattering attack on her work in Geneva much to my alarm, though I naturally said nothing, as I knew nothing about her work. Had a word with Toynbee this morning on the subject and he explained in detail – bad work and slackness last term – too open – crude socialist contact work and general bad behaviour re Conference in Geneva where she displayed no interest, was miles too open and flirted with Henderson most of the time. All very trying. I raised these points with her this afternoon and although she was very hurt and cried a lot her defence wasn't very good. I don't really think she's got any initiative or perhaps it's because she can't do fraction work at all. Bernard and Timbers are both to some extent being malicious, but D thinks that if she wasn't *told*

to do this or that it is sufficient defence. On the other business, Henderson, I tried not to make a fuss, and I'm convinced that I must not worry her about her wretched little affairs – I am increasingly certain that they are a fixture. I hate it but I can't do a single thing about it – so I'm going to accept it, expect it, and give up bothering about it. I haven't got time and neither have *we*: and I shall have to adjust the idea of *training* poor D to improve and just let it slide and hope she manages under her own steam. It's all bloody and all ludicrous, but we must stop having long hideous arguments too.

Thank God I've got other things to do. I'm beginning to get the contents of my new poetry book clear in my head and I hope to see Blunden tomorrow and get down to my thesis this week.

It is very strange to read for the first time in 1998 Peter's diary written in 1937! He was quite right. I *was* very young, in particular when compared to Peggy who was four years older than I was. But he was completely wrong about my needs. I never minded in the least his having no money and was quite content just to be with him. I didn't, in fact, have "wretched little affairs" of any kind once we were, as they now say, "an item", and only one meaningless but comforting one before then. But my reputation had suffered from my first term's round of tea parties and Oxford was a hot-bed of gossip. Above all, Communist Party members who had been up before 1935 resented me as Peggy's replacement. She had been a wonderful dedicated organiser, whole-hearted in everything she did. I was just Peter's girlfriend.

It was a busy year. We collected money for Spain: the Blind Hunger Marchers came through Oxford and spent the night in a church hall. For some reason I don't remember Peter was "gated" that week, which meant he had to be in his lodgings by 9 pm, so he was not with us when we helped with evening meals and read their letters from home and wrote back to their families for them.

The political climate at universities had changed radically since Peter went up in 1933. *We* knew that if Franco won in Spain helped by Hitler and Mussolini the second world war would soon follow. However, many in Britain supported Franco and rather approved of Hitler and Mussolini. Ordinary people didn't travel in those days so they were easy to fool. We students did get around a bit and knew what was going on. But unless we joined the International Brigade and went to Spain to fight on behalf of the Government there was little we could do except collect money for the Basque children's milk.

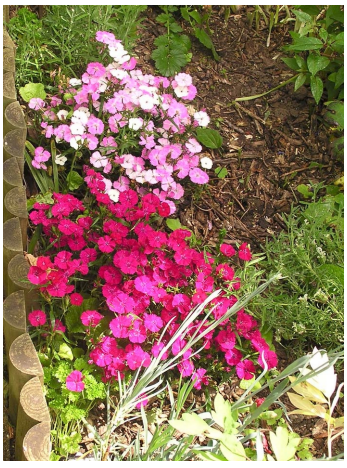
That Summer term I passed my Maths Mods (Mathematics Moderations). I had another two years of my degree to do as it was a four year course.

Chapter 5

Cotswold and Pusey Vale

March 1937

Written at the time by Peter



1937

We came down finally on Saturday evening. It had been a bad term, or at least the wrong end of a good one – fantastically quick and hurried and rushing into a positive frenzy in the last few days. Chain-smoking, rushing from meeting to meeting, wishing people to whom I felt utterly indifferent "a good vac". Tails sometimes and then the comfort and relief of putting on really frowsty tweeds again. Guests to breakfast, a spate of inconsequential little parties and a consistent horror at the number of times one seemed to be undressing for bed in those last fumbled days. Then packing, aghast at the quantity of paper and print one can accumulate in eight short weeks. A tawdry dusty incoherent fag-end of time: thousands of people packed flat like kippers into a small oblong dance hall. And then, suddenly, into the cleanliness and empty beauty of the Cotswolds in snow.

Diana and I spent Saturday night in a basement flat outside Oxford. An old friend gave me a key and had a fire lit. When we got there the ceiling was jumping with deep light and the saggy divan filled the carpet space. There was a lonely note from John and we washed in the kitchen, our feet frozen on the tiles and our stupid silk pyjamas flapping dolefully against them. But Diana looked nice with her corn hair spread like a fan on the cushions, and we seemed soon to engender enough heat for our comfort.

We got up finally at some scandalous hour in the middle of the morning, and then more cold tiles on the soles of our feet, with a tired fire blowsy with ashes and the rain scampering on the railings outside. But the grey stones of the Cotswolds had been in our minds for weeks, so we decided to go on as soon as we had broken down certain "sensible" tendencies to return to London and walk later – knowing that it just never happens. You must take your bull by the horns when he appears, which – Lord knows – is seldom enough – even if he is wet.

So we hid the key carefully behind the books on the mantleshelf and packed our ridiculous little rucksacks; then, clearly – breakfast.

We were replete with sleep and love, but our bellies were void and desperate, and it was grand to know that a very good and cheap cyclists' doss existed just over the road. There we had bacon and eggs and a comforting number of cups of coffee and shared about the stupidest Sunday paper we had ever seen. I had only the vaguest ideas about the Cotswolds and what we were to do there; but we had four pounds left of the sole proceeds of my first book of poems out of the five, and we were determined to spread it over the greatest possible number of days in Gloucestershire.

We waited an interminable time for a coach to Cheltenham in an untidy shack in the middle of Gloucester Green, which is distinguished by being the only square of its area in Oxford unfurnished with a single blade of grass. A pleasant little Welshman

was there and he told me of a free library he was building for Swansea University. He was short, with the blue serge suit and clean-lined face of the traditional Welsh miner. He got bored with us soon, and his sad and inscrutable eyes became fixed permanently and indifferently on the splashing rain outside. So Diana and I retired to a little rickety table and had a rather irritating conversation about the difference between sentiment and sentimentality and whether it was preferable for one's lover to have had a full and sensible past with another woman (man) or to have had a stupid and dilatory series of useless amours. The advantages of the first were mainly Practice and Experience in Amatory Intelligence, but the second meant that there was (in some senses at least) virgin soil for the right man (woman) when he (she) came along. The bus fortunately appeared in the middle of all this.

The unfortunate argument continued a little on the coach, but it was soon mutually dropped as incompatible. And as we were driven along from Oxford it was like casting another skin – all the piled up complexities and futilities of Oxford life were left behind and we were talking amicably and sensibly about friendly and sensible things. It rained gustily most of the way but froze up again when we got into Andoversford. We watched the driver's windscreen alternately freezing on the heights into fan-shaped patterns, and dribbling and weeping wherever the thaw had definitely set in.

Then the snow got deeper and thicker and whereas in the Witney fields it was lying in patches like pocket handkerchiefs drying on the grass in summer, past Burford most of the fields were dead white and there were huge pure drifts against the stone walls, in lovely contrast with the yellowy sludge at the edge where the cars had splashed and ridged it. But the landscape was dimmed by the falling snow, or, more often, great whirls of sleet and rain. And then – suddenly – Cheltenham, very wet and puddley, under a steely coloured sky.

We got out rather stiffly from the coach, I feeling rather self-conscious with my little knapsack and my stick in the middle of March. From a phone box I phoned up Day Lewis, the poet, who I had met recently at a poetry reading in Oxford, to ask him for a possible address where we might stay as it was obviously not walking weather. He came in a few minutes in his car and drove us to his home. A propitious start to our walking tour; it was four o'clock on our first day and we hadn't walked ten yards.

Cecil Day Lewis was very charming and yet aloof. The wrinkles round his eyes, as Diana pointed out acutely, assured us that he was a nice person. The pleasant cottage loomed red in the snow, black lane and bushes, but inside there was a rather luxurious atmosphere of green distemper, fabric curtains and square white painted bookshelves. We went upstairs to a pleasant orange-and-green study, with the snow very insistent beyond the curtain, and

talked "business" for a while round a gas fire – about addresses for his Peace Council, the sale of *Daily Workers* outside a local factory and a dirty scheme for a local militia and how to counter it – and his essay on Hopkins. Then we had tea in a pleasant warm room with Cecil's wife who was tall and tweedy – black hair, pink cheeks and a hardish mouth, but very pleasant and cool. There must be hundreds such in the southern counties, wives of young professional men, writers or musicians – nearly all Oxford or Cambridge men. They run to type.

Diana played trains with two starry-eyed little boys with gorgeous complexions and fiendish larynxes, while I waffled away quietly on a tremendous Steinway, enjoying myself no end. I was startled to see that the sky outside was a vivid blue and the snow was a sort of strange cobalt on the roofs and the walls. It was very nearly dark. The pedals moved the keyboard slightly to the right – a thing which always delighted me – and the simple chords of the more *andante* of Chopin's preludes swelled out joyously into the room.

Somehow we stayed to dinner, which was pigeon casserole and coffee ice and lots of sherry. Cecil phoned some people and fixed a place for us. And then we were rushing along the black ribbon of road, its edges defined by the counterpane margins of rounded snow. We reached Northleach and soon Cecil went back and we were left in a little guest-house, all very nicely gotten up and very, very slightly bogus. The outside, of course, was genuine seventeenth century – but inside there was more distemper and more green and grey curtains and chunky bookcases – pouffes and a great brick fireplace. Our hosts were charming: Mister was very tall indeed with a nice grey jowl and a high forehead, wispy dark hair and a rough-hewn face, with secret and dreamy eyes and very good teeth: inevitably a wine-red roll-top pullover, and many cigarettes in good, hairy hands. Missis was yet another black-and-pink tweedy woman, fine breasts and tremendous feet, with a pleasant healthy face and black eyes – disquietingly reminiscent of a tough and stupid fascist schoolfriend of mine – sportscar and porkpie hat and double whiskers. We had more talk about the militia and protest meetings – they were good but politically naïve – and listened to Bolero on the gramophone – Diana's first time of hearing and she loved it – and soon we went to bed in a square room with a snowy vista through the deep set window, twin beds, grey fabric covers and scarlet blankets, a white lacquered wardrobe, rugs and stained boards, and pots of red earthenware and yellow glaze. The bathroom was beautiful – all green and chromium, and the doors were "original" with cross-beams and iron latches. Diana was restless and I suspected pigeons, and so was piggish myself.

But the next morning when we saw the sunny snow on the hills flanks, we really wanted to walk and see it all up close. So we bolted our breakfast which was very good but more earthenware

and wooden-handled knives – and then we were out in the High Street of Northleach, feeling proud of the wind on our faces and the glaring poster by the town hall saying "A Protest Against the Militia". We decided to try to come back, if our money would last us, to see how the local peasantry approached a basic political issue. Then off on the right, and suddenly across a lovely wavy stretch of country draped in snow, with the grey-brown tower of Hampnett Church sat deliciously in the distance. We knelt by the side of the road and pressed our faces in the snow, leaving little inverted death-masks for some yokel to wonder at. After Hampnett, which was wet and low, we walked along a two-mile stretch of level cart track, through fields and fields of clean snow like a dairy or perhaps a medical ward. We were silent with joy.

Turkdean was a clean little village, the houses stupidly dropped in a hollow, as toy houses fell into a crumple of the eiderdown when I moved in bed on Christmas 1924. The farmers and hands were all pleasant, and after the surly manners of Oxfordshire it was grand to have an unsolicited "good morning". We walked along the long clean ridge to Nutgrove which again was brown and undecorated houses on a white cloth. Here I tried to buy a pipe and tobacco, finding cigarettes expensive and tasteless in the cold: but the only village shop was a tiny cottage with peacocks made of yew as sentinels, and the tobacco drawer contained only a heap of wrapped ounces of the most loathly shag in living memory. So we bought two large oranges, and spat the pips onto the roadside ridge of snow. Diana and I exchanged a few sarcastic words when I dropped, inadvertently, a piece of orange peel on the road, and I was very bitter at the expense of the Tidy Fiends. But this blew over soon, and we saw a coal-tit and heard its ethereal little call, and later saw a little brown mouse of a nut-hatch chasing up a tree at top speed.

We visited Nutgrove station to find the way and a pleasant clerk took one of the cigarettes in our luxurious box of a hundred (there are at this moment exactly four left) and directed us all wrong to Roel Gate, but was corrected by a nice porter with a creased face and a cheerful eye who really knew his stuff. We stayed just long enough to have a delicious cigarette and for the backs of our knees to get stiff, reading the railway legislation and watching little drifts of new snow on the platform, scurrying down against the old, rusty tracks and settling on the old snow like starch on a dirty blanket. Then we got back onto the road and were silent for a while as we got back into our stride.

We went through a huge drift of snow in a ditch as we tried to collect larch-cones, and into a deeper one burying our faces again, and hurling one another waist-deep into the yielding strength of a positively Siberian corner, where the snow was four feet deep against the corner of a stone-walled field. The wind was heartily

slapping us in the face at each corner and across the exposed backbone of the Cotswolds; but the sun was bright and quite warm on our backs, and even when the clouds covered it for us it would pick out a field three miles away, and make it glister like Jack Frost in a Christmas window, between the toy trees on the next slope.

Hanbury was dull and cold when we finally reached it, though there was a strange and fatalistic Jolly Farmer on the way who talked pleasantly to us about "the bloody snow". A red-faced dairymaid, who looked as though she had come out of a comic opera chorus, directed us nervously to Roel Gate, and we got there somehow. It was snowing again, lightly and pleasantly. But I think Hawling to Roel Gate was mainly spent in incoherent song.

We took a sort of cart-track up to Sudely hill – eighteen inches in snow but fouled and fretted with footprints and ruts. Then we walked along a great flat ridge for miles, with tremendous blue hills on the left which were much more like those mystic and lumpy hills in a Sunday painter's watercolour of the Highlands than the real thing in the Cotswolds.

Diana was tramping behind me through the deep snow and I found myself singing with some bombast:

" – Mark my footsteps, good my page;
Tread thou in them boldly – "

We found a disused pig-stye. The roof stays had broken and the great timber roof sloped awkwardly to the ground. We sheltered to smoke again. Pig-smells a year or so old must be one of the most sensory experiences on earth.

Then we came to a snow drift a good three feet deep, though in places it had been cut away from the centre of the track in chunks like farmyard butter and thrown in pleasant heaps on the white undulations at the road edge. We went in up to our knees enjoying ourselves tremendously. I got a solid cake of snow between shoe and sock, but somehow it vanished without any intermediate wetness. Then a gang of men clearing snow came in sight and directed us to Winchcomb, the scheduled end of that day's walk.

So we went down a tremendous hill – then there were cottages and a pleasant lane with children coming from school and a little runnel of clear water in the ditch and suddenly we were in Winchcomb High Street – a strange experience after miles of empty country – a neat self-contained sloping High Street with a few shops and dozens of guest houses and one lovely and dignified Jacobean high-shouldered house set plump on the roadside – all quiet and reserved in the afternoon sun.

We had arranged to call on an Oxford student, Judy, whose home was the schoolhouse, very small under the shadow of the church tower whose clock said 4.30, and we congratulated ourselves on

timing a fifteen mile walk with such superb accuracy. Judy had only just arrived from Oxford carrying chocolates and a bunch of tulips and we gorged ourselves on bread and butter and I listened to the chatter issuing from her sweet and somehow stupid mouth and watching her eyes, which were accounted beautiful, but were exactly like two small and identical plums. Her mother was hovering round the room – full of fine superiority to the village petty-bourgeoisie and so transparently a part of them – modern and bright and broadminded and so dull and shallow – conducting an elaborate act of filial relations with her daughter for our benefit. But tea was welcome and Judy and her mother were quite nice in their stuffy way. Diana and I rushed out afterwards, very stiff in the legs, to book a room in a grubby little pub in a back street – and then, in desperation at the prospect of an evening hearing about Mrs J's theories on education and local government we took them to see a film which was amazingly vulgar and stupid.

We left Judy and her mother to go back to a late meal of cold lamb and cheese in a frigid and over-decorated bar parlour where we had a little row – Diana maintaining that I was unnecessarily amicable to Judy if I didn't like her. I concluded that this was due to the fug of the Winchcombe Cinema after the windiness of our walk and anyway it soon died away to nothing. Our bedroom was cold too, and more like Reading or Kensington than Winchcombe, but we slept magnificently.

Breakfast, as always, was bacon and eggs. The weather had set in to a steady uncompromising drizzle, iron grey skies and wet chimney pots, so we went back to Judy's – her mother was teaching little girls in the church school behind – and gossipped and played her piano and taught her some revolutionary marching songs. Lunch was nice and we had a vivid and entertaining discussion with Mrs Judy on "modern licence" about which she took a traditionalist point of view. The rain went on and on. Judy took us to visit a local pottery which was run by the third Wadham man we had met in three days. It was very exciting to see a cake of brown clay on the potter's wheel turn rapidly under his hands into a jug or vase, and we climbed a little staircase and examined piles of newly-glazed crocks in the kiln. The place smelt of cow cake, and there was a little dog made of black wool by the brazier and, framed by the window, the wet green piles of rough timber and a heap of broken pots. Soon we left and said goodbye to Judy, for whom I had a bashful affection seeing her in her native surroundings, with rain on her face instead of leering and wriggling in the hothouse atmosphere of Oxford.

And then Diana and I set off down the road, buffeted by the wind and feeling stiff and heroic. Fortunately we had only nine miles to walk to Broadway – but we had hardly gone nine yards before a

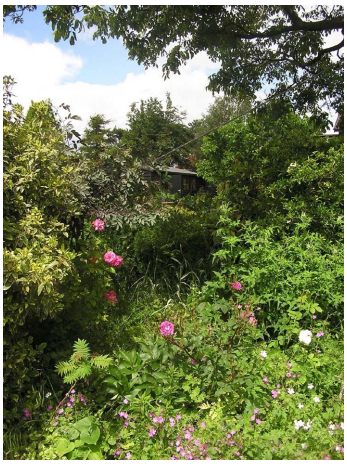
big Buick stopped and a pleasant rat-faced young commercial traveller swung us round corners and bumped us on his admirable springs to Broadway in twenty minutes. It was still raining hard in the High Street which was full of false antiquities and pastel paint.

Here Peter's account stops – but our walk went on. The next day was bright, warm and sunny – I can't remember where we walked – we saw a folly – I waited patiently while Peter looked for yellowhammers' nests in the bottom of hedges where the long grass is – but he didn't find one. It was probably too early, or too late. We walked out of a short shower into the sun half way down a hill – the edge between wet and dry clear on the road. Because we had received so much hospitality our money lasted a week and we *did* return down the hill to Northleach on the evening of the last day, the smoke from the chimneys of the cottages below vertical in the evening light.

Chapter 6

Cornwall One, Serebriacov

1937–1938



1937

Peter and I attended a Communist Party student summer school one week. Professor Haldane was there. He was a funny fat man who wore long shorts and short socks held up by suspenders, and boots. His high pitched voice, rather like that of H.G. Wells, made him a rotten public speaker, but in ordinary conversation he was fascinating.

A British submarine, the *Thetis*, had recently sunk, killing all but two of its crew. Haldane had been experimenting to discover why the rest of the crew had died. He was well known for doing all his experiments on *himself*. He described the airtight chamber he had constructed in which he sat, watched by a small boy, while he turned on a pump to remove oxygen and replace it with carbon dioxide. Once he fell down unconscious the boy's task was to turn off the pump and open the chamber to release him. Thus he had been able to find out at what concentrations the mind was unable to act rationally so that in a submarine the crew would be unable to take the simple steps needed to escape.

A blond young man, Dr. Paddy Fisher, who became a close friend later on, sang and played the guitar. He had a very beautiful Irish tenor voice and played us the folk song he had recently written:

I'm the man, the very fat man
That waters the workers' beer
I'm the man, the very fat man
That waters the workers' beer
And what do I care if it makes 'em ill
If it makes them terribly queer
I've a yacht and a car and an aeroplane
And I waters the workers' beer.

Each evening he was in demand for a repeat performance.

[In 1998, 61 years later, our son-in-law attended a session in a Maldon pub with a group of American folk dancers and folk singers and suddenly found himself listening to Paddy's song, still popular in folk circles in the USA. As Paddy had later become one of our family friends Mike was able to boast of having known the author.]

Peter and I, with a small group, sat up all night and watched the sun rise at dawn.

We now set off on a week's walking tour of the Pusey Vale to research Peter's *Uneducated Poets*. One of the more important was Stephen Duck, the only English poet other than Shakespeare whose birth is annually celebrated. Stephen was a thresher who lived in a little village called Carlton. His best, in fact his only good, poem *The Thresher's Labour* was published by subscription – that is, people subscribed towards the cost of printing in return for having their names listed in the book.

As usual in those days, it was immediately pirated – not content with robbing the poet of his meagre profits, the piratical publishers wrote a libellous preface sneering at Stephen and suggesting that his arrogance in daring to write poetry when he was nothing but a mere peasant had resulted in his becoming impotent. Eventually he was made a clergyman and provided with a little cottage in Kew where he lived miserably until committing suicide.

The first Lord Palmerston left an acre of land in Carlton the produce of which goes towards a Duck Feast each year for the villagers. We missed the actual feast, but saw the hat made of duck feathers used each year when money is collected towards the celebration – the acre not providing enough to feast the whole village at 20th century prices.

We talked to the villagers in the pub over lunch, ploughman's, of course – called on the local schoolmaster who told us that he taught his flock about their "famous" poet – found that the village parson was old and mad and had been married five times, and then moved on.

I forget the names of the other uneducated poets who came from that area. I think there was a soldier who wrote his verse round campfires on the battlefields of Europe. On the whole the walk was fruitful in a small way as we found tiny village museums which cared for forgotten volumes of verse. As we wended our way towards Bath Peter sprained his ankle leaping over a ditch – probably in search of a bird's nest. Luckily we had brought with us the address of a potentially useful student whose father was a doctor in Bath, so with the help of the walking stick that Peter always carried on a walk, we found him at home and willing to drive us to Bristol – our final destination.

Peter had written ahead to Bristol Library and when he limped in with his stick the librarian had copies of all the relevant old newspapers ready for us that covered the time of Anne Yearsley, a Bristol milkwoman, married and with a large family of children. She had written not only poetry but plays which had been performed and which made her a reasonable sum of money. An intelligent woman, she had wished to use it to educate one of her sons who would then be able to raise the whole family out of poverty. But her patroness, Mrs Mary Montagu, a celebrated Bluestocking, would not allow this but doled out the money shilling by shilling so that the family were made reasonably comfortable but KEPT IN THEIR PLACE.

Two of Anne's small sons had taken a short cut across the estate belonging to the Lord of the Manor and were caught by his agent and horsewhipped. When the little boys appeared at the cottage door covered in blood Anne had a miscarriage. She wrote a poem

describing exactly what she thought of that agent which pulled no punches. She was a very brave woman.

When we got home I discovered that the principal of St Hughs, I suppose fearing for my moral well being, had managed to get my grant withdrawn. She had frequently seen me, she said, waiting after dinner outside college for a notorious Communist student and wished to save me from myself! My father was furious and in the end she apologised and offered to take me back next year – but by then Peter would be going down and anyway we thought that some time we would marry. In those days women were not allowed to teach if they were married. So now, instead of my being in Oxford without Peter, Peter was in Oxford without me. I took a teaching job in a girls' private boarding school in Bromley, Kent, and lived in. It was run by a neurotic old maid and her sister. She was terrified of one of the girls running into her by accident, as she was convinced that such a blow would give her cancer!

On my 21st birthday, October 13th, Peter rang me fairly early from Oxford, but the headmistress refused to call me to the phone. I had to wait until he rang in the evening when she graciously allowed me to receive the call.

I did get one or two weekends off, though, and Peter would meet me in London. We would spend Saturday night in a large rented room. The walls were covered with murals painted by our host of his naked wife. There was a very fierce gas fire, a large comfortable bed and a small sausage dog which was determined to eat my underclothes. Mrs Pinney had been a debutante who had eloped with a building worker who was repairing her parents' aristocratic house, and of course had been disowned by her family. They gave us a very good breakfast after which we would sometimes help them twist up old newspapers really tightly to use as fuel in the basement where they lived.

One late Autumn night we were wandering hand in hand down Kings Road looking for a café that was still open as we had not eaten. We saw lights – candles on tables, and outside, projecting above the plate glass window, a large clock. It was midnight! Not daring to hope, we went in.

"I don't suppose you are still serving meals?" Peter said. "Anything will do!"

"Oh yes, find a seat! Would you like egg and chips?"

Indeed we would, and wine, and coffee. We enjoyed the warmth, the bohemian atmosphere, and above all the food. No-one seemed to be in a hurry to get rid of us. When eventually, we emerged into the misty cold, the clock still said midnight! We had forgotten that the clocks went back that night. It seemed we had enjoyed a stolen non-existent hour.

1938

After Christmas I enrolled myself in The City of London Secretarial College to learn shorthand, typing and book-keeping on a six-month course. It was quite hard work but Peter came to London most weekends, and we still met at the Pinneys', so we always had something to look forward to.

Peter's money was running out and he had not nearly finished his B. Lit. Peggy and Arthur were involved with six others in researching the close links between the British Houses of Parliament and the German Nazi movement. They needed someone to write the book. So Peter came down in June and stayed with them to do the actual writing of *Tory MP* by Simon Haxey.

We decided we needed a holiday before I started work. When Arthur and Peggy had married they had done extensive research to discover the best place on the Cornish coast for their honeymoon. Indeed they sent a questionnaire to 120 farms round the coast of Cornwall, collated the replies and chose Kennack Sands, six or seven miles from the Lizard and around 2.5 miles along a cliff path from Cadgwith. They found it all they wished, so we got the address of the farm from them and wrote asking if we could camp in one of their fields. Indeed we could, so we sent off our tents and other equipment by goods train to await our arrival. Bill was to come with us. In those days the train went as far as Helston and we did the last twelve miles by bus.

We had a wonderful time and got to know the local fishermen, Trip (Tripconey), a Sunday painter, and many of the Lifeboat crew. We even had good weather – swam and sunbathed, walked looking for wild flowers, and drank in the Cadgwith pub.

The only day it rained we lay in our tents and sang through all the most terrible popular songs we could remember, mercifully most long since forgotten: "Three little words", "Tiptoe through the tulips", "If I had a talking picture of you-who"...

Peter and I firmly resolved that we would return next year if it was in any way possible.

When we got back to London I found myself a job as Private Secretary to a Press Photographer, G. Denes, a Hungarian, thirty years old. The twenty-year-old junior partner was not much use at anything – but he had a father who provided the money to set us up. As soon as the paint was dry in the set of offices and the studio at Blackfriars I started work. It was an interesting job, but not very well paid.

We were all young – the dark-room man was eighteen, the office boy fifteen, and I was soon doing a bit of everything not actually involving taking and processing photographs.

Most important, during the first few weeks, I kept the accounts, and visited the bank weekly to draw all our wages. I had to

produce each week, too, a truthful graph which went up, not down, to be studied by our source of finance – not always easy as in the beginning of course we were losing money – thus enabling Mr Denes to touch his partner's father for enough to keep us going.

I never used my shorthand as Mr Denes' English was not good enough to be worth taking down. He told me what he wanted to say and I wrote the letter. We also wrote a book together on Cloud Photography. We got a photograph in *The thousand best photographs of the year* – of two poached eggs on toast which took us all of two days as the studio lights were very hot. Each time I buttered the toast and arranged the two glittering poached eggs Denes would say "Hold on a minute" and adjust the focus or lights – and the toast would dry and curl, the eggs film with a wrinkled skin. I don't remember eating any of the rejects.

We had two huge metal filing cabinets full of photographs; our stock. A newspaper would ring up to ask, say, for a picture of a Chinese crowd rioting. The office boy and I looked first, of course, under China, but found nothing. "Try Japan" – no good. Finally we found a lot of Chinese in America's China Town who looked a bit violent! The shops were in bad nick. We added a picture of an urban fire with plenty of flame and smoke and sent both up to the dark room where they were blended into a fairly convincing riot in China! Newspapers didn't mind at all if we sent them fakes.

More interesting was advertising. "Send us something to mean 'Whiteness'," we enjoyed – but to be asked for a picture of a young couple with two children sitting in the middle of a field looking at a tubercular cow within the next half hour was asking a little much, even for us.

We did some fashion work and I had to dress the models. Either the frocks wouldn't meet at the back and they had to be sewn in, or were much too large, which meant a row of clothes pegs up the back.

An article on Battersea Dogs Home with me, for economy's sake, as the human interest, went to *Titbits*.

Meanwhile Peter had finished *Tory MP*, to be published by The Left Bookclub (Gollanz). Hitler was invading more and more of Europe. Rumours of war were everywhere and trenches were being dug in Hyde Park.

Chamberlain came back from a visit to Hitler waving his bit of paper – the valueless treaty he fondly imagined would bring Peace in Our Time!

My father, now headmaster of Stratford Grammar School in the East End, rang me up at work. One of his English teachers, a young pacifist, had realised our failure to stand up to Hitler meant war, walked out into the sea and drowned himself.

"What's your Peter doing now?" my Dad asked.

"Nothing much. He's just finished writing a book."

"Have you a phone number for him?"

I had, so my Dad rang him.

"I'm in a jam, Peter," he said, "I need someone on Monday morning to teach English. It would pay you £5 a week". He explained about the suicide, and that he wanted someone at once to give the school something to talk about other than the tragic death. Peter went over to Stratford that Friday afternoon and was shown round. He had always said that there were three things he would never do – teach, get married, and join the civil service – but the £5 a week seemed like riches and it was only temporary. He agreed. He would obviously have to lodge with us as he could not travel from Bexley.

This presented slight problems.

My father had left my mother for another woman in 1935, the year I went to Oxford, but no-one at Stratford Grammar School knew. Actually, he was living with a Mrs Parker and her two children, a ten minute walk away, and travelling to school on a 108 bus through the Blackwall Tunnel. If anyone rang him at his supposed home, as they frequently did, the drill was to say "I'm sorry – you have just missed him. Can I get him to ring you back?" Then we immediately rang his new number and passed on the message.

Now it was going to be even more complicated! My father should have been living at 44 Lee Park, but wasn't. Peter was going to live at 44 Lee Park but shouldn't be, because no-one at school was supposed to know there was any connection between him and the headmaster.

Luckily we were well used to such complications. My father never told *his* mother and sisters that he had left home, and they came every year to spend Christmas day with us. So at about 8 am on Christmas morning he would arrive for breakfast and the giving of presents, as always. By about 10 am when they all arrived together, my grandmother, my two aunts and a pseudo-aunt Miss Phillips, known as Phil, Aunt Edith's best friend, he was well established as part of the household.

Our mother, helped by the five of us children, would have spent weeks making everything, the cakes, puddings, mince pies, turkey stuffing, bread sauce... and so on. The gigantic turkey would be in the oven – had been since about seven o' clock – the present wrapping-paper would have been tidied away, the Christmas tree would be looking its best and we were all clean and tidy.

She, henceforward to be known as "Spikey" as she so much disliked her two given names – Marjorie and Doris – had explained to us all that it wouldn't be kind to upset our grandmother and aunts by letting them guess that our father

didn't live there anymore. So, after a magnificent Christmas dinner, we entertained our guests, played quietly, or read our new books in the first floor drawing room while our father spent the afternoon in the basement kitchen doing the washing up for twelve *all alone*. This he insisted on. He didn't like either of his sisters, and his mother didn't know he smoked and wasn't teetotal – and this gave him the chance to smoke his pipe in peace.

So we had to listen to long lectures on what a wonderful husband and father we had, and make polite conversation. At about four o'clock the Christmas cake was produced, tea was served. Then they all went off home – and ten minutes later my father was out of the door to rejoin Mrs Parker and family, and we could start to enjoy our real family Christmas.

Earlier that year my mother had taken me aside and shyly broached the subject of Peter. She didn't want me to make the same mistake that she had – marry too young. If we really loved one another, and if I was very careful not to get pregnant she advised me to sleep with him (gulp) rather than marry too soon. I didn't want to spoil this magnificent gesture by telling her we *had* been for the last two years, so I accepted her advice gracefully and gratefully. Now she moved out of her bedroom – and her double bed – for us. What other mother would have done that in 1938?

So now, on Monday morning, Peter followed my father (hereinafter The Old Man) on a second 108 bus through the tunnel. He was taken straight to a classroom full of fourteen- to fifteen-year-old boys and girls, and left there. These were streetwise East London teenagers – and they made rings round him!

Poor Peter, straight from Oxford with his gown, made all the mistakes that could be made, and each time they called his bluff! They knew perfectly well that he couldn't keep them in indefinitely, so when he announced that they must be absolutely quiet for at least five minutes before they could go, they just went on rioting. He tried setting them lines, but they didn't do them! Many were responsible for the care of several small brothers and sisters so if not let out more or less on time they had hysterics. Most evenings he would walk back through the East End trying to work out how to manage them. He couldn't bear to be beaten, so when the permanent job was advertised, he applied for and got it. Meanwhile, he enjoyed teaching the little ones – the eleven-year-olds, and the Sixth and to some extent the Fifth form enjoyed him.

Gradually he learnt his trade, and within a year had become an excellent teacher, but that particular Fourth form always made him uncomfortable.

My mother found her new lodger very congenial. She could see I was very happy and could understand why.

Peter's brother Bill had become friendly with a very large and interesting family in Bexleyheath, the Serebriacovs. The father could remember sitting on Lenin's knee as a small boy in Russia. Now all his children were over fourteen, the school leaving age, and were working. Bill's particular friend, Victor, drove a lorry. They were all intelligent and lively and most weekends the family held a party. Those who, like us, could not get home afterwards were invited to share a bed with one of the young ones. It was my first experience of a really intelligent working class way of life and the first time I realised I had been brought up with different values – money spent on education, books, theatres, clothes of "good" quality that would *last*, and a healthy diet. The Serebriacovs lived from week to week, drew their pay on Friday and blew it on a wonderful party every weekend, and their bedding was thin and I thought inadequate.

When Easter came round Peter, of course, had school holidays, whereas I as a secretary had only the Bank Holiday weekend off. Victor and his girlfriend invited Peter to spend a week with them in Cadgwith, as we had raved about the place. I felt really envious as they drove off, and the wonderful photographs of spring flowers and birds they brought back were no real compensation for not having been one of the party.

When war came we lost touch – but Victor was given an intelligence test when he joined the army and was astonished to learn he had an IQ of over 160. When the war was ended he founded MENSA and became a company director.

Chapter 7

Honeymoon in Cornwall

August 1939

1939

As summer 1939 arrived we realised that war was inevitable. We had planned to wait one more year before we got married to allow Peter time to pay off some of his debts, but now this seemed a bad idea. If we were not married they would separate us.
So I gave in my notice at Denes and we booked a Registry Office wedding, for August 5th. As we gave people very little notice and invited no guests we had few wedding presents and wore ordinary clothes. It was raining. My brother Roger and Peter's brother Bill came as witnesses, and we were shown into a long, narrow room. The roof leaked. We all lit up cigarettes.

"Please come with us," an official said – so we stubbed out our fags and were led to another long narrow room, also with a leaking roof. Finally, we got to a little square room and settled down in four chairs, two behind two, facing the Registrars' desk.

The ceremony was soon over. All through, Bill, who sat behind me, was whispering in my ear "Taxi's ticking up, taxi's ticking up!" We signed things and emerged into the rain and our waiting taxi. After a tea with a home-made sponge cake made by my mother we took a bus over to Bexley – determined to embarrass Arthur by "doing it under his roof!" and sat up until he was forced to suggest that we went to bed – together.

The next day we went to Cornwall for our honeymoon, catching the same train and bus as we had the year before, having sent off the camping things in advance, for our honeymoon.

We had already made friends with Trip, Mr Tripconey, an ex-fisherman and member of the lifeboat crew who lived in Cadgwith and earned his living as a "Sunday painter", selling views of the harbour and the village to tourists. Times were very hard. The whole village went on the dole all the winter. Now we got to know some of the other visitors.

Before the war there was a mildly pornographic magazine called *Razzle*. We now met its originator who called himself Lord Razzle. He had bought up a failing magazine aimed at men, and gradually made it more and more mildly pornographic – nothing to what is published legally nowadays – and it became more popular and sold more copies the ruder he allowed it to be. With very good judgment he sold it to another publisher for a very high price *just* before the police pounced and banned it unless it was cleaned up. When this was done the sales began to drop off – and when they had fallen enough to make it totally unprofitable he bought it back – very cheaply – and began to edge it up again by nudes and suggestive articles bit by bit – increasing the circulation again. Again he sold it very profitably before the police clamped down. This process he repeated several times and became very rich.

His wife, Maisie Gregg, was pregnant with her first child at the age of 45 that summer – unheard of then. She was a writer of

Mills and Boon-type novels which were stocked in twopenny libraries in the corners of stationers' shops, and was making £1000 a year (now £40,000) so *knew* she was a great writer.

A younger childless couple lived an ideal life. Both wrote for weeklies – she for *Women's Weekly*, he for *Red Letter*, a very down-market cheap periodical. They had no settled home but travelled the world with their portable typewriters. Each weekday they typed for a couple of hours in the morning and posted off their contributions – then they were free to enjoy themselves. He wrote for *Red Letter* under the name of Delia Eames, but under his real name, Delano Ames, wrote novels which were stocked in *proper* libraries. Each one had some kind of bed in the title – *Double bed on Olympus* and so on.

Finally there was a little man who was living in a bicycle shed in the middle of Cadgwith which he rented for five shillings a week. Like Baron Corvo he had hung the shed with religious tapestries and set up an altar. He drew and tried to sell wavery faint pencil sketches of religious subjects.

We decided to give a party in our tent on Tuesday evening so I cooked a three course meal on our primus by dint of juggling saucepans and a frying pan and Peter read M.R. James' *Ghost stories* by the light of the hurricane lantern. Finally, about 2 am our guests left. We were too tired to clear up and slept amid the dirty dishes.

Next morning we woke up late so had to leave at once as we had a date with two of our fishermen friends to go out with them on their crab and lobster trip. We left everything as it lay and walked along the cliff path in time to catch the tide. It was a long business. Innumerable lobster pots had to be hauled in, emptied of contents if any, and stacked in the small boat leaving only a toe hold for passengers like ourselves behind the mast. They were then rebaited and flung back. By this time the tide had risen too high for more work, so we ate, smoked and chatted for five hours until it had fallen again to allow us to repeat the process. Peter and I fished with a spinner, a metal bait, whenever the boat was under way – it had to be moving so that the bait spun as it was pulled through the water to look like a small fish. It was a good day – we caught about 20 mackerel which we strung on two lengths of string to make them easier for carrying.

By the time we had unloaded the lobsters and crabs into the keeping baskets near the shore and cleaned up the boat the pub was open and we were able to get a substantial ploughman's meal and settle down to rum and beer, cigarettes, singing and good talk. Eventually we took up our string of fish and wandered up the little footpath through the village with Trip. We had never met his family. This time we were honoured to be invited in. His wife

made us welcome and put the kettle on. As we chatted the 11 o'clock news came on the wireless, very faintly as the batteries were running down.

Suddenly we stopped talking and went closer to listen carefully as we heard, "Will all teachers from the following boroughs in London report back to their schools on Friday morning next". It was now late Wednesday night. The only way we could do it was to catch the *Cornish Riviera* at Helston early next morning. But Helston was twelve miles away, and the bus left Kennack Sands at 7 am!

We walked back by road and woke up the farmer's daughter, gave her our mackerel and begged her to call us as soon as it got light. We knew she would be up. Back at our tent we realised we had no water, no paraffin, no matches – and the remains of our last night's party were all around us. Somehow we slept amid the chaos, soon to be woken at dawn. There was no way we could wash. I couldn't even find my comb. We were still in last night's clothes covered in mackerel scales. Hurriedly we packed up everything, wrapped it all in the ground-sheet to be forwarded to Blackheath, and what we could carry we packed into and hung round our rucksacks. We just caught the bus, driven by the man we called the "mad driver". It was his habit to tease the Emmets by driving very fast up to the hotel in Mullian – to stop dead about six inches from the edge of the unprotected cliff.

This morning we asked him if there was any way we could get a drink of water.

"Never you mind, my dears," he said, and stopped his bus in Mullian village. "Come on you two," he encouraged us and took us into a cottage. "Make these dear people some tea," he said to his sister, "I'll be back for mine" – and he drove the bus off with its load of anxious passengers to collect more at Mullion Hotel, leaving us to our welcome cup of tea. By the time we were starting on our second cup he was back, leaving an even fuller bus load of frantic holiday makers to sit outside while he drank his. But we caught the train at Helston. The *Cornish Riviera* was pretty full of very clean and proper Headmasters and Headmistresses with their families – spick and span from their expensive hotels in Penzance. We found a couple of seats, dumped our rucksacks and went to have a very welcome wash, but there was little we could do about our fish scales or our hair.

When the train reached London we bought two newspapers, the *Times* and the *Daily Worker*, to find out what was happening. We were too dirty and smelly to go to Lyons, so we marched into the Ivy which was full of famous theatrical people, on the assumption that the richer people were, the less they would mind. It seemed to work well and we had a meal and read our papers. We had married just in time. War was imminent.

Chapter 8

Early war years, school evacuations and call-up

August 1939 – February 1941

Peter was ordered to report at school each morning with iron rations (corned beef sandwiches), as were all of the rest of the staff and the pupils. Monday – Tuesday – Wednesday, each day they filled in time until four o'clock – then they ate their sandwiches and came home. On Thursday, though, when he got home, Peter said, "Pack your own haversack and make another packet of sandwiches. The Old Man says you are to come too tomorrow".

So we arrived at the school at about 8.30 am. Not only were all the pupils there, but many of them were leading younger siblings. At 9 am we started to march through the narrow streets towards Stratford station between pavements lined with parents and grandparents, weeping and waving. The scene was made all the more poignant as one of the older boys with only one leg was walking on crutches at the back.

We reached the station at last and lined up at the back of the platform. Trains came in and trains went out carrying other children but not ours. Eventually an empty train arrived and we were packed in. It started – stopped – waited – started again – and by 4 pm we reached Brentwood and were ordered out; collected ourselves and marched to Brentwood School where we gathered in the central quadrangle.

There were two WVS ladies there with as little table and a school notebook. Wearily they surveyed us.

"Let me see," said one, "Mrs Gibson said she didn't mind taking in a little girl with blue eyes and blonde curls. Can you see one?"

By 6.30 pm they had selected and billeted 23 children. Then they went home to tea taking their book with them. By this time the mainly conservative staff were very angry and some began to sing *The Red Flag* while my father went for the police. One policeman stopped all the traffic. The others took each took two children, piled into the waiting cars and went from door to door all over Brentwood ringing and knocking. When the door was opened they said "Police – these two children are yours for tonight," and packed the children inside. By eleven o'clock all, including the staff, were under cover.

Ours wasn't the worst, thanks to the Old Man. Five hundred High School girls had also arrived unexpectedly. At midnight several were found by their distraught headmistress in the local brothel, each sharing a bed with one of the prostitutes. Peter and I were allocated to a delightful couple who made us feel very welcome, and kept an enormous bowl of their own apples on the breakfast table for us. We stayed there for three weeks and our first cooked meal was liver and bacon. Now I was not fussy about my food and could eat with relish practically everything *except* liver and malt toffee. How could I tell them? They had taken so much trouble! So I forced it down, convinced I would be sick at any moment.

They were delighted to find something we all enjoyed and liver was served three times in the next three weeks! Having eaten it once without a fuss I couldn't say I didn't like it – and eventually I found that I did – all that fuss throughout my childhood for nothing!

Some of the more alert of our pupils had posted their postcards home to announce their safe arrival before the last post went. Brentwood was only a shilling bus ride from Stratford, so why not visit the little dears to make sure. After all, it was Saturday. Parents started to arrive at lunchtime ... but ... we had no idea where any of their offspring were! Although the war had not yet started the Government expected bombing might well start before a formal declaration of war, so we were forbidden to call the children together.

My Dad was in his element. He took over the best room in the best pub in the High Street as his office. Peter and I were recruited as his aides and worked with the billeting officers. The Declaration of War on Sunday passed un-noticed – we were too busy tracking down our children and moving any who had been put somewhere unsuitable. Several of the more affluent residents of Brentwood resented the evacuees from the East End of London. Two of our girls were nagged until they got fed up and went home. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, two great girls of fifteen, to be still at school instead of going into service to help your poor mothers." It made no difference that theirs was a Grammar school at which they were either paying fees or had scholarships. That first Sunday more than one well-heeled family sat down to Sunday Roast in the dining room while their evacuees ate their very elderly corned beef sandwiches in the kitchen. However, most of the residents, mainly the less well off, did their best to make their visitors welcome.

Part of this time Stratford Grammar School was able to use Brentwood School for lessons. After three weeks Peter and I were found a house to share with the Economics teacher and his wife, Mr and Mrs Smith. The house was amazing and had been built bit by bit over the centuries. At the front it was a very old, low-ceilinged cottage. The door opened onto one of the two front rooms, out of which a low door revealed a winding staircase to a bedroom, ours. Another door led into another front room, theirs, from which a second staircase led nowhere. A fourth door from our sitting room led into a high ceilinged passage, Victorian, giving access to a square dining room on the right and kitchen, bathroom and lavatory on the left. Behind that again was a large single storey school room, now partitioned to store coal and wood and to serve as a box room. A wide imposing flight of stairs led up from the hall to a second bedroom, theirs. There was a pleasant garden.

As our sitting room had four ill-fitting doors it was full of draughts. The first thing we bought was a folding screen. The room was heated by a tiny basket coal fire set into the wall about 15 inches up. If we folded the screen right round our two chairs and kept the fire going well we managed to keep reasonably warm that cold winter. We all four ate together, sharing the cooking and each Sunday Clifford Smith and I went over the weekly accounts. One weekend I remember we spent two hours trying to find an error which made them a penny out. Peter offered to put a penny in, but Clifford was horrified. The error must be tracked down. We kept on finding little notes when we got in reminding Peter that the second peg in the passage had been allocated to him but he had hung his hat on the first *again*, Clifford's. The two families were not ideally suited.

Mind you, Clifford Smith was an admirable man. He had obtained all his qualifications, Matriculation, Higher Schools Certificate, Degree and Doctorate all by correspondence courses. All his mature life he had gone to bed at nine – risen at five – worked for two hours before seven when he began to prepare breakfast for his wife who got up at eight and retired to bed at eleven. They had no children.

One evening as we sat huddled round our little basket fire protected by our screen we saw a black vase which stood on the floor full of paper spills for lighting cigarettes start to dance about!! "Peter," I cried, "there must be a mouse and it must be roasting alive." He knocked the pot over and we waited for a mouse to run out. Nothing! Peter tipped out the spills and peered inside. Empty! "It must have been a Poltergeist," he said. So he spent some time writing out a spell against the supernatural in Elizabethan handwriting and pinned it onto the wall above the fire. We never found what caused it, and it never happened again.

Hardly had we moved into our shared house than I was asked to coach a couple of children; a girl aged twelve and her brother aged seven. They had been suffering from tubercular glands in the neck so had not been able to go to school. They could both read, write and add up. Next term they would be ready to attend a school but meanwhile needed to catch up. So they came to me every morning. They were both intelligent and we read widely, learning most of our Geography and History from story books, although we had text books as well. They enjoyed writing stories and could spell reasonably well – but they knew no maths.

However, they soon learnt their tables and "what makes ten". By Christmas they were happily solving quadratic equations – not that they were specially gifted, but they had my undivided attention so understood what we were doing.

Half the time Peter was teaching Stratford children in Brentwood School. For the rest, in particular for the Sixth formers preparing

to get to university, he had to improvise – sometimes in cafés, sometimes in our house – sometimes if it was warm enough, outside.

We were still members of the Communist party and so got to know several interesting people. One, a black doctor, was married to a blond wife. They had two children, the boy exactly like his father and the girl like her mother. When Peter suddenly developed arthritis in one knee, that doctor ordered him crutches and forbade his putting that foot to the ground for six months.

The winter got colder and colder. Someone left the tap dripping in our bathroom and in the morning we found the bath solid with five inches of ice so no-one could have a bath until the spring when we were at last able to lift out the bath-shaped iceberg and take it into the garden.

It was still there in the spring, and Peter was still on crutches, when the Old Man asked us to go to Cornwall to set up a second evacuation. He had heard on the grapevine that since a lot of children had drifted back to London during the Phoney War because bombing didn't materialise, the Government had ordered a new evacuation; this time we were to go to Helston, twelve miles from Cadgwith, from which we had been snatched on our honeymoon. He reckoned we would have three weeks and he gave us a list of pupils likely to be going this time. So we took what we could carry, spent a night or two in Blackheath, and caught the *Cornish Riviera* again.

It arrived very late – in those days one could go by train all the way to Helston, and we were tired, so we turned into the first hotel we came to in the main street, booked in, and slept soundly.

Before breakfast we went out to buy a paper and were surprised to be greeted by passers-by: "Good morning Mr and Mrs Hewett. I hope you slept well."

"How on earth did they know?" we asked one another.

Our list enabled us to match up our children with the offered homes, so when they arrived, three weeks later – how did my father know? – we were able, on the whole, to match evacuees to homes.

When the day came the Old Man sent the Senior Master to take charge, he himself staying with those children who preferred to risk the bombs yet to come.

"God help you if you let those children get onto any train that is not going to Helston. You will have me to deal with – so stand firm," he said. So for four hours the Senior Master and the school stood firm against all pressure from police and station staff. In the end the right train came in and they embarked. Many, many

London schools were sent to Cornwall that day, but we were the only one that got to the right place.

Peter and I had arranged to share a granite house with the French teacher, Mr Betts, his wife and three-year-old son. Some of the teaching took place in Helston Grammar School and some in church halls. If I needed to know where Peter was, all I had to do was to step outside the front door and ask the first passer-by. They always knew.

Down in Cornwall rationing meant very little. Our milk came from Jersey cows and was literally half cream. There was a solid fuel Cornish stove in our shared kitchen. We skimmed off the cream and left it on the back of the stove to turn into Cornish clotted cream with its delicious buttery-yellow crust.

Every morning a fisherman called with a large basket of fish. Each night he would let his nets down over the cliffs at Porthleven, the nearest fishing village, and each morning he would fill his basket with whatever he had caught and call round to his customers. Many of the fish I had never seen before, but he would advise on cooking methods. He also fished for crabs with crab pots and these he boiled. If you put a live crab into cold water and slowly bring it to the boil the crab stays whole. If you are soft hearted and kill them quickly by dropping them into boiling water they "shoot" their large claws where most of the meat is. He must have been soft hearted because for a penny or two I could buy a delicious large claw full of white crab meat.

There was a dairy just up the road where one could buy eggs off the ration, lard with which to make lardy cake, unrationed rabbits, chickens, Cornish pasties, and saffron to make saffron cakes. I learnt to cook them all in the side oven of that stove. Although we shared the kitchen there were no problems. Mr Betts was a vegetarian and ate mainly lentils and Mrs Betts cooked very little. Young David Betts had already learnt to make early morning tea for his parents, and somehow never scalded himself. Mr Betts had been brought up to go into the Air Force and when he announced that he was going to university to read French instead his father disowned him, so he had financed his way through college on his Bridge earnings. He only played for money and he always won. Every now and again, as we went up to bed at about ten o'clock he would come back from the pub with three local men and they would settle down for a whole night's Bridge. As we came down to our breakfasts we would see them leaving, sadder but I am afraid not much wiser. He had only recently taught himself Russian by haunting the docks in London to meet Russian seamen, and offered to teach us, but I only learnt a word or two.

Peter's leg was still bothering him quite a bit. Eventually he graduated form crutches to a stick – cobbled streets on a steep

slope were not 100% suitable for crutches. When his call-up papers arrived he went for an interview but was deferred. The summer weather was glorious that year – we had a white camelia and a medlar tree in the garden.

When autumn came, and then winter, the weather was still warm but misty. We woke up each morning to find our hair wringing wet on our pillows and shoes left in a cupboard for as much as a week grew grey mould. At the beginning of December I developed a bad tooth-ache and the dentist diagnosed an impacted wisdom tooth, decided I needed gas for the extraction but had no way of calling in a doctor to administer it that day. I was to come back next morning. During the night my face swelled up like a balloon and I couldn't open my mouth. For days I went each morning for infra-red treatment to bring down the swelling but it had no effect. All over Christmas, for which I cooked a delicious chicken, I was unable to eat anything larger than a grain of rice. Eventually the dentist decided that he must somehow force my mouth open or I would have to go into hospital to have the tooth out through my cheek. As I breathed in the gas I felt him kneel on my lap to get a purchase, and when I came to I had chipped front teeth and a very sore face, but the wisdom tooth had gone.

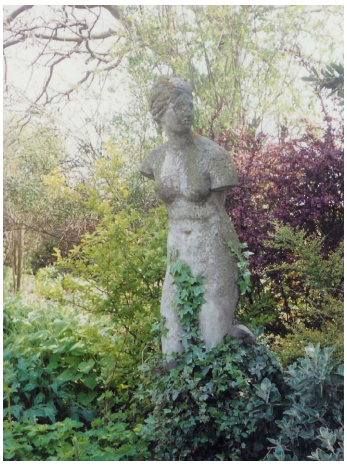
Peter's arthritis was improving so they called him up again, but the muscles in his leg had wasted so he needed physiotherapy. Eventually in late February 1941 he joined the Royal Ordnance Corps as a private and was posted to Earl Shilton in Leicestershire. Solemnly he handed me his stick as he boarded the train.

I followed him a fortnight later, as soon as I had sorted out our affairs in Cornwall.

Chapter 9

Peter's army career, birth of Gale

February 1941 – August 1943



A sad and sorry Peter met me at Earl Shilton station. His hair had been cut very short, badly; his battle-dress irritated his skin like crazy. About a hundred new recruits were sleeping on mattresses on the floor of a church hall. Every morning at six they had to dress and square up their kit on their beds. He knew how to do this because he had been a cadet at school. Then rifles must be cleaned and oiled and placed reverently across the bed.

Breakfast followed – porridge already over-sweetened, kippers, bacon and liver or some-such and sweet tea. They were issued with a billycan each – a metal container consisting of a top and bottom clamped together for packing but taken apart it made two receptacles. One half took the porridge and the other the tea. It became obvious that the liver or whatever had to sit on top of the porridge! There was certainly no hope of eating the porridge first – everything must be collected in one go.

Finally one queued for a turn to wash up in one of two buckets of luke warm water, all that were provided. While the men ate, two orderlies swept the floor. Then there was an inspection of kit. Of course, all the newly oiled rifles were covered in dust, so their owners were put on fatigues! Peter reasonably suggested to his sergeant that it might be more sensible to clean and oil them *after* the room had been swept and got a hail of abuse for his pains.

He had found me a little room in a local house owned by a lady who took in washing – or perhaps rented. Now in his time off he had at least somewhere to sit (on the bed) in peace and quiet. I was the only wife who had followed her man and earned brownie points by offering to mend his sergeant's socks. I was also able to buy him cotton vests and long johns to wear under his scratchy uniform, mend his socks too, and soothe his troubled mind. Already he hated the army as much as he had thought he would.

There was nothing in that little mining town but seven pubs and two fish and chip shops. One night when he was drinking in a pub with some of the other privates they began boasting about their conquests – how they had taken a young married woman into the allotments and fucked her... and Peter said "If you got an unexpected twenty-four hours' leave and went home to find your wife had been carrying on with a soldier what would you do?" Their faces changed to a grim mask. "I'd slit his bloody throat," one replied, "and hers too". A silence followed while the others nodded agreement, but no-one seemed to see the connection.

After the initial six weeks' training Peter was promoted to Corporal and sent to Leicester to instruct clerks and storemen in army rules and regulations. But already the stress of it all had caused him to develop gastric trouble.

We found a first floor flat to rent; Peter had been posted to the race-course and the flat was nearby. We sent for our bikes.

The army doctor soon decided that Peter could not cope with army food so he was allowed to sleep and eat out. I found a job nearby teaching in a small private school for a term. All I can remember about it is that the children, who were quite young, had peas on toast instead of beans on toast for lunch. Then I joined Pictorial Charts as a research assistant and general dogsbody. Peter settled down to a life of gastritis and dull acceptance of his predicament.

For something to take his mind off the war we started to collect pre-revolutionary Russian stamps, and together spent many happy evenings in our flat ruling out pages and looking up stamps in Gibbon's catalogue. Very few people collected Russian stamps so we were able very cheaply to build up quite an interesting collection. We also joined the Anglo-Czech Friendship Club. There we met a Sudetan German Czech who had escaped just as Hitler had marched his armies in. Sadly his wife and two children had been on a visit to her parents so he had had to leave them behind and didn't know whether they were alive or dead.

Peter was promoted to Sergeant. We got to know a young man, a capstan lathe operator. Originally he had lived in Wigan where he had been trained for seven years as a skilled sheet metal worker. In those days the metal sheets had to be made perfectly flat by hand. Then in the slump almost the whole town became unemployed and he soon lost his skill. One small factory was still working and the town's children would line up outside as the workers came out to beg for any crusts left over from their lunch.

His married sister lived in Leicester and invited him for a week's holiday. While he was there the dole people found him a job as a nightwatchman at ten shillings a week. He had to take it or lose his dole. So the whole family had to move to Leicester. Now he had a good job but the years of privation had ruined his digestion and if he spat into the fire he produced sheets of flame, his spit was so acid.

My Pictorial Charts job proved interesting. I did do what typing and so forth was required but mainly I had to research the statistics to produce the bar charts or pie charts to be published in newspapers to inspire people to more war effort.

Peter's job was to get batches of new recruits through a simple examination or test about army rules and regulations as they applied to clerks and storemen. When he went in to teach one new intake he found that the first man he looked at had only one eye. Hastily he shifted his gaze to another – but that man had only one eye too. Anxiously he glanced around. All the men present had lost an eye! He used to tell how once he cycled into the gates of the race course when in the distance he saw a *giant* sergeant drilling a new intake of men. But he knew all the sergeants and they were all of normal size. As he drew nearer he realised that this one was normal too – but was drilling a squad of dwarfs. They had called up all the dwarfs from the circuses.

If he could get his men through their test it meant an extra shilling a day to them, but many were illiterate including one black-jowled bruiser who had to admit to the name of Cupid Dart. In 1942 when we had just got back from leave we were posted back to London. Peter was to work in the War Office, so we could live at home.

My mother was now working from a flat in Cambridge. She had been head-hunted to take charge of Social Services for one eighth of England. So only my sister Helen, now working at the Admiralty, and my youngest brother David, waiting to join the Navy, were living at 44 Lee Park. It was very good to be home. There was a lull in the bombing and things almost seemed normal.

Peter worked in a department concerned with REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, earlier Royal Ordnance Corps) officers' records. His superior there was an ardent philatelist. He had been escaping from Dunkirk when he came across a bombed French post-office – so he stopped to empty his haversack of all his kit and filled it with sheets and sheets of French stamps. When he got back to England he sold them and with the proceeds started to go to stamp auctions. By the time Peter met him he was spending most of his time on stamps – buying up old collections in his lunch hour, taking them home for his wife to soak off in the bath and iron them flat – after which he sold them through the stamp clubs. Already he had made enough money to put his small son through public school after the war, and then to university. He was now beginning to build up a fund with which to take his wife round the world! Peter was glad to cover for him when necessary.

Together they invented an officer for whom they opened a file. Periodically they posted him and ordered kit for him, on paper only of course. When the department was checked if they couldn't quite match the officers' files to the number required they could either add their invented officer or subtract him, so he proved very useful.

I had been getting more and more broody, but felt it unfair to put pressure on Peter. He had to want a child too. Now, by autumn 1942 he had come to terms with the fact that he was never going to be posted abroad – Hitler was not going to win the war, and he – Peter – stood no more chance of dying than anyone else. He suggested that perhaps we shouldn't wait any longer for peace, but should try for a baby. Almost at once I found I was pregnant.

Perhaps we had been a little over-optimistic. The Germans stepped up their bombing of London. Already, before we got back from Leicester, the church next door but two had been demolished by a high explosive bomb, which also brought down our kitchen ceiling and broke all but one piece of my mother's marvellous blue china. Now, night after night the siren would go and Peter would bully me out of bed and down the curved wooden stairs to take shelter under the very sturdy large kitchen table. Several

times I sat down on the wedge-shaped stairs and went to sleep, to be roused again by Peter who wouldn't leave me but longed for something more sturdy above us. I wasn't worried – the calm of pregnancy protected me and my baby.

Peter was suffering all the symptoms described by old wives' tales. As I grew larger he grew iller; so at the beginning of July the army doctor at Kidbrook, where he had been transferred from the War Office, decided he must have a grumbling appendix and he was whipped into an army hospital to have it out. Army spit-and-polish demanded that the floors of the ward were like glass and all the patients held their breath as I negotiated the "ice-rink" to visit and cheer him up. Then he was moved to Army Rehabilitation in Surrey.

There were still three weeks to go before baby was due and I was missing Peter. One morning I got up early, left a note for Helen and David and caught a train. He was a bit flustered when I turned up, very large, and unannounced, and I wasn't allowed in, so we went for a walk in the July fields and forgot to keep an eye on the time. It would never do for him to be late for lunch, so we ran, leaping over the stacks of wheat, and he just made it back in time. As we had no phone then we arranged for him to phone me at my father's house at 6pm every second day. This would give me time, I thought, to have the baby before he could have a nervous breakdown with worry.

Gale was due on August 14th, a Saturday. On Thursday August 12th I was alone in the house when the door bell rang. There in the porch in full uniform stood our gallant Sudetan German Czech from Leicester. His face dropped a little when he saw my condition. I think he might have been nursing a faint hope of a farewell to a hero. He was to be dropped behind enemy lines the next day and wanted a bed for the night. *That* I could offer so he came in. Helen was at work at the Admiralty as resident mathematician to help Andrew Huxley decide what guns new ships should carry, and David was out somewhere, so we waited a bit for them and then ate what I could provide.

Eventually Helen arrived with her arm in a sling. She had gone ice skating with Andrew after work, fallen and broken her arm. No thank you, she didn't want to eat but would go straight to bed. Later still David arrived with eight sailors he had found in Greenwich Park. Could they sleep on the floor? They had nowhere else to go! Finally I got them all to bed.

Next morning, wearing Peter's dressing gown and looking like Friar Tuck I organised a ten-man removal team as Helen had been waiting several months to exchange her heavy bedroom furniture for that in our mother's room. It seemed a good time to get it done! Then Helen went off to work, broken arm notwithstanding, and I got ready for my hospital appointment that afternoon.

At Lewisham Hospital they listened and prodded. "Any time now," they said. Tomorrow if you haven't started, have a hot bath and take a tablespoon full of caster oil.

Friday was the day Peter rang me, and nothing had started so I walked up to my Dad's house through an almighty thunderstorm and, when Peter phoned, said, "They say everything is OK but it may be a week yet. Ring me on Sunday. How are you?" etc. etc. Then I went home; the rain had stopped; had my bath and caster oil and went to bed.

At about 5am I woke and began to wonder – but it was too early to do anything. At 6am I got up and went downstairs to make a cup of tea. The sink in the scullery was crawling with enormous black slugs, as big as my fingers, which had come up the plug hole. While I drank my tea I filled in the time with a slug hunt using up all the cooking salt, then cleared up the mess, made yet more tea and wrote a note for the others.

At 7am I thought it not too early to go over the road to use their phone as arranged to ring the hospital. Nursey answered the door, the children's nurse in full brown uniform who had arrived there when the twins were born, and was still in residence although they were now grown up and in the Air Force. She would never touch the phone herself as she was convinced that germs came down the wires, but I was welcome to risk it. Soon the ambulance came, and I was on my way.

"You are not quite ready," they said, "but now you are here you might as well stay."

That day I rested in a bit of discomfort, but not too much, and read a book about childbirth Peggy had lent me, so as to know what to expect. That night I slept fairly well, but on Sunday things started to happen, just as the book said. However Gale was a bit slow to face the world and when Peter phoned the hospital soon after 6pm I had to ask them to give him a message to ring back at 9pm but say I am fine.

I found the last stages of labour very hard work but I felt no pain. I think I produced my own painkiller. I heard the phone ring at 9pm. "Tell him to hang on," I shouted, "the baby is just coming." Sure enough, at 9.05 there was Gale and Peter learnt that he had a daughter.

My Dad came to see the baby next day – more than he would have done for her, my mother said, when she arrived a few days later. Then Peter came. He had a good look at Gale, "A Japanese gentleman I presume!" he said. She did look a bit Oriental at first as her head was a bit squashed and she had a lot of black hair.

In those days we had to stay in hospital for ten days. All day we had to sit bolt upright in bed except for an hour after lunch when

we were made to lie on our tummies. As my mattress was a bit short I often found I was sitting on the springs of the bed, and as I had stitches it was not exactly comfortable. The ward was a Florence Nightingale type holding fifty mothers. The babies were kept elsewhere and brought to us only for feeding. We could often hear them crying and longed to cuddle our own but were not allowed out of bed for the first week.

Each evening, before they went off duty, the day nurses insisted that we drank senna. The night nurses, who always seemed to be well out of call delivering babies, locked up all the bedpans! No-one in that ward gave a thought to air-raids and bombs falling near! We had more important things to concern us. After the first night I led a strike. All fifty of us refused to take our senna unless bedpans were left out for our use. Matron was adamant. She would not have her ward looking untidy, even at night. But we still refused. Finally she had to allow the bedpan cupboard to be left unlocked at night. Those nearly ready to go home and so allowed to get out of bed took it in turns to fetch what we needed. We had won.

We had little else to do but talk. Of the fifty of us it turned out only three missed our husbands. The rest only wanted their mothers and boasted of their own frigidity. "Turn over iceberg," my husband says; and "Look what you've got me into, you bastard," to an embarrassed husband brave enough to visit.

When Gale and I got out of hospital, as Peter was still being rehabilitated and the bombs were getting worse it seemed wise to take her out of London. I learnt of a wonderful woman doctor, Doctor Sutherland, who had taken over a large farmhouse in Privet where she now lived with her two children and her husband, recently invalided out of the Navy after drifting for three days around the Atlantic in a rubber dinghy, his ship having been torpedoed. Dr Sutherland made it her war work to take in young mothers whose husbands were in the Forces and their newborn babies for a few weeks, to set them up and keep them safe. At that time there were seventeen of us, with seventeen tiny babies.

It was an experience every new mother should have. She taught us by example to enjoy our babies. Wonderful meals were brought to us wherever we happened to be. There were no clocks. She started with some but when they were stolen she didn't replace them as she wanted us to respond to the needs of our babies, not a clock. If they cried Dr Sutherland would drift past saying, "I should feed her if I were you. I expect she's hungry" ....but "Babies are tough but perhaps you shouldn't lay her down lengthways on the bed. If she *should* happen to roll off and if in a later life she should turn out a bit odd you would think it was your fault." She believed very strongly that "A happy mother makes a happy baby." Whenever the sun shone she would send some of us out with a picnic – a very large, hot casserole well lagged in blankets and settled in a

pushchair while we carried our babies. "Feed them under a hedge," she advised.

When Gale was three weeks old I was sent with another mother whose little boy was exactly the same age by bus all the way to Winchester to have their photographs taken. Inspired by her we walked a couple of miles pushing a bottomless pram to support the carrycots to a garage where we could leave it and catch a bus. Photographs duly taken we marched into Winchester Cathedral and demanded to be taken somewhere to feed our babies. Politely they showed us into the Bishop's Chapel where we satisfied the children in comfort and changed them on the Bishop's blotting paper.

Peter got a day's leave and came to visit. When he had to leave Dr Sutherland advised "Go part of the way with him on the train. Go as far as Reading" – so Gale had her first train ride and I took her to show her off to my grandmother – my father's mother.

That night, tired out, I slept through everything but Dr Sutherland lay outside my bedroom door. When Gale woke and cried she crept in to fetch, fed her and soothed her back to sleep, to make quite sure I didn't lose confidence in her adage that life needn't stop because one had a child.

Peter was relocated in Taunton for more rehabilitation and arranged for us to lodge with a delightful elderly couple. The wife taught me a great deal. "When we were first married," she said, "I had ten shillings a week housekeeping money each week. I managed on nine shillings – an enamel bowl here, a pot there. We furnished our house on that shilling."

After some weeks of peace Peter was well enough to rejoin the War Office, so we went back to the bombs.

On the whole we had got used to the Incendiary and ordinary High Explosive Bombs – but now the Doodlebugs (the VIs) started coming over the house. These pilotless planes flew slowly and low. When you heard the engine cut out you were in trouble. I had been taught that babies needed fresh air, but no sooner was Gale settled in her pram in the garden than I heard the ominous hum of an approaching Doodlebug, so would rush out to rescue her. It was no life for a baby.

Peter had been posted to a base at Kidbrook nearby but he was not at all well. The army is not a suitable institution in which to suffer clinical depression.

He was still suffering a lot of stomach pain even though he no longer had an appendix to grumble, and he alternated between being sure he had stomach cancer, and being equally sure he had an ulcer and was soon to die.

He ate less and less.

He cycled back home from the army for lunch but would put his hand on his folded arms and sleep on the table throughout his lunch hour. Of course he wasn't sleeping at night. Sometimes he wouldn't or couldn't speak to me for all of twenty-four hours. The only way, I found, to get through to him was to make him angry, which took days of work!

Obvously we were doing each other no good, and Gale was suffering. Relunctantly I took her to stay with my sister-in-law in Coventry, which was now bomb-free, and Peter went into hospital again. There he was injected with insulin, to put him to sleep, into a coma, and they roused him on alternate days to eat mounds of mashed potato. This dangerous treatment was used as an alternative to electric shock threatment, which would have been even worse. He also had sessions with a psychiatrist, a female, but never told me what went on, afterwards. Then they invalided him out of the army and Gale and I returned to be with him. He went back to teaching at Stratford Grammar School. As far as we were concerned the worst was over.

Chapter 10

Third evacuation, V2 hits Blackheath

Summer 1944 – Spring 1945

In July 1944 the Powers That Be decided on a third evacuation from London. We travelled by coach to Corton on the Norfolk coast, taking Gale's pram and basic necessities. The party consisted of about 250 boys and girls of eleven to eighteen, mostly from Stratford Grammar School but a few from a neighbouring school in Plaistow, my father the headmaster, the caretaker, Peter, Gale and myself, and six assorted mums who were to cook.

We landed up in an ex-holiday camp in the woods on top of a cliff. The beach below was mined, and there were no fences or walls. The army had occupied the place until about a month before and it was a shambles. Half the huts' doors were hanging off. The drains were blocked. The workhouse and laundry were so overgrown we didn't find them for two days. Everywhere was filthy and thickly strewn with live ammunition.

And, because it was the start of the summer holidays none of the staff had come!

There were two large halls on the site, one for recreation and the other a dining room with kitchen attached with gigantic cooking stoves, long tables and tip-up wooden chairs. The authorities had provided basic food, mainly dried egg, spam, potatoes and cabbage. Gale was a very fast crawler and when I put her down for a minute on the hall floor she was immediately unrecognisably filthy. Luckily I had made her several dungarees out of unrationed check dusters.

Gale was never one to sit still. She would set out, very fast, for the crates of third-of-a-pint bottles of milk and poke her little fingers in all the tops if I didn't get there quickly enough.

The Old Man got hold of some tools and set about mending the huts with a team of helpers – gathering up the live ammunition as he went.

The caretaker recruited a gang of ne'er-do-wells who enjoyed going down the drains, and managed to clear them.

Peter got on the phone which was working thank goodness, and rang up the nearest army base. This couldn't have been more helpful and sent over immediately two members of the Catering Corps to teach our mums how to cook in bulk on the gigantic stoves. They also warned us to watch out for our girls as there was a camp for delinquent young soldiers a mile down the road. For the next two days Peter spent most of his time on the phone. As our outside contact man he had to get the hot water system working again, order food and supplies of cleaning materials and necessary equipment, argue with the authorities. For a non-organisational man he did very well. I spent most of my time settling Gale's needs. Eventually the hall floor was scrubbed so I was able to allow her to crawl as long as I watched the milk, but the tip-up chairs presented a real problem. She was not heavy

enough to hold the seat down when she was strapped in so if I didn't keep my foot on the seat the chair would snap shut with her inside.

To begin with our food consisted mainly of fried spam and sausage rolls which I didn't consider perfect for an eleven-and-a-half-month-old baby, but I got hold of a large container of dried egg which I was able to reconstitute and scramble on the corner of one of the stoves.

And what if the two hundred and fifty boys and girls? Well, there was no-one to look after them, so they had to run the place themselves. The sixth form took responsibility for the younger ones without being asked; saw them to their own huts and to bed before, we suspected, running their own grown-up parties in the woods. We thought it best not to know. The eleven to fourteen girls took up housekeeping, and could be seen gossiping at the door of their huts as they leant on the half-doors. A dozen or so each day, missing their little brothers and sisters, would queue up outside our hut each morning and beg to be allowed to do something for Gale.

"Can't I even wash a dirty nappy, Mrs Hewett?"

Soon I found that I could be more useful to the whole party as I could trust them to mind her and stop her eating the sandy soil of the cliff top. Wherever I was in camp I could hear the chant, "One... two... three... four...Oh!", "One ... two... three... Oh!" "One... two... three... four...FIVE... SIX!... Oh!" as Gale learnt to walk.

Meanwhile the fifteen-year-olds began organising regular evening classes and entertainments in the other hall. The leading light was Spud, although in general he was one of the least law abiding. From somewhere he had cadged on long loan a Music Centre, so dances were popular with himself as Master of Ceremonies. "Come on, Mr Ewett, look at Eileen all dressed up and with no partner! Do your duty!"

Really the "children" were no trouble... that is, until the beginning of September when the rest of the staff arrived. They were horrified! "How are we going to keep them in camp with no fences and no gates?" they asked anxiously, and immediately set about organising a rota to patrol the camp at night. Lessons started although we had no books – but it would "keep them out of mischief". Nightly we watched the Doodlebugs pass over on their way to fall on other, less fortunate, people.

My father put one of the two village pubs out of bounds to the staff. He knew there was nothing else for the seventeens and eighteens to do. There was nothing else for the staff to do either, and while we learnt to play Cardinal Puff, a wicked game to

ensure you drank more beer than you should, in our pub we couldn't see our pupils playing darts in the other, so we didn't have to know they were there or do anything about it.

But the nightly patrols were a challenge to Spud and his friends as we knew they would be. One horrible dawn my father was called to the phone.

"Are any of your boys missing? This is the coastguard. I'm afraid there is something on the mined beach below your camp that looks like a body."

The army were called and made their way down. It was a body – a dead boy – blown up by a mine.

The huts were searched and Spud and one of his friends were found, in bed but dressed and wounded in the back.

"Yes, they had evaded the patrol and crept down to collect more live ammunition. Yes, there had been a mine detonated. Yes, they had been hit and were scared and had run back and put their heads under their blankets. Yes, their friend, Sid, was not with them. No, they didn't look. They hoped he had got away along the beach."

The doctor came and said Sid had died instantly – thank goodness. We couldn't bear the thought of his having lain there all night in agony. That was what we found hard to forgive – that his friends had not known that he couldn't be saved and done nothing.

The London police were alerted to contact his parents who came next day. His mother, in shock I suppose, kept worrying that one of his socks was missing. There were two younger siblings and against our advice she insisted on taking them to see the body. Perhaps she was right.

Gradually the children drifted back to London. By Christmas there were only about thirty-five left, including Spud, and we were moved to a large house in Hunstanton, where Gale was astonished to see coloured curtains and cushions. She had forgotten that sometimes things need not be just plain wood. The local WVS provided me with a large bag of pieces of material and I spent most of my time with Gale patching the boys' trousers. Peter was in charge.

Spud had learnt nothing from the tragedy and we caught him many times searching the Hunstanton mined beaches for live ammunition. There was nothing we could do! We couldn't keep a fifteen-year-old boy in the house day and night, and you can't punish him more than by wounding him quite badly and killing one of his close friends. Peter always wondered what happened to him after we all went back to London after Christmas. I expect he either grew up to be a millionaire or spent all his adult life in and out of prison – who knows?

The Doodlebugs stopped coming and soon after we got back to London the V2s started to arrive. Horrible though they were they didn't cause us so much anguish of mind. Perhaps this was because the war was coming to an end. We were winning and it was now only a question of time. If one of the V2s landed, and they were not all that frequent, it could be heard all over London – but if you heard one you were safe. The bomb arrived before the sound of the bomb so if you were hit you would never know.

One morning I wheeled Gale up to Blackheath village to buy some buttons in the large drapers, and she grizzled and wouldn't stay in her pram outside one of the palatial entrances. So I unstrapped her and lifted her onto my hip and we went in. As I stood waiting to be served I saw with amazement bricks and debris detaching themselves near the ceiling and beginning to fall. There was time for me to step across the aisle and crouch down with Gale under the counter before they landed and the noise of the explosion came. Suddenly I couldn't see my hand before my face for dust.

Quite unharmed I picked my way, still carrying Gale, to the open door. There was Gale's pram, still on its wheels but packed with shards of jagged plate glass. With Gale seemingly quite unperturbed on my hip and pulling the pram behind us I turned uphill.

At the top we emerged into clear air to confront a small crowd of people applauding each survivor. A V2 had fallen just the other side of the village.

Still carrying Gale and pulling the pram I walked slowly down Lee Park, dreading what I would find. The windows were out of most of the houses but strangely enough the old avenue of lime trees was undamaged. We came to the house next door. Their windows were out too. But amazingly as I turned into our gate I saw that our house, number 44, was the first that had escaped unharmed.

Before we even washed I phoned Peter at school. "Don't worry – we are all right and so is the house but a V2 has fallen in the village. I don't know about the Old Man's house, but that would have been empty anyway."

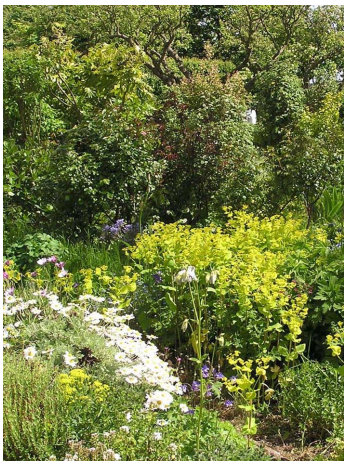
At school all those miles away they had heard the bomb and I knew they would be worrying. We always did. If there is a moral to our bomb story it is that one should never leave one's child alone in a pram outside a shop.

Soon after that came VE Day. There were street parties in some of the working-class streets off Blackheath but no signs of rejoicing in the "posh" streets of large houses like ours. My sister-in-law babysat for us so Peter and I wandered out to join the celebrations if we could find them after Gale was in bed. When we did come across one we realised that we were strangers so felt too shy to join in and went home. It was an anti-climax really. But as far as we were concerned, the war was over.

Chapter 11

Post-war holiday, Russian Embassy

Summer 1945 – Christmas 1945



While Peter was teaching the young people as Stratford Grammar School, I had been getting to know the mothers of other young people of Gale's age. Whenever I was at 44 Lee Park I always tried to take her to the clinic. Soon there was a group of us, all with girls as it happened, and all the girls first children and within three weeks of one another in age. We would meet in the afternoons in the little park across the road at the bottom of Lee Park. This boasted a pond and nearby a little café where we could get a cup of tea even in wartime. We began to meet, some of us, most afternoons, park our prams and daughters by the railings to look at the ducks and socialise ourselves over tea. Ellie and her daughter Margaret became particular friends, as did Pat and her daughter who actually lived in our road, and Nesbitt Filtness with her extremely good, clean daughter.

Ellie and Margaret lived in an upstairs flat in a working-class road of two-storey houses with no gardens. The children had to play in the road. We decided to campaign for a nursery school so we canvassed that road with a petition, discovering sixty-five children under five among the residents. Of course we didn't really expect to get anything done in wartime but hoped the idea would recur after the war.

Nesbitt too lived in an upstairs flat but solved the problem by taking her baby out all day to friends or the park and doing her housework in the evening.

Now that the war was as good as over we began to plan a summer holiday. My mother had a friend, Peggy Angus, who lived in a cottage in Glynde about eight miles inland from Brighton across the Downs. We wrote to ask her to find out if the local farmer would allow us to camp on his land – and got permission. Next we chose a few friends, Ellie with Margaret – Ellie's husband was still in the Forces – and a John Manley and partner who had a baby just at the sieved vegetables stage. We renovated the tents, not used since we left them in Cornwall in 1939, and hired a little van from a greengrocer. This was open at the back with a hanging tarpaulin curtain, and was probably illegal for passengers but we didn't think of that.

When term finished we packed ourselves in with all our camping equipment and luggage – a tight squeeze, and John drove us down.

We camped in the lee of a small copse planted on a slope, and shared the site with a herd of young bullocks. There was no fence or hedge between us and Brighton. As there was plenty of wood about we cooked on a camp fire. Gale and Margaret, not quite two, soon began to run about with no clothes on and Gale, quite fearless, would pick up a stick and chase the herd of bullocks down a little earth path through the trees behind us. They did

always avoid the guy ropes. We had packed her cot – but she could climb out easily although we laced the top backwards and forwards with rope. Most evenings in the dark we would become aware of a little figure in a white nighty setting off across the Downs towards Brighton and someone had to run to retrieve her.

On our last day we didn't light the fire so the ashes were cold. We were all busy, taking down the tents and packing up when we became aware that Gale and Margaret were sitting on the camp fire site rubbing the ashes into each other's hair! The two men had to go many times the hundreds of yards to fetch a bucket of water before we could get the girls clean.

Milk, like everything else, was rationed then so we cleaned out the water bucket and the farmer filled it with milk for us to take home. This we fastened onto the "ceiling" of the van, which seemed a good idea at the time – but we arrived home with half a bucket of milk, the rest liberally distributed over ourselves and our belongings.

While we were away the Americans had dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus slaughtering Japanese women and children in payment for the brutality of the Japanese soldiers, and then war in the East was over too. Peace had come.

We worked hard for the Labour Party during the election of July 8th, even though we were not enamoured with Herbert Morrison, our candidate in Lewisham East who had run the London County Council before the war and was a friend of our parents. We had to wait a fortnight for the results to allow for the counting of the Forces votes. Arthur and Peggy joined us in Blackheath in a little local pub on the evening of the final result. We had not expected a landslide, but we got one. Britain had its first Labour Government with a proper majority. The air was full of hope.

My mother was approached by the new government to go as an ambassador to the women of America under the Ambassador Lord Halifax, and managed to slip out of the country on Friday October 10th before the press got hold of the news, so they came and interviewed me, and tried to put words into my mouth. Of course, they got most of it wrong, as they generally do, under the headline "Glamour Grandmother Flies to America", and her photograph was on the front cover of *Picture Post*, a famous and popular magazine of the time.

While she was living in Cambridge she had acquired a boyfriend, Professor Norris, one of the atom scientists who was in the process of inventing lasers. Now he left his wife and twin daughters for Spikey, a silly thing to do as she was out of the country. So he used to come and cry on our shoulders. He had been invited along with the five hundred other most important people in Britain to a celebration of the Russian Revolution at the

Russian Embassy in London on November 7th and asked me to go with him in my mother's place. I did have a little black frock, but as they didn't make women's shoes my size during the war, had to wear men's shoes. Luckily the other guests were so crowded together no-one could see my feet.

Long tables were covered with snacks of all kinds caviar, quail's eggs, pickled cucumbers... and everything alcoholic you can imagine. As fast as a guest emptied his or her glass one of the slightly sinister looking members of the Embassy staff would fill it up.

Of course, I was with a group of scientists, the Huxleys and sundry eminent professors, but scientists don't talk about science at parties and they were not scintillating. Just behind me, back to back, stood the very young and beautiful Michael Redgrave with his glamorous theatrical friends and I was sorely tempted to turn round, but it would have been rude, so I didn't. Never, before or since, have I seen a crowd of people, the most important people in Britain and me, drink so much so fast.

On our way back to the station Professor Mott was sick in the taxi and had to be taken home, so I was left sitting in the entrance to the Café Royal, a venue I had never aspired to visit.

Spikey sent us marvellous monthly parcels. Rationing was even stricter just after the war than during the fighting and the tins of ham, the rich fruit cakes, the packets of cheese and interesting biscuits were very welcome. One of the cheeses was sweet and we were never sure that we liked it, so had to keep nibbling to find out until it was all gone. She also sent us copies of *The New Yorker* which we read from cover to cover.

My middle brother, John, had now been demobbed. He had quarrelled with his sergeant about the right way to make doughnuts so had been posted from the 6th Air Arm and sent to India thus missing the slaughter and instead spending a very pleasant time shooting tigers with minor princes. As he had spent the previous three years training at the school for chefs and waiters before working at the Dorchester Hotel in London I expect he was right about the doughnuts. Anyway, it probably saved his life.

Now he joined B.O.A.C. as a steward and flew backwards and forwards to USA and Canada, each time stocking up the plane's refrigerator with butter and meat to bring home. No wonder his mince pies tasted better than mine that Christmas.

Chapter 12

Post-war in London; Peter starts to write

1946–1947

Spikey spent eight months in America. She flew all over the country speaking on the radio and at Womens' Clubs; receiving hospitality from their officials, and coming back regularly to her flat in Washington. She talked about women in Britain, the war and conditions now the war was over, and they loved her. Being an ex-housewife she easily fitted two years' work into that eight months. They tried hard to persuade her to stay longer but she was missing her grandchildren and, I expect, Professor Norris. Thoughtful as usual, she left money behind her there so that the parcels and magazines kept coming. Nothing like them was available yet in Britain even if one had coupons to spare.

Her professor was very pressing; she should divorce her husband and marry him. She thought long and hard about it, but came to the conclusion that, while she loved him, and while he was the man who had awakened her sexually and had introduced her to orgasms, they already had the best of their relationship. If she married him so that they were *living* together and not just *sleeping* together she could foresee that she might begin to object to the vast amount of whisky he drank and the amount of time he spent at the Savage Club, from which of course as a woman she was excluded. So she refused him and sent him back to his wife and daughters. But they remained good friends and occasional lovers.

Meanwhile the weather had decided to finish off what the war had started. Even in London we had deep snow. Everything froze, even the water pipes deep underground in the road. There was no fuel to be had unless Peter pushed Gale's pram to the gas works at Greenwich to queue up for a bag of ovoids (reconstructed coal dust and cement) from the gas works. Luckily in Gale's little bedroom there was a large gas fire. Someone had left a tap dripping in the bathroom directly above and a momentary thaw, soon over, lasted just long enough to bring water down through the ceiling. Gale was frightened and refused to sleep in the room, so we moved her cot into our big room next door and spent the winter in her little room heated, overheated by the gas fire, but cosy. For a while we had to melt snow to get water to make a cup of tea.

Peter painted a mural all over the long wall where she had picked off the wallpaper – an almond tree in full bloom, rabbits, primroses, a little road winding between the hills into the distance, while I made a patchwork quilt.

Eventually the bitter winter came to an end, and things returned to normal. We took Gale to the zoo. Most of it she loved, but while Peter was carrying her on his shoulders we went into the giraffe house. A particularly large giraffe bent its head down over the high railings of its cage until its very large head was level with her face, and breathed on her – a long, noisy, warm damp breath. She was terrified. For months afterwards she was convinced that there was a giraffe on the kitchen stairs.

Peter decided it was time to arrange a holiday back in Cornwall from which we had been so rudely wrenched in 1939. So now, in 1946 we planned a group to go back to the field above the cliff in Kennack. Gale's friend Margaret was to come with her mother and aunt; one of the doctors from the Peckham Family Health Centre would bring his wife and two children to join us for part of the four weeks and Honour Arundel, a journalist who wrote for the *Daily Worker*, and her 50-year-old Red Indian husband who worked for the Water Board brought their eleven-month-old baby. We travelled at night and for the only time in our lives booked berths in a sleeper, one for Peter and one for me and Gale. The camping equipment we had of course sent on in advance.

And for four weeks it rained.

We had three 60mph gales. All the tents blew down several times, one on a lighted primus. The doctor and family, having come in a car, went home. The rest of us had, for several days, to take refuge, Peter, Gale and I in the farm's bike shed and the rest in a hayloft which seemed very warm, soft and comfortable but where they all got bitten quite badly.

It was the year of the worst cigarette shortage, and we all smoked. We had arranged for friends to send us supplies, but they didn't. So one of us, each day, had to make the twenty-four mile round trip to Helston, to return, if lucky, with ten tenners, small disgusting cigarettes reputed to be made from the sweepings of cinema floors. Ten divided by six won't go – so we bought a tiny pipe, dismantled the cigarettes and passed a pipe of peace round the circle.

We kept telling each other it couldn't last – the weather must clear up eventually – but it didn't. Although we were all wet through most of the time no-one caught a cold – in fact it was quite warm so we wore bathing dresses under macintoshes, which looked indecent but wasn't. Nearly everyone was good tempered. Only the Red Indian tended to sulk in his tent. Perhaps he was too old for such an adventure. Finally we arrived home, damp but none the worse.

By now everyone was demobbed so the house had filled up. My niece, Jill, ten months younger than Gale, lived with her parents on the top floor. David and Spikey occupied the next one down, Peter, Gale and I slept on the ground floor, and we all used the basement "kitchen" as a living room.

In January 1947 my mother suggested that as Gale was now nearly three and a half Peter and I ought to have a weekend together leaving her to baby-sit. So, rather nervously, we left her in charge one Saturday morning and caught a coach out of London. I don't even remember what county we went to, but there were beech hangers. When the coach stopped at what looked like a nice

pub we got out and went in for a drink. I don't think we knew the name of the village, but the pub, although a bit posh, was very welcoming. Large coal fires were burning in the bars and the solid-looking tables and chairs were old and well polished. The beer was good too, and so was the ploughman's, plentiful and not ridiculously expensive. So we asked, and they did have a double room which we booked. Yes, they did evening meals – when would we like to eat? – as it got dark so early perhaps at seven.

We explored the countryside round and had afternoon tea in an afternoon tea shop – villages had them in those days. Then we people-watched and talked, enjoyed our very good meal, more drinks before an early bed.

Next morning we got up pretty late, but not too late for a Sunday morning breakfast of bacon and eggs – obviously rationing was not very strict out in the countryside. The sun was shining as we left the pub and the air seemed quite warm. Peter was carrying his walking stick, an essential accompaniment for a walk. As we passed the last cottage we heard the unmistakeable sound of a hunt in the distance, then saw, weaving its way between the beech trees on a hillside, first the dogs and man with a horn, then the well-groomed horses carrying men in pink coats and women in black, a couple even riding side-saddle. We both disapproved of hunting but despite this found the sight entrancing – trees and ground both thick with the rich tan of leaves framing the picture. It was magic.

For a while we were silent as we left the village behind, content just to walk together – then we began to talk, to talk properly about our future. Peter certainly wanted to continue teaching, but we didn't want to share my family house for ever. And Peter had always said that eventually he wanted to live in the country, and to write. I had always lived in London, and was not sure if Peter's dreams of authorship and a country cottage were just pipe dreams. Maybe if we uprooted he would find he didn't like it after all! Anyway he really liked the job he had, and we were still paying off his college debts and the Kent Education Committee and had no savings or furniture.

So I made a bargain.

"All you need with which to write a book are determination, paper and pen. If you will write one, then I will live in the country."

"It's a deal," Peter said. "We'll start as soon as we get back. Let's turn the little room next to the kitchen into a study. No-one is using it now and it will give us somewhere to get away from your family."

"Good idea," I said, "I'll type everything you write during the day while you are at school."

So that's what we did. At first Peter started on a book about his childhood in Owslebury, but realised very soon he couldn't ever publish it without hurting his parents very much. So he put it aside and began writing poetry again, and then decided to write a novel about an evacuated school during the war.

His health was still not brilliant and he still suffered from a lot of stomach pains, but every evening after supper he went into the study and wrote a few pages – and then read them to me and made any necessary alterations once he heard how they sounded. I typed them next day. Gradually the book took shape. Fired with success he started to write articles and more poems too. We joined a Writers' Group which met monthly in a pub in Charing Cross Road, and there we met other left-wing writers: Cedric Dover, a race relations expert from India, Randal Swingler, who had written the libretto for Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, George Barker, a poet, and many others. Randal and Cedric became friends.

Peter went to hear Louis Arragon, a French poet, read his poems. It was in a house in one of the posh London squares and the audience sat on elegant little chairs. Peter laughed so much that he fell off his chair, broke it and slit his trousers right down! Luckily he had a mac with him – but they all went off afterwards to the Trade Union built Unity Theatre to dance on the stage after the show. It was really hot and Peter's partners kept asking him to take his mac off, and thought him very strange that he wouldn't.

That winter was another bad one, but not quite as bad as the year before. We had quite a lot of snow though, for London, and Gale and Jill, well wrapped up, enjoyed being pulled on the sledge to shop.

Randal Swingler became a close friend and visited us at Blackheath. He invited us to meet his wife, Geraldine Peppen, and her identical twin sister Mary who turned out to be married to Dr Paddy Fisher who, years before, we had heard singing about the fat man watering the workers' beer. Mary and Geraldine were professional pianists who played together always, on two pianos. Their great friend James Gibb was also a professional pianist and they started inviting us to their concerts, and to the booze-up in a pub afterwards.

Chapter 13

Camping in Dorset

Summer 1946

It all did Peter a lot of good, giving him back some of his self-confidence. He was enjoying school very much and had long been Senior English master. My father had many faults but he was a good Head, liked and respected Peter and gave him a free rein. Peter also enjoyed the mild flirtations in the mixed staff-room, although when one young woman playfully slapped his face he slapped *her* face back, quite hard, believing firmly in the equality of the sexes.

We had begun to think of another baby as Peter agreed, rather reluctantly, that only children were a mistake. He adored Gale now she was here and a real person but didn't much like the idea of children he didn't yet know. I had to be very careful that he never felt pushed into the background. As I had conceived at first attempt last time we were surprised when my period arrived on time as usual...and when the next month came round, and the one after, and the one after that we began to worry.

Undaunted by Cornwall we decided on Dorset that year. My sister-in-law Lynne was expecting a sibling for Jill and decided to join us as soon as it was born. There was a polio epidemic that year, the last really bad one before people were vaccinated against it, so we got out of London as soon as the schools broke up. Spikey came with us to a field in Burton Bradstock in Dorset. Half our camping equipment failed to arrive on time so we had to cut sticks from the hedgerows to use as poles! But after a few days we settled down to domestic bliss.

Then we had an urgent message from Peggy. Extreme as always she had been making her two boys sleep all day and stay up all night to avoid risk of infection, but they were not taking kindly to the regime. Could she join us at Burton Bradstock? Of course we agreed.

Stephen, Gale's age, was a difficult boy, but Henry couldn't have been more placid. Neither of them were speaking intelligibly yet, and Stephen took his frustrations out on the world – and had in consequence been banned from railway carriages so they had to travel in the guard's van. At once Peggy insisted on doing all the work of the camp and looking after *all* the children, insisting that we should "let self-sacrifice *be* its own reward."

We were near the sea, but not too near. There was a little stream running through the field – only a few inches of water running about two and a half feet below field level on its bed of boulders. Gale, in a new sun hat of which she was very proud, perched herself on a tiny wooden stool balanced right on the verge, *over*balanced and fell in, landing on her head. Very luckily she seemed not to have been injured but the trauma has stayed with her to this day. As summer wore on, Spikey went back to work and Peggy and sons packed up and left. We met a married couple

that Peter took to at once as the man was a butterfly collector – inspiring him to relive his youth, make himself a net and join in, setting them on a jagged bit of driftwood. Soon we found that the collector was a schizophrenic looked after by his long-suffering wife.

The time came for Peter to start school – but there had been two cases of infantile paralysis in Lee Park, so Lynne and I stayed on with the two little girls. It seemed silly to take them back into danger.

So I missed a fantastic party given by Cedric Dover in an Indian restaurant. He had been offered a permanent job in the USA, a lectureship in race relations, and was taking his female partner. After a long, delicious meal he took his friends back to the flat and *started* to pack, taking all night. What he couldn't pack he gave to his guests and left for America at seven o'clock in the morning.

I did go to London to see Peter for one night, leaving Lynne in charge in Dorset and taking his driftwood set butterflies with me. The train was very crowded so I had to stand clutching the four foot flotsam and calling "mind the butterflies" when anyone got up to leave or have a fag in the corridor. Peter was pleased to see them and me, and we had a very pleasurable re-union.

As I ran into the station next morning I called to the guard, "Is this the train to Bridport?"

"Yes, but hurry! It's just going!"

I jumped in and settled down to read, but presently I began to sense that something was wrong.

"This *is* the train to Bridport?" I asked the man opposite.

"No! This is the non-stop to *Newport*!"

I considered pulling the communication cord but decided to keep perfectly calm and resign myself to a long day in the train – first to Newport, then back nearly to London, and finally to Bridport.

Lynne was extremely relieved to see me.

Chapter 14

Trying for a second child; camping on the Gower

Summer 1948

Peter's book was progressing well, so we settled to a nightly routine after supper, broken only by unwanted visits from a "friend" John Longdon, a very intelligent but very boring man who was working as a statistician for the health service. Soon he was coming every evening and staying and staying until in desperation we said "Sorry, John, but we must go to bed".

"Don't worry," he would say. "I'll let myself out," which was *not* what we had hoped to hear. However, he did respect Peter's need to write and mine to type and we could think of no way of discouraging him.

There was still no sign of another child! So we decided we needed help and our doctor referred us to a Sterility Clinic in a hospital in London. I forget which one!

At first I went alone. All the doctors were male; the one who examined me being particularly young and handsome.
He questioned me closely.

"How often do you and your husband have sex?"

"Most nights unless one of us is very tired."

"Fine! Nothing wrong there! You would be surprised how many couples say they manage it at least once a month, and then wonder why they can't conceive!"

Then I had tests.

"Nothing wrong there as far as I can tell. Now I would like to see your husband."

I made an appointment. Peter was terribly insulted at first but then began to see it all as a bit of a joke. The appointment was early, so he took the day off school and we left Gale with Lynne and Jill so that we could spend the night at Canonbury Square with Geraldine and Randall Swingler, who thought it all hilariously funny. Geraldine took me aside and offered me the services of her husband if Peter proved sterile.

"He wouldn't make any claim on the child," she assured me. "It would be entirely yours and Peter's." She didn't mean by artificial insemination either.

By then the whole subject had turned Peter on and we spent most of that night, much against my better judgment, making love.
So I was not unduly surprised at the hospital, when Peter was sent into a private room and asked to produce a specimen, that he took a fair time. On examination the doctor said the sperm proved a bit sluggish and many had bent tails. Of course, he didn't tell them what he had been up to the night before.

In the end we were told that there was nothing basically wrong with either of us – to look after our general health and diet and to keep trying.

Peggy was very, very sympathetic. Children were of supreme importance to her. She quite seriously suggested that *her* husband, Arthur, would make an ideal father for our child.

"He's so brilliant," she explained, "that he ought to father a *lot* of children. He wouldn't interfere." They both considered I was an ideal mother. Neither Geraldine or Peggy understood that what I wanted was another of Peter's children, not just any child.

By now it was summer 1948. Gale was nearing her fifth birthday and would be starting at Blackheath High School in the autumn. Peter's book was finished, all but the title and chapter headings. We decided to camp with Arthur and Peggy and their two boys plus Paddy and Mary Fisher. Mary, also a pianist, was Geraldine's twin sister. After much discussion we chose the Gower Peninsula in Wales and found a rather boggy field on top of a cliff (again) on a farm. It made a great difference that Arthur and Paddy both brought their cars.

To get to our ideal beach, sand, caves, rock pools and all, we had to climb down the cliff.

Peggy took charge, of course. We were all to eat proper porridge for breakfast, and, before breakfast, to prevent any couples nagging one another, we were to swap husbands. Someone else's husband would be much less likely to snap about the long treck for water and milk and the crises that always arose when people were hungry. After breakfast we were allowed to change back.

All three men decided to grow beards – and none of the women could bear the look of other people's husbands but didn't mind our own, which was fortunate. As far as I was concerned, Peter looked like a version of Jesus Christ – Arthur a grizzled bear and Paddy like a large pink pig.

We went for long, long walks with the children as Peggy believed in tiring children out every day. Four-year-old Henry was unable to tell what was wrong if he felt uncomfortable. Was he tired? or hungry, cold, or too hot? He didn't know, so Peggy had to guess. Stolidly he marched on, uncomplaining. Not so Stephen! He was still not talking intelligibly, indeed he started school that year unable to make himself understood so said not a word for the whole term. But if he wasn't understood he would throw a tantrum.

On one of our walks we had at least ten minutes of a screaming, kicking Stephen lying on his back on the path before a very patient Arthur discovered he wanted to know why the waves came in curved and not straight.

One night at about two o'clock we were all shocked awake by screams coming from the boys' tent. Eventually, Arthur found that Stephen had been lying awake since bedtime trying to work out

the internal structure of a crayfish and it had all suddenly got too much for him.

When the children were in bed the six adults would gather in one tent with plenty of blankets – put a stew on a primus as a primitive kind of central heating, and lie among the bedding solving the problems of the universe and drinking beer. Peggy had a weak head and one evening got really drunk – sat bolt upright and announced firmly "I want to see Arthur doing all the work!" before passing out.

Peter discussed chapter headings for his book, now to be called *The Rule of Three*, which he decided to take from Hall and Knight's "Algebra". Arthur asked advice about what he should do next. He had been Chief Engineer of Cossers during the war and had been responsible for the invention of Radar, among other things, around Orford and Felixstowe, but now felt there was no future for himself in science. "It's only a case of spending enough money and we can do anything, even control the weather", he said, not anticipating the Chaos Theory. "The task before us is to discover how to stop mankind destroying itself."

We suggested Chancellor of a University. "No, that's just a figurehead! Vice-chancellor might do, but is not quite right."

He went off for a long interview – three days – during which he had to explain why he had been an active Communist for so long. He must have been persuasive, because he came back as "Our man in charge of Safety in Mines" in Britain. At that time two men a day were being killed in the mines, most because although strip-searched and although they knew only too well the risks for explosion in a mine full of firedamp if someone lit a match, they still smuggled tobacco and matches down with them. If he could stop miners blowing themselves and their mates up he would have he would have started on the task ahead of us all.

Chapter 15

Gale starts school; interview at Goldsmith College

Autumn 1948

That September Gale had a new fairy cycle, quite a big one, for her birthday, and started school at Blackheath High School. The little ones now inhabited a house at the end of The Paragon, facing the Heath, a much longer walk. There was a back way, even longer but quiet and very suitable for a bike. By the first day of term she had learnt to ride, but not yet to mount and dismount. I had to put her on, give her a push, jump on to my own bike, and ride beside her with my hand on her shoulder, past an actual farm; yes, a farm in London eight miles from London Bridge. The first day of school came and, dressed in her new uniform, we set off. All went well. We managed to cross the fairly main Lee Road safely. When we arrived I very quickly rested my bike against the fence and turned to catch her before she fell off.

As an infant she had morning school only, so I met her outside school at 12.30 and we repeated the process. After three days I rode up Lee Park in good time to fetch her when I was amazed to see my daughter cycling safely and independently down the hill toward me. She had been let out a little early, decided she *could* get on by herself; had ridden home carefully looking both ways at the main road. After that she insisted on getting on and off the bike herself, but I still escorted her each way making quite sure I got there early to meet her before she set off home.

Cedric Dover insisted that *The Rule of Three*, now complete with chapter headings, be professionally typed and soft-bound to send to an American agent in zero time, so against our better judgement we paid £30 to have it done – not as well as I could have done it! And off it went.

Peter had done his part; now I must do mine. But before we started on our project to live in the country he decided to apply for a job at Goldsmith College, just a twenty minute tram ride away at New Cross. Here is a story he wrote about that adventure.

I realise now that I was even less well organised in those days; the story of my solitary attempt to get a job in training college depended on this personality quirk. That summer I felt that I ought to be applying for suitable posts – almost so that I could say that I had tried. There were practical considerations too, including considerably more money; Bill Spikes had said that I shouldn't be too long in my first job and took the view that, including war service, I'd been nearly ten years at Stratford; and a training college, rather distinguished, advertised for a lecturer in Speech and Drama and was only a sixpenny journey by tram from the end of Lee Park. The last thing I knew about in any professional way was Speech, but on the other hand I was quite a dab at drama. Anyway, it was worth trying.

So on the day before the interview I felt at last obliged to check my only suit – my demob suit, issued when I left the army three years before. This was a heavy serge three-piece which combined blue with a foxy red and was always mentioned as my unemployed tram driver's suit. It *was* on a hanger, but it was hopelessly crumpled and had obviously been gardened in if not worse. There was no time to have it cleaned – no time,

even, to press it. Then our frequent visitor, John Longdon, said that *he* had a perfectly good grey suit which he had worn in Burma when he was in the army there, and – triumph – it had been cleaned and hung up in *his* wardrobe, still in its paper overcoat, and therefore immaculate. We arranged for him to bring it round next morning. The interview was at eleven. We thought we were roughly the same size, and in any case, I reflected, it wasn't a beauty competition.

I was up early, had a bath and a rather meticulous shave, and John arrived holding the suit well off the ground by its wooden clothes hanger. It didn't fit very well – a bit "proud" in the behind and waist, and a trifle narrow across the chest; but with a "sincere" tie (I'd just been introduced to the American comic writer S.J.Perelman) it looked tolerable, and in any case there was no alternative. I put a coloured handkerchief in the top pocket in a desperate attempt to distract attention from sartorial inadequacies elsewhere, stuffed a packet of Players Weights and some matches into the rather tight pocket, hung my scruffy mac over my arm, and launched forth to the interview.

As I climbed up the little curved stairway of the tram I was aware of being a trifle nervous – it was my first job application and I felt a bit stiff and unnatural in this grey but rather fibrous hairy suit the material of which was unpleasing to my bare legs. So of course I lit a cigarette and looked out at the bright morning from the open top of the tram. I was sitting in the front and thus had a Cortez-like view of three sides of the landscape all the way to New Cross. My own body really did look strange, like somebody else's. On the crotch I noticed a bit of red cotton had caught on the slightly bristly material. I pulled, and pulled, until I had a couple of feet of red cotton in my right hand, my left still holding the cigarette. At last – or at length – there was no more and in attempting to tidy up the area I touched my own skin. I felt the area thoroughly. There were many square inches where there was no grey heavy protective suit material but only a gaping hole. Then with a sudden rush of dark blood to my face, I remembered that if you sent anything to the cleaners and they found a hole, slit or burn, they stitched round with red cotton to draw attention to the need for repair and to absolve themselves from any responsibility. I felt further and encountered only the soft cotton of pants and my own bare skin; my trousers, or rather John's trousers, were virtually crotchless and I was twenty minutes off an important interview. The tram stopped at the traffic lights. I threw my cigarette butt over the side; it landed on the open top of a lorry alongside loaded with large objects wrapped in straw. As the lights changed I saw with rising disbelief the lorry speeding up the hill in front, thick smoke rising from the straw and a flicker of flame half visible in the bright sunshine. It was then I concluded that I *must* be dreaming. Too many impossible things were happening simultaneously.

Soon my stop arrived. I got off the tram and walked across a big paved area and up the steps to ring the bell and be admitted by a porter who, on my shyly admitting my name and purpose, led me to a Miss Someone, a shortish lady in her fifties with a wind-battered face, grey hair pulled back into a would-be casual bun, and conspicuously short skirts showing rather bony knees. She took me to the coffee room and chatted amicably about the job and the prospects and potential colleagues. Then

she checked her watch and said "Mr Hewett, I think it's about time we went up" and led me to the bottom of a very steep and narrow stone staircase. She invited me to precede her up the stair, and I insisted that she went first. Very soon we were waving at one another like Punch and Judy, she insisting with rising firmness that I went in front so as not to receive inevitable glimpses of hidden treasures beyond those very short skirts, and I equally insistent with a kind of quiet doggedness which I'm sure she took for utter stupidity and insensitivity as well as rudeness that I should follow her. Better, I thought, a glimpse of her maiden underwear than a full frontal – or backtal – view of my totally unclothed privates. I won in the end and she went up first with some difficulty, knees together: I followed equally spavined and was led across a very long interview room, knees banging, to a solitary seat in front of the board, which I greeted briefly before sitting down smiling and then nearly shouting aloud as I lowered myself onto the very chill leather-topped chair.

The interview was, of course, a disaster. My ignorance of recent developments in Speech Therapy was revealed in all its richness and I pictured them saying after I left what an incredibly awkward and shy young man the last applicant had been. But when I got home and exposed my plight to John and Diana they showed no pity at all but merely howled with cruel laughter.

Chapter 16

Move to Ipswich; house hunting

Winter 1948 – Summer 1949

We were getting to know the Swinglers very well, and drinking with them after their concerts, so we began to know Mary and Paddy too. Several times the three of us were invited to Randal's country home in Pebmarsh for the weekend. It was a dear little thatched cottage – not all that little – but with no facilities – a well in the garden for water – a little hut with a wooden seat over a bucket for a lavatory and a wood fire and candles for heat and lighting – on a sharp bend in the lane just before you came to Pebmarsh. They bought it for £100 together with an acre of orchard a few years back.

Recently Mary and Paddy had bought for much more money a cottage nearly opposite the pub in the centre of the village, which they called "Great Lengths" as they went there to get out of London. Their very elderly mother also lived in the village and needed a lot of care. Geraldine's daughter Judy was nearly grown up but Mary's son was quite a bit younger than Gale. This was bad planning as it interrupted their professional life twice as much as if they had twins.

Quite a little colony of musicians had begun to grow up round Pebmarsh as people came to visit, fell in love with the village and bought their own places – Alan Rassthorn among many. Peter found them all very stimulating but tiring – and I didn't feel it fitted in well with Gale.

It was their habit to get up late and, as soon as possible, walk to one of the two pubs to be ready for opening time and to stay drinking until closing time at 2 pm. After the stroll back and a bite to eat they would rest until tea time which merged into the walk to the pub for opening at 6 pm. If we went home at 11 pm when it closed we took a crate of beer with us – but frequently we were invited round the back to drink with the landlord – a source of the best dirty stories I have ever heard.

Peter and I had theories – life should be 90% Apollonian and 10% Dionesian – but at Pebmarsh it was the other way round, so only bearable in small doses.

Of necessity as we had Gale we had to modify the pattern anyway, but once or twice we left Gale in London and experienced the full weekend.

That year though, since I had promised to live in the country, we all spent Christmas there. Judy was there too. On Christmas morning Geraldine and Mary played the piano and Peter went outside into the frosty but sunny orchard and pruned some of the old apple trees while I cooked a large turkey in an oven over an oil stove. On Boxing Day one of their friends flew in from Geneva bringing a small suitcase full of the best steak! There was no refrigerator so we had to cook and eat it. After years of rationing it was a feast indeed.

Back home we held a conference. I had proved that I could cope with whatever country living threw at us. So now – should we look for a country home and then a job near – or a country job and then a home near? We decided to do the easiest first – so we drew an eighty mile radius circle round London in the atlas and agreed that Peter should apply for the first Senior English post that came up within that circle.

The first one advertised in the *Times Educational Supplement* was on the edge – Northgate Grammar school in Ipswich, Suffolk. We didn't know anything about Ipswich – or indeed Suffolk, but it was country, not London, so Peter applied, had an interview and got the job – just like that. The die was cast.

Peter's brother offered to drive us down in February to look round, while Spikey looked after Gale. Once we got out of London we found a heavy frost and roadside fields covered in patchy fine snow. The sky was very grey. I sat in the back knitting socks for Gale out of white knitting cotton which was not on coupon,s in a complicated and intricate lacy pattern on four needles.

In Ipswich we drove past the school buildings to have a look at them, headed out of town to look for our cottage in the country. Of course there were none – no To Let signs – no For Sale signs even. No empty properties. Everything looked bleak and each house and village turned its back on us.

Suddenly Bill shouted "Look – an empty house!" and there, across a small field was a dilapidated shell. He stopped the car and both men raced across – and came back laughing like crazy – "There's a goat in the kitchen!" they shouted.

Disheartened but not despairing we gave up as it began to get dark and headed for home. It was quite dark when the car broke down and we had no idea where we were. Luckily we were too far from a garage and pushed it there – but it was too big a job – they couldn't do anything that night. Wearily we tried to hitch a lift but no-one stopped. As petrol was still rationed there were not many vehicles anyway. Finally in the distance we saw a well lighted something bearing down on us, so we all three stood in the middle of the road shouting and waving. It stopped, and when we ran to it, turned out to be a Grey-Green coach bound for London – not as we had hoped a free hitch, but very welcome for all that. We had enough money between us to pay the fares and eventually got back to a warm house and a welcoming Gale and Spikey, with very little accomplished but one beautiful white lacy sock. We decided to wait until the Easter holiday before visiting Ipswich again.

That last term at Stratford Grammar we were too busy enjoying ourselves to worry about where and how we were going to live. The Peppin twins gave several concerts, which were followed up by long sessions in a pub and then a party at Cannonbury Square.

There was a lot of talk about Dylan Thomas being expected but he always got too drunk at another pub before he got to ours. We did meet Augustus John though, also drunk, I was not sure whether he was being amorous or leaning on me for support he needed for his age or condition.

We were also seeing more than we wished of John Longdon. Indeed he began to turn up every evening we were at home and staying remorselessly on until we were obliged to say "Sorry, John, I'm afraid we must go to bed now".

"Don't worry," he would say, "I'll let myself out!"

I had a mild attack of flu. John insisted on sitting on the end of my bed reading aloud to me in his harsh monotonous voice. I suffered the whole of Byron's *Don Juan* and have never taken to it since! He must have been very lonely – a very intelligent man but most unpleasing.

We didn't have much time to see much of Arthur and Peggy and the Swinglers suggested we should spend Easter with them at Pebmarsh to be within spitting distance of Ipswich. Peter had a lot of farewells to say at school and after an almost all night party at Cannonbury Square we left 44 Lee Park behind us to start a new life, with £32 in hand.

It was a late Easter and the weather was glorious. The country lane which twisted past the thatched cottages was bordered thickly with primroses, violets, cowslips ... so plentiful they even grew into the road where the tarmac was thin and it was impossible to avoid treading on them.

Peter hitched to Ipswich to make arrangements. We had been given an introduction to an architect, Birkin Howard, his wife and four children. Unfortunately they had no room for us too, but offered to do Gale's washing. Eventually he found a fairly cheap room for the three of us in a small hotel facing Christchurch Park and booked us in for bed and breakfast. We had most of our £32 still, but obviously couldn't afford to stay there for long. Getting back to Pebmarsh took longer and involved walking more between lifts.

On May 1st we were all sunbathing in the Swinglers' orchard, Geraldine, Randall and Judith their daughter, Peter, Gale and me, and Gale was running about naked in the hot sunshine. Regretfully next day we said goodbye and Paddy drove us to Ipswich to start our new life, and Peter started term at Northgate Grammar School. Luckily the good weather held as we had to be out of the hotel all day. The park was a great resource but we must find lodgings before our money ran out – well before if we were to pay a week in advance. How does one find lodgings in a strange town? A local paper might help – not very likely but worth trying – some newsagents have cards in their windows but not,

obviously, those in the centre of Ipswich – so we went to buy a paper and an ice cream.

There was nothing in the *East Anglian* about rooms – only notices of houses for sale we couldn't possibly afford. Anyway we didn't want to *live* in Ipswich. We had long since drawn up our list of requirements. Peter insisted on a ploughed field at the end of a long garden, and room for a piano and all his books and much more. I felt we had to be near a school for Gale and some children for her to play with. But meanhile we needed an affordable roof over our heads while we house-hunted. While Gale enjoyed her ice cream I asked the saleswoman if she knew of anyone who let rooms – just for a few weeks while we looked for somewhere permanent. She wasn't sure but thought we might try the other end of Woodbridge Road. "We needn't walk all the way," she explained, looking at the length of Gale's legs. "We could catch a bus at the top of Lloyd's Avenue". That sounded a good idea. A bus ride would be nice, if only for two stops. Then we knocked and asked, walked and knocked and asked again. Each time the answer was the same – no, there were no rooms to let, but possibly it might be worth trying Mrs So-and-so. Eventually, tired and very hungry, we caught another bus back to the centre of town. Gale had been so good and patient we would look for her favourite sausage and chips. They were not too difficult to find, and the waitress was very kind and helpful. She was not sure, but she had heard that they had rooms to let at number 96 London Road.

This time we walked, past the shops, a swimming pool, a big church, and there was London Road running downhill and there on the left was a tall house with steps up to an imposing front door. Yes, it was 96 – Yes, they did let rooms. Yes, they had a double free and a small one next to it that would do for the little girl – would we like to see it? We thought we would, though it didn't really matter as we wouldn't be there long. It looked fine. Mrs Barber seemed kind, a small dark haired tousled middle-aged woman with a little girl a bit younger than Gale hiding behind her skirts, and then, suddenly, two more girls who obviously ought to have been at school but were instead cleaning down the stairs and hallway. We would pay a week in advance and could we please come tomorrow. Peter *would* be thankful.

He was. Now our remaining money would last until he got paid. The house was clean and comfortable and not nearly as expensive as a hotel. I could use the kitchen. Peter could concentrate on his work. He found the Suffolk boys difficult at first. There was none of the lively insubordination and sparky taking up of opinions he had been used to dealing with from the East-Enders. There, besides being half girls the pupils had been about an eighth Jewish, mainly third generation Polish Jews now working on the Docks or running stalls in West Ham market. Here, besides being

100% boys, his classes were also almost one hundred percent Suffolk born and bred. There was no bad behaviour. There was no response at all! The boys sat stolidly, did what they were told but no more. Most of them spoke fairly broad Suffolk if and when they did speak. It was very hard work.

Gale and I visited all the house agents to ask about cheap cottages in the country and were given a handful of brochures advertising expensive bungalows on the suburbs of Ipswich – but now we were settled in rooms we could afford we could give our minds to house-hunting. It didn't seem worth sending Gale to a school for a few weeks only to change her again. Mr and Mrs Barber were a constant entertainment and almost compensated for the dearth of country cottages. He announced himself as an ex-spiv – a balding smooth-looking man who seemed to have plenty of money, but no obvious means of livelihood, though his wife and daughters worked hard enough keeping the house clean and polished. Occasionally the two older children went to school, but since their mother never left the house they were needed at home anyway to do the shopping.

Each teatime brought Peter back with the Ipswich *Evening Star* and as soon as Gale had been kissed and tea poured out we turned to the Houses to Let (generally none) and Homes for Sale (very few). It didn't really occur to us to wonder how we were going to be able to buy a house without any money on a teacher's salary. Three years before we had taken out an endowment policy with the Woolwich for one thousand pounds which seemed a lot of money until we looked at the prices.

One or two did seem possible. There was a cottage over at Debach – Ray kindly took Peter over on his motorbike to have a look – two and a half acres of garden, the advertisement said, and £950 freehold! There was no bus to and from the village, so no way Peter could get to school, but maybe we could think of something. His face when they got back told the whole story. The rooms were tiny, he said, but what was worse, there was no room in which he could stand up – someone had poured concrete on all the floors so the headroom had been reduced to five feet six inches. And the two and a half acres were a disused sand pit which fell as a vertical precipice fifteen feet deep just outside the back door. There was no way Gale wouldn't fall down and kill herself. Never mind, we said to one another, tomorrow there will be something good.

We had great hopes of a one-classroom school at Harkstead. That even had a teacher's house attached, one up, one down, and a lean-to kitchen. There was a pocket-handkerchief-sized playground in front and the school room was sturdy and a fair size, the windows skied to make sure no inattentive pupil would allow his gaze to wander outside, but no space at all for a garden – one of Peter's "musts". He and Sid Barber went off to bid for it. We had

decided to be sensible and stop our bidding at four hundred pounds as we would obviously have to spend twice as much as that to make it a habitable house. Perhaps fortunately for us a local businessman was willing to give five hundred pounds to use it as a store – so we lost it.

As the days and weeks went by we got more and more anxious to have a house of our own, which seemed as far away now as it had when we lived in London. We found the Barbers friendly but unbelievable. How many of their stories were true I will never know. I'm sure Sid enjoyed our shocked faces as we tried to listen with the mild interest of middle class sophisticates. The house, he assured us, he and his wife had run as a "short-time house" for American soldiers during the war.

"Very popular it was – sometimes the place was so full you could sit and watch all the lights swinging and dancing on the ceiling. They used to bring us whisky when you couldn't get it for love nor money. Very free with it they were, and my Little Darkey would pass her glass out to me where I stood in the garden where I poured it back into a bottle so we could flog it to the pubs. They were glad to get it. Plenty of meat they brought us – any amount."

One day he decided to let us into a secret. "Come with me down into the cellars," he said. Down we went. The stairs seemed very sturdy for cellar stairs and at the bottom we stood, quite as astonished as Sid hoped. He had secretly excavated a whole flat underneath the house. There it was, absolutely empty and spotlessly clean. I don't know how he managed about the foundations! It was not furnished nor was it even used as a store. Obviously he couldn't let it! but he really enjoyed the thought that it was there.

Sometimes he made money by not bidding for houses. He would go along to an auction with no intention of buying but knew just how much he could push the price up without being left with it on his hands – unless, that is, someone who really wanted it "bought him a drink" not to bid. This brought him in £100 a time. I don't know why local people didn't get together to call his bluff. One day he took Peter to see the boat he had nearly finished building on the Orwell near the Live and Let Live public house on the Westerfield Road. It was a four-berth beauty, just about finished down to the name proudly displayed on its prow "Mons Veneris". He nudged Peter hard. " You and I, Peter, are the only two people in Ipswich who know what that means."

Once Gale was in bed and asleep he regaled us with stories of his life. He had seduced his wife, Little Darkey, when she was fourteen on Hampstead Heath. By the time she was seventeen and married with a young baby he attentions had wandered. He was driving a taxi at the time and she would watch him getting ready to go out, dressed up to the nines while she stayed at home. She

knew he was being unfaithful and plotted revenge, buying a bottle of hair remover and carefully mixing it with his Brylcream, but they didn't blend, so each morning she would have to be up first to give the bottle a really good shake and then get back into bed to watch him annoint his thick black hair really well and slick it back. Within three weeks, she said, he was almost totally bald, and it never grew again. When she went to see a doctor about a bothersome discharge she knew he was still at it, hair or no hair, as she was told she had gonorrhoea, so she left him and went back to mother with the baby. As soon as he was cured he coaxed her into having coffee with him, drugged her cup and kidnapped her and his daughter. She enjoyed the tales as much as he did, and seemed very proud of him. When he casually confided in Peter that tribes in the South Seas worshipped the male organ she was scandalised, "Worship it!" she cried. "Worship it. I'd spit on it."

Still, there were no possible houses in the paper and nothing remotely likely from the estate agents. Someone, I forget now who, told us there was a farmer at Walton, near Felixstowe, a Mr Smith, who owned an empty cottage at Levington which he no longer needed for one of his labourers. He might be willing to rent it to us.

As soon as Peter went off to work Gale and I washed breakfasty faces and set off for the bus station to catch a red double-decker for Felixstowe although we didn't need to go all the way. It was a lovely sunny day, warm already, and we were glad to be out of Ipswich and in the country.

We found Mr Smith in. The bus had put us down right by his farmhouse which was on the main road. He was reluctant to discuss renting out the house at all but in the end took pity on the homeless teacher's wife – Gale's big eyes looking up at him may have helped too – and said he would be willing to let it for a pound a week, but we had better go and see it before we decided. It was a bit isolated. Maybe this would be the answer to our problems.

We crossed the road and waited for a bus to take us as near Levington as it could; got off by a road bridge and crossed the railway line – and on, and on, and on, it seemed until, as directed, we took a left hand turn at a T-junction and came to an old thatched pub, The Ship. By this time we were very hot and dusty, so a drink of lemonade seemed a good idea. While we rested and looked over the Orwell estuary the elderly publican pointed out the house we were looking for, a distant blur right down by the water.

"You go down across this field," he said, "through that gap, across the next field, then across the marshes until you come to a plank across the ditch. Cross that and follow the path alongside the water and you'll come to it." It seemed a long way for little legs, already tired but Gale was brave and we enjoyed walking on grass.

As we crossed the plank it did occur to me that it might be difficult to move a piano into the house if we decided to live there. At last we arrived.

I hated it – or rather them. The empty double-dweller was high shouldered and ugly. Inside the walls had cracks the wrong shape in all the rooms and I seemed to feel an atmosphere of menace. In the bare and weedy space that should have been gardens, a headless doll lay by an unprotected well-head. Between the houses and the river lay a wide strip of black, smelly, dangerous looking mud, and there were a lot of large black flies gathering round us.

Desperate as we were for somewhere to live I suddenly knew that nothing would induce me to live there, however cheap it was. I tried to sound cheerful and coax Gale into facing the long, long walk back to the bus. She, too, seemed glad to leave, and we sang, plodded, ran, dawdled back, picking some rushes to plait, gathering a few wild flowers to take with us, thankful to reach the lane at last and the final test of the long lane to the bus stop. Luckily we did not have too long to wait, and thankfully we rode back to Ipswich and the safety of London Road.

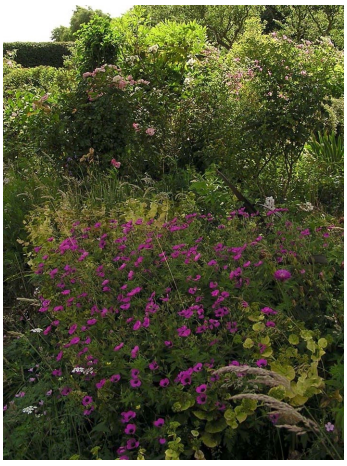
"We'll get something really nice for Daddy's tea," I promised Gale, wondering how I was going to explain why we couldn't live in a country cottage available to let at only one pound a week.

Peter didn't try to persuade me to change my mind, which was just as well, because in the 1953 floods that house was completely swept away.

Chapter 17

The Mill

Summer 1949



Our lack of a house naturally preyed on Peter's mind, so when one morning over school dinner Mr Campbell, the art master remarked "I'll tell you what you should do – come and live in our mill" it didn't seem quite such a ludicrous idea. The Parkers were quite willing to keep an ear open for Gale, so we got her to bed fairly soon after tea and caught a Felixstowe bus. It seemed strange and holiday-like to be going out together on a lovely warm June evening.

We got off the bus as instructed at Banks's Corner and started to walk past some well designed council houses with big front gardens and then along a country road. The pavement petered out; there were fields each side and wild roses in full bloom in the hawthorn hedge. It was quite a long way, past an ugly, sturdy Victorian village school which had a few houses opposite it, but no sign of a village – round a bend, and there on the right was a group of picturesque buildings.

Ignoring the tiny cottage with a steep pantiled roof, a long, large wooden barn and cart shed, also pantiled, and not daring to look further, we went in through a wooden gate in a high, untidy hedge, part overgrown hawthorn, part Duke of Argyle's Tea Tree as Peter pointed out – and crossed a patchy lawn to Black Mill House.

Bob Campbell was tall, thin, red haired and loosely put together. He suffered from psoriasis which made his legs all scaley and, since shaving was so difficult, wore a beard. This was unusual in 1949, but in keeping for an artist! I don't remember thinking him not too clean at that first meeting. Perhaps the war brought lower standards for us all, or perhaps the tendency to a dirty neck and food spattered clothes came later as his marriage deteriorated.

Bob, his pregnant wife Yvonne, and three children welcomed us in, but almost before we had been introduced we were out in the garden again. We crossed the grass to a circular red brick building with a strangely conical roof of black roofing felt.

"This is the mill," Bob said. "I've got chickens in it now; come in and see." He opened a low plank door and we peered into the gloom, seeming almost dark after the bright sunlight outside. There were the chickens, and plenty of chicken muck on the floor. Half in and half out of one of the home-made nest boxes on one side slept an enormous black cat. There were two tiny, dirty windows, one each side of a slit in the wall through which the hens went out to their run, and curtains of cobwebs draped and floated down to chicken head height from the low beamed and trap-doored ceiling.

The building wasn't round inside after all. The walls varied so much in thickness that it was actually four-leafed-clover shaped and the smell was good, half healthy chickens and half grain, or could it be a flour smell? It was cool and dry and seemed to us

altogether delightful. The former miller had used the walls to chalk up prices and quantities. There the writing still was! What could be more romantic to a couple of Londoners?

"When did it stop work?"

"Well, the top with the sails blew off in 1933, but they ground corn here using a donkey engine until 1939."

Peter and I looked at each other, hardly daring to believe what we saw. It might be possible! What a room it would make!

"Can we look upstairs?"

Out of the door we went, carefully shutting in the hens to keep them off the Campbells' garden; a quarter of the way round the mill, and there was a ladder.

"Its not very safe, I'm afraid. Be careful!"

At the top there was a low door under the eves, and inside a bell shaped room with a post up the middle. Under the roofing felt we could see tapering old tongue-and-groove planks, a circular ring of wood, and above that several heavy timbers at strange angles. The thickness of the walls downstairs in four places was here revealed as four solid brick buttresses finishing at different heights three-and-a-half to four feet above the wooden floor, which was strewn with broken glass, dust, and old picture frames.

"Be careful, the floor is rotten, I'm afraid," said Bob, but we were enchanted.

Down the ladder again and round another quarter of the circumference we came to the chicken run, large and irregular in shape and half full of nettles and horseradish, dust, and bedraggled hens, and beyond were two empty pigsties and an enormous straggling rubbish heap, while towards the road was a very tall thin hedge, half hiding the little cottage we had passed on the way to the Campbells. To the east, away from the road, the semi-cultivated ground tapered off into a small field of about two and a half acres of sugar beet, and at the end finished in a deepish ditch, now dry, with a very large field beyond stretching all the way to the school. Lots of lovely unused land, we thought.

"We could have a garden?"

"Of course, if you come. I have much more land than I want. The small field is mine too. I had to buy it to get the house and it is let out to a neighbouring farmer. You could have some of it if you want more than the bit below the mill."

It seemed too good to be true. Already in my imagination the dirty, dusty ruin was our house and the chicken run, pigsty and rubbish heap our garden.

"Come in and have a cup of tea," said Bob.

Yvonne Campbell was seven months pregnant with their fourth child. She was plump and neat, her long dark hair with its centre parting, her full flowing maternity dress and small sandalled feet gave her something of a look of a Madonna. The older boy, about two years older than Gale, was very like his father. The girl was just about Gale's age and had a mass of curly light brown hair, but was otherwise a bit like her mother. Three year old Dicky, blond, sturdy, and good looking was like neither. They seemed at the time a united Catholic family.

The central door of the long, low red brick house opened into a small square hall from which very steep narrow stairs led straight up ahead. To the left was a charming sitting room, low ceilinged and brick floored with a fireplace at the far end. Although it was still warm outside a fire was burning brightly and the chintz covered armchairs and small cottage sofa made it clearly a grown-ups' room. To the right, the dining room was its mirror image, also with a brick floor and a fire. What seemed very strange in that functional and under-decorated time was that both rooms were lined with pictures – flower paintings, views of Suffolk, children's portraits, by both Bob and Yvonne. It was obviously an artists' house. The mats, curtains, and even the mugs and cups were all more decorative than the plain white utility stuff we had become used to. All along the back, a lean-to contained a long, damp, dark narrow kitchen, still with its disused bread oven; at one end of which, nearest the road, what had been a walk-in larder had been very recently turned into a bathroom and lavatory, when mains water reached past the cottage to Kirton the year before.

We were pleased to see a gas cooker. Mains gas did not come past to Kirton so we would be able, eventually, to cook with it as we were used to – or rather, as I was used to.

Up the ladder-like stairs, too narrow to be comfortable for my large feet, were two small bedrooms and two very small bedrooms. The whole house seemed to us beautiful.

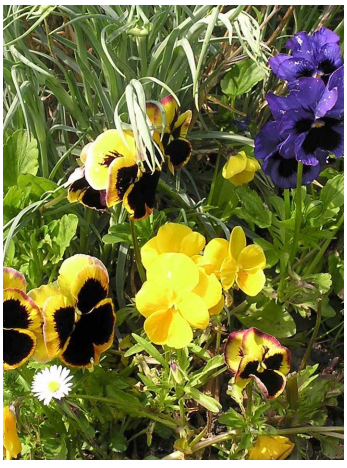
We went back into the sitting room for tea, which we drank from delicate decorated cups, and discussed possibilities. Yvonne wanted electric light now it was available, and proper floors. The bricks were "interesting" but, being laid straight onto earth, made the place very damp and were not practical for small children. If we bought the mill this could be afforded before the new baby arrived in September.

Could we afford it? Would we be allowed to live there if we did find the money? One thing was agreed. We would send for our tents from London, leave our lodgings, and camp here for the rest of the summer. At least we wouldn't run into debt and Gale could play with David, Corinne and Christopher. As dark fell we walked back along Kirton Road towards the bus stop, holding hands, breathing the sweet evening air, and making plans.

Chapter 18

Camping at the Mill

Summer 1949



Our weekend at home in Blackheath was an unmixed pleasure. We caught an early Grey-Green coach from the depot in the middle of Ipswich, and, after nearly two hours it stopped at a pub just outside Chelmsford so that we could queue for lavatories, a pint of beer each for us and lemonade for Gale. Then it took us on until we asked to get off in the Mile End Road where we could walk round the corner past a block of flats to catch a 108 bus through the tunnel to Blackheath Village, Peter's old route home from school. It took a long time by modern standards as there were no bypasses, but two lane roads through all the villages, but it was easy.

Gale was pleased to see her little cousin Jill again and to be back in the safety and comfort of what was still home.

Once the children were in bed we sat with Spikey, Lynne my sister-in-law and her mother and my sister Helen describing, drawing pictures, interrupting one another as we shared our excitement in our find. Whatever reservations they may have had they seemed nearly as pleased as we were. Helen and Lynne offered to pack up our tents and camping equipment to be sent down. "You will want your bikes," they said. "What about that old "officers-for-the-use-of" stored in the wine cellar? Would that be useful to keep things off the ground?

Spikey offered at once to deposit her National Savings in the Blackheath branch of Westminster Bank so that we could borrow money against them from the Felixstowe branch if the price turned out to be reasonable. I don't think we realised at the time just how supportive the family were.

Back in Ipswich Peter's term was nearly over and we waited to hear that our tents were at the station, and called on Birkin to ask his advice. He promised to come and look.

On Friday, sure enough, everything was ready for collection, so on Saturday Mr Barber drove us down in his lorry with all our luggage and tents, and Birkin met us there in his rather posh car.

Both thought our idea might be possible. As we did not know of any of the difficulties, such as no damp course and not enough headroom plus only two new building licenses that year for the whole of Suffolk, *we* were quite confident. We thanked our kind advisors. Birkin went away to draw up plans and fight our cause, and we pitched our two tents, large for us, small for Gale, just beyond the mill and settled down for a long summer holiday. Peter's term finished two days later. We were able to draw water from Yvonne's kitchen and use their lavatory. The weather was perfect.

Note: The picture is now in the possession of a family friend, but I hope to be able to scan it at some point and put a copy on the website. SW

Peter borrowed some water-colour paints and did a faithful, elegant picture of the mill as it was, including the edge of a tin hut belonging to the Campbells. This shows the tent in which we

Note: Diana's original text read "It hangs in the Mill sitting room now" and "The large empty view...is now our garden". I have updated this to reflect the situation in 2005. SW

ate and slept but not Gale's little tent with its patchwork quilt. It hung in the Mill sitting-room for many years. The large empty view past the laburnum and mill building became our garden.

In a few days we began to get to know the Campbells. Yvonne had a very fine baby's shawl, some kind of family heirloom, which was in a bad condition, and as my fingers were starting to get itchy for lack of handwork I took on the task of mending it for her.
We caught a bus down to Felixstowe to explore the town and beach and have a bathe. Bob asked Peter if he would mind if I sat for him for a figure drawing. I was used to posing for Peter, though he generally chose mid-winter for his artistic endevours, so that I roasted one side and froze the other, so that was no problem. There was the rest of Kirton village to explore. We found three pubs. At the far end was The Greyhound, which seemed the oldest building in the village. In the middle, nearly opposite the Co-op and near the village shop was The White Horse, kept by Mr Hopeful Brown, and a mile away, really in the next village of Falkenham, was The Dog, another really old pub that kept its beer in the cellar. Each had a "twirler" on the ceiling beams, and a thing like a blackboard pointer kept to spin the arrow to decide who would pay for the drinks. But having Gale, who was now coming up to her sixth birthday, and having very little spare money, we could only chalk up the delights of country pubs as a pleasure for the future. For Peter, above all, he was surrounded by his real countryside, and for me, the seaside was only four and a half miles away by bike or bus. Gale, as all children must, accepted life without complaint.

In a few days Birkin was back with plans for a circular extension which would have made the finished house a figure of eight.
I think he knew it would be too expensive for us, but hoped against hope to be allowed to design something really interesting. Sadly he took it away and came back with an ordinary rectangular building to be joined to the mill by a panel of windows next to the stairs. This, he explained, was in case the old mill shifted at a different pace from the new building. We were to have what seemed to us a minimum – downstairs a bathroom, separate lavatory, and a kitchen-diner – upstairs two bedrooms, one small one for Gale and one to be Peter's study and a guest room. Our bedroom would be upstairs in the mill, and our sitting-room downstairs with a chimney and noble fireplace where the door now was. Both mill rooms would be big – twenty feet diameter at the largest and down to about twelve feet where the buttresses stuck out. He explained that the work could count as "extension to existing building" and thus get round the lack of building licenses. One hurdle down! Now Birkin just had to deal with inadequate headroom and no damp-course in the mill, but we had fortunately picked the most important architect in Suffolk, so we had faith in his power to overcome obstacles.

It was now time to negotiate a price for the mill and some land. We all agreed we didn't want to be unfair, so in the end decided to abide by an independent valuation. A valuer was called in from Bannister's in Felixstowe and he valued the mill building with half an acre of land, which was all we thought we could cope with as a garden, at £250. We rang Spikey who said her savings certificates would cover that, and the Felixstowe branch of Westminster agreed to advance us the money with her to back us. So as soon as we got planning permission the money would be paid over and the mill would be ours.

We tried very hard to buy the very attractive barn, cart shed and stables which would have given us road frontage, the lack of which might yet bring it all to nothing, but Yvonne had plans for these and wouldn't sell, hoping one day to turn them into a studio.

While we waited we went to London again to see Peter's parents in Bexley and tell them our news. Bill was there with his wife Betty and son, Little Peter, a couple of years older than Gale. We thought the name, Peter, unwise for a boy who was later to grow to over six feet tall, but he was stuck with it. I believe they all thought we were mad to take on something so nebulous, but they didn't try to dissuade us, and we were quite sure that everyone must eventually see how eminently sensible our decision was.

Chapter 19

Working on the Mill with Graham

Summer – Autumn 1949

Bob had constructed a ramshackle hen house and run nearer their house and moved the hens and the cat. The next job was to remove the curtains of cobweb which hung from the old beams down to chicken head height As Peter was an arachnophobe (i.e. he was terrified of spiders), this was my job.

I bound up my hair in an old silk scarf – pre-war, I am sure – borrowed a brush and dustpan from Yvonne, and went in. I found I had to deal not only with old spiders' webs, but with the dust of decades. Of course, I had to look upwards to see what I was doing, so there were only my eyebrows and eyelashes to protect my eyes. Soon they began to ache, but I struggled on. By now, as the cobweb curtains fell the air became saturated with dust, so it was difficult to see any improvement. Finally I staggered out to be met by Peter and Gale, both in fits of laughter.

"Look at yourself!" they shouted, and ran back to our tent to fetch a mirror. I was exactly like a 1920's film star, my eye sockets black with dust, my cheeks red with exertion. I was very grateful indeed when, as I took back the borrowed tools, Yvonne offered me a bath.

Next, Bob shovelled and barrowed out about five years of chicken muck off the floor. Peter was sorry to see it go. It would make wonderful fertiliser. Then we borrowed a stiff broom and plenty of water to clean the concrete floor. We found that at the south end of the building the concrete had been broken up to rubble. Now, too, that we could actually see the beams we became conscious that the whole building had sunk to the South over the centuries by about five inches.

The floorboards as well as the trap doors upstairs turned out to be really too rotten to save, but the beams themselves seemed sound.

We had to decide on a school for Gale, now six. The obvious thing would have been to send her to the village school just one field away – but we had now been there long enough to learn that Mr Herring, the Headmaster, completely under his wife, Vi's, thumb, thought it unkind to teach the ordinary village children anything. He said so! "So much in-breeding, you know! You cannot expect anything from them. It wouldn't be kind." So, like Squeers, he sent them out to weed his garden while he concentrated his efforts on the very few local children who had taught themselves to read and write against all the odds. Obviously, the daughter of a Grammar school Head of Department would be one of the elite. We thought that this situation would be bad for Gale, but hadn't made a final decision.

There was a small private school in Felixstowe run by a Mrs Powell who had recently set it up for her own children. We took Gale to see it, and let her choose. She chose Norseland.

We had done all we could unless we were prepared to jump the gun. It would be unwise to touch the structure until we knew for certain we could go ahead, so now we enjoyed a few days' holiday before Peter had to go back to Northgate. Then his term started. He cycled to the end of the road, left his bike in the hedge (you could in those days – *and* find it there when you got back), caught a bus to the outskirts of Ipswich where he changed to a trolleybus for the final couple of miles round the ring road to Northgate. Norseland started later, so Gale and I cycled by back roads to Ufford to view another advertised cottage. It was part of a strange conglomeration of buildings, the bedroom of one of them over the kitchen of another. But my heart was not in it – and when we got back we were greeted by the news that a couple of Planning Officers had been, from the council – had looked all round the mill and had a good look at our tents.

Peter had a phone call at work from Birkin. "I think we have planning permission. It must have been the sight of your teatowels hanging on the guy-ropes to dry that melted their hearts. We'll know for certain in a few days."

Next day I took Gale to Norseland by bus. Soon she would be able to make the journey on her own. Suddenly I was alone.

As I cycled to Kirton Co-op I dismounted several times to pick large, clean field mushrooms from the narrow verges – petrol rationing meant no pollution, and we had them for our tea. Our new life was beginning. Sure enough, by Friday word came through. "Permission granted – see you Saturday. Birkin."

Everything now had to be done at once. Birkin brought with him grandiose plans for a circular extension to result in a figure of eight finished house – but, questioned closely, admitted this would cost twice as much as an ordinary rectangular building. I don't think he really believed he would be allowed to build it, as he had ready a conventional two-storey extension. Even this we had to insist he pared down, omitting the porch, the cupboard under the stairs and other exotic unnecessary luxuries. While conventional it was to be very good of its kind as we only appreciated later.

Peter's own writing:

It must have been in the period between the agreement with Bob as to what he was willing to sell, and our actual excited coming into possession that I got to know a little the surroundings at the mill.

The south of the mill building was a chaos, a half-hearted chicken run and an area roughly twelve yards by twelve of discarded pigsty. These pigsties, two of them, were made of very strong materials and stood in the middle of the patch, surrounded by hen-scratched and channelled earth interspersed with equally dusty patches of nettles and horseradish, the latter not very familiar to me as a wild or semi-wild plant. The hens

kept all other herbage at bay but despised these two. A little twisty path, or rather, stamped down drift, led to some chaotic rows of cabbages and lettuces – chaotic because Bob's method was to weed a patch and dump the weeds, many of them in flower or seed alongside the bumpy little bit he sowed or planted; these soon made irregular-shaped heaps of vivid flowering plants – red deadnettle, vast quantities of field pennycress, field thistles, docks, and the ubiquitous horseradish, which also appeared a bit blasted-looking but otherwise flourishing, actually *in* the rows of turnips and onions before these were even more than a few inches high. The fine mulberry-tree, already bearing impressively, dominated the chicken run and its fruit was already beginning to fall into the surrounding dust, though the chickens and starlings ate most of them, dust and all.

Beyond Bob's vegetable garden scratched out from a background of huge seeding docks, young elder trees and impressive spear thistles, the ditch dividing us from the field that stretched to the school cut at right angles across any further vegetable-growing efforts by Bob, and if you went left, you soon came to the edge of the garden and Mr Lampard's three-acre rented field, also, fortunately for us, owned by Bob. The proposed sale of the property at £250 included a bit of Mr Lampard's field, and the surveyor and I marked on the edge of the ditch and well into Mr Lampard's barley, an important boundary mark – a mere stick which I was more than once tempted to shift a trifle further east, but which the official had driven in fairly hard, perhaps to discourage such an impulse. Dozens of times I walked along the bumpy ditch edge to stand with the corner post between my knees and survey the vast area it subtended, driving an imaginary line through the almost white drooping heads of the barley, all the distance to the right of way. Barley, then chaos I see to my left, behind me ditch and a vast field of sugarbeet with leaves flagging in the hot sun; the red-brick village school on an oblong chopped out of it. The garden, my garden, would be enormous, and I imagined already elegant sweeps of lawn, curved flower beds backed with shrubs, and above all row after row of superb vegetables. Not long now. It was a relief from some of the hard slog on the mill building to stumble yet again through the clods at the field edge and survey my garden plot *in potentia*.

I got to know the mill's immediate surroundings piecemeal. A favourite short walk was along Innocents' Lane, one of the crossroads a couple of hundred yards from the mill itself – at that time a twining curly road with a high hedge on one side sentinelled with trees, and a flowery ditch on the other side with open sloping fields beyond.

As I have said, everything must now be done at once if we were not to spend the winter under canvas. The new extension could now be left to Birkin, who was investigating local builders, but we must arrange the mortgage, so we went straight to the Woolwich, confident as we had been saving with them now for more than three years. They too one look at Birkin's plans and turned us down flat.

"Too unusual," they said firmly.

This was a real difficulty as obviously we couldn't afford two mortgages, but Birkin suggested we tried a local society, perhaps the Ipswich Building Society where his reputation would help us.

Later, when the house was completed we could apply to the Woolwich again – once they saw what he had done he was sure they would allow us to transfer.

We thought, too, that a local village builder would be best as his workmen would have a reputation to keep up in Kirton. There were two, Farthing and Woolnough. We have ever since been grateful for Birkin's local knowledge when he chose Woolnough whose workmen had been with him, and his father before him, since they left school and were all real craftsmen. Mr Woolnough came to see the site – had a good look at the plans and offered us two prices, the lower, £1100, being on condition he could use us as a dormitory job – that is, we would allow him to take his men off to urgent jobs from time to time – and didn't mind if he couldn't start until after Christmas.

Meanwhile, though, he would provide a new, sturdy, safe ladder to the upper floor and we, ourselves, would do the work needed on the mill itself to allow us to move in there as soon as possible. We had no idea where to start! Neither of us were DIY enthusiasts – indeed, people tended not to be, then. Labour was cheap and people of our parents' generation would "get a man in to do it"!

Which reminds me of my father-in-law's comment when, a few years later, he saw me cleaning the kitchen floor.

"I would never allow a lady to go down on her knees to scrub the floor," he said as he watched me.

"Oh, really, Arthur. What would you do?"

"I'd get a woman in to do it!" the bankrupt boasted.

So, even if Peter's health had been better, the refurbishing of the mill would have been beyond us.

Yvonne suggested we might call in a bricklayer who had helped them in his spare time, and who lived at the end of the road in one of the new post-war council houses, so Peter called in to number 19 to ask for Graham Tramaseur, and brought him back to look the job over.

He was a stocky man with tow coloured hair, pale blue eyes, and a wide, smiling mouth who exuded confidence. We showed him our plans and explained what we had to do.

"The first job will be to get rid of that rotten floor," he said. "I'll bring my tools up tomorrow evening and give you a hand. It won't take long."

Sure enough, before it got dark, there was time to rip them all out and throw them down. My job would be to clear all the mess up during the day.

"Be careful of the nails," Graham said, looking askance at my bare feet. "Most of the beams are sound – reused ship's timbers

I would think. I'll just take a look at the large main ones that go into the walls. Ah yes, look, there's a good core of really solid oak. They will certainly last your time. The only ones that have to come out are the small ones round the trap doors. I'll have those out. There's been a bit of worm of course but I don't think it's live. Tomorrow, Saturday, I'll come up in the afternoon, and if you buy me a large sulphur candle or two in the morning, we'll fumigate the place and get rid of the chicken mites."

First thing in the morning we caught a bus to Felixstowe, had a quick bathe, and shopped for sulphur candles, squat, thick, golden ones. When Graham arrived on his bike he helped us block up as many cracks as possible, lit the candles – shut the doors and stuffed them with newspaper, and then we sat around and drank tea. He was originally from Lancashire and had learned his bricklaying down the mines, joined the army at the beginning of the war and met Rosie, his wife, when he went to the laundry where she worked in Spriteshall Lane to fetch his officer's clean uniform. He was now secretary of the Bricklayer's Union, and a Communist.

"See you tomorrow afternoon," he said, and left to put his younger son to bed.

Next afternoon he arrived at about 3 pm to find us admiring the swallows that were diving and swooping round the mill.

"We'll open up, but don't go in until the fumes have dispersed," he warned us.

We stood back while he opened the door at the top of the ladder and then came round to open the north facing front door.
The candles had certainly made a lot of fumes – the place was thick with them, and we watched them escape into the open air. Suddenly, four swallow rushed in. Graham went quite white.

"I didn't think to look if there was a late brood" he cried, and followed them – so we followed him. There, on the "plate", about two thirds of the way up the sloping roof we could see a couple of nests. Graham ran to the Campbells to borrow a ladder, and we felt like murderers. Back he came with a long ladder, manoeuvered it inside and up to the plate and climbed to the top.

"It's all right," he called quietly, "there *are* two nests but they are only just hatching out and the fledglings are fine. The candles must have kept them warm. Another half hour and we might have been too late."

Carefully, he took the ladder down from between the beams and returned it. Obviously, we could do nothing more that day, but on Sunday we had the pleasure of seeing the parent birds flying in and out to feed their young, More by luck than judgement we were not guilty.

"I'll come tomorrow after my tea and knock out a few bricks where you are going to have the french windows," he said. "Have you ordered them?

We had. Birkin had arranged for us to get all we needed for the restoration from a large building supplies firm in Ipswich and had opened an account for us so that, as his agents, we got everything at builders' discount, which made a considerable difference. The french windows and one ordinary window for downstairs, plus two windows for upstairs were to be standard size.

"Meanwhile, go to Felixstowe and buy scrubbing brushes and a large can of creosote, and you will need a couple of cheap brushes to put that on with. The beams all need to be treated just in case there is any live worm left."

We pressed him to take some money, but he said he hadn't done anything yet.

"See you tomorrow," he called as he cycled off.

Of course on Monday Peter and Gale were at school, so I went on the bus to shop. I kept away from the mill building, afraid of disturbing the swallows, but when Graham turned up after tea to "give it a bang" he brought down a whole shower of bricks, more than were necessary, but if we ordered some sand, cement and shingle, he'd soon make it good. So we did that.

Meanwhile, it was our job to scrub down the beams, and, when they were clean and dry, to creosote them. Graham didn't think the swallows would mind now there was plenty of air in the building. He left too put his son to bed and we saw to Gale. Then, as it was still light, we fetched a bucket of water and began to scrub. First we did the main beams, then the lower ones radiating outwards. As I lent over towards the "french windows", resting my weight on one beam and beginning to scrub the next one, I suddenly fell through onto the rubble beneath. I had forgotten that the outer ends were no longer supported by the missing bit of wall. Luckily I didn't hurt myself at all – it all happened too quickly, but Peter got a terrible shock when suddenly I wasn't there!

For the rest of the week we creosoted each evening after tea and went around smelling permanently like a new fence.

Once all was dry, we gave everything a second coat, brushing the creosote well into all the nooks and crannies. It was a very warm September. By Saturday the shingle, sand and cement had arrived – we had ordered a good, sturdy spade which came too and the beams were dry again. The swallows seemed happy and the whole place smelled fresh and different

During the day I tent-kept, washed, borrowed Yvonne's iron, shopped and cleared up after the evening before.

Graham turned up on Saturday with plenty of old wood, for shuttering, he explained, strapped to his bike. Then he went back for bits of old metal, for reinforcing, including an old music stand he had found on the dump. Quickly, he made good the wall round the open space where the french windows were to go, cleaning off and using the old red bricks which had come out of the gap. Then he fixed shuttering into position over the hole in the wall and showed us how to mix the concrete on the mill floor. As that was already concrete we just had to wash it down afterwards, he explained.

Peter and I took it in turns to mix, fill an old metal bucket and pass it up to Graham, no mean task, who assembled the lintel over what was to be our route into the garden. We must have borrowed Bob's step-ladder. Eventually it was finished and left to go off.

"Tomorrow we'll do the one over what is going to be the west window under the ladder that goes upstairs," said Graham.

"Wouldn't it be better to make it on the floor next to the wall and then lift it into position?" said Peter. "The curve must be the same." It certainly had been hard work and a difficult job making the first one in situ, so Graham agreed.

On Sunday newspaper was laid down on the floor close to the wall, and a little shuttering nailed together; not much was needed. Then Peter and Graham mixed the concrete and poured it in. It certainly *was* easier.

"Now that'll have a week to go off nicely," Graham said. Again he carefully swept up and removed any stray nails before he went home.

He accepted a little, a very little money for his work. Indeed it was a constant struggle to pay him. "Call it a couple of hours," he would say. "I was drinking tea and talking most of the time." And indeed he could talk. We were to find that he was a terrible gossip, but his remarks were never malicious. He just wanted to share his constant astonishment at how folk are!

So we got on with our lives and, eventually, next Saturday morning arrived, and so did Graham, bright and early. He set to on the job of removing unwashed bricks and throwing them outside the mill – mixed up some mortar, scooped it onto a board, and started to make the opening good. By the time it looked like an opening for a window and not a nasty accident, we needed light refreshment – in the case of Graham and Peter a large mug of tea with plenty of sugar. Now came the time to fit the lintel into position. They rolled up their sleeves. Now, as I have said, Peter was just on six feet and at his thinnest, while Graham was perhaps 5 feet 6 inches and square.. The lintel had certainly "gone off", and between them they managed to manhandle it outside ready to lift it into its prepared rightful place. Bravely, they each grasped an end and lifted. Up it came until their forearms were

horizontal – and there they stuck. There was no way they could lift it any higher. Putting it down slowly was just as hard as lifting it up. We all stood and looked at it. There must be a way! Graham looked at all the loose bricks lying there round our feet.

"We need Diana to use the loose bricks to build us up to the right height," he declared. So that is what we did. Patiently, they held the heavy block of concrete and lifted one foot in turn, like a Suffolk Punch being shod, while I chose the best of the bricks and slipped them into place under their feet. Slowly they rose, tipping first to one side and then to the other until they were, or their hands and elbows were, level and at the right height. With aching arms they slid the lintel slowly into the prepared position being careful not to dislodge the newly laid bricks, stretched themselves, and climbed down from their brick pillars. It was time for dinner, but the job was done.

Hastily Graham filled in with mortar and turned to pick up the old metal-bucket-handle he used to finish off brickwork. Again the haggle about payment took place, Peter trying to be fair, Graham refusing to take all that money. It was embarrassing, but I think he knew we couldn't easily afford him, and anyway it was only beer money.

"I think the next job will be to lay the new wooden floor upstairs while we wait for the windows," he said. "Let me know when the tongue-and-groove has arrived – and you will want – I forget how many and what kind of – tacks. Have you a decent hammer? No? OK! I'll bring mine." We were able to measure the area of our strange four-leafed-clover shaped bedroom on the concrete downstairs, and on Monday Peter rang Browns and put in an order. This time it came in couple of days, so Peter dropped a note in to number 19. Sure enough, that evening Graham was there.

"We can do the job in the dark with your hurricane lantern and a few candles in jam jars" he said. "See you tomorrow evening."

Gale was fast asleep in her tent. It was very cosy and intimate sitting first on the beams and then on the newly laid bit of floor while Graham fitted and hammered and made our hair stand on end with his stories of village life.

"Of course, So-and-so is married to his sister, but he doesn't know," he said calmly – and then went on into a long story about one of his mates going back unexpectedly to his council house in Trimley only to find his wife on the bathroom floor with a young man called Bull.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?" he shouted.

"If you don't like this," she replied calmly, "you should see what he gets up to with your daughter!"

There were plenty of such stories, enough to last for the whole of the laying of the floor.

"Building workers see much more than people realise," he explained. "We are on the roof and up ladders and people don't look up – so they think they are safely hidden."

The floor in place, our strange bedroom with its central post was nearly ready for us. Now all we had to do was to wait for the windows to arrive. This didn't actually happen until the second week in October by which time it was getting quite cold and damp to be still in our tents. Just as soon as they arrived we alerted the removal people who were to bring what little furniture we owned from London.

"I'll get the windows in place in a weekend," Graham had said. Sure enough he did and on October 19th our furniture, such as it was, arrived in the pouring rain, and we moved in.

Upladder	The bed in which I was born, cut down and used head to tail without the tall headboard
	Gale's bed
	Gale's cot
	An officers-for-the-use-of and chaff mattress
Downladder	One old scullery table
	3 elegant dining room chairs and 1 carver*
	2 wicker chairs that talked all night after you got out of them*
	1 elegant old sideboard (2 levels – cupboard and 2 drawers)*
	1 elegant bottom half of dresser with 2 drawers
	1 borrowed upright piano

Note: The question mark was in the original manuscript! SW

* Bought in Caledonia market by my fat aunt Gertrude and presented to us now we had a house? to put them in.

Although we had been married for ten years we had never had anywhere to put furniture even if we had any. Of course we still used our camping things. The primus and slow oil stove sat on the sideboard next to the door.

That weekend we bought for £1 an old tortoise stove with a kind of chimney pipe which stuck out of the little east window and an Aladdin lamp which used paraffin. Peter and Graham put up a proper washing line for me. We invested in an Elsan, a portable loo which we put in our now empty tent, so we no longer had to use Yvonne's lavatory, and within a few days the water company came to lay a water pipe up the right of way, ending in a stand pipe outside our door – so we now no longer needed to tread mud in and out of Black Mill House.

We settled in happily and Gale found it quite acceptable to be carried out, round and up in her red dressing gown at bed time. Luckily, it was a dry, warm autumn. And then, perhaps because we had been so busy to think about it, or perhaps because of the country diet, fresh air and exercise, in November we found I was pregnant.

We contacted the electricity people who sent a lovely man called Smith who worked away laying flex along the beams and made the place look like the engine-room of a liner, so that we had a lighting fixture on the four widest bits of the curved walls, one 5 amp plug upstairs and one down, and a fixing on the post in the middle of our bedroom. We were home, and living in comparative luxury.

Meanwhile, Peter had been planning his longed for garden.

Chapter 20

Planning the garden; the extension is built

Autumn 1949 – Easter 1950

Even before we moved into the mill, Peter's mind was largely on school and his new garden. He had come to terms with the Suffolk boys with their Suffolk accents, and now found them much more responsive than he had originally thought. He did miss the mixed staff room at Stratford even more than he missed the co-educational classes, declaring that the all-male staff were a lot of old women, and he was horrified to be told that "We don't talk politics here. We are all Conservatives." But he was beginning to make friends with the English teachers in what he regarded as his team. Ray Weight, a typical minor public school product, was gentle and soon devoted to Peter, and besides a young married man, Ken Brown, there was a very nice Quaker, Geof Mitchell, who taught English most of his time.

But I didn't hear much about his work. Once he got home his garden filled his thoughts. I have a school notebook of his started in October, before we were even out of our tents. On the first page he lists the fruit trees he has ordered, and on the second, the soft fruit.

We decided to divide our half acre plot into four parts like Gaul. The erstwhile field to the east, marked of from the rest by a slight curve and the footprints of the horse as he turned the plough, was to be a vegetable garden near the house and an orchard below that. There was a convenient double plough drainage line to divide the two halves. The slight, very slight curve we kept feeling that there must have been a reason for it.

The other half to the south of the "house" must be a pleasure garden and lawn as one emerged from the french windows. Beyond that, the last quarter, we set aside for soft fruit, rhubarb, Gale's garden and, now that we *were* living in the country, chickens!

Graham, of course, knew someone who wanted to sell a second-hand hen-house and run for half a dozen hens – enough for a start. Indeed, the chickens were under shelter before we were. On advice – always advisable! – we bought six point-of-lay first-cross Rhode Island Reds. These were expensive because normally hens are programmed to stop laying in the winter, so it needs skill to hatch them at exactly the right time to *start* laying eggs in the autumn and to go on through the winter when eggs were expensive to buy. They had Rhode Island Red mothers and White Leghorn fathers – the first because of the egg quality and the second because they stood up to the cold east winds of Suffolk better than pure bred birds.

Sure enough, they started to lay beautiful eggs within a couple of days of taking up residence and all through that winter we were able to collect at least four sweet smelling eggs from the nest every day.

Each morning I boiled up our vegetable peelings and some very tiny potatoes on the primus and mixed the drained result with spicy bought food – to carry it, steaming and succulent down to our

eager ladies. Each afternoon, at about 3 pm I scattered handfuls of mixed grain and laying pellets in the straw for them to scratch for before dusk sent them indoors onto their perches. Mr Lampard let us have a bale or two of straw to strew in the run to keep their feet dry. They were pampered creatures but rewarded us well and next summer we got a FIRST for eggs at Trimley Flower Show.

At the end of October, Peter's fruit trees arrived – no problem to plant, as that bit had been ploughed. They went in quincunx, Peter explained, so that we could get more in without putting them too close together. We had ordered the cheapest we could find – a mistake as it turned out as several turned out to be not what we had paid for – but proper trees not bushes, and not on dwarfing stock as we wanted trees with trunks so that when Gale grew up she could entertain her young men in a hammock slung between two of them. The soft fruit and rhubarb went between the hen house and the plum-tree hedge, as did a bush Beauty of Bath for Gale's early picking. For these we had to tackle some of Bob's very varied weeds.

The main weed round the pigsties was horseradish, but before we could tackle that we had to dismantle the sties themselves. They were made of good quality corrugated iron fixed securely into thick concrete and held together by countless large headed nails which had been hammered through the iron, so were very difficult to get out. Peter and Graham made a start and, during the week, I set to, but in my ignorance took the edge off Peter's best chisel. Eventually we dismantled the building and then Graham's sledgehammer came into its own as they smashed up the very solid concrete base. The rusty old angle irons and inadequate chicken wire came up next, and the space round the mulberry tree was ready for us to prepare a lawn.

Christmas itself we spent in London, and brought back with us two of Peter's old boys, brothers from Stratford, who slept on the concrete floor of the mill under our old scullery table. One morning as I washed Gale using an enamel bowl *on* the table, trying not to tread on our guests who refused to get up, there was a knock on the door and there was the French teacher from Northgate looking extremely astonished. When he decided to be neighbourly and call I don't think he quite expected what he found. Peter liked to keep his private life and school life separate at that stage.

After Christmas, Mr Woolnough arrived as promised with the house plans. As he measured out the foundations, he looked worried. "You can't keep that walnut tree there," he said, "its roots will have the drains up. So as soon as Peter got back to school he organised a tree moving party of staff and sixth formers on a Saturday. The walnut, like the mulberry, was fifteen years old and well grown, nearly twenty feet high and with a trunk eight inches across, but we decided we must save it if at all possible. It and the mulberry were the only things taller than horseradish now

growing in the garden. First we dug an enormous hole beyond what was to be our lawn – there it would partially screen the chicken run but not overshadow it. Then they (my job was to cook and make tea) dug out a circle all round the tree – luckily some had brought their own spades – and, keeping as much of the root ball as possible, began to excavate under the tree, gradually dragging our large groundsheet below the severed roots. It took a very long time. Finally we had it and a great deal of earth on the groundsheet, the tree still more or less upright. The next job was to bucket thirty buckets of water from our tap to the new hole. While that soaked in we all stopped for tea. Then more water and men and boys dragged the tree down to the new position where some held it upright while others filled in all around and tamped down. It was teatime before the walnut was looking comfortable in its new, permanent situation. We had no stake for it that would be any good so we just had to give it a final bucket or two of water and hope for the best, and I served tea to the triumphant working party. The groundsheet was never the same again.

My mother had given me a bundle of hawthorn twigs as an advance Christmas present, but before we could set them we had to put up the rabbit fencing. The whole garden must be protected with bent angle irons, bent to stop the little blighters from digging underneath, and then fenced with wire netting also bent and let at least six inches into the ground. To make doubly sure we then put an inner rabbit fence round the vegetable patch to be and finished it off with a small gate also covered in wire netting. Just inside the outer fence we set our hawthorns. There were enough to do the whole of the east side and to go half way round the north, which was to be our frontage onto the right of way.

The winter of 1949–50 was very mild and weeds continued to grow. Whenever we disturbed the soil, hedge garlic grew like mustard and cress on flannel. It was not difficult to pull out but within a week it was back. Luckily for us there was no snow and very little frost. Graham often came to help Peter. He had become a family friend.

But I was having problems. The workmen started digging the footings after Christmas. Mr Woolnough had asked Yvonne if they could use her cart shed to make their tea in, but she refused, so he brought a wooden hut where they could sit and take their breaks. When I am pregnant I need to "spend a penny" frequently. In fact, when I was pregnant with Gale and we visited any town, in particular London, Peter would wish to gaze into stamp-shop windows while I fidgeted and waited to run to the nearest underground lavatory. Now I was surrounded by workmen all day – and the tent containing the Elsan kept blowing down.

Mr Woolnough came up to us both one day with a very red face.

"Don't take me wrong," he said, looking away into the distance, "but my men tell me Mrs Hewett is having trouble with your tent. Now, I've just renewed the pews in Kirton church. How would it be if I were to put up a little hut for you made out of the old pews – to hold your Elsan? There would be no charge."

We thanked him and accepted gladly, and next day, as if by magic, a little hut went up to be our lavatory and my troubles were over.

The builders made good progress because of the good weather, and soon another problem arose. Our tortoise chimney pipe stuck out of a small window right into the space that was going to be our extension. As the walls went up, day by day, we could no longer use it. So we had to get rid of it and invest instead in a paraffin heater which smelled a bit, but kept us reasonably warm.

Gale was doing well at school and seemed to enjoy it. She went on the bus by herself now and had lunch with Mrs Powell's family. I think, though, she wished we could live in an ordinary house like other people. Yvonne next door began to resent the amount of time Graham spent with us and made it a little difficult for Gale to play with her children, but we found a Susan the right age who lived opposite the Co-op in Kirton.

Luckily I kept well and was not sick at all. I enjoy being pregnant. Sometimes I made the workmen tea to save them lighting up specially. They were a lovely set of men – so considerate and helpful. The walls rose apace, then the roof rafters appeared and we could see how it was going to look. The rooms looked very small but I was told they always do at that stage.

Soon it was time to put in parsnips and broad beans. Everywhere we went Peter begged plants. That first spring he grew sweet peas from seed, sown in a cold frame made out of turf with an old window as a top. He bought £1.3s.7d worth of flower seeds and £2.1s.5d of vegetable seeds and sowed them all. Friends, relatives and gardeners gave us plants of course My oldest brother, Roger, sent a dark purple lilac, a white one and a pale mauve one, all of which are still there.

Spikey had been staying with friends near Diss a year or two back and had been taken to Cedric Morris' garden in Hadleigh. She came back with a large bag of iris corms. Cedric bred his own, and these were new but not quite different enough to be shown and named except for one or two – Great Lakes, I remember, a beautiful clear blue, and Cleo, a greenish, yellowish grey, and very pale and delicious. Now they had made, so she was able to give us a sack full so we were able to plant up a whole long iris bed between the lawn and the shrubs that we were collecting to divide the pleasure garden from the utilitarian vegetable bit. Everything was carefully noted down by Peter in his little blue book. I was amazed, as I read it through, how many plants he had cadged and

how many he managed to grow from seed, all carefully listed in alphabetical order with their Latin names.

Then the time came to sow the lawn in front of the mill, or rather, at the back of the house, but the real front, facing north to the right of way, had hardly any interest for a gardener. We couldn't afford a roller. Graham helped Peter dig over the area to be sown with grass seed, removing several barrow loads of horseradish roots – then we enlisted the help of three of the Campbell children; the baby, Rachel, was of course too young – borrowed Bob's ladder again – tied rope onto both ends, and asked the children to sit on it while the men dragged it back and forth across the ground. We did have a rake, so they alternately raked and dragged the ladder until they got it as near level as possible. We had bought the cheapest grass seed, pure rye grass, as we needed a tough area of grass and had no ambitions to have an elegant English lawn. Peter sowed broadcast after measuring out enough seed for each square yard, and we sat back and hoped the birds would leave us enough to cover the soil when it germinated. We knew it would be useless to sow right up to the house to be, so left a strip of earth to become a terrace later. Later, having bought more seed than we needed, we sowed the spaces between the fruit trees intending to let that grass grow long and have it cut once a year with a scythe.

During this, my second pregnancy, Peter suffered much more than he had when I was expecting Gale, probably because he was with me more of the time. As before, I was perfectly well and exhibited no symptoms except growing larger; but he began to complain of sickness (morning), stomach pains, and general disability. Luckily, except for his precious garden and his school work, there was not much he had to do.

I see in his 1949–50 Garden Book that he kept writing in "Dry Wall". It was too great a task for him alone and he never got started on it until he brought down a group of his sixth formers. While I cooked them an enormous stew on the primus and oil cooker they set to. It wasn't exceptionally well built, as we discovered forty years later when my son rebuilt it, but it used up all the concrete blocks of every shape and size left from the foundations of the pigsties and went up in one day. I don't remember how pregnant I was by then, but it must have been summer as the lawn had grown and could be walked on. Now he was on the lookout for dry wall plants from friends and neighbours. We left a gap so that I could go straight down though it to feed the chickens.

I don't remember either who gave us the little old lawnmower – one of the old fashioned ones you never see now in the days of hover mowers and petrol-driven monsters. There was plenty of horseradish coming up through the long grass, and even more hedge garlic, as much of that as of grass, but constant mowing

discouraged the weeds and encouraged the grass, whose length in irregular patches demonstrated the hollows and bumps we hadn't noticed when we thought we had made it level. The orchard "meadow" grew sparse but tall.

We registered with a married couple of doctors, Drs. Leslie and Katya Smith. Dr Leslie was a very tall, gentle man, and came out to Kirton every day from Felixstowe to see patients. He had arranged to call into Black Mill House to see if any phone messages had come about late calls to be made in Kirton before he drove home. He couldn't eat anything containing flour, being what we now know as coeliac, but that hadn't yet been discovered, so Yvonne would bake him little cakes made of soya flour to eat with his cup of tea.

Because I am RH Negative, as had been discovered not long before – indeed all my siblings and my parents were RH Negative – and because our house might well not be ready by August 15th, Gale's birthday, which was the expected date for the new baby, he booked me into Heath Road Hospital in Ipswich. Normal births still took place at home in those days. He and Peter soon became very intimate as he too was a fanatical gardener

The roof was on the extension and the windows and doors were in place – as were the stairs. The time had come to knock the holes between the mill and the extension. That day I had to take Gale to the dentist – but I have an account written by Peter of that event:

I think it was a Wednesday evening when I felt shivery on the bus coming back home and the mile from Banks's corner to the mill seemed a very long way and the third form essays I was carrying in my case were heavier than usual in more than one sense. It was a bleak, chilly – yes, showery evening and even the usual thrill of the familiar cone of the mill roof being actually alongside a proper pantiled roof carried less delight than usual.

Still, I got there, and there was a splendid stew with rather floury potatoes and slightly tough cabbage. Why didn't I relish it as usual, after the school lunch and the long, long afternoon? I seldom pushed my food aside hardly eaten but this evening I had little choice: I found I could hardly remember what food was actually for, and watched incredulously while Diana and Gale tucked in ravenously. What I wanted was to sit in a soft chair or even better lie down, and drift away if I could. Washing up in our smallish enamel bowl seemed a gargantuan task, and I admitted to Diana that I felt pretty ropey. She wisely suggested bed; Gale said "Poor Daddy!" several times and when I finally got into the rather bumpy bed upstairs I had no inclination to read: a dry throat and a slightly swimming head were sufficient symptoms to prevent me from even opening a single blue exercise book with 3B's observations on "The Best Day of my Holidays".

Next morning Diana insisted on taking my temperature and I found with a dull ache of surprise that it was 101 degrees. She went over to Bob's house and asked him to report me as sick – a heavy day which I was only too happy to miss. I drank a good deal of tea and got down a little bread-and-milk, suitably soft for an invalid. I dressed with double the usual

sweaters and was settled into our strange wicker armchairs with a thick blanket over my knees which enclosed but didn't stop the shiver. By 8.30 the workmen were busy "next door", hammering and laughing and shouting but still divided from me by the round brick wall. Diana was to take Gale to the dentist at 10.00, on the bus, but before that she went out of our front door and round to the building site, to be informed that today was the day when the hole for the linking door was to be knocked in the brickwork. Soon after this the two Smith brothers came in with sundry apologies and fastened a tarpaulin with slats hammered into the beams, to prevent the bricks actually flying through our sitting room. A few minutes later they started: there was an amazing thudding and booming noise (old brickwork being attacked has a note all of its own). Lumps of brick and rubble tumbled through the lower reaches of the tarpaulin and made a sizeable pile by my side. What I had not expected was that the whole room became quickly fogged with dust – the ancient chokey smell of eighteenth century mortar an soft, red brick. Neither helped my throat or my headache and I prayed that it would not go on too long.

I was in a light doze in spite of the muffled bangs from beyond when I was electrified by a loud double knock on the front – my front door. It was a respectful but slightly incredulous gas man in a peaked cap announcing that he and "his mate" were going to lay the gas pipes from the road to the new part of the house, a distance of eighty yards or so. I could only acquiesce.

Quickly after this two drills began in the surface of the right of way – hard indeed with nearly two hundred years of wagon wheels, not to mention a few years of Bob's car and a few months of builders' trucks. When they were at the gate the noise was deafening but as, towards lunchtime, they approached the mill building itself it was pandemonium indeed. So what with the half bricks flying towards my head, the builders' thuds and bangs, the dust and the noise of the two pneumatic drills coming nearer and nearer I was glad indeed to see Diana and Gale back on the midday bus, eager to air the room, sweep up the bricks and brick dust upstairs and down, and settle me back into bed upstairs, to sleep in relative peace and comfort.

Chapter 21

Birth of James; Paradise Regained

May – August 1950

Easter came and went. Peter planted out his sweet peas. He was now able to leave his bike at Graham's house rather than in the hedge and we were already eating our earliest vegetables. The roof of the house and the stairs were in.

As the months went slowly by I grew large, and larger. Often in January, February and March I had made the builders' tea to save them the trouble. Now in May, June, July and August they made me tea and watched my progress with paternal eyes. They were all local men and had played in the empty mill as boys or, if old enough, as some were, had played round the working mill before the war. They must have thought us very strange. The Campbells had kept themselves to themselves with (now) four children and their art and also being Roman Catholic. So as far as Kirton was concerned we were the first incomers and they couldn't make us out. There I was, walking around in bare feet – cycling up to the village to shop and queuing with other village women on Wednesdays and Saturdays at the mobile butcher's van – but as I rode I would be reading a book propped open in my bicycle basket – and we didn't mix with the local gentry but we didn't talk Suffolk.

As summer and the baby drew nearer I decided to cut down the officers-for-the-use-of mattress to fit the baby's cot. Peter had to stay at school that evening for a parents' meeting... so I put a stew on the slow oil cooker and started work on the floor, with difficulty as it was not very easy to reach over my bump even that early. It took me at least a couple of hours to make the alteration, but I stuck at it. At last it was done. Triumphantly I stood up, stretched, and turned round. The whole of the part of the room near the door was black! Everything was black! The kettle was black! The white enamel bowl was black! A whole tray of our eggs, carefully numbered, all had black caps on! I had left the wick on the oil stove turned up just too high and it had been smoking all that time – greasy black smoke. I suppose I hadn't smelt it because my nose was near the floor. The stew was fine, except for the lid which was on tight.

Wearily I filled the kettle from the outside tap and set it on the primus to boil. That done, I was able to wash the enamel bowl and the kettle – refill and boil up again. Bit by bit, using all the soda and soap we had, I cleaned down the black walls to their now habitual whitewash – the black furniture to its usual brown – and lovingly washed and dried each egg, piling them up in a now clean enamel bowl.

Peter and Bob had waited at school after the meeting until they could get a lift home, so it was eleven before they turned up. Peter was greeted by a very tired and bedraggled pregnant wife and the lingering smell of paraffin smoke. It could have been worse, I suppose. But I wasn't really grateful that the mess had been confined to the area round the door. I was too tired to be grateful for anything except bed.

Peter's garden was really taking shape and the vegetable garden was beginning to make a real contribution to our diet. He raised many boxes of seedlings in his strange cold frame, and as June turned to July he and Gale were off down the garden whenever I needed them for a meal or wanted something done – picking sweet peas! The mill was awash with sweet peas in jam jars. "You *must* pick them every day," he explained, "or they stop flowering." And pick them every day they did.

At first, as we had no compost or manure to build up the fertility of the soil, our vegetables, though fresh and tasty, were on the spindly side – but no matter.

Now that we had stairs it wasn't long before we had a bedroom door from the stairs – and Graham was called in to remove the ladder and little door at its top, and to replace it with a proper window. This time we decided to have wooden lintels. We were also going to put in triple south-facing windows as we needed more light and more air. With no cavity walls and nothing but boards under the tongue-and-groove our bedroom was liable to get too cold in the winter and much too hot in the summer. The new window to replace the door could be standard like the one that faced north-east, but the triple would have to be made by Graham as it would be too expensive to get it purpose built by Brown's. The lintels we did have made for us in the village. The long one would need to be curved but the triple window could consist of the three windows at a slight angle. Now Graham was a wood butcher, not a carpenter, but we had infinite confidence of his ability to do anything, as had he himself. He set to, and his windows would have been fine had they not caught on the bottom edge of the roof so that they could only be opened outwards a few inches. This was a pity because we really needed the fresh air in the summer. However we left that problem to be sorted out later – much later.

Luckily I felt very well. The floors were in upstairs in the house. We acquired a very intelligent female tortoiseshell cat who very soon became pregnant too. This did not stop her catching lizards and bringing them in, where, in self defence, they shed their tails. Either she ate them or they escaped, and several times we found a tail still wriggling long after its owner had gone.

Once we had a spare bedroom in which to put a bed, my father came to stay with us, and our cat produced kittens. He set himself the task of building us a potting shed and bike shed out of the timbers and corrugated iron from the pigsties, just between what was to be our coal bunker and the little hut. By now the plumbing had been done, thank goodness, and we had been able to get rid of the Elsan. The drains were a bit complicated. There was no main drainage in Kirton so Mr Woolnough had dug and lined an enormous cesspit half way down the garden, fed by several lidded chambers, to hold hundreds of gallons. This was to purify itself

and the "clean" liquid would disperse through the orchard via "weeping pipes". At least, that was the theory. But in practice after the system had been inspected the pipes were more or less joined together, an extra one was put in to allow the presumed clear liquid to escape into the ditch and be carried down to Kings Fleet and the sea. The council provided a twice-a-year free emptying service, but if we wanted more, we had to pay.

The ditch never smelled really bad so we presumed it all worked and asked no questions.

The kittens were a great joy to Gale. As soon as they became mobile they took to climbing up inside her rather wide trouser legs, and when I sat down they would climb up and sit hiccuping on my rather large bump.

Peter's parents, Florence and Arthur, had agreed to come and look after Gale and Peter while I was in hospital. One day Mr Rivett, the bricklayer, came to find me. He had just fixed the Redfire into the new kitchen with its back boiler, and, never having done one of these before, was anxious to test it to make sure he had done it right. So he had spent his meagre lunch hour picking up little bits of coal left around under the mulberry tree from the old days of the mill being a mill, had lit the fire, heated the water and now said that if I was very, very careful not to splash, as the floor was not done yet, I could have a bath. I did, and it was bliss. By now I was too large to be able to wash my feet, and had to take a bus down to the sea to bathe if I wanted to clean them, by paddling.

My Dad went home, and Florence and Arthur arrived at the beginning of August as baby was due on the 15th and they wanted to be in good time just in case it was early – but weeks went by and I was still as large as ever. Dr Smith was away on holiday and his stand-in was most abrupt when I rang to ask if such a delay was all right. A fortnight went by. Still no baby. Florence and Arthur were due to go home!

Finally, on Wednesday August 30th I cycled into the village for some stewing steak and cooked a sturdy stew, potatoes, cabbage, the works, on my new gas cooker in my new kitchen. The house was almost finished – the workmen had been racing the baby. They just had the fireplace in the mill to finish. Dear Mr Rivett went round the garden with Peter, picked some flowers and stood a vase in front of the completed hearth and mantelpiece – then called me to admire the effect. There were just a few odd jobs to finish off.

Half way through lunch my waters broke. There was no way I was going into hospital until I had finished eating. I remembered only too well the starvation I suffered at Gale's birth. I must have changed colour though because Florence noticed, but I wouldn't allow Peter to go next door to phone for the ambulance until I was good and ready. It came almost at once.

Heath Road Hospital was a great deal more civilised than Lewisham Hospital had been, and as before I gave birth painlessly and easily at 6.05 to a very large James, who looked more like a month-old boy than a new born baby. Peter came in by bus to see me that evening. This time we were allowed to keep our babies by our beds – change them and feed them when we wanted to, and get up the next day if we wished. They still kept us for a week in hospital, but that week was stress-free and thoroughly enjoyable.

Gale and Peter were glad to see us back. Florence and Arthur went home having admired James. Gale and Peter went back to school. The house was finished and "Peter's Garden" was taking shape nicely. At long last, it was, for Peter, Paradise Regained. Almost he forgave his father for having torn him away from Owslebury all those years ago.

PS Peter told me, years later, that he had found it difficult to believe that he had been able to father another child and had three-in-the-morning thoughts that I might have taken up one of our friends' offers and got pregnant to make him feel better about himself. Indeed, Geraldine, who could be very malicious, hinted as much. It was only when Florence discovered that James had double jointed thumbs just like his father that he really believed a hundred percent that James was his. When Jas was born, indeed, he looked exactly like my father, but luckily only for about ten days, and in many ways he is a second Peter, for good and ill.

Appendix

Peter's postscript

Written 1980

When I walked round my garden this morning with Diana I was trying – really very unsuccessfully, to remember what it was like thirty years ago, when we bought the Mill and the half-acre attached. I find it almost impossible to *see* it or even any part of it – but then by straining my memory I can see a bit, and then a bit more, and I can remember episodes which bring the scene back, at least to some extent. In the summer when we arrived the central garden features were indeed odd – a mulberry tree, already fifteen or so years old and grown not for anything as elegant as a lawn tree – which it now is, but planted, we gathered, by an ex-policeman who was running a rather chaotic smallholding – for what purpose (except the delicious fruit) we never learned; a walnut tree, also fifteen years old, and almost impossible to move, but liable – indeed certain – if left, to ruin our drainage system. So one of our early tasks was to move it – a mini-saga I shall tell later. Then there was a largish patch of worcester-berries – fiendishly prickly, hairy, unlikely-looking, foxy red, with fruit that was supposed to be a cross between blackcurrants and gooseberries and tasted rather unpleasantly of neither. Down the right-hand-side, there was an appalling old hedge of hawthorn and myrobalan plum which divided us indeterminately from our neighbours in the tiny miller's assistant's cottage with its small plot facing the road – a pretty cottage, but I feel sure, very dark and damp. The people were charming but inclined to want over-long daily chats through the gappy hedge which didn't chime well with our London ideas of privacy. Geographically we shared a pump although we never used the water; for the few months before we had water laid on we fetched buckets full from our other neighbours who had piped water and lived in the larger and slightly more convenient miller's house. It was from this family, a colleague who taught art, that we had bought the crazy broken-down mill and the parcel of land. He had made some half-hearted attempts to grow vegetables in the vicinity of the hedge without really removing the weeds first – so among the wild radishes with their curious pale-yellow-mapped-with-mauve blossoms were cultivated radishes in roughly the same state with long curly crimson roots and a mass of blossom; carrots unthinned grew in apparently unraked soil. The weeds had been hurled on top of a bank of older larger weeds, so tall vertical ones grew out of yellowing horizontal ones and a sprinkling of wall barley seedlings sprouted everywhere. Not a gardener, my colleague, I felt – though he was a more than respectable sculptor.

The dominant feature of this chaotic patch of land was the pigsty which dominated what was later to be our main lawn. Bob's predecessor had kept several pigs and had built truly gargantuan premises for them – not very good concrete for the yards and the sleeping quarters, but relatively huge 6' by 4' timbers to support the houses and pigyards themselves. The hideous but invaluable

corrugated iron was fastened to this elaborate wooden construction with zinc nails which were new to me – a round 1/2" head and a 3" stem which had a mild thread to it. Some came out easily enough but many had to have the heads wrenched off – my father-in-law spent many patient hours on this job when spending a holiday with us – before the corrugated plates could be got off the timbers, then lifted from their square concrete holes and the concrete itself patiently broken up – it was, as I have said, rather poor thin stuff: 1 in 5 I should guess, but marked off by wave-curves in many places, corresponding to the wave of the corrugated iron against which the wet concrete must have been thrown. Much of this rough stone was later embodied in the dry wall which still divides the lawn with its dominating mulberry from the four island beds which contain so much of our horticultural wealth and most of our perennials. From the house – or rather the house-site, as there was nothing there apart from the circular Mill itself – there was a curious twisty attractive and somehow inevitable little path curving down to the ditch at the bottom. This marked the edge of the barley-or-sugarbeet field next to the chaotic garden. As a part of this field was also to be ours we retained the path for its delightful curve and it's still there – now running under the transplanted walnut tree; straight and no-nonsense until it gets half way, then subtly and beautifully twisted in a way that no land scape gardener could reproduce down to a broad grass strip at right-angles which runs with the orchard. Just why the field – meticulously cultivated, and this extraordinary little corner of chaos and weeds and scratched soil and broken grass should be divided by such a curve at the bottom I don't think we discovered: but Diana insisted on keeping it as inherently beautiful. We did see the contrast between the straight regular furrows and the four, five, six foot flowering (or, worse) seeding weeds dominating the bit near the mill. The field was ploughed in late September and we made two discoveries: one that the horses (it was actually ploughed with horses that recently!) as they were turned on our edge of the field left beautiful heavy horseshoe marks which embodied for us the rurality I, at least, so needed and wanted – the kind of thing that *couldn't* exist in our ever-so-elegant suburb, let alone in dear old Kentish Town, or Chancery Lane. The second discovery was that the very skilled and careful farmer who farmed the little field (it was only two and a half acres and we were to have a quarter of this for our very own) had ploughed a doubly-deep furrow for drainage – at right angles to the run of our land, thus turning up some relatively dead soil, and what we now call the cross-border, which divides the vegetable garden from the orchard, has always been a little less fertile than the surrounding soil – though it has grown some fine rugosa roses and lilacs the soil is slightly dead and only recently have we built it up with compost as thoroughly as the island beds and borders containing the treasures we really

prize. In the far corner of the plot, beyond the orchard on the bank of the ditch we made our bonfire site, which is *always* a mess but also a pleasure as it represents change – wood, leaves, stems with flaring fire and finally hot white fragile wood-ash, which we sometimes use for feeding the little drills of vegetable seeds.

As I have said, we had arranged after protracted negotiations that we could buy a quarter of an acre from the field and the chaotic chicken-run weed patch belonging to the mill made the other quarter, so that we should have half an acre in all – plenty, we thought, and plenty as it has turned out, not only for vistas, beauty and general spacious lavishness but also to grow most of the vegetables and much of the fruit that four could need – and certainly an ample amount to fill the maw not only of two parents whose babies have flown the nest and set up their own establishments, but also a large humming and extraordinarily capacious deep-freeze, which is nearly always stuffed with produce – five-sixths of it home-grown. So though I won't pretend that we planned and landscaped the garden a lot – a great deal of it merely "happened", like Topsy – we did early on think of the patch dividing into four approximately equal patches: starting on the left and going counter-clockwise, an orchard, grassed; a vegetable patch (a quarter seemed reasonable and though we loved the thought of home-grown vegetables we weren't going to be martyred to this concept); a lawn and pleasure garden dominated more and more by the astonishing gift of the mulberry tree; and a fourth section, backed by the ditch and sided by the disgraceful beautiful gappy bird-haunted hedge, was to be soft fruit and so on. The really surprising feature about this plan is the negligible space it gives to flowers – shrubs, climbers, perennials, "bedders" and all the other extraordinary beauties which I now think are the garden's main feature. Pleased with my rows of broad beans, proud of my greenhouse tomatoes and pots of basil, I am really concerned with showing friends and visitors the flower garden – roses when they are out, everything else when they're not.

Dashing back thirty years – which seems incredible as it also feels like the day before yesterday – I must remember as exactly as I can the morning and evening walk over the ragworts, codlins-and-cream, thistles, nettles, bumps, lumps, rabbit-holes – the ditch edges in fact which backed – or fronted? our garden as it was to be – or at least defined its southern limit – and I walked from the familiar scruff to the deeply ploughed areas until I reached my five-foot bamboo which marked the corner of the garden. All of this was to be ours by or before Christmas. I had measured meticulously "164" and stuck the bamboo into the ground so that I could sight the exact extent of all my small empire-to-be. I would look back to the mess and the scruffy hedge, and then forward to the neatly ploughed field which I knew would be mine as soon as the deeds were signed – a vast expanse, it seemed, twenty times the size of any garden I had owned.

The landscape around me was, however, alarmingly flat, a field of barley, a field of sugar beet, over the road a field of wheat – a few small trees almost on the horizon. Where was the rise and fall of my Hampshire hills? The garden itself fell slightly, *very* slightly; but what we longed for was height – trees, large growths, and above all ups and downs in the landscape. Our early wishes to get any shrub, tree or plant which would grow more than three feet were due to consciousness that everything was as flat as a billiard table.

It was a lovely experience, all the same, especially when I thought of all the plants I might ultimately grow in that splendid space. I stood out there, hair blowing, trying to see how rich it would be – full of dreams and realities. This would be my garden. I ordered a number of half-standard apple trees, a pear, a crabapple and a cherry – and they were the cheapest I could buy – so cheap that three-quarters of them were wrongly named – but the Bramley was right and true, and thirty years later it all looks lush and beautiful. And the little curly path remains and will do so – perhaps because it's so exactly right – fluky but perfect.

In these early days I was mainly engaged with Diana and various friends, in building, windowing and flooring the mill itself and hadn't much time for the garden. All the same, I had time to make a cold frame out of turf with a discarded but glazed window on top and to raise the first of many many batches of sweet peas in it. This was a rich pleasure after the not entirely satisfactory and half-hearted kinds of gardening possible in London. This was rural, pastoral, country gardening with a vengeance, and I looked forward with a life-long ambition to making it grow and live. A visit to Diana's relations at Coventry brought us a batch of lilacs, berberis, laurels and other bits and pieces which still make one of our major boundaries, between the flower garden and the vegetable garden. Many times we have trimmed back this ever-thickening hedge: many times it has brought us broods of thrushes, blackbirds, dunnocks, greenfinches: many times we have cut delicate branches of *Spirea van Houttei* and fat Senna pods for the winter. It was our first tall feature, and started tall, unlike the £5 worth of hawthorn hedge which we asked for as a Christmas present and which Diana's mother gave us – a small neat bunch, a double handful perhaps, of 2' stems – and which now is a substantial chunky hedge – according to Bill Read the best hedge in the parish.

I try to recall what the actual surface was like except for Bob's funny little hummocky beds and remember that as there was no grass, no beds, no paths, except for the "accidental" field path, what was it "made of"? A large area near the mulberry was full of coal dust and small bits of coal – remnants we were told of the donkey-engine that took over from the windmill sails when they blew down in 1933. Then there was an indeterminate area

dominated by the scruffy mixed flock of chickens which slept in the mill, their front door being a rough hole about twice their height but strangely with its own little lintel, which is still there in the now bricked-up wall. For many yards from this entrance the soil was bone-dry (we arrived in July) flattened except where large rat holes exposed the yellow complex roots of nettles: not a green thing for yards with two important exceptions – horseradish – masses of it in great dusty leafy clumps, and nettles, again in large healthy clumps – presumably because they got regularly manured. Bits of chicken wire stapled on inadequate and rickety sticks showed some half-hearted attempts to keep the hens in, though they found their way into the field, the road, the next-door cottage and so forth. This dry desert punctuated by its clumps of horseradish and nettle was to be our lawn and it took a full winter to dig it over.

When at length the house was built too – no, when the foundations were dug out – we had eight- to ten-foot heaps of dead soil which I had asked the builder not to cart away, and in the next year we used this dead soil – not utterly dead but very suitable for alpines which shouldn't have rich food, to build a three-foot dry wall: a little bogus perhaps with its dead soil as a filler and its pigsty concrete pretending to be stone – but it was a great success from the very beginning, much admired by me and my friends and relations, and we managed to keep it in shape except when *Geranium sanguineum* or *Helianthemum* took over greedily and had to be restrained, fairly fiercely (I've just done a chopper-job on the dry wall this autumn – pleasurable, cleansing, faintly heart-breaking).