

## THE CAROUSEL II

*“Human nature does not change ... What happened yesterday,  
will happen today, will happen tomorrow.”*

in “Shadows,” *Long and Short Stories*, by Henry Tedeschi

There is no way of predicting the future. Who would have thought that his marriage of only two years would dissolve into nothing? His wife, Isabel, was a most attractive woman, not just physically but in her bearing, her thoughts, her vitality, her mental agility. Yet Adam Cotrell had lost her without knowing why. In his imagination he still saw her lovely face, when she had still loved him.

“It’s just been a huge mistake,” she had intoned, her face stern. “We are just not suited.”

He hadn’t been suitable for her parties, her special activities, her understanding of culture. Adam knew there was another man, but he thought that wasn’t why she had rejected him rather cruelly. She hadn’t wanted to discuss the matter with him. She had just left and started divorce proceedings. He had agreed to a Reno divorce.

His parents had been incensed and his mother’s reaction was clear. “How could you have let something like this happen? She’s such a suitable woman.” There was little he could explain since he didn’t know the reason himself. He had expected some support, some concern for him from his parents but those hadn’t materialized. Isabel’s social standing and her charm seemed to be what they had cared about.

His previous involvement had had a much more rapid denouement. Just out of West Point, he had met a charming girl, June. No great beauty -- no dazzling intellect — but he’d

cared for her. In his naiveté he had taken her home to meet his parents. They had been clearly disapproving and expressed it in very nasty, sneering ways. After that, June had refused to have anything to do with him. That had been his first love, many years before.

In the middle of his emotional crisis, it became clear that he'd have to serve in the army. After West Point and having taken care of his obligations, he had immersed himself in reorganizing his father's engineering and architecture firm. Fred Cotrell, his father, had founded the firm which had acquired a solid reputation. Adam, who was well qualified in engineering and well informed about architecture had taken over because of his father's faltering health. Then it was time to serve in a most vicious war. He had never expected that to be the case. For a long time a war looked to be in a remote future if at all, although he had always been in full agreement with Roosevelt's support of wounded Great Britain. He had learned long ago that bullies can only be dealt with by force.

For his divorce, Adam had left everything in the hands of his lawyer, without really caring about the details of the settlement. His money, some of it inherited, had always been a concept to him rather than reality. It had been very helpful in reorganizing his firm, but in his mind had no special significance.

The tragedy of Pearl Harbor had determined his future. He had become even eager to have a role in the war. There was nothing more important, as cruel and disruptive as it might be. After delegating the proceedings to his lawyers, he'd dedicated himself to the enjoyment of life for the short time of freedom that remained in front of him.

Adam had no real friends left to frolic with. The ones acquired during his marriage, he felt stood clearly in Isabel's corner. Some neglected acquaintances -- out of his past -- a

freewheeling, boisterous bunch were easy to contact. One night they cruised several night clubs. He had no idea of how he'd found himself in a workingman's bar. He remembered later that he'd entered as part of a group.

The bartender kept harassing one of the waitresses. That's how Adam first noticed her. After drinking a good deal, his companions were gone and he found himself alone, flirting outrageously with the waitress, a honey-blonde with a fine smile. Her name was Joanna. In part, he started his courting with flirtatious compliments and double entendres to irritate the bartender whom he found cruel and unpleasant. Somewhat attractive, Joanne didn't have any of Isabel's qualities. Dressed carelessly, with too much cleavage, her attire was too tight on her, although he wouldn't have considered her fat. She became a challenge. Suddenly in earnest, his every effort, all his wiles were to get her into bed. They arranged to meet when her work was over. He thought later that both of them must have been operating with only a small part of their brains functioning.

He picked her up in the parking lot. It was well past midnight. The fancy Lincoln he drove impressed her as he thought it would.

"Haven't you had a bit too much drink to drive?"

Adam ignored her concern. It didn't take long for the two of them to tumble into bed at the apartment he had rented after Isabel had left him. There had been no useless prattle about love or romance. For both of them it was a case of naked desire. Despite the effect of his drinking, the encounter was intense, passionate -- different from any love-making he had known before. In the morning, they looked at each other sheepishly. They exchanged phone numbers but he never called her. He imagined that she felt the same way about him. What had happened, must

have been from the convergence of a number of factors, just for that once.

Two months later, after a stint at Fort Dix, he was back for a short while and in civilian clothes. The doorbell rang and after a brief delay while he was yelling "I'm coming, I'm coming," he opened the door. She was in the doorway. He had never expected to see her again. Joanna looked demure and much younger than he remembered. He had not noticed before that her eyes were a dark gray-violet. She smiled shyly.

"Can we please talk?"

Adam stood aside and let her in. He was surprised that she had remembered where to find him and curious about what she might want.

After they sat down on the couch, it took her a few moments to speak.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this. I'm pregnant."

Nobody could possibly realize how much it had cost her to come and confide in him. Their encounter was something she couldn't even understand. She wouldn't have come to him if her need hadn't been desperate. She had lived hand to mouth for some time. She had no idea how to cope with an added burden. Although she appeared calm, thoughts and worries were churning inside her.

When Adam had been much younger and had just discovered the joys of sex, his parents had been very concerned about the ploy women use to trap men into hefty financial settlements or marriage. What made it plausible was the fact that the family was financially very comfortable and the depression had not yet abated. Adam had never believed in the reality of their warnings. But at that moment it occurred to him that he might be facing such a ruse.

"Are you sure you're pregnant?"

She nodded.

“Are you sure it’s mine?”

She was blushing, “Adam, I’m not a whore. I might have given you the wrong impression when we first met. I’m not after much, but if you can, I would appreciate a helping hand.”

“Help for what?”

“Children take money to raise.”

Adam was amused. This seemed to be a game if he didn’t take her too seriously.

“I’ll think about it.”

She took it for the rebuff it was. “Sorry to have bothered you. I’ll be on my way.”

Why did she feel abandoned and betrayed? She hadn’t expected anything else, but somehow she had hoped this man was a bit better than all the others she had met. But then, the two of them hardly knew each other and why would he really be different or more caring than all the men she’d known before?

Somehow Adam was taken aback by her quick decision. He offered her a ride home.

“No, thank you. I won’t bother you again.”

Her attitude seemed to affirm her claim.

At first he chose to forget her although he admitted to himself that she probably needed help and that he bore some responsibility for her plight. Then many thoughts started tormenting him. He was going away to the wars. Whatever conventional future he’d had, it had been wiped out. He regretted his terseness with her. In the evening, an idea formed in his mind. Why not combine helping her as he really should, with an ultimate vengeance against his fate, against his parents’ lack of sympathy?

It took him a while to identify where Joanna worked. There, he was able to obtain her address. She worked only evenings. The bartender and owner was not friendly.

“That slut! I wouldn’t give you her address if I had it!”

Adam was overwhelmed by anger. “Watch your tongue if you want to keep your teeth.” That’s when he discovered that somehow, unconsciously, he had acquired loyalty and concern for Joanna and the unborn child.

The bartender glared at him. Adam held his eyes for a silent moment and then left. Just outside the door a waitress gave him a piece of paper. He learned later that she was Joanna’s friend, Dawn.

“He can be a first-rate bastard and he’s been trying to screw her ever since she started here. Didn’t manage it.”

When he arrived at her address, after a long delay, Joanna opened her door in disarray, with red eyes and wearing a frayed robe. She probably had been sleeping. They didn’t greet each other and Joanna spoke first.

“I thought you had expressed yourself clearly. You aren’t interested.”

“Look, very few people can respond rationally when faced with such a big surprise. I thought about it. I believe you and perhaps I can help.”

After a few moments of silence she responded, “Yes. All I need is a few bucks a month for about a year. Maybe a thousand for the year, maybe a bit more.”

“I’m going away in the army. It will be a long stretch. You need something more solid. Why don’t we just get married?”

She was visibly shocked. Then she decided he was teasing her and laughed. “Please, this

is too important to joke.”

“I’m not joking. I have given it some thought. I’m perfectly serious.”

“That’s not logical. There is no future in a shotgun wedding,” and then blushing, “even in the absence of a shotgun.”

“Isn’t there? I don’t want to have fathered a bastard.”

“You won’t go through with it. You’re reputed to be well-to-do. As I understand it, if we get married I could really collect a small fortune in a divorce settlement. Not that I would do that, but after you talk with your lawyers you won’t go through with the wedding.”

“That can be taken care by a prenuptial agreement. Look, you owe it to the child. A single mother is very vulnerable. If I get killed in the war, as improbable as it sounds, you would get nothing for the future. The easiest way of solving the problem is for us to get married.”

She paused for a few moments. “Adam, I don’t think so. Marriage without love can be a trap. I appreciate your concern but I don’t think it would work. I’ll settle for a small payment, perhaps a thousand dollars, just to tide me over when the baby comes.”

Her response had dispelled any doubts about her honesty. Sadness joined his disorientation. Imagine, he was now rejected even by a woman who needed him and was in desperate straits. He went quickly back home and stayed there to make arrangements for what he expected would be a long absence -- a few phone calls. Instructions for the manager of his business. Talking to his architect partners. Some instructions for his lawyer to alert him to Joanna’s possible future needs.

In the evening, he was wondering what else he might have neglected when the shrill trill of the telephone brought him out of his thoughts. Joanna’s voice, now familiar, sounded very

hesitant.

“Would you ... would you allow me to change my mind?”

Adam didn't know whether what he was pleased by her words or was ready to rethink his whole offer. She sounded in distress. And then an impulse resolved the problem for him. “Yes, of course! Did something happen?”

“Yes, I'll tell you when I see you.”

At his door Joanna appeared flustered and unsure of herself. Her face was flushed and tears were crowding her eyes. Her story was very short. She had felt rather sick and had left work for half an hour. She had thought that her morning sickness would be gone at her stage of pregnancy, but that was not the case. And it wasn't even morning! She had been fired by her boss, the same man who had been trying to bed her for the past few weeks.

Adam took care of the necessary hasty arrangements -- the blood tests, the license, the appointment at city hall. He brought her the papers for the financial settlement if they ever got divorced. Joanna signed it without even reading it. What choice did she have? Dawn and another waitress who had worked with Joanna were the witnesses at the wedding. Nobody else had been invited.

Joanna was actually trembling through it all. She couldn't understand why under ordinary circumstances brides and grooms could have the jitters. Her case was special. She didn't know whether she was making a terrible mistake or not. She hardly knew Adam and his apparent concern might simply turn out to be an idiosyncrasy, an aberration which had nothing to do with his real character. Perhaps to him it was all a joke -- the situation appealed to his sense of humor.

The token kiss after the very brief ceremony was perfunctory. But then at his apartment, he grabbed her and kissed her passionately, with his hands wandering under her clothes. She held his hands.

“Do you really think we should?”

“Isn’t that what most married couples do?”

“Yes, but it seems to be too much like an exchange. You give me this and I’ll give you that!”

He silenced her with kisses and then she was reassured by his tenderness and gentleness – nothing like their impetuous encounter when they had first met. The single bed was too small for the two of them but it didn’t seem to matter even when later they slept easily.

In the morning, he announced. “I’ll be gone in about a week. We are going to have a six-day honeymoon.”

What followed was a whirlwind. Although they didn’t travel, they stayed in a fancy hotel she had only admired at a distance. She couldn’t believe how every little whim of theirs was quickly catered to. Every evening, the bedding was turned down and two pieces of chocolate were placed on their pillow. She was as delighted as if she were a child. The bed was so large, she thought they might get lost in it, although Adam always managed to find her.

Adam had insisted that they buy her some fancy designer dresses and they only ate at the fanciest restaurants. They went to a play and a concert. She skipped the sumptuous breakfasts in favor of staying in their room. She felt that she was experiencing what a fancy call girl or mistress of a rich millionaire would go through. The thought made her very uncomfortable, but then she decided to enjoy herself as much as Adam seemed to. She still had an upset stomach,

fortunately only in the morning. Adam was very understanding and patient. At all times he was the perfect gentleman. Their afternoons and evenings were dedicated mostly to sex. She knew that reality would soon set in and then all would be gone.

Adam made sure that she meet his lawyer, Rutman, of Margolis, Margolis and Rutman. Rutman was a sour looking short gentleman in a gray suit and a fancy red tie. His sparse hair was dark gray and a small narrow gray mustache adorned his round face. He spelled out the financial arrangement Adam had devised. She couldn't see how she could even spend half of her monthly allowance. They also went through the prenuptial agreement she had signed before the wedding. She couldn't understand why Adam was adamant in making sure she knew every little detail. He even signed a document giving her powers of attorney.

She had the uncomfortable feeling that he was preparing to die, a thought that upset her. What could possibly be going through his mind? At first, he had seemed so indifferent to her problems and fate. Then everything had changed. Taking care of her was something that came naturally. Why shouldn't he? He was beginning to think of her as a real wife. She was considerate, thoughtful, friendly. What more would he want in a woman?

The fateful day arrived when he had to leave. He suggested that she move into what had been his apartment. He had jotted on a piece of paper how he could be reached and that was only by snail-paced mail. On his side the mail would be censored and there would be much he couldn't discuss.

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Over four years they exchanged many letters. For some reason they'd found nobody else they could confide in. They could tell of their pains, feelings and thoughts without fabrication or

pretense. The correspondence left in their minds a collage of intimate memories and confidences.

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It didn't take long before there was an encounter between Joanna and Adam's family. Adam's mother, Lucille Cotrell, made an appearance accompanied by her daughter, Sophia Mathews. Lucille Cotrell introduced herself with hauteur as Mrs. Cotrell and then she let forth with an acrimonious tirade.

"This is a falsehood, a sheer fabrication. You have no right to be here. You must have tricked him. We'll have you thrown out."

Somehow, Joanna was not surprised or helpless. Something had happened since she had met Adam, something that she couldn't define.

"Thrown out from my house? How would you manage to throw out your son's wife?"

"Wife? A masquerade. We'll expose you and have it annulled."

"Really? On the grounds that the marriage was not consummated?"

Joanna laughed and caressed her belly that was beginning to show.

"Bitch! Bitch!"

A dignified, calm Joanna asked them firmly to leave and they did, Mrs. Cotrell murmuring threats. Joanna lost no time and called Mr. Rutman of Rutman, Margolis and Margolis. Rutman promised to wave at Mrs. Cotrell the threat of a court order to keep the unpleasant woman at bay. Joanna wasn't bothered again.

When Adam had a chance to respond to her story a few weeks later, he seemed much amused, although in some ways he'd been surprised at Joanna's strong backbone. He wished he could have been there to witness the exchange.

Sophia came back the following day after a brief phone call and gave her a friendly smile. “Don’t think that I was a party to that unforgivable display. You handled yourself beautifully. I don’t think I could have done it that well myself.”

Unexpectedly, Joanna had returned the smile and waited for more.

And Sophia had more to say. “Adam and I were never very close, but he is my younger brother and I understand why he proceeded the way he did. You know, he didn’t tell us about the wedding. Imagine what a melee our mother would have created! But that’s not why I came. Perhaps I can be of help. With Adam gone you seem to be alone. I have three children of various ages. The least I can do is share some of my experiences. And perhaps I can do more. ”

Joanna nodded.

“No mother, father or siblings?”

“Mother and siblings, yes. They weren’t invited to the wedding either. I expect them to call at any moment to try to borrow money. For psychological or any meaningful support, I’d have to look elsewhere.”

“You can count on me if you wish. I’ll be glad to do whatever is needed.”

They chatted for a while. Sophia shared some of her experiences with her children. Some stories were funny. Others very serious.

On parting, Sophia asked, “Do you think I can hug you? Or would that be too presumptuous? After all we just met.”

Joanna held out her arms and they embraced. Sophia’s parting words were, “You seem to be so sensible. I think finally Adam has been lucky. I’m glad he married you.”

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A soldier's training isn't so much to learn how to fight, but more how to die! What a terrible equation. After a stint of organizing the continued training of soldiers, Adam was transferred overseas and had to interact with his British counterparts. Besides his military contacts, as an officer, he had met a number of individuals socially -- some of them charming women. He couldn't resist writing that he hadn't found any who measured up to Joanna. What could he possibly mean? Joanna was conscious that she'd had only a high school education and had never been considered a beauty. She felt a stab of jealousy despite the good intention of his comment. She suddenly realized that if he strayed, and he had every right to do that, her heart would break. Nobody ever knows where their hearts will lead them. But then perhaps it was just her pride that would suffer.

For Adam, the contacts with his British counterparts required a good deal of tact that he didn't think he had. He felt he should be with his soldiers -- their light moments, their laughter, their fears mostly hidden by bravado, their suffering and their death.

Joanna hadn't really thought that Adam's death in the war was possible. She hadn't faced that eventuality. Suddenly, learning how he felt, she became tormented by the possibility.

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There was the day when Sophia invited Joanna to dinner. She had led her into the living room. Two little boys and one very young girl were playing on the rug, and a man was right there playing with them, sitting on the floor.

Sophia made the introductions. "Guys, this is Joanna-auntie and I hope occasional babysitter. That's Calvin and the children: Dawn, John and Robert. Calvin is a regular guy as you can see. He passed muster with Mama because he can be polished and charming when he wants to

be -- the hypocrite!"

Calvin was laughing at the introduction. "I only had to be a hypocrite when I was introduced to Mama. After that, once a year for a few minutes. Sophia had to dissemble several years through her childhood and teens!"

Dinner was pleasant. The children had to be asked to behave a few times. One of the boys, Joanna thought Robert, had to be asked to stop running and sit down. With each dish, Sophia would absent herself from the table for a few moments to go into the kitchen.

After the children went back to their games, the grownups sat leisurely chatting over coffee or tea. Sophia confessed how relieved she was that Calvin did not have to serve in the armed forces. He was forty and involved in the defense industry.

It suddenly occurred to Joanna that she had found the family she never had. With a pang she also realized how tenuous her position really was.

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Adam mused that it was unfortunate that the Luftwaffe was still dangerous despite the air superiority of the allies. Sometimes the swift roar of engines could be heard overhead. The airplanes had Swastika markings and would fly low, almost at roof height. The staccato sound of anti-aircraft guns and then the grave tones of the pom-pom were followed by the terrifying explosions of the bombs which shook the ground. The Germans used aerial torpedoes and the strange glider-bombs released from the parent aircraft at a distance and guided by a radio beam. And then dive-bombers followed.

It took a while for the Allied Air Force to exert its superiority with heavy bombardment of the German forces. An endless stream of aircrafts unloaded their bombs, throughout the day.

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Joanna had had prenatal care from an obstetrician. It had been one of the conditions Adam had insisted on. In her limited experience this concept was new to her. Her worries were more about what would happen when her contractions started. She had only Sophia or Calvin as possible support. Would they be available when they were needed? For some reason the delivery itself didn't worry her. But first she had to get to the hospital.

The contractions started in the early morning before her due date. Joanna considered calling the Mathews, but for some reason didn't think the birth was imminent. When her water broke, and inundated her bed, she knew she needed help. It was Calvin who came and drove her making soothing talk. After all, he had had experience.

In the hospital the pain became excruciating. The initial hubbub around her, she didn't even notice. She was relieved to see her own obstetrician present for the delivery. She had heard that it didn't always work out that way.

Laura came into the world not without some difficulty. When Joanna held the little creature, love, tenderness and pride almost immediately overwhelmed her. The baby was so perfect and so lovely even when her little face was distorted by her weak cry.

Joanna wished Adam had been with her. Fancifully, she imagined him delighted with Laura.

She was lucky that Sophia was with her to soften the changes in Joanna's life that came with a new baby.

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Small streams ran at the bottom of the valleys. Winding, they had cut deeply into the earth

and acted as anti-tank booby-traps stranding armor and supplied perfect cover for the Germans. In rainy darkness the men with Adam waited for an attack on a February night. When the attack finally came shells burst all around them, Then the enemy soldiers followed with shouts of *Sieg Heil! Gott mit Uns!* inherited from the Germans of World War I. It was bloody. Machine-guns cut them down but yet they came. The Germans seemed to appear out of nowhere. Rifle shots, the thumping of the Bren-guns and the ripping sounds of the German spandaus, the bursting of hand-grenades, the tanks, and then hand-to-hand combat became the rule. A terrifying, noisy scenario.

In the confusion, Adam felt the fear of an imagined impact on his body by the metal pieces exploding and disintegrating around them. Artillery and tanks did their best to contribute ear-shattering din and mayhem. His battalion was in the middle of it all, with machine-guns stuttering and hand-grenades exploding around them in an intensity of sound and destruction. He wasn't sure he would survive. Only few did. At the end, only a small fraction of the men remained but the battalion had held its ground. Adam was proud of their performance, saddened by the deaths. Everything had an air of unreality and the dulled hearing only increased the disorientation.

Later he realized that he'd been lucky to have provided for Joanna. One less matter to worry about. Most of the men had dreams of sweethearts, wives -- real or imagined. Frequently they were just pin-up images they were ready to hang on the tents that sheltered them during rare quiet moments. Adam didn't have to hang pictures of women. For some reason, the image of Joanna, his wife, was always in his mind. In those moments he realized how fortunate he was to have Joanna to get back to. At other times, exhausted almost at the edge of hallucination, he wasn't even sure she really existed.

After their retreat, the allied forces had to be ready for more as there were no

reinforcements. Adam and his men were exhausted, hungry and cautious. But it all had to go on. The war had gone on for a long time and Adam knew that some of the fiercest fighting had still to take place. But the end would eventually come.

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After Laura's birth, Joanna was filled with contentment. Breastfeeding isolated the two of them in loving intimacy. After that, the care of her daughter and the worrying about her well-being filled her days. Having Sophia as a support was a godsend, Joanna couldn't be more grateful. Interacting with Sophia's children was a delight.

All her life Joanna had worked and as Laura became a toddler, she started thinking that she had accepted the role of a parasite. In her mind, the money Adam had provided was excessive. Besides, a war was going on. There was an acute need for workers. Impatient with herself, Joanna still knew that she couldn't take a full-time job without neglecting Laura.

Almost by chance, she discovered what to do. One day, her friend Dawn, with whom she had been a waitress, phoned her frantically. Her brother was one of the casualties of the fighting. Joanna accompanied by Laura, now two, went to Dawn's apartment to see what assistance she could provide. Dawn was hysterical. Joanna had to hug her to calm her down. A torrent of tears followed. Joanna felt helpless.

Fortunately the bell rang. Two women entered -- sober and soberly dressed Joanna judged them to be in their late forties. They smiled and asked,

"Dawn Ferguson?"

After Joanna answered, and pointed to her friend, they addressed Dawn. "We are from the Association of War Widows. We try to support and if necessary offer material assistance to the

families of GIs killed in the war. In our case, we are widows of military personnel killed during World War I, but we welcome anybody interested in our activities.”

Joanne observed how carefully they consoled Dawn and offered their help. Apparently, they also were part of a support group where families met to discuss the emotional and physical problems they had encountered. Suddenly she saw she had to join them. She also realized that in extreme cases she could offer some of the money she really didn't need. Adam had left her too well provided! She found that her sensitivity and affectionate concern went far to console the bereaved families.

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The wounded couldn't be removed from danger quickly. The hospital was too close to the fighting and had been sprayed with bombs. Basically the physicians, medical personnel and nurses were in the line of fire.

The wounded in dirty coats, pullovers and battle dress sodden in mud and blood were placed in rows. Sometimes they couldn't be attended to for hours. The nurses more than anybody else contributed to raising the morale of the wounded. In their minds they represented a step toward normalcy.

Often the wounds were in the form of gashes or multiple injuries. Adam had been hit and had a rifle bullet in him. It hurt but his wound didn't bleed much. He chose to ignore it. Seeing the wounded men around him, he considered himself in good shape and returned to the fighting. It was later when there was a temporary lull that he could be attended to.

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When Laura was two years old, Sophia's agitated tones on the telephone couldn't be missed. "Have you heard anything from Adam about selling his business? It seems to me absolutely the wrong move."

Joanna wished she could reassure her. "No, he hasn't said anything. But you know, I don't always get his mail and sometimes it's really delayed."

"I can't believe that he would do it. Right now they couldn't possibly get much unless the company is getting a military contract. In peacetime, in Calvin's opinion, it's going to be worth a mint!"

"I can look into it if you can babysit for Laura."

"When could you go?"

"Tomorrow, PM, seems a possible time. That's when the board meets." That much she knew.

"Okay. I'll pick up Laura in the late morning. Laura seems to have gotten accustomed to me and my domestic turmoil."

What was happening was a strange development that worried Joanna. In all his correspondence, Adam seemed to be troubled only about the war. She didn't feel he would be contemplating such an enormous step. Would he want her, a mere woman he hardly knew, to stop the transaction? And how could she possibly do that? Although she had gained much self-confidence, she couldn't see herself facing seasoned businessmen and architects. And would that be what Adam would want? She read her powers of attorney through and through. Perhaps there was a mistake. Without spelling out the details, Adam had given her the power to manage the house and finances. His business wasn't even mentioned. Nevertheless, the powers he had

delegated were general — encompassing everything as far as she could see.

Rutman, the lawyer, was the only person who could explain to her the intricacies of the situation. How could they speak of selling the firm without explicit permission from Adam?

According to Rutman, everyone on the governing board was a partner, although Adam was the main shareholder. The manager, a Mr. Seymour Coosick, could sell or dispose of the firm alright, but only if Adam was unavailable. The idea was that Adam might become incapacitated by disease, an accident or such eventuality. The documents had been formulated during peacetime. The possibility of Adam being in the army hadn't been contemplated.

Joanna thanked him and for a while was totally confused. What could she possibly do? It occurred to her that in a way she had pledged to intervene simply by having accepted Sophia's offer to take care of Laura.

Joanna had never had any contact with Adam's business. The building was modern. After she reached the door labelled Cotrell, Inc., she felt totally unequal to the task and perhaps a foolish interloper. What did she really know?

The secretary was a well dressed, attractive woman.

"What can I do for you?" Her voice was musical, in harmony with the surroundings.

"I would like to talk to Mr. Coosick."

"At the moment he is in a conference and cannot be disturbed." Joanna noted that the secretary had unconsciously tipped her head almost imperceptibly in the direction of a door.

"Would you like to make an appointment?"

Joanna decided it was time to use her credentials. "I'm Mrs. Cotrell."

"I'm so sorry not to realize that. I'm Susan Smith. I don't think we ever met."

"I want to see Mr. Coosick now."

Joanna didn't give Susan a chance to respond. She quickly went to the door and opened it.

A man jumped up from the conference table. "This is a private business meeting. Please leave." And he glared at Susan who had run behind her. There were several other men present. She assumed they were discussing the conditions of the sale.

"I'm Mrs. Adam Cotrell." Joanna thought the man who had addressed her must be Coosick and she assumed the same tone as Adam's mother had when she had come to chastise her.

Coosick was clearly flustered. "Oh, Mrs. Cotrell. I'm so sorry. We never met. What can I do for you?"

"I would like to hear what is being discussed."

"Oh, Mrs. Cotrell, this is a business matter. No reason to involve you. A complicated matter."

That sounded too much like, "the little woman wouldn't understand." It was enough to toughen her resolve.

Joanna pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. She extracted a copy of her power of attorney from her purse and handed it to him. "I'm sorry, but there are plenty of reasons for me to be involved."

Coosick briefly perused the document and then opined firmly, "I don't see how this gives you the power to intervene. We are doing what best for the company."

"I've been in contact with Adam. I really don't think this is what he wants. I suggest that we discuss this before you go any further."

Coosick only saw a young woman, practically of college age facing him. How could she possibly take a stand against him, a seasoned businessman?

“Mr. Belfour of Otto Corporation is negotiating with us to purchase Cotrell Inc. now. We can't waste the opportunity.”

“I don't think Mr. Belfour can take the chance.” And then turning to the group, “ What Mr. Coosick has in his hands is a powers of attorney given to me by my husband Adam Cotrell. on his behalf, I oppose this move. I'm having my lawyer send Mr. Coosick such instructions in a certified letter. If you wish to ignore me, I'll see you in court.”

Joanna had no idea if her move would do the job, but she felt that even if Coosick ignored her position, Belfour definitely couldn't. She turned around and at the doorway she heard only silence. And then suddenly several heated voices intermingled.

Once she was back home everything looked different. In the heat of the moment one may have a certain perspective. But then the doubts begin. Perhaps she had been entirely wrong and what Coosick was trying to do really was in Adam's interest. Why else would he want to carry out the sale? Coosick had been an able administrator for Adam for some time. Since she had to see Rutman anyway, she would put the conundrum in his court. She called Sophia and asked her to keep Laura a while longer. Luckily Rutman agreed to see her for a few minutes.

From her previous contacts, Joanna had thought that Rutman had no sense of humor. But upon hearing of her maneuver he couldn't contain his laughter, which contorted his round face. Joanna was taken aback. “Mrs. Joan of Arc Cotrell,” and then he laughed again. And then seriously, “Well you sure did it. I will ask my secretary to type the letter.”

Joanna was not finished. “What bothers me is what his motivation might be.”

“He might just need his share of the money. Business must have been awful with the war blocking all civilian enterprises. He might simply need his share of the cash for himself now.”

“I’m not sure I want to lose him as a manager. He might resign. Adam thought highly of him. I don’t think I could extract the truth from him by myself. Could you try, please?”

“What’s on your mind?”

“Well, perhaps a loan.”

“I doubt if you could extract money from Cotrell, Inc. They must be strapped for cash.”

“As you know, Adam set up a very generous fund for my upkeep. Some of it might be lent to him in some mysterious way you lawyers can figure out.”

“Let me have a go at it. I’ll phone you when I have some news.”

Joanna really had blocked the sale and she was pleased to find that Coosick had accepted her offer of a loan.

After several weeks Adam’s letters caught up with the events and Joanna was pleased to find that Adam approved of her stance.

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Demobilization eventually brought Adam back. He no less than Joanna had been looking forward to their reunion. They had been corresponding all along and had been very frank with each other. Somehow the new situation had given rise to new worries.

Did Adam really love her? The letters seemed affectionate. But how much of his affection was an illusion? In a sense their marriage had been forced on Adam by circumstances -- perhaps his conscience and sense of duty. Would he see it now as a trap? Could Joanna and Laura lose him now?

Adam was terrified that Joanna would just suffer him out of gratitude. Hadn't it all been a huge mistake? Perhaps with his return she wouldn't really want him.

As he disembarked he looked around trying to find a woman he hardly knew and a little girl he'd never met. Much was happening in the cacophony and confusion around him. Emotions coming to the surface. People hugging, crying. Children in distress. Some couples, the man in uniform, were hugging and kissing with tears in their eyes. The soldiers had been gone for so long!

Adam suddenly saw the demure familiar figure of an attractive young woman holding the hand of a little blonde girl. The reunion was entirely driven by their emotions. The man and the woman were hugging and crying. Then Joanna picked up the girl and introduced the man to her. Laura was looking at both of them very seriously.

"Why you crying?"

Adam allowed Joanna to answer. "Because we are so happy!"

Later at home after Laura had been put to bed, they sat on the couch, holding each other. Their embrace provided a calm spot away from the rest of the world. They were man and wife in every sense of the word.