

**CORBENIC**

**COLLEGE**

**A story about conflict within a **green** college -  
devoted to stopping **climate change**.  
From this conflict a green self-sufficient community emerges.**

**by**

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The Author Speaks

Green Living

## 1. SATURDAY NIGHT

This whole episode started a little less than a year ago on a very special night for me. It was a fine late summer's evening and I was standing looking out from a high balcony over our beautiful college grounds, busily absorbing the romantic scene. In the foreground, courting couples were doing their thing – holding hands, walking, talking and occasionally kissing. Further away on the left, beside a little stream, some were plainly trying to go a little further – but without much success - at least as far as my ever prying eyes could see. Behind this, the land rose steeply and at the top a ghostly white cliff was shining in the moonlight. Then on the other side, behind our playing fields, a lake was shimmering in the moonlight making funny patterns as the wind played on the water. Above all this, little clouds were scurrying along making many shapes – some benevolent - some ominous. And among the clouds, “the moon was a ghostly galleon tossed on cloudy seas”. OK, so I'm getting carried away a bit - but hopefully you get the picture. At least for myself, it was a really romantic special evening indeed.

To complete the picture, beside me there was a very amorous maths teacher doing the right thing and making the most of this perfect situation. He was chatting me up by telling me nice things about what a great new adornment I was to our college. I am not averse to a bit of praise. Furthermore he was telling me how much he could help to save me from the wicked ways of the world in which we live in. I wasn't quite so keen on this. Through no fault of my own I had, up to this point in time, led an excessively innocent life – so I wasn't quite so keen on being saved. In fact quite on the contrary, I was rather hoping that he himself might represent this wicked world. Thus I had placed my hand right next to his on the rail with the simple hope that he might place his hand on mine - then I could draw back in horror at such a dastardly advance to a girl so young and innocent as myself. But alas he was determined to stay on the right side of the line - so much for the supposed wicked ways of the world. Most people are much too chicken to step too far out of line - just like I am myself.

Then, quite suddenly, I made a momentous decision - I would step out of line myself. I did have the perfect excuse, and a person is only young once in their life. So I turned to him and looked at him in what I hoped was my sweetest and most innocent manner.

‘What would you like me to be,’ I said, ‘good or bad at maths?’

‘What do you mean?’ he replied blankly.

‘I thought you mathematicians were supposed to be hot shots at logic as well. Isn't it obvious.’

‘Not to me it's not.’

‘Let me lead your powerful brain through a very easy bit of logic. You surely must fancy me. After all I am just a fairly ordinary girl, and so your calling me “an adornment to our college” must be an indication that you rather fancy me.’

‘Well just a little’ he stumbled out, but blushing rather sweetly.

‘Well I, in turn, am inclined to encourage this most becoming feeling. But there is just one slight problem. I am sure neither of us wishes this situation to become public knowledge. After all you, in spite of your bumbling ways, are a hotshot lecturer. Similarly I myself would naturally prefer to continue to be regarded by the rest of the world as a sweet and innocent young student. So the easiest way we can get to know each other, without the rest of the world knowing, is for you to give me some tutoring in maths. And, if you are to give me some tutoring in maths, I must be either good or bad at the subject.’

‘Ah, finally light does indeed begin to dawn.’

‘About time too. So, back to my original question, do you want me to be good or bad at maths?’

‘But are you in fact good or bad at maths?’

‘I am, as in almost everything, fairly normal. I can do it, if I have to. But on the whole maths is hard work, and there are much more pleasant ways of spending one’s time. However, as we have to put on a bit of a show of doing some maths together, I wouldn’t mind you telling what all this calculus junk is all about. This is the major thing that all my friends, who did further maths, used to rave on about. I wouldn’t mind learning what they were wasting their time about.’

‘They weren’t wasting their time at all, as I am sure you know perfectly well. However, I agree it is a reasonable thing for me to do with you. But you have to play your part as well and treat the subject reasonably seriously.’

‘OK, I promise. So when do we start.’

‘My tute session after assembly on Wednesday afternoon is usually fairly empty. How about then?’

‘Trust you to choose a tute time when you must know most students won’t turn up and you can simply do all your marking instead. Just goes to show that you are a slacko - same as myself. I suspected that all along. However the time suits me fine. Now, if we wish the rest of the world to think your maths tutoring to me is perfectly innocent, we certainly don’t want anyone to see us here planning this whole affair. So push off now and leave me with the pleasant problem of trying to work out how far the various courting couples I can see may be going.’ So I gave his hand a little squeeze and off he went.

This conversation may have given you the impression that I am exceedingly pushy. This is not normally true at all. But it will take me a while to explain why I was in this exuberant, pushy mood at this moment. I need now to go back a little bit in my recent history and explain how this whole situation arose.

Now, before I came to this college, something rather strange had happened in here. And I was naturally very curious to find out what it was. My Dad had always been keen to get me into this college. But it is normally very hard to get in, and I am certainly no genius. However, at the end of last year, the dean had rung Dad, an old friend of his, and told him a few places were vacant. So the entrance exam and requirements would not be as demanding as normal and so I might be able to get in. I was keen to go, and so I didn’t want to queer my pitch and query why this strange situation had arisen immediately. However, when I was safely in, I pressed Dad a hell of a lot to explain what had happened. Eventually he partially cracked, but he was still very vague. He said that he thought that a bit of idealistic communism had broken out among the students. Some outside people had got to hear about what had happened, and so enrolments were down for the next year. So this is why some extra places had become free. This outbreak had naturally been carefully suppressed. The episode had been kept as secret as possible and all students had had to vow to silence on the subject. So I ought to do the right thing and not query the situation here any further.

Also, from my own personal experience during my first week, I had thought all the students were slightly more subdued than they ought to be. So naturally I was dead keen to find out what actually happened. And a member of staff would be the ideal person to find out about this.

But now we come to the reason why I was in an exuberant mood, and also perhaps the reason that, on this evening, everything seemed so romantic. You see - I had just met my Mr Perfect. And my Mr Perfect was certainly not Alfie, the amorous maths lecturer that had just been chatting me up on the balcony. Now Alfie is OK – I'm not knocking him at all, he is cheery, friendly and good at maths. But he is also short, paunchy and an incorrigible flirt. He had chosen to flirt with me simply because I was new, and he fondly imagined I didn't know his reputation. So he is certainly no great catch at all – but that doesn't matter, if no one is going to hear about my slight association with him. But now, before I can explain things any further, I need to describe how I had met my Mr Perfect and what he is like.

On every Saturday night our college runs a traditional dance. This is a big affair and it is attended by nearly everyone in the college who is free at the time. It is the big social occasion of the week for the college. This was my first dance and, as in the previous week I had only made friends with girls, I was a bit apprehensive about finding partners. However, the situation turned out not to be too bad at all. At our college, everyone is supposed to do his or her social duty at the dance and so they have to mingle a bit, and certainly not dance with just one person all the time. So I usually got a partner. But usually these partners were just the left-overs - i.e. the guys who couldn't dance or who were in some way a bit nerdy.

But finally a guy that was reasonable looking, fit and clearly a competent dancer asked me to dance. So, wonders of wonders, here was a guy that was exceeding assiduous in doing his social duties. The dance was Waves of Tory which is Irish - but you can in fact do it in any style you like. This guy clearly knew the correct Irish stepping but as soon as he saw my dancing, he immediately adjusted his stepping to fit in with mine. And this was just the common polka or what some people call Scottish skip-change-of-step. It was just so wonderful to dance with a guy who is kind, considerate and not interested in showing-off all the time. Then, later in the dance, he was fantastic to swing with. He was so tight and fast that I almost got giddy. I had never danced with a guy that could do a swing so well. But better still, later on when we had got used to each other, we managed to get really synchronised with each other during the waves. So, when we went under the arches, we managed to swing our hips in time with each other, and then, when we separated to form the arch, we managed to separate with a little nudge of our bums. Very nice and friendly and it was wonderful to feel that we could fit in with each other so well. Then, besides all this, the really hard thing to do in the Waves of Tory is to know when to start the dance again after the waves. This is because the various sets take different amounts of time to do the waves, but each set must then wait a little-while to be able to start again on the correct phrase of the music. Now my noble partner seemed to know exactly the correct time to start the dance again. Furthermore he even managed to persuade all our set to follow his lead. Thus, our set was one of the few sets in the hall to finish the dance at the correct time. So we finished precisely when the band finished playing. Now you cannot possibly have a more perfect partner than this.

Now, when I meet a guy as nice as this, I'm not one to hang around. I believe in showing a bit of real genuine enthusiasm. I've no desire to be like the Jane Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice*.

'Matt,' I told him, 'that was the most wonderful dance I have ever done – all due to you. You led me and showed me what to do all the way. It was fantastic. Thanks awfully.' As normal we had introduced ourselves at the start of the dance. I had introduced his name here to see if he remembered mine.

‘Thanks for your praise Ellie, but you were pretty good yourself. We just seemed to fit together very well. Thank you and I have enjoyed dancing with you very much.’ As you can see, he passed my little test.

Clearly he thought he had done his duty in dancing with me - but I wasn’t going to let him go quite as easily as this. So I smiled sweetly in reply and then said, ‘I am told that, in traditional dancing, a perfect gentleman is supposed to offer to take his partner back to her seat. How about a bit of traditional courtesy from you?’

He smiled in return, gave a little ceremonious bow and then dutifully led me back to my seat. When there I thought I might as well try to push my luck just a little bit further.

‘I’m new here and I haven’t met many people yet.’ I said. ‘Could I persuade you to sit down for just a couple-of-minutes and then you can fill me in, just a tiny bit, on what goes on around here.’

‘Sure, but for just a short while. I do like to circulate.’

‘You are a terrific dancer. So what other dancing do you do?’

‘I’m not really a good dancer at all.’ He replied. ‘It is just that Waves of Tory happens to be a bit of a favourite of mine. I don’t do much other dancing at all.’

‘But you do know the correct Irish stepping.’

‘Yes, but that isn’t really my fault. It is just that my Mum used to be keen on Irish dancing and she insisted that I learn how to do the correct stepping.’

‘Can I persuade you to teach me, how the Irish stepping goes at the next practise session on Saturday afternoon?’

‘Well I would teach you, if it was necessary. But it definitely isn’t necessary. There are lots of guys at the Saturday afternoon dance practise who are only too willing to inflict their wisdom on a pretty girl like you. You can just ask anyone to teach you.’

Clearly Matt had no great interest in me as all. But I still wasn’t going to give up yet. ‘I don’t suppose that I could persuade you to go the disco dance on Friday night.’

‘No, just no way in the world,’ he replied. ‘Dancing is obviously your scene, but it certainly isn’t mine.’

‘I was just checking, it was just a forlorn hope. So what is your scene?’

‘Climbing – I am very proud to say. A much more noble pastime.’

‘I suppose you climb on that little white cliff we can see in the distance.’

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘So when do you go?’

‘Wednesday evenings and most Sundays.’

‘When at school,’ I said. ‘I went climbing a couple of times to the local climbing gym. That was quite fun. I saw your mob on the open day - but your kind of climbing looked as if it would be horribly dangerous. And there was all that complicated gear, - ropes, harnesses and all that metal stuff of an infinite number of shapes and sizes. It would take years to know what it was all for.’

‘I’m afraid we didn’t do too well at our open day. It is only natural for everyone to show off all their gear and pretend that they are hard climbers. If you had talked to us we would have explained the correct situation. The truth is that you can climb on our little crag in just the same way as you would do at a normal climbing gym. Thus you can belay everyone with a top rope, and so you can be just as safe as in any normal climbing gym. This is what we do most of the time. We are quite safe. Why don’t you come along? We are really desperate for new members.’

‘I am interested. So I could be persuaded.’

He turned and looked at me slowly and carefully. I, in return, studied him in detail. He wasn't too bad looking. A tangled mess of brown hair was his most distinctive feature, and that was pretty awful. He could have at least put a comb through it. He had the normal Anglo-Saxon bluey/green eyes and I suppose his face was a bit too thin. But he had an expressive face and the way he looked at me I thought he might really like me. He smiled slowly in a wry sort of manner and I smiled back.

'If you agree to come climbing on Wednesday evening,' he finally said, 'I will come along on Saturday afternoon and teach you the Irish stepping.'

'Fair enough' I replied. 'And besides that, I'll even go climbing on Sunday if you agree to have two dances with me on our next Saturday night dance.'

'Ok, I'm getting a good bargain there. I'm getting a whole days climbing from you at a cost of a mere two dances from me on Saturday night. Besides, I would clearly have been duty bound to give you one dance then in any case.'

'I might very well to be happy to continue climbing if you would look after me there and continue dancing with me occasionally.'

He studied me again and thought a bit longer. 'Strangely I might be happy to go along with that situation as well. I quite like your simple forthright manner.'

Unfortunately our conversation at this point was interrupted by the arrival of a quite beautiful young girl. She tapped Matt on the shoulder and said. 'It is my turn for a dance now. Come along. It is "Stacks of Barley", that is my favourite dance. It is only natural that I should have my favourite partner for my favourite dance.'

Matt politely introduced us, 'Ellie this is Fiona, and Fiona this is Ellie.'

'Hi Fiona,' I said, trying not to show my resentment at the interruption.

'Hi Ellie,' she said smiling sweetly, 'On Saturday nights, Matt is in high demand. He has to be shared around, and you have had your turn. It is my turn now.'

Matt rose to dance with her but before leaving, he gave my hand a little squeeze and said, 'I'll save the last dance for you. See you here at about quarter to eleven. We can organise our climbing on Wednesday evening then.'

I stayed where I was – I was just amazed at my good fortune. A quite nice looking guy even asked me to dance, but I turned him down. I wanted to be left alone to think about what this all might mean.

The first thing I need to explain is that I was actually quite happy to give climbing a go. I had actually vaguely been thinking of joining the climbing club to begin with. But, on the open day, I had done the rounds of the stalls with my new friend, Choon, and she had persuaded me to join a new club that was starting up called "The wild-life rambler's club". This was the club that most people seemed to be joining. So I agreed with Choon to join that club. After all, it would be better to join a club that was the centre of current action. So climbing was forgotten.

But, when you think about it, there is clearly a lot more status in saying you are a rock-climber rather than saying you are a wild-life rambler. So, if I could become a genuine rock-climber in perfect safety and with a really nice guy like Matt to show me the way, then I would have been mad to throw the opportunity away. I had put up my bit of my bit of token resistance to climbing just to show I wasn't doing it purely because of my interest in him. And low and behold he had gone along with my request. So now, with a bit of luck, he could even become my boy-friend. And then he would have to go to the disco dance with me simply out of duty.

But the truly amazing thing was that he really seemed to like me. After all, he still wanted to do the last dance with me in spite of that clear interest from that beautiful girl he was dancing with now. I could see them at the moment and they were doing the dance superbly well. Stacks of Barley is a real show-off dance. It is done to fast Irish reels and it starts with couple doing some spectacular twisting grape-vine steps together towards the centre of the hall. Then the couple proceed along around the hall with some reel steps that start with a sharp stamp of the heel. Finally the dance ends up with the couple doing some very fast double-speed spin-hops around each other. Then the really hard thing to do is to start the dance again in the correct direction. The spin-hops leave you dizzy - but the following grape-vine steps must lead inwards to the centre of the hall, right in time with the music.

I had tried to learn the dance at the dance practise that took place this afternoon. But for the moment, it was still too hard for me. It certainly wasn't a dance that you could do at a disco, but here at a traditional dance, it looked absolutely fantastic. And Matt and Fiona were probably the best couple on the floor. Yet Matt seemed happy to start a reasonably long association with me in spite of the fact that Fiona was obviously dead keen on him. So now, hopefully, you can see why I was in such an exuberant mood on the balcony an hour or so later.

Now you could well be wondering why I should be flirting with Alfie, only an hour after meeting my Mr Perfect. Well it is an interesting question and I wonder about it often myself. One of the reasons was of course that I could flirt with Alfie with complete impunity. Thus no one would hear about it and there was no way that I would go too far with Alfie, when I had a nice sensible friend like Matt in the offing.

But the other thing was that Matt was, in a way, almost too perfect and good. Now, in all the relationships I have had so far, the element of 'lust' has always been present. Now lust is rightly one of the seven deadly sins - and so it needs to be kept well under control. But lust is everywhere and so one should always have constant practise in keeping it under control. So my reasoning was that Alfie would supply this practise. And I certainly wouldn't get this practise from Matt. This was my reasoning, but perhaps my reasoning could be a bit suspect. It is just possible that I really like a bit of genuine lust in a relationship.



## 2. CORBENIC COLLEGE

Now, before I can go any further, I need to tell you about our college. Our college is not a normal college at all and the nature of the college is very important to my story. But I am afraid that telling you about all this will involve a large amount of tedious detail.

So, you ought to learn why we are named Corbenic and what the purpose of our college is. You ought to learn how radically green we are and why. You ought to learn what that little badge you saw on the cover of this book is all about. You should learn about all the peculiarities of our college. You might even go to the absolute extreme and learn a little about what they teach us here. Perhaps you ought to learn a little about my friends, activities and family.

But, if you are like me, then you seldom do what you ought to do and only you only do what is essential. Now I am a great skipper. So what I would do, if I were you, is that I would start to read this chapter. Then, when I got cheesed off with all the detail, I would then skip over to the next chapter where the action really starts. Then, when I was suitably inspired, I might go back and read a bit more. You can understand this story without reading this chapter too carefully. So the chapter is not all that essential. I just don't want you to give up on my story simply because of all the tedious detail here.

Now let me first explain about the name. The name of our college is Corbenic and, in case you do not know, Corbenic is the castle of the Holy Grail in the Arthurian legends. So, if Corbenic is the castle of the Holy Grail, you hopefully will be asking, where or what is the Holy Grail that this castle is guarding? Well, I am pleased to tell you that it is we, the students of this college, that are to be considered as the Holy Grail of this very special institution. So, when we, the students, go forth from this glorious college with our Corbenic badges on our lapels, we will duly let our wisdom so shine throughout this world that the world will turn away from its wicked ways. Thus we will persuade the people of this world to stop polluting the atmosphere with an excess of CO<sub>2</sub> and so we will prevent the climate change, which is currently threatening to destroy this beautiful but fragile planet earth of ours. At least this is the plan, and this is why our college was founded.

Now, don't get me wrong, we, the students, are completely in agreement about the iniquity of climate change and that the people of this world must change their ways. Moreover this change must be done, not in the airy-fairy distant future, but right now. So we must start this very day. All we students are already fully conversant with all the details of climate change because that is what our entrance exams were all about. So we are all clued up and we are in complete agreement about the general worthiness of this cause. But, when we go forth into the big wide world wearing our little Corbenic badges proclaiming our mission, it might all be a very different story indeed. Let me explain.

Now here in this college we do indeed live a perfect green life. Thus our college has been built with plenty of insulation and so our college buildings stay at a pleasant temperature without using much energy. Furthermore we, the students, are quite willing to play our parts ourselves and so we open or close the insulation panels on our windows at the appropriate times of day and so we reduce the college energy heating/cooling requirements to an absolute minimum. On our roofs of our buildings are hot-water and PV panels and so, while we live here, we have almost no need for the electricity produced by wicked coal. Furthermore we are

very happy to travel to and from town to college by the college's small electrical buses, which are powered by batteries charged by our own PV panels.

And besides all this, at our college we grow all our own fruit and vegetables, which of course is the correct environmental thing to do. We even keep chooks and pigs in our grounds and these animals eat all our left-over food and these provide a significant amount of our meat. We are so diligent with our composting and returning this compost into the ground that, we are not only carbon neutral, but we take a significant amount of CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere.

That is what the symbolism on our badge is all about. You will have seen the badge on the cover of this book. You put CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere by burning things like coal, oil or any organic matter. And that is what the fire on the left hand side of the badge symbolises. This activity results in the devastated red land you see on the left hand side of the globe. You take CO<sub>2</sub> out of the atmosphere by growing things. All organic matter always eventually decays and so the CO<sub>2</sub> will return to the atmosphere. But, if you dig the organic matter underground, then it decays much more slowly and benefits the soil as well. This is what the spade symbolises. And this activity will give rise to a healthy green earth you see on the right hand side of the badge.

Thus we correct some of the damage that we might have caused by our previous lifestyles. So here at college we do all the right things and we don't find this very green lifestyle limits us in any manner. In fact we love and rejoice in being fully green.

You should also know the official stance that Corbenic college takes on the subject of climate change because it is fairly radical. The following comes from the handout that our parents receive before our entry process starts. Just skim through the blurb quickly to get an idea of where we stand.

*Corbenic College takes very strong stance on the subject of climate change. Thus you must be aware of this stance before you child applies for entrance. First you must consider the following three points:*

*1) Polluting the atmosphere with CO<sub>2</sub> and causing climate change should, by any normal logic, be regarded as illegal. Thus, if a farmer lets their cattle stray into a neighbour's property, then we say that they should pay for the damage they cause. Similarly, if a chemical company allows their chemicals to injure the health of local people, then they should pay for just restitution. So, if we the rich countries pollute the atmosphere with our CO<sub>2</sub> and cause the people of poorer countries to lose their livelihood, then the very least we must do is to pay for the damage - and then correct the problem. Any destruction that a country causes beyond its own borders must be called illegal. If we want to be stupid and destroy our own livelihood then, that is our problem – but it must be illegal to destroy other people's livelihoods.*

*2) The situation about climate change is already very bad and it will soon become much worse. Thus both India and China are trying to follow our disgraceful example. Now just think how bad things will become if they, with their huge populations, start to pollute the atmosphere as badly as we are now doing. The situation will be absolutely disastrous. We need to rectify our errors as soon as we possibly can and so we can set a reasonable example (and then tell India and China that any form of global pollution is illegal).*

3) *Climate change, as we know, does occur over periods of thousands of years - but we should not think of this as a very comforting thought. Over these thousands of years of climate change, some species die off, some species flourish, some move to a different part of the globe and others change their physical form in order to cope. All species have to change in a very significant manner to deal with the problem. We are also an animal species - so the same situation will apply to us. Do we really want these sorts of things to happen to us, within our own children's lifetime, simply because we want to continue travelling by car too much and not using sensible methods to keep our houses at reasonable temperatures.*

*Also we simply cannot afford to wait. Thus, for example, 30% of the arctic ice has already disappeared, and so climate change is already significant. Moreover we cannot imagine that by simply stopping our pollution now that everything then will be OK. Thus the pollution that we have already caused will need to be removed from the atmosphere before things even start to improve. So we need to act right now, and so far we have done nothing. A reasonable time-scale Corbenic college considers to be appropriate is that the world should be completely carbon neutral within 10 years time and, within 20 years time, the countries that created this excess of CO<sub>2</sub> must remove their contribution to this excess (so that CO<sub>2</sub> level return to a normal level i.e. the 1950's levels).*

*This timetable might seem a little extreme, but we at Corbenic think it has to be this way. Leaving things until 2050 simply means everyone forgets about it – because their thinking is that they will be dead by then. We should be acting now, and so far we have done nothing, apart from talking about good intentions in the far distant future. Remember it is WE, our generation, who have caused this problem, and so it must be WE who have to solve it. To bury one's head in the sand and say it should be partially solved by 2050, when our children will be inheriting an absolutely frightful problem, is terrible. Any parent who thinks that we should wait that long should crawl under the table and hang their head in shame.*

*Furthermore there is no problem about how this scheme should be implemented. All that we need to do is to decree that all non-green forms of energy must rise in price, over the next 10 years, until their price incorporates the full price of the removal of the CO<sub>2</sub> associated with their use. This extra money will go, in the normal way, to the companies that remove the corresponding amount of CO<sub>2</sub> (this removal procedure needs to be immediate and permanent – not like some of the tree growing schemes that are in operation). This means that the price of non-green energy forms must rise considerably - but there is no alternative.*

Now everyone at Corbenic College supports this view completely. There is no dissention among us on this subject at all. Our problems will only start when we will have to leave Corbenic and enter the big wide world. Our parents believe that the wisdom we have gained at Corbenic will so shine from us that we will convert this wicked world to a saner manner of living. Now our parents are funding us here at college and we all like our life at this college very much indeed. So, if our oldies have this rather rosy picture of how we will reform this world, then we have no desire to correct their view. But reality might be a little different. Of course, if the world is receptive to our message, then we are only too willing to let our light shine through the world and so change the world. But if things don't turn out like that, then – we students are after all just normal humans. We have to live in this world and get on with people. We can't ram our message down the throats of people that don't want to hear it. So if our future bosses don't want to hear our message then we will naturally shut up. Similarly if our friends stop asking us to come to their parties, when we talk about their big petrol guzzling cars, then we will probably immediately plead with them to forget what we ever

said. It is easy for us in Corbenic Colledge to live a perfect life. But in the outside world some people won't find it easy to change at all. Thus, for example, young families with big mortgages living in the outer suburbs of cities will find it difficult to deal with higher energy costs. So, when we go out into the outside world, then there are going to be problems. But for the time being we are happy here at Corbenic, so we try to forget this future problem. Nevertheless it is a bit of an underlying worry.

So this is what our Corbenic College is all about. It also has a lot of other peculiarities. One of these peculiarities you have already met. This is that its main social event of the week is an old-fashioned traditional dance. Its other peculiarities follow in this same old-fashioned trend. Thus in several ways, we students are separated into clear-cut male and female areas. Also no student here is allowed to have their own phone, T.V., radio or internet connection. These facilities are all available in our various common rooms, but their usage there is carefully monitored. The reasons for these peculiarities were given in the blurbs we received before we came to the college. But I didn't agree with all the reasons - and I have forgotten them in any case. In spite of these things, it is a great college to be at.

There is one really funny thing concerning our college, which is almost too embarrassing to mention. The college was founded by a group of people that were closely associated with an Arthurian society. Thus my father and the dean knew each other by both belonging to this same society. This is partly why the college is named in the way it is. But these people, being keen on the Arthurian legend, also tended to name their children after characters in the legend. So my name is Elaine and my poor brother's name is Percivale. But the really strange thing is that the people here have a tendency to act out the character they are named after. I suppose it could be one of those horrible, weird, psychological things. I assure you it does not apply to me - it couldn't in any case because there are three different people called Elaine in the legends. Hopefully you don't know the legends so this weirdness won't bother. But it bothers me - I don't like it at all. People should be more sensible than that.

Now let me give you a quick little picture of our college. My story is a little dependant on the layout of our college and this picture will help you to visualise what is happening. The main part of the college consists of a quadrangle-like-building with a small green lawn in the centre. On the bottom floor we have: our main hall in the back branch, our coffee lounge and bar in the left branch and our refectory (i.e. eating place) in the right branch. In the front branch, of course, we have the usual things like, reception, visitor information, pigeon holes for students and staff, phones, internet connections etc. On the upper floors are all the lecture halls, study rooms, library, offices etc.

Besides this, we have the girls and guys residence halls on the right hand side of the quadrangle. A covered walk way goes to the entrances of these halls, which are at the front. The girl's hall is closest to the quadrangle and the guy's hall is further out. The staff's terrace units and houses are on the left hand side of the quadrangle. The parking, such as there is, is in the front of these buildings. The college gardens and agricultural facilities are on the left of the staff accommodation. And behind our buildings are our playing fields and other recreational facilities as I mentioned in my opening paragraph.

That is all I need to say about our noble college so now I can go on with my story and tell you what actually happened. But I'm afraid nothing much interesting will happen till I go

climbing on Wednesday afternoon. Till then all I have to tell you is a lot of normal boring details about college life. I'll try to be brief.

As you may remember, the next thing that was to happen was that I was due to meet Matt for the last dance. But, besides the dance, this meeting mostly consisted of him telling me about what I should take with me for climbing on Wednesday. So this was done. Now I need to tell you about our sleeping arrangements.

All students here at college are either full borders, half borders or day students. I am a half border and this means I have a room here - but it is only half size. In fact the room is only big enough for a bed and a small desk and chair. So one can either hang one's clothes above the bed or put them in two small drawers beneath the bed. It is quite hard to put things beneath the bed because, when you pull the drawers out fully, there is no room to stand. So if you want to pull the drawers out properly you have to do it lying on the bed. So there is very little room in my half-room to store my gear. But that doesn't really matter because all us half-borders normally have families who live in town. So we can keep all our gear at home. But we must go home reasonably frequently. It is still very nice to have a small little room in college because then, on Saturday night, all I had to do was to go to my room and then slip into bed.

Next day was Sunday and this was one of the days I had elected to go home. So a quick breakfast in college then I took our little electric bus into town and then an easy walk home.

Now I need to tell you about my family. It is a very normal family consisting of me, Mum and Dad, and my brother Percy, two years younger than myself. We came to this town, which incidentally is called Minchinbury, principally so that it would be convenient for Percy and me to go to this college. In spite of what my parents outwardly express, I don't think that they are all that 'green' in fact. They were keen to get us into this college, not because of its green principles, but because, in their eyes, Corbenic is sort of an elitist college. Dad in particular was keen to see some of his old mates again from his own college days and then boast to them about his children being here. It wasn't all that difficult for my family to come here because Dad is an anaesthetist and Mum is a nutritionalist. So they both could get jobs at the local hospital and they were very happy to be here.

When I got home naturally everyone was keen to know what I thought of Corbenic and what new friends I had made. I of course expressed my enthusiasm for the college and told them how I was going climbing. But on the subject of friends I think it is best to leave one's parents in the dark. Hence it is best to get out of the house fairly soon to avoid their eternal probing. I had a perfect excuse because I was dead keen now to get my body in order. While at school, I had been physically quite active and so quite fit. But during the year since then, during which I had worked and gone overseas for a little while, I had got a bit slack about my daily exercise. But, now I had two good reasons to get my body in order. First I wanted to be fit for climbing, And secondly I wanted to look as good as I possibly could for the very social life I intended to live at Corbenic. So a lot of the day was taken up with a run, some work with light weights and a work-out regime which I had learnt at school. Exercise is an excellent means of avoiding probing questions. In view of my future climbing on Sundays, one of my little tasks was to change my home visiting regime to Monday evenings and sometimes Thursday evenings.

One of the big clubs at Corbenic was the Arthurian society. I, like most people, had joined this society. Its main meeting time was Sunday evening and so I was keen to say farewell to my family, get back to Corbenic to check out this meeting. It was a terrific

evening. The meeting was held in the main hall and everyone sat or slid around on cushions. The society covered a much wider range of topics than just the Arthurian legends. This society covered all the Tolkien stuff as well as anything that could vaguely be said to inspire people to live a better life. At the moment, the society was doing 'Farmer Giles of Ham' - but previously they had done 'Camelot' and 'Joseph and his technicolour dream coat'. So sometimes the society worked in conjunction with the musical society. Most of the practise and preparation for these shows was done at other times. Sunday night was simply a chance for a group of members to present a partially finished show to a larger audience. Other people filled in the time with skits, poems, readings or songs. So most of us just simply sat around, drinking coffee and cheering, booing or hissing as we saw fit. I thought it a very pleasant way of spending a Sunday evening.

This leads us onto Monday and so I had better tell you about what they teach us here. Our college can be regarded as a good finishing school - or as a small University. It all depends on which courses you take and which exams you do. Now my case was a little difficult. I could have done a full degree course here taking three years and I had been thinking of doing this. The difficulty was my younger brother Percy. He is 17 and I am 19. He is keen and hard working - and I am not. So, if I had done a full degree, I would be in the same year as him. Mind you, I would take damn good care that I didn't take the same subjects as him. But, knowing the obnoxious brat, he might work hard and do better than me. Then he would gloat over it all and in general put me to shame. So I thought the easiest thing for me to do was to enter as a third year student. Then I could do relatively easy courses, treat the college as a finishing school, socialise a lot and above all have a good time. So this is what I was doing. This also explains why I felt just a little out of place on my first week - because there were very few people in my situation. It was certainly wonderful to make friends with Matt on Saturday night.

So, as regards courses, each year, each student is required to do a science related subject, a maths related subject, a writing related subject and a vocational subject. And besides this, just once, you must take the college's special 'Climate Change' course. So my courses were, 'Weather', 'Mathematical modelling', 'The French Revolution' and 'Laws of Land Tenure'. And of course I had to do the 'Climate Change' as well. My courses were naturally chosen to be easy. Thus my 'Weather' duplicates a lot of work we do in 'Climate Change'. On each of the 5 working mornings, we normally have three hour long lectures that finish at noon. We call them lectures but at Corbenic a lecturer never speaks for more than half an hour. The rest of the hour is then spent on problem solving and discussion.

After mid-day, our labours are mostly over. From noon till one, we first have what we call our 'Tute Group' and this is really one of the nicest hours of the day.

Each 'Tute Group' consists of about twenty students of the same sex and of the same year. Also, each group meets again each day at the same time in the same room. Thus the groups are designed so that students can form friends with people with similar interests and work with them. This was really good for me as it gave me an automatic friend in a Chinese girl called Choon Phoon. In China I think this is just a single Christian name but here we just called her Choon and treated the Phoon part as her surname. Like me she was new here and she was only going to do the third year at Corbenic.

Each 'Tute Group' has their own tutor, also of the same sex, and this person takes a close personal interest in the well-being of each person in their group. Our group's tutor was

Julie Weston and we all really liked her. A week ago at our first tute group session Julie Weston introduced Choon and myself.

‘Choon has an appalling problem’, she said with a smile. ‘She is a work-a-holic as regards study. I am pleased to say the same cannot be said for you Ellie. Your special duty Ellie then is to take Choon by the hand and introduce her to all the clubs and activities we support. If Choon has not lost her work-a-holic ways by the end of the year you will both be scoring a black mark in your social report at the end of the year. You get the picture’

‘I am very capable of dealing with this problem.’

There wasn’t much of a problem. At Corbenic, social activities are considered to be just as important as course work and because social activities were rated so highly everyone was keen to get you to join their club. In particular, the committee members were particularly assiduous in this respect because everyone’s final report would give full details of each person’s social achievements. So, within five minutes two girls, Liz and Rochelle, from the water sports club were pestering us to join their club. It was a large club covering many different water activities. We joined quite enthusiastically and so Liz, Rochelle, Choon and myself soon became bosom buddies. Liz, I later found out, to be one of the committee members. So water sports became Choon and my major activity, and this was to account for our Tuesday afternoons and Saturday mornings. Naturally all this activity occurred on the lake I spoke of in my opening paragraph. Now I expect that you will be expecting that my bosom buddies are going to feature fairly heavily in my story. So they will later but for the time being climbing and how my flirting goes is foremost in my mind. So you can forget water sports and my bosom buddies for a while.

I expect it is my duty now to explain why social activities are rated so highly at Corbenic. I don’t like doing this sort of things because it involves the purpose of life and horrible things like that. But I am writing about my Corbenic Colledge so I suppose it is duty to give you the proper spiel. Skip it if you find it all too painful. In the current world, economic growth is considered to be the measure of human progress and this means we work hard, earn lots of money and spend this money on big houses, cars and overseas holidays. All of this is bad for our personal health and causes climate change. So naturally Corbenic is opposed to this materialistic attitude to life. But, if we wish to avoid this type of attitude, we must replace this materialism by something else. Hence Corbenic’s support for all forms of social activity. Thus, when we students leave Corbenic, one of our little duties will be to be very active in appropriate community social activities. I am not at all sure how this will work out in practise but I, as a lazy but social animal, was only too happy to go along with the general idea.

As social activities are important at Corbenic, it is quite OK for you to spend the whole of this tute hour chatting to your friends. But during this hour, the tutor, Julie Weston in our case, once a week talks to each of us students checking how our courses are going, recording our assignment marks and enquiring about our social activities. There is no pressure in this questioning, but, if one decides to slack, then this fact soon becomes public knowledge. So during this hour it is easiest to join with some of your friends and do some of your assignment work together.

Now - for the rest of our daily routine. The time from one o’clock till two o’clock is of course for lunch. Then the time from two till three is for what we call ‘Subject Tute’. During this hour most of our lecturers are available in specified rooms for consultation. We call all our teachers lecturers but in normal universities most of them would just be called tutors. All students are recommended to spend this hour studying in the room of the lecturer whose

subject they will be working on. Then they can ask the lecturer about any problems that are bothering them. A student can do all their assignments and learning that is necessary during their two tute periods. So, by three in the afternoon, a student is free for any social activities or simply to idle. Thus, for example, on Tuesday afternoons at three o'clock precisely I and my three friends always toddle off to the lake for canoeing and sailing.

This then is the daily routine at Corbenic. On Wednesday, however, things are slightly different because a general assembly is fitted in between 1.45 and 2.15. This assembly is compulsory for everyone. Its main purpose is to allow the various clubs and societies to rave on about how wonderful their previous activities have been and how exciting and interesting their coming programme is bound to be. It could be a bit boring if it wasn't for the fact that all the other clubs and societies can heckle as much as they like. It usually turns out quite fun.

We now are almost ready to go climbing. But before doing that, you are probably burning to know as to how I progressed this Alfie during my time with him at his subject tute on Wednesday afternoon. Well, I am ashamed to say, I mostly chickened out. I turned up of course but with an exciting climbing trip coming up in just two hours time, I didn't want to worry about maths and Alfie too much. Dr Alfred Eilbeck was my lecturer in my 'Mathematical Modelling' course and this is how I had first got to know him. This course wasn't the easiest of courses and so there were plenty of questions I could ask about this, without worrying my poor old brain about what calculus was all about. He then graciously led the conversation into more general topics. So we also talked about our own personal interests and activities. From this it transpired that we both visited the town library occasionally. He naturally suggested that we might meet there sometime and I replied that we could think about it sometime. I didn't want to appear to be too keen. But, on the other hand, I wanted to keep this option open. As he had said, there were very few other students at this tute and so he could spend a considerable amount of time on me. I was quite happy to let him do this.



### 3. CLIMBING

A bit before five o'clock that afternoon then a motley crowd of students were to be seen gathered together in a corner of our main lounge. Some of them were still in the process of finishing their coffee. They were obviously the climbing party because they all had packs and that smug look on their faces as if they were saying to the world what an intrepid bunch of climbers they were. Fiona was amongst them and she kindly introduced me to everyone. Matt arrived just after five and he quickly took charge. Unfortunately he took his responsibilities seriously, and this meant there wasn't much time for me. So we set off on what for me was to be my big adventure into the world of climbing.

Our path led off very pleasantly through the Corbenic grounds and then it slowly led down to that little creek I spoke of at the beginning of this story. I was very keen to see this creek because I imagined it to be the perfect place to go and sit with the partner of your dreams. And it really lived up to my highest expectations. It had good lush grass with various bushes and trees giving many little nooks and crannies all with a certain amount of privacy. But the best thing of all was the creek itself. Although it was quite small, it was lively enough to remind me of a favourite poem of mine. So it chattered and sparkled just like any true-blue brook ought to do before it joined our brimming lake – but I have never been not quite sure that I know what “brimming” actually means. It was just the place where one might pour out one's soul to your future partner in life. An ancient little stone hump bridge crossed the creek and this led to the outside world. So our college's strict rules on student behaviour should no longer apply here. I imagined that there might be a time when even I might wish to avail myself of this freedom. I naturally decided that I would try to return with Matt late in the evening and try to have a nice intimate conversation on the way back.

From here our pleasant walk turned into a really hard slog as we had to make our way upwards on a stony rough little track. The quality of the flora also decreased markedly here as the better quality trees soon became strangled by things like Convolvus, Privet and Lantana. The stinging nettles had been removed around the track but further a field they would certainly be a pest. Then suddenly the trees opened up and there was our goal.

The cliff was a lot bigger and more intimidating than I was expecting it to be. Directly in front of us was the main part of the cliff and this seemed horribly hard and vertical. A couple of guys were already climbing here. I certainly couldn't see any way that the rope that trailed behind the guy that was climbing would stop him hitting the ground if he fell. It certainly didn't look anything like as safe as Matt had assured me it was. Climbing for me at that stage looked as if it was going to be a one-day wonder. On the left side of this main wall, there was a more broken wall. This wall was perpendicular to the main wall and it decreased in size as it came forward. Behind this cliff, I could see there was an obvious easy but steep track that would lead to the top of the cliff. On the other side of the main wall, the cliff gradually broke down in size and formed some more easily angled slabs. They didn't look too bad. A really good feature of the place was the open glade that the various walls contained. This open space was especially welcome after the claustrophobic wood we had just been through. But the best feature of all was the nice friendly little stone hut that stood on the right in front of the slabs. This hut had a good view looking over everything. So I could stay in this hut and watch everyone else climb and avoid the horror of actually climbing myself. And fortunately this is where we now all made our way.

When we got to the hut and everyone was busy getting their gear ready, Matt finally had some time for me.

‘Most of this party,’ he explained, ‘are experienced and can look after themselves. You are the only person that is completely new. But the first year students, Fiona, Eric and Julie, have only been climbing here once before. On that first day, I took them up some easy climbs on the slabs. These three are now due for some abseil practise and I have told them I would give them some practise today. So, if you don’t mind, what I would like you to do is to first join us on this abseil practise. After this, these three will be ready to join and climb with the rest of the members. I can then devote my time to you and so we can do some easy climbs together. Is that OK?’

And of course it certainly was. In fact it would suit me absolutely perfectly as it would leave me alone with Matt late in the evening. Better still, perhaps Matt had even planned it all that way. Things couldn’t be better. So now I was going to have to put on a really good show of enthusiasm for climbing. I wasn’t feeling very enthusiastic at that moment at all – but I had to put on a good face.

It seems to me that one of the fundamental sad facts of life is that, if you do any activity in a sensible, safe and gradual manner, then, to any onlooker, this activity will appear to be infinitely boring. And this is precisely what Matt did so well when teaching us to abseil. Thus we did two easy abseils on the slabs then a couple of harder abseils on the broken wall in front of the walk-up track. In everything Matt always explained all the various problems that could arise and how they could be overcome. All very interesting and exciting to me but, not alas, to you the reader. All very sad because I was looking forward to having a nice little rave about my first go at abseiling. But I must desist. I have to think of you.

When this was over Matt and I finally had out time together. We started this by sitting on the grass, eating our food and watching everyone else climb - the perfect thing for us to do. Why suffer yourself while you can watch other people suffer instead? Besides you can learn a bit simply by watching other people climb. We had taken food with us so that we could return whenever we liked. So we both had had our main meal at lunch time and we had taken a couple of rolls and a drink for the evening. I, of course, was keen on this arrangement because it might give me more time alone with Matt.

We had nearly finished our food when the two guys who had first been climbing on the main wall joined us. Matt introduced them to me as Angus and Steve. He explained to me that Angus was in charge of the local climbing gym. A group from the gym regularly climbed here as well.

‘Angus,’ I asked, ‘when you were doing your first climb it looked terribly unsafe. If you fell it looked as if you would just simply have hit the ground.’

‘You really are a rank beginner to real climbing.’ he replied, ‘Let me take you over to the climb and show you how a leader is protected. Matt would have explained it all to you in ten minutes time in any case. But I don’t mind sneaking in and beating him to it.’

So he took me over so see the climb and there he showed me a line of bolts going up the climb each about two meters apart.

‘But how can you use them?’ I asked. ‘They stick out less than a centimetre.’

‘See these key-hold brackets’, he replied taking out a small karabiner on which several of these brackets were hanging. ‘They slip over the bolt head like this.’ And he demonstrated how the bracket could neatly fit over the bolt head. ‘Then you take one of these items we call a quick-draws and you use it to attach the bracket to the rope. We call this whole thing a ‘runner’ because the rope runs through this solid fixture. Then, as you climb upwards, you should not fall more than twice the distance you are above your last runner. Provided that

your belayer hasn't fallen asleep - which sometimes is a real possibility. Belayers can get fairly slack if they think nothing is happening.'

'It still doesn't seem all that safe to me.'

'It is not as safe as having a top rope. But, when you have seen plenty of other people take a few fliers and have taken a few yourself, then you start to accept that the system works reasonably well. Leading a climb adds a bit of excitement to the whole procedure and gives a lot of entertainment to the watching crowd as well.'

'Is this the standard method of protecting the leader?'

'In general this runner system is how a leader is protected. But the methods of attachment to the rock differ enormously. In traditional climbing, a climber relies solely on the natural form of the rock to protect themselves. There are a large number of ways by which this can be done and most of the ironmongery you will have seen around the place is for this purpose. It is always a very difficult thing to do. In sport climbing, one normally uses bolts of one form or another. The form we use here comes from NSW, Australia. The advantage of this system is that it is easy to place the bolts in the rock and when they have been placed then they look fairly innocuous. The disadvantage of this system is that it is harder to clip onto these simple bolts than the ring bolts, for example, that you used when you were abseiling. This bolting method, however, is more akin to the traditional methods because, in traditional climbing, it is often very hard to find and place a good runner attachment. So we see no benefit in making an attachment too easy. So we support our method on these grounds as well. We like to think that all real climbers will eventually do some traditional climbing as well.'

You, as a proper greeny, should also like our system because it does not deface the rock too much. I like our system because sweet young beginner girls like you often can't see the runners we use. So you think that people like me are fearless heroes.'

'It does give that impression. Is it hard to belay a leader?'

'Not really. I'll teach you now if you like. I just need to tie in to the rope again and then climb up to that bolt you can see up there. Then I'll fall off and you can find out if you can hold me with your belaying device.'

'Not now. We should go back and join the others. Probably Matt will teach me later.' I wouldn't have minded being taught there but there was a glint in his eye. He was clearly a bit of a wolf.

'Matt will take you over to the slabs and it won't be so easy to do it there. If you do a practise fall on a slab then you tend to slither and graze yourself.'

'I am sure it can wait. But one last question before we rejoin the others. Was the climb I saw you doing a hard climb?'

'This climb is called Vember. It is not really a hard climb but it takes a bold line up what appears to be a blank bit of rock. The climb just next to us is our hardest fully independent climb. It is called Susbits. It is a superb climb.'

Then we rejoined the others. When we had finished our meal and Angus and Steve had left, I was finally in a position to ask Matt a question that had been bugging me for a while.

'It seems an incredible bit of fortune,' I asked, 'for Corbenic to have such a good crag so close at hand?'

'This is what everyone wonders. Ten years ago this area posed a serious problem to our town council. It was an old disused limestone quarry. People had been using it for years as a rubbish dump for old cars etc. It was completely overgrown with creepers and that junk vegetation we came through on the way up to here. Even dead bodies had been found here.'

But then two incredibly keen English climbers came to Corbenic and they decided they would make this their heaven on Earth. They just worked like stink and this is the result. The council provided the heavy machinery and a lot of students provided a lot of labour. But it was mainly a labour of love by those two guys. If you look carefully you can still see some of the old drill holes on the main wall. The slabs are natural rock and the upper part of the broken wall is also natural rock. But it is mostly quarried rock and a huge amount of loose dangerous rock needed to be removed. It was all created by a lot of hard work.'

'That is amazing. What is it called?'

'Cloggie. Cloggie is what climbers call Cloggwn D'Arddu, a cliff on Snowdon that is one of the oldest, largest and best loved cliffs in Britain. Most of the climbs on this crag are named after these climber's favourite routes on the real Cloggie. So on the broken wall the two prominent cracks are Woubit's Left Hand and Curving Crack. Then our corner between the walls is called The Corner which also exists on the real Cloggie. Then on the main wall we have Shrike, Octo, Vember, Susbits and Troach. Then on the slabs are White Slab, Great Slab, Slanting Slab and Red Slab. Compared to the real thing, these routes are a bit now farcical. But let us go to the hut and compare our crag with a big photo of the real thing.'

On the way there he explained about the hut.

'Our hut is called Innes and this is also related to the real Cloggie in North Wales. The two guys were members of the Climbers' Club in England and Innes Ettis is the hut the guys normally stayed at while climbing on Cloggie. Our hut is supposed to be a little Innes Ettis.'

Inside the hut was this huge black and white photograph of the most horrible cliff you could possibly imagine. For a start it lay above a lake that looks like a coffin. Even the cliff looked broken and depressing. But Matt rejoiced at the sight. He showed me all the climbs and described how long and difficult they were. Most of the climbs were originally done when protection for the leader was marginal in the extreme. Finally he said 'Even now there are no bolts at all. So, when you need to get down, the route lies down this central gully here. It takes too long to belay all the time and so there are many places where you can still fall to your death. So now you can see what a safe little haven we climb on here.'

I was duly appreciative. Old style traditional climbers must be out of their minds.

Then Matt took me off to the slabs and his slow solid method of teaching me to climb continued. So I will say no more. At the end of this I was thinking about what Angus had said about people taking fliers. It would be fun to see a bit of real action like this and have a bit of excitement. Perhaps I could stir things up a bit.

'It must be your turn to do a climb now.' I said. 'You have taught me to belay. So test me out now.'

'What climb would you like to do?' he asked. 'I have done most of the major climbs here and so you might as well choose a climb that would fit in with your future aspirations.'

'Do I really have the choice?'

'Certainly.'

'Angus said the hardest climb here was Susbits. Why don't you try that. It won't really matter if you can't do it. You have been raving on how safe our protection system is. So it will be just good belay practise for me to hold a minor fall.'

'A clean ascent of Susbits is the major challenge lying ahead of me. I have worked out most of the moves using a top-rope and could possibly now make a clean ascent. But I certainly wasn't expecting to do it tonight with Angus and Steve eager to see me take a flier near the top. At the top of Sustbits, the bolts are more spaced out. The theory is that you don't

need so many bolts at the top because there is no opportunity to hurt yourself with so much space beneath you. Still it is damn scary. I certainly prefer not to do it tonight.'

'But you are my hero. You can't let me down after giving me your word. You don't need to go to the top. You can simply give up or fall off in a safe position before you get to the difficult bit. But I know you won't give up. You will give it a proper go won't you?'

'Blast. I suppose I don't have a genuine excuse to avoid it. I'll have to give it proper go. But first I'll check out your belaying abilities more fully.'

So we wandered over and fortunately everyone else was busy doing their own climbs. So nobody paid any attention to us. To check my belaying technique, I went on belay, Matt climbed up to the first bolt clipped it, went a bit further and then fell about a meter. I am proud to say that I had no problem in holding him and so let him back down to the ground. So I was OK to belay him. Then he did what I thought to be a strange thing to do. He climbed up to the bolt again, unclipped it and then climbed back to the ground with difficulty.

'Why did you do that?' I asked. 'You could have just left the runner where it was and used it on the climb.'

'It is a question of ethics,' he said, 'and it is all rather complicated. Firstly when you say you have "done a climb" everyone these days assumes you have done it cleanly. This means you have not used the protection in any way to support your body weight. But even then there are four ways you can do a climb cleanly. These are "on-sight", "red-point", "pink-point" and "top-rope". Hopefully "on-sight" and "top-rope" are self-explanatory. In a "red-point" ascent one places the protection as one climbs whereas in a "pink-point" ascent the protection has been placed before hand. Here at Cloggie, when we say we have "led a climb", we mean we have done a "red-point" ascent. So the reason I took that first runner off was so that I have now the chance of claiming a genuine lead ascent of the climb.'

'It all seems as if you are nit-picking about nothing.'

'It would seem that way. But, if Angus or Steve should happen to notice that that first runner was already in place, they would sneer and jeer about the matter for evermore. So I prefer to be on the safe side.'

Then Matt started to get really serious about the matter. First he stretched out thoroughly. Then he tightened his climbing shoes and checked they were completely clean. Then he chalked up fully, which he hadn't bothered to do previously. Then he played around making a few moves on some tiny holds at the bottom. Finally he was ready. I wished him luck and off he set.

The climb was obviously hard right from the start. He had to weave around from side to side making funny little moves all the time on very small holds. Nothing was straightforward. When people saw what he was doing they started to gather round. By the time he was halfway up everyone was sitting around and watching intently with bated breath. I started to be heartily ashamed of what I had done. Fancy a mere nobody like me putting a really nice guy like Matt so much on the spot. I tried to look innocent about the whole thing. Progress was all very slow indeed. After every hard move, he shook each hand alternately behind him to relax the muscles. Finally the wall appeared to be blank except for the remains of an old vertical drill hold. The bottom of the drill hole wasn't too bad because it was fairly complete so Matt could use the hole, first for a multiple finger jamb hold and then, as he moved up, for a toe jamb hold. But further up the hole decreased to almost nothing and there was almost nothing to hold at all. He finally made a couple of desperate layback moves on the sides of the hole, managed to grab a miniscule wrinkle and then he was up. The whole place burst out into rapturous applause. I hoped to heaven that no one would ever know that I had sort of pushed him into it.

It was starting to get dark now. So he asked me to let him down slowly on the rope while he removed all the protection from the climb as he came down. When down, of course, everyone congratulated him on his superb ascent and he duly thanked them for their praise.

‘You had all better push off now,’ he then said, ‘otherwise you will get caught in the dark. I’ve got I torch, so Ellie and I can come back a bit later. I’ll see you all in the lounge at the usual spot at ten o’clock on Sunday if you want to go climbing then. A lot of you will want to go on the inaugural wild-life rambles walk but a few of us will still be here.’

So everyone else left. He then turned to me. I could see that his success with the climb and the praise and applause he had received meant nothing to him. He didn’t seem to like becoming the centre of attention. He looked as if he was pretty mad at me.

‘I’m sorry,’ I pleaded, ‘I just didn’t realise the climb would turn out into a big thing. You will forgive me won’t you?’

‘We’ll deal with the matter later. Let’s pack up quickly and use the light while we can. We can talk by the creek when there is only an easy walk back to college. We can do that in the dark.’

So I was going to get heart’s desire of a talk with Matt in the most romantic spot I could imagine. Trouble was, I didn’t really fancy the nature of the conversation that would follow. It looked as if we were due to have a really terrible row. We packed up and made our way there.

When we had sat down and made ourselves comfortable, Matt said. ‘I really would like us to become friends but - ’

But I didn’t let him get any further. I put my hands on his and said - ‘And you are about to tell me that putting a person on the spot in a situation like this evening is not the way one ought to act to a friend. I know, I know, I know. I made a mistake and I am deeply sorry for what I did. Can’t you just forgive me and we become friends again. I have learnt my lesson. It certainly won’t happen again.’

He looked at me hard and long. And I began to cry. ‘I’ve told you I’m sorry.’ I said. ‘What more can I do?’

‘OK. I forgive you.’ He finally said. ‘Let be friends again.’ And he gave me a hug. With a bit of luck we really were friends again.

‘I was surprised you were so angry about how everything turned out. After all you did become a hero to everyone and you received great deal of praise and adulation on all sides. Most people would like that.’

‘I have received praise and adulation before and it has meant nothing. What I need is a friend who will remain a friend through thick and thin.’

This statement got me thinking. For some time, I had been suspecting that Matt could have been associated with that problem business last year. I decided that I really would take a punt on the subject.

‘My Dad told me in a very hedged manner,’ I said, ‘that last year Corbenic suffered from an “idealistic communist” outbreak. The whole thing needed to be suppressed and all students were carefully bound to secrecy on the subject. Now I don’t think a bit of idealistic communism is anything to be ashamed of. And I would have a lot of sympathy with anyone that was involved with it. I suspect, from everything I have seen and heard, that you were involved and very likely you were even in charge. If you have been I would like to give you my complete support.’

And now from what I have seen and heard today I think it could have been much worse. I think you must have suffered horribly about it. No one would act like you have today unless

a leader has seen his followers turn against him. I would just love to redeem myself really be a constant friend to you for ever and never turn against you.'

I was going to continue on but there were tears coming into his eyes. We just gave each another good hug so that I didn't have the embarrassment of seeing him crying. He finally recovered and wiped the tears away.

'Yes,' he stumbled out. 'You read me exactly right and that is why I am in such a desperate need of a friend now. I would love to receive your support.'

'Can you tell me about everything that happened last year.'

'I would love to but it will take too long to do tonight. Besides I want to compose myself. Next Sunday there won't be many people climbing so I can tell you then. We have to be very careful because we are not supposed to talk about the subject at all. Is that OK?'

'I have been wanting to find out about what happened last year right from the beginning. So that would be perfect. But now on another subject; should I buy my own personal climbing gear before Sunday?'

'I certainly would like you to. It sort of commits you to go climbing regularly. Tomorrow night the three other new climbers will be getting their gear at the climbing gym in town. It would be a very convenient time for you to join them and get your gear at the same time. But any time would do.'

'Well I will and I am happy to commit myself to climbing regularly and be your friend at all times. Tomorrow night would suit me fine as I was expecting to go home in any case. I will go then. My younger brother Percy will be at home and he is very cynical about my climbing interest and my aptitude at it. When he sees my new gear he will be terribly sarcastic about the whole thing. When we climb on Sunday can we do a climb that will allow me to say I am a real climber.'

'I shall organise the climb accordingly. It is getting late so lets get home.'

He gave me a another hug. Not very romantic but it was early days yet. I could wait. The evening had turned out as well as I could possibly have hoped.

On the following night, I duly turned up at the town climbing gym. Fiona, Eric and Julie were already there climbing. They explained to me that, when a person buys a substantial amount of gear, then you get free entry for the night. So they had bought their gear and they were now using their free climbing entry. When he was free, Angus came over to serve me. And very soon I was the proud owner of a pair of climbing shoes, a harness, a belay device with locking karabiner, a chalk bag and two slings together with normal karabiners. Angus had explained to me that, if I wanted to regard myself as a real climber, then a couple of slings with karabiners were also essential. As I wanted to appear a real climber in Percy's eyes, I had bought these extra items as well.

I was also offered the free night entry but I declined. I didn't want to become too associated with either Angus or with Fiona, Eric and Julie. But I stayed and watched for a little while. It soon became clear that I wouldn't need to worry too much about Angus's interest in me. He had rapidly transferred his interest to Fiona. And she appeared to be reasonably receptive to this attention. I was surprised that a girl as young and beautiful as Fiona would welcome this attention. But perhaps I was new to the ways of the world. Perhaps she really fancied his big muscles and rough hairy look. But I didn't need to worry - I was fairly sure Fiona could look after herself.

I, of course, was dead keen to try out all my new climbing gear next Sunday. And you, no doubt, are waiting with bated breath to read about it. But this chapter is also about Matt and me and you might remember that I was due to meet up with him twice on Saturday first. So I need to fill you in on these encounters. But unfortunately there is not much to tell you. At the dance practise on Saturday afternoon at the back of the hall, Matt started to teach me the Irish stepping. But as soon as the woman in charge saw us, she promptly got Matt to demonstrate the stepping with her to everyone in the group. It is really hard to keep Matt to oneself. Also at the dance that night, Matt duly gave me my two dances. But he was also in high demand from many other people so there was certainly no time to be with him alone.

Fortunately Sunday was a much more relaxed affair. We all gathered in the lounge at ten for coffee first. The party only consisted of me, Matt, Fiona, Eric, Julie and Leo. Leo was the only experienced climber besides Matt. We wandered slowly over to Cloggie and joined with a small party from the climbing gym. Angus immediately took the opportunity to ‘teach’ Fiona and Matt took care of me.

‘We have the perfect climb here for you to brag to Percy about.’ Matt said to me. It is called ‘The Sky-Line Ridge’ and is the longest climb we have here. It goes up the ridge of the broken wall. It is a bit artificial because the way-down is only a few meters away. But Percy doesn’t need to know this. It is still a pleasant climb and it is our only multi-pitch climb. Would you be happy to try this?’

‘This sounds perfect.’

‘There is just one slight problem – it is best if you lead some it.’

‘Surely I am not up that yet?’

‘It is just the nature of the climb. There are a lot traverses on the climb and if you fall off on a traverse even seconding you will go for a swing. On this climb there are a large number of ring-bolts because the climbs below use them as belays. So it is just as easy to lead the climb as second it. But when it comes to bragging this is a distinct advantage.’

‘So what is that?’

‘The term climbers use for leading is to be “on the sharp end” of the rope. Now if Percy or some of your friends ask what climbing you did, you can reply “I only did reasonably easy climbs but I was on the sharp end some of the time.” They will then ask what “sharp end” means. You explain that this means you led and hence that you would fall twice the distance you were above your last piece of protection. And then your friends usually go away most impressed. You don’t need to explain to them that on this particular climb there is a bolt at every hard move you have to make and so you can’t fall much at all.’

So this would be the perfect climb for me.

This is what we did. I led the first pitch and then Matt led the second. This pitch took us to the top of the regular cliff above “the Corner”. However there was a final third pitch that went to the top of an isolated block above the regular crag, which I led. It was an easy climb but it still gave me the feeling that I was acting out the part of a “big bold mountaineer”. We used to sing about this sort of thing when I was in the guides a few years ago.

At the top of the isolated block we were in a perfect position to watch the world go by and where we couldn’t be easily disturbed. So Matt could tell me what happened last year.

‘The whole thing started during the summer holidays just over a year ago.’ He said. ‘Our club then was called the Venturer’s Club and it included both climbers and ramblers. For our major event we had initially organised a combined climbing, walking trip. But the Dean,



Stan Rabidowich, decided to come along as well. He was so enthusiastic that numbers increased and so we decided to miss out the climbing altogether. We would have our work cut out just looking after all the relative beginners. In light of this, I persuaded my friend Lance to join us as well. The trip was to our state's peak region and this area is high enough to still retain some hard snow in the gullies in summer and have high meadows with an abundance of wild flowers. We didn't take rock-climbing equipment but we did take a few ice-axes and a couple of ropes. During the trip all of us could all practise cutting steps and self-arrest in the snow gullies. So the whole party had plenty to do.

The group was so large that we tended to break up into separate cooking groups. And these cooking groups usually consisted of a tent of guys and a tent of girls. My group consisted of me and Lance in one tent and three girls in another tent. I was the only experienced person in our group and so I sort of became the leader of the group. Because of this I suppose the prettiest of the three girls, Jenny, tended to attach herself to me.'

'Are Lance and Jenny,' I asked, 'the Lance and Jenny who are now the male and female student representatives on the Corbenic council?'

'I am afraid they are.'

'Gee, you have had it rough. Those two positions are two of the three most important positions a student can attain at Corbenic. But, for the time being, go on with your story.'

'After about ten days on the trip, Jenny came to me and suggested a small diversion for our group from the main group. She was sick of washing in freezing cold water and so she suggested we go down for a day to a warm stream. We could then join the others further on the trip. We did this. The valley we went down to was out of the national park and so we camped on an open bit of land on a small farm. The people that ran the farm then asked us to join them for coffee when we had finished our meal. These people consisted of two young families, one couple with two young children and in the other couple the wife was pregnant. The group were trying to become as self-sufficient as possible. They were doing quite well. In the morning they showed us their fruit and vegetable patch, their little wheat, corn and soya-bean areas and also their chooks and milking goats. So they had become completely self-sufficient in food. We were most impressed. But when we asked about the future it was a bit sad. In a couple of years they said they would have to give up their venture. They felt they were too isolated and their children needed more friends. They needed more people there. They had chosen a beautiful scenic spot but, because of this, it was a significant journey to go to a local school. They needed to run a car with all its associated costs. The whole thing wasn't sustainable in the long term for them.

After we left them, we talked about self-sufficiency between ourselves quite a lot. And from this discussion, we realized that, in our college, we were in a position to form a self-sufficient community that really could be sustainable. After all, we had lots of people at college who would be interested in doing such a thing. Moreover there was plenty of agricultural land reasonable close to Minchinbury so there would be no need for such a community to be too isolated. We could even get these families to join us and teach us what they knew. After we had agreed among ourselves, we broached the subject with the whole party. They were also fairly receptive. Stan, the dean, was a bit cynical at first but on the whole he encouraged us. Then when we got back to college I brought the subject up a couple of times at our major college debate forum on Friday afternoons and again the idea was well received. We formed a society to study the matter further and about a hundred people joined. Everyone was very enthusiastic and all was going well.

But then the big blow fell.

I received an order from home to return home for a week so I don't know the details too well. When I returned, everyone had been sworn to complete silence on the subject. And Lance and Jenny had been nominated for the student representative positions they now hold. While away my Dad had explained the full situation to me. This was that the complete college hierarchy had studied the situation carefully. The result of this was that they deemed that our self-sufficiency idea was interfering with the college's main purpose which was to fight climate change.'

'But that is ridiculous!' I butted in. 'Everyone knows that to be self-sufficient is to be as green as you possibly can be.'

'The case against it, I'm afraid, was fairly detailed. Firstly, Corbenic's main agenda is to produce people that will persuade the rest of the world to become a lot greener. Just a few of us being fully green won't make much difference. They held that our self-sufficiency ideas expressed a very insular point of view.'

'I suppose I can vaguely understand that point. The hierarchy has always been up themselves in expecting us to change the world. What else did they say?'

'Apparently our second year exam results were poor.'

'Were your's?'

'No, I did well. To be self-sufficient you need to know a hell of a lot. I chose my second subjects that year to be as closely associated with agriculture as was possible. I wanted to know the detailed facts and so I automatically learnt a lot. I wouldn't be surprised if people studying subjects like accountancy and economics slacked a bit. It is hard to know.'

'Anything else they held against you?'

'They said that that our ideas were mostly airy-fairy, communist rubbish that had been shown many times to be impractical. The whole hierarchy had spoken at length about the many other attempts that had also failed miserably. I must admit at that stage my knowledge of previous attempts was rather poor. Apparently Kibbutz communities in Israel have been the most successful communities so far. And even they are now starting to fail.'

'Do you think your self-sufficiency system really is impractical?'

'No, I certainly don't. But a lot of people's ideas are and it is terribly hard to separate the good ideas from the bad. It is all about fine detail and no one listens to or remembers the fine detail.'

'Do you now know a complete practical system?'

'I didn't to begin with. But I think I do know a practical system now. But no one will listen to me.'

'I don't know your system and I am no genius. But I do know what you have to do now. You have to write everything down in detail and show it to everyone that is interested. Everyone will then think they have much better ideas. But then you must insist they write their ideas down in detail like you and show in detail how their system is better than yours. The one thing I do know about this world of ours is that everyone is just like me. That is they are deeply and profoundly lazy about that sort of thing. No one would ever write down their ideas in detail. But you are abnormal. You are strange. From everything I have seen, you are a plain simple hard working guy. In fact you are quite weird. So, if you write everything down and ask everyone else to do likewise, then everyone will temporarily forget their better ideas and people will follow you. I have a lot of faith in you. I think you probably do have the goods and all you have to do is write it all down. And I will be a faithful reader and help you where I can. But to what extent are your plans finished?'

'I think I now know what has to be done in most of the major areas. Everyone in Corbenic, of course, knows about energy conservation and sustainable buildings. So these

areas are OK. During my second year I learnt all about agriculture, water and recycling so I think I know what needs to be known about these areas. I was really stung by the criticism about our ideas being airy-fairy communistic ideals. So during the holidays I thought very carefully about how the finance would work and how the community would be run. I think I now have a plan for all this. People may not like it. But my plan certainly isn't based on impractical communistic ideals.'

'So you really are now ready to commit everything to paper?'

'Yes, I think I am. I hate writing and I'm not very good at it. But you are right - it must be done. And I really would like you to keep me on track by reading and criticizing everything I write. You are just the partner I need. But everything has to be kept completely secret. My condition of being allowed to return here was that I forget all about self-sufficiency for the next two years. Do you mind that?'

'I already guessed that. So don't worry about it. But do you know why Lance and Jenny were accepted back into the fold, whereas you are still plainly way out in the cold?'

'I haven't spoken Jenny or Lance since that fateful week. If I had agreed to say that my ideas on self-sufficiency were all wrong then I might have been invited back into the fold. But I absolutely refused. In order to come back I agreed to say nothing. But I certainly wasn't going to say I was wrong. I expect Jenny and Lance agreed to go along with what the hierarchy said and so they were suitably blessed by the establishment. I was terribly depressed by the whole thing.'

'No wonder you were. But you did absolutely the right thing and I am completely behind you. I know that the whole communist movement has now been discredited but at least they were trying to create a better world. At present in our capitalist world, all we do is wallow in our materialist wealth and get fatter. We turn a blind eye to the poor of the world and the fact that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. We should be trying to do something. And I think you might be showing us the way. Don't ever give up and I at least am with you. But don't expect me to work as hard as you do.'

'Well all I can say is to thank you enormously for inspiring me to continue on. You really are my friend for ever.' And he gave me a big hug.

Then we sat for a while and watched the world go by from our high vantage point. It is great to feel that I had a friend forever that shared the same ideals. But it would also be nice to have Matt as my own boy-friend and show him off to the world as well.

'There is just one minor little thing you could do for me.' I said. 'You know that the Corbenic green ball is coming up next Saturday night. I know most people go without a partner. But it would so much nicer to have you as my partner there.'

He suddenly looked awfully sad. 'I will if you like,' he said, 'but let me explain my situation. Last year Jenny asked me to do exactly the same thing and that is how we came to be a couple. But it never really worked out. We were closer and more open in our conversation when we were independent than when we were a couple. Perhaps she expected too much of me. Perhaps I wasn't good enough for her. Perhaps I wasn't passionate enough. It is even possible that everyone got jealous of me for having such a beautiful girl friend and then turned against me. I just don't know. But I can't bear the thought of having another girl friend at the moment. I desperately need a friend. But I need a girl friend like a hole in the head. I really like you and in two years time, when I regard myself as becoming free, I would even be quite happy to marry you. But please don't expect me to become your boy-friend at this moment.'

I knew I had put my foot in it as soon as I saw his face change. But if there is one trait I pride myself on is that I can do a very quick back flip if the situation requires me to do so.

‘I’m sorry.’ I said. ‘I have to admit I was angling a bit in the boy-friend direction. But I was completely wrong. I just hate the thought that I could be another Jenny to you. But, now I think about it, I can be of more use to you by simply being your friend. Besides I could have a bit of fun myself. We both want to know why the world turned against you last year. And I can investigate this matter more easily if I am single than if I am attached. Dr Eilbeck is quite keen on me and he would be the ideal person to find out all that exam results business.’

‘That would be terrific. But be careful about Dr Eilbeck. He is a really nice good guy. So don’t go too far with him.’

‘Dr Eilbeck is not a nice guy at all. You can’t know him at all. You certainly need have no worry about me going too far with him. But let’s forget Alfie for the moment and let us get down to the practicalities of how I can help you. If I am to help, we will still need to see a lot of each other and people might think we are associated. It would help the situation if you gave a bit of encouragement to Fiona so that it doesn’t appear that I am working with you. You could even ask her to be your partner at the green ball.’

‘Yes that is a great idea. Fiona is a light-hearted girl and won’t take it too seriously. I will follow your advice. You really don’t mind.’

‘No, I rather fancy myself as a flirtatious investigator. It would be great fun. I always had an inkling to know more about the iniquitous ways of this world. Now I can do it with a clean conscience. Also I know that, if ever I get into serious strife, I have you to come and rescue me.’

‘Can I now ask one special request. Can we now have just one special kiss with each other. We won’t be able to kiss again. But I would like to do it now to show there is a real genuine bond between us.’

So we kissed. Just an ordinary kiss – nothing special or sexy. But it seemed to be a kiss that said we would be friends forever.

After that we joined with the rest of the party for lunch. Matt joined with Angus and Steve to do some hard climbing together leaving me to climb with Fiona. We went over and top-roped some of the climbs on the slabs.

‘You are probably wondering,’ she asked, ‘why I am climbing with Angus so much?’

‘I thought you were probably keen on him.’

‘I thought you might think that and that is why I have brought this subject up. I like climbing and eventually I wouldn’t mind getting a job in out-door sports. With this in mind I am very keen to get a job as a helper at the gym. And, as such, it helps to be as friendly with Angus as possible as he is in charge there. But I am the same as you, the person I am keen on is Matt. So I don’t want you to think for a moment that I am no longer a rival to you.’

‘Well I think I will bow out of our rivalry. You are younger and prettier than I am, so I don’t want to undergo the humiliation of being defeated. Perhaps I will turn my interest to Angus instead.’

‘I don’t believe you for a moment. I saw you having that long conversation with Matt on top of the isolated block and I imagine you were both forming some more devious plan together. However, if you agree to play along and take Angus off my hands for a while, it would fit in with my plans perfectly.’

I of course agreed. So every thing on the climbing front had worked out perfectly. Thenceforth Angus, Fiona, Matt and I tended to form a little party together when climbing on Cloggie on Sundays. Angus was ostensibly my interest and Matt was Fiona’s interest. So now

I was ready to start my mission as an investigator as to why Matt had been treated so badly and why self-sufficiency was now so much out of favour.

#### 4. ALFIE

When I have a good fun mission ahead of me I am not one to hang about. I am not one for fond contemplations of future actions. I like to get into the action immediately. Fortunately I had a lecture from Alfie on the following Monday morning. So, while he was doing the rounds, checking with each student how their assignments were going, I casually mentioned that I would be going to the town library that evening. And he equally casually mentioned that he might go as well. So that evening we met each other at the library and we mutually expressed our great surprise at meeting each other at such a remote location. Then we quickly found that we had so much to ask each other about our studies that we would be in danger of disturbing the necessary quietude of the library. So off we went for coffee.

Alfie led me to such perfect coffee spot that I wondered if he had carried out this operation many times before with other girls. But I naturally kept these wonderings to myself. It was a small Greek little place with very few customers indeed and most of the customers themselves were clearly also Greek. So there was very little danger of there being people who would recognise us. Our conversation, of course, was not about our studies but our personal interests. Alfie then suggested we went for a walk in the nearby park. This is what I had expected. So off we went.

In the park things progressed quite quickly. When we were sure no one could see us he took my hand. A kiss followed soon after this. Then we sat down and our kisses rapidly developed into a good solid tussle on the ground. He tried to remove some of my clothing. I prevented him from doing so, but I certainly didn't prevent him from trying. He seemed to have a fine amount of lust for me and I enjoyed myself by keeping this excellent lust in check. All good healthy exercise and practise for me. I have admit that I was no stranger to this sort of situation. My previous boy friends had also had only one very physical interest in me.

'What do you do for holidays?' Alfie finally asked me. I'm sure he only made this enquiry after he was fairly certain he wouldn't make any further progress on our degree of physical intimacy that night.

'I think this might a bit of leading question.' I replied. 'But I don't mind being led. Up till now, unfortunately, my holidays have mostly been spent with my family. We usually went to seaside resorts. I would be happy for this situation to change.'

'Would you like to go skiing?'

'Are you suggesting I might go skiing with you?'

'Why not?'

'I would love to go skiing and I might possibly even like to go skiing with you. But it must be a question of when. The first chance we would have to go skiing would be in four months time during our semester break. But, if we went then, I think the fact that we were both away at the same time skiing would be enough for college people to assume that we were going as a couple. And neither of us have any desire for people to think we are a couple. And a year after that would be too far away in the never-never land as far as I am concerned. So you see there is a problem about going skiing.'

'Yes, I can see the problem. Would you be interested in doing something with me during our next summer holidays? You will be finishing here then so this would be a good opportunity for a really good holiday.'

'Yes, I could be tempted. Next summer is so far off that everything must be very indefinite. But I am certainly open to any suggestions.'

'What would you like to do?'

Now what to do next summer was a very tricky problem for me. But I had been thinking about such a possible suggestion so I was well prepared. Just like the good girl-guide I had been in my younger days. What I was hoping to do for holidays next summer was go on a hiking and easy climbing trip with our climbing club in our high peak region - similar to that which Matt had talked about yesterday. But the last thing I would want would be to be coupled with Alfie on such a trip. The other thing I would like to do would be go on a long canoe trip with some of my friends from our water sports club. But again I certainly didn't want Alfie on such a trip as well. So these possibilities needed to be avoided like the plague.

'A good holiday,' I replied, 'would be to do a coastal walking trip along our southern coast line staying at the various hostels over night. I have stayed at some of the places with my family in the region and so I know it is an interesting part of our coast line. Would you be interested in that?'

'Yes, that could be fine. As you say it is too far away to be very definite. But it would be a good healthy thing to do.'

'A good healthy bit of exercise won't do you any harm. I suppose you are so involved with your mathematical studies that you don't have much time for exercise. You have a doctorate in mathematics but do you need a degree like that to teach here?'

Please don't think for a moment that this conversation represented my true feeling. The reason that Alfie was unfit and had a paunch was pure and simply because he was a slob. But when one chatting a guy up one can't speak the truth. My leading the conversation onto the subject of qualifications was to allow him to show off a bit. Guys like that sort of thing.

'No, you don't need a higher degree to teach here. You can teach here simply with a normal degree, a demonstration that you can teach and if you can pass the exam in one's subjects at a reasonably high level. The reason that many of us here have higher degrees is because we enjoy knowing a small amount of knowledge in depth. It makes you feel good.'

'So why did you come here to Corbenic?'

'I like the relaxed atmosphere here as regards work. I also like the people that come here. I think it is good for people to have higher ideals.'

I would have loved to have answered back with, 'so that you can prey on innocent girls with high ideals like myself.' But I had to curb my tongue.

'I haven't been inside any of our lecturer's housing units at all yet. Could I persuade you to invite me to afternoon tea some time? I would like to see how the high and mighty live.'

'Yes, that would be OK. How about tomorrow afternoon?'

'I do water sports tomorrow afternoon and then on Wednesday afternoon I go climbing. How about Thursday instead?'

'Yes, that will be fine.'

'Could you, before then, give me a spare key to your unit? I don't want to hang around outside your unit and advertise to the world that I am visiting you. If you give me a key I can slip into your unit when I can see there is no one around to see where I go.'

'I will give the key to you at the tute on Wednesday.'

I was rather proud of my little strategy on the subject of the key. It was true it would be convenient to have a key so I could pop in without being seen. But having his spare key would give me the opportunity to keep an eye on him. I have a very generous nature and so I would be doing a good turn to the world by making sure that Alfie didn't associate with other girls while he had an interest in me. His terrible lustful appetite needed to be kept in check. I could keep him in check but clearly other girls would need to be protected against him. If I

had his key and I could pop in at any time, he would need a lot of nerve to carry on with any other girls. And I was fairly sure he didn't have that sort of nerve.

We then had a friendly kiss to seal our compact and made our ways home. We naturally went our separate ways as soon as there was any possibility that anyone could see us. I was very proud of my progress that night. At this afternoon tea, I thought I now would a position to tackle the delicate question as to why the world had revolted against self-sufficiency last year.

When I am hot on the trail it is annoying to have to drag one's feet for a couple of days. But it had to be done. To fill in the time then I started the other part of my investigation. This was to get to know Lance and Jenny with the hope that they might tell me their part of the story. I wasn't too hopeful about this side of my investigation because Lance and Jenny had fairly august positions. Thus these two representatives of the student body had their own personal offices and were more important in many ways than a normal lecturer. So students would come to them with any problems they had. Then, at the Wednesday assembly, these two people would bring these problems with their suggested solutions. Thus these two people were the only two people that regularly spoke at our general assembly. As far as I could see Lance and Jenny carried out their duties competently and they were fair to all people. So I didn't wish to use this avenue as a means of getting to know them. Lance was also a senior figure in the athletics club and Jenny was also a important person in the Arthurian Society. I belonged to both these groups but they were large societies and I was a nobody in these areas. So it would take a long time to get to know them through this. Lance was also black, played rugby and was very good looking. So he was the sort of person that many people would be interested in – myself included. But this simply made it harder to get to know him. Jenny played tennis and so I joined the tennis club in a rather forlorn attempt to get to know her. This association could possibly help me in the distant future. One lives in hope.

Alfie duly gave me his spare key at the Wednesday tute. At this tute he also gave me the good news about calculus and why it is useful. With my other interests now in the forefront of my mind, I had gone right off any desire to know what calculus was all about. But I had to play my part as the enthusiastic young student and listen to what he had to rave on about. And you in turn can play your part and read about this most exhilarating of subjects.

According to Alfie, calculus is best thought as the mathematics of how things change over time. A simple problem is how the temperature of a milk bottle would increase in time when it was taken out of the fridge. A really hard problem is how to predict the oncoming weather if you know the current situation and all the physical laws that govern these things. It involves differentiation, integration, differential equations, partial differential equations and how all these horrible things can be solved. Alfie says that the mathematical study of nearly all real problems rapidly becomes so hard that an experienced person is often still better than a mathematician with all the computing power in the world they can use. So beware of mathematical predictions. It hasn't inspired me to learn any more about the subject and you as well I imagine. But if you had any sense you wouldn't have even bothered to read this paragraph to begin with.

Finally back to the action and at four o'clock on Thursday afternoon you would have seen me letting myself into Alfie's unit. The staff also lived in a very green manner like us students. So they lived in terrace housing which can easily be made to be very energy efficient. Alfie's unit was one of four units, which together made a terrace house. A common stair well at the



front served all four units. Thus there was one unit on either side of the stair well on two levels. I'm sorry about this detail but unfortunately it will be vaguely relevant to my story later on. As Matt had said on Sunday, being self-sufficient is largely about detail and it cannot be avoided. Alfie had one of the ground units. My having my own key wasn't really necessary because, once inside the stair well, no one could see you from outside. But I still was glad to have my own key to check on Alfie.

Inside Alfie was waiting for me and showed me round. Nothing much to see at all of course. A living/dining/cooking facilities room at the front, a bedroom at the back with a toilet/shower room and passage way between them. All very simple and functional.

'You will be pleased to know,' Alfie told me, 'that each unit has an internal thermal bulk of five tonnes and has an internal sustainability of .08 degrees per day per degree of external temperature differential.'

'Why that is just fantastic.' I glibly replied.

'You do remember what all this means don't you? It was part of your entrance exams before you came.'

'I've become a bit vague. You had better tell me again.'

'A sustainable building needs a lot of internal thermal bulk so that its internal temperature does not fluctuate much during the day. Five tonnes of internal thermal bulk is a lot. An internal sustainability of .08 means that on an average winter's day, which in our country is about ten degrees below an optimum internal temperature, a unit will only drop by .8 of a degree over a full day without any internal heating. This is the fundamental figure by which you can measure how much energy will be needed to keep your building at a sensible temperature. Do you remember how it all works now?'

'Yes, it is gradually coming back.'

'It was the great lord Kelvin that said that if you want to say something about a quality then you must be able to measure that quality. Thus, if you want to say how sustainable a building is, then you must be able to measure this quality. This internal sustainability figure is precise measure of this quality. It shows how effectively your building's insulation and thermal bulk can work together in practise. So you have to remember what that figure means.'

'I bow to your superior wisdom on this particular issue.'

In case you don't know, the best method of keeping a building at a good temperature is to use the daily temperature fluctuation to your advantage. So during summer, one uses cool night air to extract heat from the building and one closes the building's insulation panels during the day to remain cool. Then during winter, one opens the building up during the hot part of the day and absorbs as much heat as one can. One then closes the insulation panels at night. Having a low internal sustainable figure means that this process will be very effective. Having a low sustainability figure also helps a green community deal with the problem of how to cope when the sun doesn't shine for few days at a time.

Alfie then showed me how a fan could direct a draught of air through the unit past the walls with lots of thermal bulk. So the unit would be cool in summer and warm in winter. These units required slightly more involvement than our student rooms because the inhabitants needed to use the fans at the correct times. In our buildings, our extractor fans were turned on for us. So Alfie appeared to be a genuine greeny. I am afraid that if you want to be green then you can't simply turn the thermostat at the required temperature and leave it at that. You need to think for yourself occasionally.

After that little harangue, we finally settled down to afternoon tea. And again Alfie excelled himself. He had cooked fresh scones, which we ate with butter and blackcurrant jam. The best afternoon tea I have had for ages. The scones were not flawless – if you inspected

some of them carefully then you could see some of the burnt bits, which he had tried to cut off. But he had made them himself so he was being very self-sufficient. I wouldn't have thought that a mathematician could be quite as practical as that.

Clearly I had to lavish out a lot of praise to him for his knowledge on sustainable buildings and his home made scones. He clearly enjoyed the praise. Then my scene was set for me to broach the crucial subject.

'Last year,' I said, 'there was a student movement in favour of forming self-sufficient communities. It was strongly put down by the authorities but I can't understand why. We all know that to be self-sufficient is a very green thing to do.'

'I am surprised you have heard about this episode because everyone was sworn to complete secrecy on the subject.'

'They can make students swear to secrecy but they cannot force external people to secrecy. Through climbing, I have come to know Angus who runs the local climbing gym. He told me all about it.' I had though he might ask that question so like the good girl-guide I used to be I was fully prepared with my answer. 'Angus also can't understand why the hierarchy were so heavy handed about the matter. Do you understand why they were?'

'The situation has perplexed me as well. I'll give my thoughts on the subject but they are just conjectures and you must not repeat them to anyone. You will be absolutely silent on the subject?'

'I promise.'

'I think,' he said, 'that our academic vice-principal, Dr Martin, might be in league with big business. He has worked for big business previously and I think he has maintained his contacts with them. He probably works in conjunction with Mortimer Gonzales who is in charge of our debating forum. Mortimer Gonzales in turn probably works in conjunction with Anna Richards. You know her because she is the president of your water sports club.'

'So what would be the purpose of the collusion between these three people?'

'Big business is always keen to siphon away the cream of our students into positions in industry where they can be moulded into agreeing with the concepts of associated with economic growth. Dr Martin is in charge of a lot of scholarships and also through him many people do obtain jobs in big business. Mortimer and Anna probably help him in this process. A self-sufficiency movement would interfere with their little system and so they could have a motive to suppress such a movement.'

'I was told that last years our second year internal exams were below standard and this was one of the reasons that the self-sufficiency movement was suppressed. Is this true?'

'That is a terribly difficult question answer. Dr Martin is in charge of the scaling process, which adjusts all our raw internal exam results so that they are comparable with each other. In my subjects, students actually did reasonably well. It is possible that Dr Martin could have made false adjustments and given a false picture. Stan Rabidowitz, our dean, is supposed to check these things but I doubt if he would have – it a very tedious job.'

'Is it possible for any member of staff to check these things?'

'It is possible but it would require an enormous amount of work and at the end of it the result would be marginal. I don't think anyone is going to try.'

'Did you support the self-sufficiency movement?'

'I thought it was a good idea. I am very comfortable with my position here so I have no intention of moving out and joining a self-sufficient community. But if I was out of job I certainly would. We should have let it go ahead.'

So Alfie had supplied me with the information I needed. Clearly what I would have liked to have done was to have put the hard word on Alfie and so get him to check out the

exam results. But first I had to talk it over with Matt. I finished our meeting by talking about the 'Green Ball' that was coming up on Saturday. Although we were not going as a couple, he would, at least, be my principal partner.

The purpose of our green ball is to persuade each student to obtain a costume for them selves that, in appropriate circumstances, will proclaim to the rest of the world their strong green affiliations. The main part of this costume is a little green vest (or waist coat if you prefer that term) worn over a flowery white shirt. For the shirts, the men's sleeves billow out to the wrists and the women's sleeves billow out to the elbows, in the style of previous centuries. The college provides both these items. The green vests should eventually be highly embroidered. The vests, when given to us, have the college badge embroidered on in the usual place. And besides this there are three little toggle sets with gold braid that take the place of the usual buttons. Then the college provided facilities to embroider on things like trees, flowers, vegetables, stars, moons, sickles, scythes, spades, peasants, shepherds, milk-maids and windmills etc. You can even embroider on things like PV and hot water panels - but they don't look real good. You can make your own choice about what you want put on and where. And of course the keen students can embroider on their own design. The rest of one's costume is just supposed to be as rustic as possible.

For myself, being of a fairly lazy disposition, I did as little as possible. I accepted the vest and shirt as they were and put off the evil day of deciding how to embroider them till later. I already had some fancy boots and a billowy skirt, so they would do. Finally I put some flowers in my hair and a smile of my face. That should be good enough.

Dances we did at the ball were also of a rustic nature. Thus we did dances like 'Sweets of May', 'Gathering Peascods', 'Stacks of Barley' and of course the old standards 'The Barn Dance' and 'Strip the Willow'.

Against my own personal desires, I think I now have to do the right thing and explain to you why, at our main social dance, we only do traditional dancing. The reason is fairly simple - it is the most social form of dancing. Thus all modern dances are usually technically quite hard and mostly everyone does their own particular thing. So such dances are mostly done solo and so they are not social dances. They are show-off dances - perfect for TV viewing by the masses, but not to be actually done by the masses. Ballroom and Rock-and-Roll dances are not as bad but have similar disadvantages. Such dances are done in couples, which makes them more social. But the dances are of a free form and this means that the man leads and decides what to do. This makes it very difficult for a woman if she does not have a good partner. So usually in Ballroom and Rock-and-Roll dances, people only dance with people they know very well. So it is hard to meet new people. In traditional dances on the other-hand, all dances have a defined form and are usually quite straight-forward. Everyone can do these dances although it usually helps to know the dance before hand. When you do know the dances, then anyone can dance with anyone else and so they are fully social. Also in such dances, usually groups of couples join together to form larger sets. Within such a set, the dances are often designed so that each couple will meet each other couple. You can see this in action if you watch the TV version of *Pride and Prejudice*. Thus the form is designed to be social and usually people are even encouraged to change partners after every dance. So in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Bingley could only dance with Jane Bennett twice on his first night at the assembly. I prefer modern dancing, but I have to accept that, because Corbenic is so socially oriented, its main dance must take a traditional form.

At the ball, the main highlight for me was that I finally got to do Stacks of Barley. I persuaded Alfie to come with me to the dance practice on Saturday afternoon and we practised it together. We weren't anything like as good as Matt and Fiona, but at least we were competent. I did one dance with Matt but the main point of interest here was his vest. On the back of it, he had embroidered it with a picture of an Indian fakir playing his pipe to a coil of rope. The rope was rising out of its container like a snake and was about to loop over a large tree. Thus the fakir, who was obviously a climber, would then have a top rope to do his climb. Rather good I thought. I also danced with our dean, Stan Rabidowitz. We did Strip the Willow together. He in general played the buffoon and he hammed up his part very well by doing those Scottish hand wave things above the head and in general carrying on. He was rather nice and it seemed most improbable to me that he could seriously be behind what had happened last year.

At the Saturday night dances, I continued to sit with my friends from the water sports clubs together with other people from the same group. Last week I had rather been hoping that Matt would ask me to join with the climbing group. I thought this group had a bit more status. This week, however, I was glad to be left where I was. It was safer to maintain a separate group of girl friends independent of whatever other flirting I might engage in elsewhere.

In order for me to help Matt with his writing, we had organised that he would put his writings about self-sufficiency into my pigeonhole weekly. I would then read them, make suggestions about them and return them into his pigeonhole. In this way, the major part of our collaboration could remain entirely secret. Any general discussion then could occur at climbing on Sunday when there would be plenty of time to have a quiet discussion between ourselves. His first chapter of course was about the benefits of joining a self-sufficient community and this was fine. Living in a self-sufficient community would be healthier, safer, better for the children, give us more spare time and of course it is the greenest thing one can possibly do. I agreed entirely and so there were no problems about the content. His grammar and spelling was awful but I dealt with that. I encouraged him strongly to continue with the good work.

I then told him what Alfie had told me, stressing that it was highly confidential.

'All you say could well be true,' he said, 'but I'm afraid it won't help us very much. It is all supposition and there is no way we can check on the exam results. Thanks awfully and it is good to know how it could have happened. But there is nothing much we can do.'

'I, for one, haven't given up yet. For a start, if I kidded Alfie that I would be happy to go on holiday with him, I think I could persuade him to check out the exam results.'

'Don't you dare to do such a terrible thing. Alfie is a really nice guy and has always been a good friend to me. The only way you could do a thing like that is if you really were to go on holiday with him. And even if you did this, as he said, the results would only be marginal so it wouldn't really help. I know I don't want you to be my girl friend. But I certainly don't want you to be firmly coupled with Alfie. I really would like the possibility to exist that we could get married in a couple of years time.'

'Don't worry I won't do that then. Another line that I could follow then would be to get to know Mortimer Gonzales and Anna Richards and see to what extent they are connected to the racket.'

'Yes, that would be useful. I don't think there is any chance of you getting too coupled with Mort – he is not your type at all.'

'No there is no problem there at all. I will follow that line then, but it will take time.'

In fact I had no intention at all on giving up on Alfie at all. Matt is noble to the point of being stupid on certain matters like this. In my opinion, love is like war – anything goes. I was quite certain Alfie had no noble intentions to me at all. So I was entirely at liberty to treat him just as I liked. I had to do the correct thing by Matt and not pretend that I wanted to go on holiday with him. But there were many other avenues I could follow. None of these avenues might match up to Matt's high moral standards. So I needed to keep quiet on the subject.

We had already organised to meet at the town library, as we did last week, so that activity could go on as planned. At this meeting I then enjoyed my weekly physical exercise in keeping Alfie's lust for me in reasonable order. Then we were ready for some conversation, which I had every intention of making as deep and meaningful as possible.

'Alfie,' I said. 'You know those exams results we were talking about last weekend. It would help our self-sufficient movement enormously if they were shown that these results could be false.'

'And you are expecting me to check them all out. Forget it. It would be an enormous amount of work for very little benefit. I wasn't a member of the movement. Let someone else, who was a member, do the work if they want to.'

'Such a person has to be a member of staff and, although you were not a member, you did support the movement. As far as I know, there were no staff members of the movement. So the person has to be you.'

'Forget it – there is nothing in it for me.'

'There is nothing in it for you because you have a comfortable secure job. The person you are talking to is not in your comfortable position and nor are any of her friends. It is time you thought about other people and not just yourself.'

'I am a reasonable person. If we were to agree to share a holiday together, then I might view the situation differently.'

'Remember the reason that you said you came here was so that you could associate with young people who have high ideals. And you yourself will not raise a finger to help your fellow people who are not in as fortunate as yourself, simply because there is nothing in it for you. How can you expect me to commit myself to a holiday with a person who is as despicable as that. What are you supposed to be doing with your life? Have you any ideals at all?'

'I do a reasonable job here at Corbenic. I live a perfectly green life and I occasionally help people like you with their maths problems through the generosity of my heart. That is much more than most people do. You cannot expect more than that.'

'No, that is nothing like enough and I definitely expect a hell of a lot more than that from you. It is dead easy to live a perfectly green life when everything has been set up for you. Everyone would do that. The hard thing in life is to change the current situation and so set up a new green environment. When you came to Corbenic everything was set up for you so you didn't have to do a stroke of work. You are living on the work of those people who have gone before you. But that is not your fault. You were just lucky. But when we leave our green life at Corbenic, which we love, the only way we can live a green life is to change the world. And the only way we can be assured of doing that is to form little partly self-sufficient communities, which you agree you support yourself. I am not asking you to join a self-sufficient community but you have to do the thing that only you can do. And this is to sort out those exam results.'

Now, although at the moment you are acting like a lazy despicable worm, I in fact have faith in you that you are not really quite as bad as you appear. I am your girl friend at the

moment and so I am allowed to tell you all these sort of home truths. In fact I regard it to be my sacred duty to save you from cushy life you currently lead. But for the moment you must give me a kiss and take my hand. Then we will go home. Over night I will allow you to wrestle with your conscience over this matter. I have a vague feeling Jacob did something like this many years ago. I have the key to your unit and I intend to let myself into your unit at 7.30 every morning until your conscience has finally persuaded you that you have to do your duty. Not another word from you for the moment. I can't allow you to put your foot in the mire any further. Let's go.'

He was pretty sullen about the whole matter but he went along. I harangued him in a similar manner for the next three days until he finally cracked. I was rather proud of my effort. Perhaps this is my little gift – to harangue wayward little children. Perhaps I should be a teacher myself sometime in the future.

So I was really looking forward to seeing Matt next Sunday and boasting to him of my achievement. But I had to be careful. I didn't want Matt to know about my having my own key to Alfie's unit and things like that.

'Alfie,' I said, 'has finally seen the light and agreed to check out the exam results.'

'How did you manage that?' He replied. 'You didn't commit yourself at all to him I hope?'

'No, not at all. I just applied myself to the better side of his nature. It took a lot of digging and searching to find this better side. He only has a miniscule element of good intentions within him. But I finally found them and worked on them relentlessly until he gave in.'

'Well done. Eventually those results could become very useful indeed. How did you like my further writing?'

'It is terrific and it is great to see the whole thing starting to take shape. But I wish you would avoid writing about the possibility of people being evicted from the community. No one wants to think about such possibilities. If it has to be done, then hide it towards the end of your work where no one will read it.'

'It isn't possible to leave it until the end. Remember the chapter is about the various sorts of community that need be considered. There are two quite different forms. There are communities where people have a share and the holder of that share is always a member of that community. This happens in a normal block of units. Then there is the other form where the community as a whole says who will be a member. These are the two fundamentally different forms so you must talk about this at the beginning.'

'So just briefly remind me why, in your community, the community as a whole must control the membership.'

'For people like us, our future employment is about the most important thing we have to consider in our lives. I want our community to be able to offer as much self-employment as possible because then we will be less dependent on the outside world for employment. If we are relying on self-employment then, if members won't do their share of work, we must have the option of getting rid of them. Our community must be able to run like any normal operation. Later on, when it comes to finance, I can explain that if a member has paid their full share, then eviction is most unlikely. But we cannot form a community where people are free to do precisely what they like. Control of membership is the only form of discipline that our community can use.'

'Perhaps it has to be that way. You will just have to keep on writing and I will just have to keep on reading.'

Then we went climbing. It is much easier to go climbing than to think about nasty problems like that. Matt has to think about things like that now. I can leave them all till later thank heavens. I am just a normal person. I bet you also have never thought about whether a self-sufficient community should have control of membership either. You would also be like me and leave that nasty decision till the distant future.

## 5. MORT

This chapter is mostly about Mortimer Gonzales. I considered him to be the chief villain of the piece because he looked the part and was strongly connected with the other related people. But before telling you about him, I must tell you about Anna Richards who I knew already because she is the president of our water sports club. Firstly - about her name. Her full name is Morgananna Le-Fay Richards. In case you don't know, Morgan Le-Fay is the evil witch-like person in the Arthurian legends. Unlike most people, Anna rejoices in this evil connection and she actually likes to be called Le-Fay. I, as a new person and not really knowing her, get very embarrassed about what to call her. So I try to avoid calling her anything. She is a big, strong, hearty girl and she makes a superb president of our club. All the girls in the club simply adore her – myself included. The guys are a bit more circumspect.

I didn't know her very well but my two older water club friends were more than happy to tell me all about her. She was certainly no innocent. At Corbenic, as I have mentioned, the two sexes are often separated and all forms of contraception are strictly prohibited. One of the many stupid old-fashioned laws that I am afraid we have here at Corbenic. Our noble president, at a price of course, provides these necessary facilities to help us girls to protect ourselves should the occasion arise. So I thought she was providing a good useful service. But I could see that Alfie might think otherwise. The other fact I learnt was that, during their first year, both Le-Fay and Mort lived quite wild lives and they probably had an affair together. So this could be the reason why Alfie connected these two people together. No one in our club held either of these two items against her at all. In fact they just endeared her to us even more.

You may have noticed that, in relating my story, I have been very slack about describing people. This is a distinct problem of mine. I am not an assiduous studier of the human form. All I tend to notice about people is whether they are fat or thin, tall or short and whether they have a good figure or not. For me whether a person is beautiful or not is a very difficult question. I find this terribly depends on the circumstance. When people make themselves up carefully and are animated they usually appear to be beautiful. And vice-versa. So at least in the TV version of *Pride and Prejudice*, I find Elizabeth to be much more beautiful than Jane her sister simply she is so much livelier and animated. The supposedly beautiful Jane leaves me for dead. So I must have no judgement on this subject. And so I take no great effort to describe people.

But rejoice, as regards Mortimer Gonzales, better known as Mort, I can really go to town. This is because in my opinion he is a bit of a freak. He is classically good looking. So he is tall, has broad shoulders, thin hips, a strong square jaw and shiny black hair. He sports black rakish sideburns and comes over as being supremely confident. He looks as if he has some ancestry from South America. I suspected he must have misused his time and spent a large amount of time in a gym pushing weights. As Matt had said, he was not the sort of person that I would be attracted to at all. But I would imagine many girls might be. The name Mort seems sufficiently close Mordred, the evil guy of the Arthurian legends, for me to feel that, like Anna, he might have fancied himself as this character. But I certainly wasn't going to ask anyone about this kind of thing.

He held the position at Corbenic of being the organiser of the debating forum. This was a very important position indeed. When we students eventually go out into the big wide world, we are expected to be able to put forward the 'green' point of view at any public forum. So we are expected to gain some public speaking skills. So every Friday afternoon, the college runs a debating forum and all students are expected to speak at this group several



times. So Mort, as the organiser of this group, was a very important person. His position was possibly an even more important than the student representative positions. Like these two positions, the holder of this position had their own office where students could come and ask advice from him. All these three positions had been elected by the students at the end of last year. But before this, the staff had given their advice on the suitability of the candidates at the assembly before the elections took place. So some of the students might have followed the staff's advice.

Mort had the air of someone that was slightly older than the rest of us students. But he couldn't be much older. All students have to be greater than 16 and less than 22 years old on the first day of our student year. So he could only have been a year or two older than myself. On the Saturday night dances, he was closely associated with the elite people in the college. In particular a young lecturer called Vivian appeared to be his girl friend. She was the most glamorous, vivacious and most sort-after girl in the whole college. So in every way, Mort appeared to be the top dog at Corbenic and held a very important position.

So Mort was the person I wanted to get to know. I suspected his game was the usual one. In return for sexual favours, he would support students to gain scholarships or jobs from Dr Martin. So my game was to appear to be prepared to offer sexual favours to him in order gain a scholarship or a job in the outside world. I was quite keen to try this out because, although Mort wasn't my type at all, it would be fun to find out how the iniquitous outside world really did work. I obviously wasn't going to go too far.

Because eventually I wanted to study law, I was already an active participant in the debating forum. So I was already slightly familiar with Mort. At this society he seemed to be just a little over theatrical with his well modulated voice and flowery ways. But he was also very approachable. I decided I would start my investigation by seeking his advice about what I should speak about at our next debate, which was on 'Freedom of Speech'. I went to his room and he welcomed me and greeted me by my name. So he already knew who I was. He obviously took his job very seriously.

'I would like to participate a little in our next debate,' I said. 'Trouble is, everything is too clear cut in this debate. After all, everyone supports freedom of speech.'

He just laughed and took his time in replying.

'At a simple level, everyone always does have freedom of speech because a person can always speak to another person in private and say what they want to. And, in general, no government or political system can stop this happening. So everyone always does have freedom of speech in private. When people talk of 'Freedom of Speech' they are usually talking about public speaking or publishing. And then people with opposing views want to be heard first and usually have more time or space. And then what is to happen if a speaker gives wrong facts or defames another person? People that have thought about this subject carefully tend to think that 'Freedom of Speech' is a very hard subject indeed. I certainly do.'

'I never thought about it in those sort of terms. So what can I do?'

'The best thing to do is just to relate a little incident in your life which shows just how difficult this problem is. At the end of the debate, I have asked our dean, Stan Rabidowitz, to sum up on the whole subject. When you have a really hard subject it is best to pass the buck to someone else. But please do try and speak. When you have thought a bit more about the subject, come back to me and I will try to help you further.'

So he certainly had his head screwed on OK. He wasn't just a simple womaniser. So my adventure had started. But this meeting had left me just a bit bewildered as to what sort of guy he was.

I was wondering when would be the appropriate time to approach him again. But, fortunately, the matter was taken out of my hands. I was sitting in the main lounge having coffee when he, passing by, saw me and came and sat opposite me.

‘Have you thought about what to say yet at the next debate?’ He asked.

‘I will follow your good advice. When I was at school there was a serious accident which was reported in our local paper. The report blamed the authorities when in fact the student was equally to blame. We wrote to the paper but this other side to the question was not reported. It is hard to get a balance.’

‘Yes that would be good example of the problems we face. I will list you as a speaker then?’

‘Yes, and thanks for your help.’

‘I am only doing my job. But now can I ask a little request from you. You know that I, as one of the three special student officers, am given my own car spot and can come and go to college by car with much greater freedom. Now I enjoy using this privilege and, as my family is wealthy, I can easily afford to use a genuinely green fuel. But still I feel a bit conscience stricken about the situation. It helps my poor conscience enormously if I can take other people with me sometimes. Then I can feel I am also acting for the common good. Can I take you home occasionally?’

‘OK, I’ll do my good deed. I will help to sooth your conscience.’

So getting to know Mort was turning out to be very easy indeed.

So a couple of days later, he duly took me home. His car was one of those red, snazzy, two-person sports cars and he took me home by a very scenic route with the hood down. The wind rushed through my hair. He certainly knew how to give a person a good time. When home, I thought I might as well try to push things along a bit further still.

‘Thanks awfully for the ride.’ I said. ‘I would always be happy to sooth a person’s conscience in a circumstances like this. Can I now make a little request of you. I would love to go disco dancing occasionally, but I don’t know anyone in the scene. Do you ever go yourself and, if so, could you take me just once and introduce me to the scene? You only need to do one dance with me and then I can look after myself.’

‘I used to go the disco night quite often but now I only go occasionally. I would love to take you and I’ll stay with you as long as you like.’

So everything was zooming along.

So he took me to the disco night and, as in everything, he was very good. We just danced together and we were very much a couple. We watched each other all the time as we danced and imitated or responded to each other’s actions. So modern dancing can be a very social affair if you want it to be. We didn’t stay there too long because Mort asked me to go for a walk. On the walk we soon took hands and when we returned he gave me a goodbye kiss.

‘We seem to be attracted to each other.’ He said. ‘Why don’t you come to my office next Wednesday? We can then discuss possible ways by which we can help each other. I don’t want any misunderstandings to occur between us.’

‘That would be wonderful.’ I replied.

So everything was set. I would soon find out what evil plans he might have for my downfall. But he certainly wasn’t trying to rush things too much at the moment. Up till now in every way he had been the perfect gentleman.

If one has a task in front of one that must be done, one might as well enjoy oneself and do the job well. So I put in a good deal of effort into making myself look as sexy as possible for Mort. My new exercise regime was now showing fine results so my figure was now nearly perfect. I bought myself a new pair of slightly fancy, black, just-below-the-knee tights. Over them I wore one of those new, flimsy, colourful dresses with corners that hang downwards. I then wore a white blouse that showed my upper half to its very best advantage. I wore slightly high-heeled shoes and I had my hair teased up a bit. Finally I put on an appropriate amount of makeup. I don't think I had ever looked better. I then spent a fair amount of time admiring myself in the mirror before I went to his room.

I knocked at his door and he welcomed me in.

'What a wonderful sexy girl you are looking today.' He said. 'Let me study you in detail.' So he walked all around me and admired me in every fine detail. It was nice to have one's work so well appreciated. He then carefully closed the door and turned the little knob to indicate 'engaged'. 'I certainly don't want to be disturbed when I am talking to a girl as pretty as you.' He said. Then we both sat down in front of his desk. So he was careful not to take the dominant position behind the desk.

'I think it is important,' he said, 'that, in any relationship, each person helps the other person in some manner. I am rather hoping that I can be useful to you in helping you to obtain scholarships or future employment.'

'Yes, eventually I would appreciate help like that very much indeed. But I don't need help like that at the moment. For the time being, a little help with my speaking at the Friday forum is all I need from you.' I wanted to go very carefully here. I planned to drop my association with Mort fairly soon. So the last thing I wanted was to feel indebted to him for anything he might do for me above the call of duty.

'It is hard for me,' I said, 'to imagine how I can be of any use to you.'

'You have to think about my position. When you have an important position like mine, people treat you differently. And so it is hard to know what the normal students think about me. I need a person like you to tell me what is going on around the college and what people think about me. So that is where you can be terribly useful to me.'

'Well I will gladly do that for you. Anything else?'

'There certainly is. In case you haven't noticed, I am very attracted to you and I would like to know you better.'

'That is rather nice because I am also attracted to you. I also would like to know you a bit better too.'

'OK, let now seal this little agreement between us then by having a good genuine kiss.'

So we kissed but I am afraid it was no ordinary kiss. For a start it was very slow and, of course, it was a very deep kiss and went on for a long time. During the kiss his hands travelled all over my body investigating everything. He gave me the impression that he was very keen on this little body of mine indeed. And, when a person with an incredibly good body themselves does this to you, it is hard not to feel just a bit sexy towards them. Even if he could be the main villain in this whole episode. I'm afraid a little thrill of excitement ran through my body through the experience.

'Let us sit down together on the couch now,' he said. 'I'm afraid I now need to tell you about my problems.'

'I can't believe you have any problems at all.'

'We all have problems. That is what life is all about. My problems started during my first year at college when I had many affairs with different girls. A lot of girls fancied me and I took full advantage of my situation and enjoyed myself. But at the end of that year, I found

myself to be probably the most hated person in the whole of this college. This was a terrible situation to be in. So I had to change. Since then I have tried to be much more careful and only proceed with a girl when I am absolutely sure that the girl is happy to go further. And even this is not easy. Sometimes girls say they are happy to go along further and later on they change their minds. So what I try to do now is to talk with girls for a long time about such matters before going too far. Do you get the picture?’

I did get the picture and I didn’t like this new picture at all. This damn Mort was turning out to be one of those new age freaks full of genuine concern for their girl friends. This was the last thing I wanted. I would much have preferred that he had stayed as the simple selfish womaniser as he had been in his first year. Then I could drop him whenever I wanted to. But I couldn’t say this to him.

‘It is wonderful that you went through this period and have turned over to a fine new leaf. I can see that I will now be the fortunate beneficiary of your new concern. I am a very lucky girl indeed.’

‘So you will be happy spending the new hour or so telling each other all about each other.’

‘That would be perfect.’

So we did. It was mostly me talking about myself because I didn’t really want to hear too much about his life. I would have liked to have asked about the self-sufficiency movement. But that would have been too risky. About me, he wanted to hear about every thing. So I talked about my previous boy friends and then he wanted to know how far we went. And this led to the fact that I was still a virgin. He then asked whether I wanted to remain like this. I replied in the usual way by saying I didn’t want to but I would only do it with someone I really liked. He then told me how I could prepare myself for such an occasion. I thanked him for the advice. I don’t like talking about things like this, but under the circumstances I couldn’t avoid it.

About college, I told him what I did and what was going on in water sports and climbing clubs. I mentioned the slight interest that Angus had in me. I also told about my family and when I visited them. I then mentioned going to the library, accidentally meeting Alfie and having coffee with him. I talk naturally about everything and it is hard for me to know when to stop. And it is also nice to have a good listener who seems interested in all you have to say. I ended up by telling him more about myself than I wanted to. But it was hard to avoid it. But, of course, I hadn’t told him about Matt or my actually carrying on with Alfie. So I don’t think I was all that bad.

‘Let us have a drink.’ Mort finally said, and he led me to his little drinks cabinet and let me choose my drink. ‘Let us drink to our association,’ he said. ‘May all our current activities continue and flourish, may we support for each other in our different ways and may we both enjoy a deepening knowledge and intimacy with each other.’

‘I am most happy to drink to that.’ I replied.

So we did. We had final kiss and he arranged to take me home as he did last week. We said good-bye and I was off.

I suppose the meeting went well enough, but I was confused whether I actually liked Mort or not. He wasn’t pushing me into anything, but on the other hand we were going to see a lot more of each other than I wanted to. And it wasn’t going to be real easy to break things up with him. But then again maybe I didn’t need to break it up because he wasn’t going to push me into anything I didn’t want to do. I could just go along with him even to the point of accepting his help with a scholarship or a job. If people want to give you help then that is up to them. So I could accept what is offered. So maybe he is OK. I suppose it is part of your life

to explore the avenues of life that are offered up before you. So I might as well go ahead and enjoy whatever befalls. And so I will – at least while the going is good.

I like to think that I have one of those good positive natures that people rave on about. So, by the time came for him to give me a lift home, I was really looking forward to the journey. It was great to feel the wind rushing through one's hair. Also I enjoyed my status as one of the few people selected to enjoy these things. A life, loosely associated with Mort, would have many benefits.

'I have been thinking about us.' He said as we approached my home. 'I hope to be taking you home regularly now. Your parents are soon going to wonder who I am and what my association with you could be. It might be best to keep things in the open and you can introduce me to your family simply as a person who will help you progress your work. This would help to stop too much speculation on their part.'

'I suppose it would be best,' I replied.

So I ended up by introducing him to my family. They then persuaded him to stay for a cup of tea. They were most impressed by him. Unfortunately this meeting didn't stop my parents thinking there might be something more between us than just friendship. But if people want to speculate on such things then you can't stop them. Mort seemed to be entwining himself more into my life than I wanted him to. But I would just have to put up with it. I would far rather have introduced a nice sensible normal person like Matt as my friend to my parents. But I suppose that is life. One has to take it as it comes.

Mort and I then met again in the coffee lounge on the following night before the disco dance as we had on the previous week.

'When I do dancing,' he said, 'I like to enjoy myself to the full. I find I enjoy the dancing slightly more if I have a small amount of amphetamine beforehand. It has less effect on me than a cup of coffee does, but I find it a good sort of drug to have before a dance. Would you like to take some as well? It only gives you a very mild little high.'

'I have never had illegal drugs before,' I replied, 'but I wouldn't mind giving it a go a couple of times. Should I pay you for it?'

'Of course not. It will be my pleasure to give it to you.'

So Mort appeared to be leading me onto the downward path associated with drugs. But I was happy to try it out a few times and see what it was like. I, like everyone, have to learn to control myself in these sort of matters. The night then followed on in the similar manner to the previous week. But this time we went all the way down to the romantic creek. And there in a little alcove we sat, kissed and talked.

The effect of the pill was, as he said, very mild indeed. I could very easily missed the effect altogether. So I thought I had nothing worry about. At the end of the night, after our farewell kiss, I told him I preferred not to associate with his very select group at the big Saturday night dance. It definitely wasn't my scene and we would be dancing together enough on Friday nights. He was happy to go along with this. I was pleased with myself that I had made this little stand. I wanted to show I could keep my independence of him. Also I particularly didn't want Alfie to see us together before I had explained to him what it was all about.

There is only little item about that night that I was a bit ashamed of. I was a bit worried that Mort might ask me whether I was preparing myself in the way he had suggested for possible future sex. It would look bad if I said I hadn't. So I did just a very tiny bit of stretching so I could say that I had, if he asked me. He didn't ask me in fact but I felt a bit

nervous and wanted to be prepared for the question. I certainly had no intention of going the full way with him. But I wanted him to think I might.

When I saw Matt on the following Sunday, I told him absolutely everything about what had happened. Except, of course, that bit of intimate detail I have just mentioned. Also I didn't mention that very slight sexy feeling towards him. That feeling shouldn't have existed.

I felt it was best to tell Matt everything because Matt would then feel responsible for me. So he would have to come and rescue me if I ever I was to get into trouble.

'You have done superbly well.' He replied. 'You have confirmed what Alfie had suggested and, in time, you might learn more about what goes on. Thanks a lot.'

'It won't be easy to break off my association with Mort. It may go on for a while. You don't mind do you?'

'It will probably finish fairly soon in any case because he will develop further interests in other girls. At the very least, it must finish by the end of the year because we will all be leaving. So if you are happy to continue on, then it is fine by me.'

'What do you think about the drugs business?'

'Everyone must do a little bit of experimenting in this regard. If it is convenient to do this experimenting with Mort then why not use the opportunity. So just be careful. But if it is OK, then continue on.'

'At the end of this association, I might have nothing to show for all my work.'

'But that is true for everything. It will be an experience of life for you such and you may not get another chance again. Continue on.'

'I was just a bit worried about what I am doing. But thanks for the encouragement and now I will be most happy to continue on.'

'Great. So what did you think about my latest piece of work.'

'In general it is good and you progressing very well. You spent a huge amount of time on showing how we can be completely self-sufficient on a quite small amount of land. But I, probably like most people, enjoy the surplus of land that surrounds us. Do you really need to harp the fact that we actually need much less land than this.'

'That is a terribly difficult question. I, like you, enjoy the excess of land that surrounds us at the moment. But I want to get a self-sufficient community started. Although most of our parents are wealthy, we students certainly are not. We can probably persuade a few older wealthy people to join us but we still can't afford to spend too much money on land. Furthermore, as I have explained in my writing, keeping everything compact actually makes everything much easier. The situation is that just using only a small amount of land is the best and easiest way to go.'

'Yes, you did go over everything very carefully. I suppose you are right and what you propose is completely green and fully adequate. I just keep wondering what will happen to all the wealth we see all around us.'

'That is not for us to decide and I want to do something well before there is any chance of us inheriting any such wealth. So you really are happy with what I have proposed?'

'Yes, of course I am. You just keep up the good work.'

I wasn't really all that happy with what he had written. But I was also far too lazy to try to check that everything that Matt had said was correct. In the current western world, we use far more land and so it is hard to believe we can live with much less. So I had to trust Matt's figures. The cost of not trusting a person is that you need to do a lot of work yourself. I fear that this is one of those very fundamental facts of life. And I, probably like you, was not prepared to do the work.

So Matt was completely happy about my association with Mort. But I wasn't at all sure how Alfie would take it. But I thought it best to pretend our connection was no big deal and put a positive spin on the whole thing. At our next meeting on Monday night, then I first asked how the exam result investigation was going. Alfie replied that it was hard work and his progress was slow.

'I am a much faster worker than you,' I replied. 'My part of this investigation is to see to what extent Mort is connected with this whole affair. And I am proud to say I am making great progress. I am getting to know him really well and he has talked about helping me gain scholarships or jobs in return for a bit of co-operation with him. So in time I am fairly sure I will be able to show that he will be connected with Dr Martin in this whole affair.'

'Mort is a horribly dangerous character,' he replied. 'So what precisely are you doing with him and what does your 'bit of co-operation with him' consist of.'

So I was forced to tell him all about my weekly lifts home, the disco night and hourly discussion session. I could miss out on a lot of the detail, but I couldn't avoid telling him about those things that he might actually observe himself.

'You are taking an insane risk in associating with him as much as that. He is really very clever and dangerous character. You are allowing yourself to become his pawn. You must break off this association immediately.'

'So how do you know he is as bad as you say he is?'

'Has he told you about his family's connection with the North Coast Entertainment Centre.'

'Yes, he has. He is very proud of its perfectly green carbon-neutral credentials.'

'I once spent a fortnight in the town where it is situated. I learnt all about it. I grant that it is carbon-neutral because, like us here, most of the workers live on site in a well-built green buildings and so there are little travel expenses. But the place is a den of prostitution. Most of the workers are young pretty girls and they offer their services to the older men clientele in their very handy rooms. It is terrible.'

'Mort did say there had been some adverse public opinion about the centre. But he insisted that, in fact, everything was perfectly legal and above board.'

'Technically that is true. All the people are given relatively short working hours as waitresses, massage workers, bar-maids, attendants and jobs like that. For this they are given good board and lodgings but only a small wage. The girls can then make whatever arrangements they want with respect to any propositions that are put to them by any of many enthusiastic visitors there. So technically no prostitution occurs because all arrangements are by individual choice and the management has nothing to do with this process. It is just that this whole set up is designed so that this whole process can occur very easily indeed. And of course they only choose pretty girls or good looking guys to work there who will attract customers.'

'So you can't really complain that,' I replied. 'We do live in a free country where everyone has the right to choose what they want to do.'

'There is also a lot of drug usage going on in the town. A lot of the girls and guys in the centre use their substantial income from customers to buy drugs. They then start to degenerate, become addicts and finally overdose and die.'

'To what extent is the centre associated with this process?'

'Here again I have to admit the centre itself is squeaky clean. There is certainly no dealing in drugs at the centre at all. But the centre provides an environment by which a lot of young people end up by dying. It is a very evil place.'

‘OK, perhaps you are correct. What precisely is Mort’s connection to the place?’

‘Mort’s parents started the centre and they were the initial owners. Then Mort’s elder brother disappeared. It is not very abnormal for people to disappear in that town. Mort and his family have strong connections with the underworld that exists in that town. It is a dangerous place. The parents then sold up to move to the relative safety of Michinbury here. It is hard to know to what extent Mort is now connected with the place. I was there during our holidays and during this time I saw Mort working there in an organisational position. Anna Richards was also there working as a masseur.’

‘So that explains the connection between Mort and Anna. Why did you go to the town yourself? It certainly doesn’t sound like your sort of scene.’

‘During my first year here, Vivian was my girl-friend. At the beginning of the second year she dropped me in favour of Mort. I went to see what Mort was up to with the hope I could persuade her to drop Mort.’

‘And I see you were quite unsuccessful.’

‘Yes. I am afraid she just laughed at me. Simply told me she was quite capable of looking after herself, thank you very much.’

‘Vivian is a very attractive girl. I am surprised that you managed to get her as your girl-friend in the first place.’

‘Looking at her now, this does seem improbable. But two years ago, she was new here and wanted a friend. Also she wasn’t all that glamorous then. I just happened to fit the bill. I can’t claim that we were all that close. It was just that we both liked each other and it was convenient to do things together.’

‘Getting back to Mort. I don’t mind the so-called prostitution or even the drug scene. It doesn’t worry me. I can’t see any need for me to go into prostitution or drugs. But I must admit the underworld connection does scare me. I think you are right. I should break off my connection with Mort. But it won’t be a very easy thing to do.’

‘I will finish doing my work on the exam results in two or three weeks time. You should finish your connection with Mort then.’

‘You are quite right. This is a firm resolution on my part that I will finish my association with Mort then. Please keep me up to that resolution.’

‘Don’t worry – I will.’

I suppose Alfie is not a bad guy. At least I think he is fairly straight. And it sounded as if Mort definitely wasn’t.



## 6. MILLY

I was lying in bed, pondering on my coming problem of how to extricate myself from Mort, when I heard a light knocking at the door.

‘Come in,’ I said. In walked a girl called Milly. I had seen her before at our debating forum where she was quite a droll sort of speaker. There she always played the part of absolute ignorance but then, from this position, she was rather good at picking out flaws in other people’s arguments. She is a small, friendly sort of girl and quite popular.

‘Push over,’ she demanded, as she came in. ‘It’s cold out here.’ And then promptly jumped into bed with me.

‘But I hardly know you. What do you mean by this? People don’t just hop into bed with people, particularly with people they hardly know at all.’

‘When two people are in both in a dangerous situation there is no point on waiting on the formalities of being correctly introduced. We both unfortunately have Mort as a close friend and that is a dangerous situation to be in. We urgently need to combine our forces.’

‘Yes, I see your point.’ And I returned the hug that Milly now gave me.

‘It is much the best,’ she said, ‘if we can keep this friendship of ours an absolute secret. As you probably already know, Mort likes to know about everything that goes on about here and that gives him a lot of power. But we don’t want him to know about us. So I couldn’t introduce myself to you before, where everyone would see us.’

‘Yes, you are right. It is much the best keep our friendship a absolute secret. But how did you get to be become involved with Mort yourself?’

‘My family has always lived at Minchinbury and I had a boy friend here that was keen to marry me. I certainly didn’t want to get married at that stage, but I didn’t want to hurt his feelings, So I thought the easiest and most pleasant way of breaking off with him would be to accidentally get involved with someone else. So, when Mort asked me to have a holiday with him, I was keen to accept. The holiday was at an entertainment centre, where I could also do a small amount of work to cover my keep, which was good. I got keen on him and we slept together during this holiday. And we have continued to do so spasmodically ever since.’

‘Do you actually like Mort?’

‘I don’t know. It is fun and exciting to be with him occasionally. But he is a control freak. He loves to be in charge of people and he is very good at it. But it is dangerous to let other people try to take control of your life. And I am afraid I am a bit lazy and let him help me when I shouldn’t. So, do you like Mort yourself?’

‘I suppose I am the same as you – I don’t know. Fortunately I haven’t gone as far with him as you have and I certainly don’t intend to do so. I must break it off with him before I feel obliged to go any further with him.’

‘It won’t be real easy to break it off with him.’

‘I have a horrible feeling it won’t. I presume Mort took you to the Entertainment Centre that his family are associated on the north coast with, for your working holiday?’

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘Did you like it there?’

‘Yes, very much. A lot of so-called immoral behaviour goes on there and I was propositioned quite often. But it was usually only done in a very friendly manner. I always refused but not all that definitely. I was always very sweet about the matter and thanked them for the offer. There never is any point in making enemies. And you never know when you might need extra friends and money. The work there is pleasant and you feel you are being part of life. It is nice to feel useful in this world.’

‘What is the place like?’ I asked.

‘It is a very green and well-run complex. Thus all the windows have external automatic insulated shutters. You have your own switch in the room to control them if you want to. But also the shutters open or close automatically depending on whether building needs to accept or exclude heat. It is all very well organised. So it is a nice place to live in. The centre has all the facilities that you could need including a free crèche and things like that. It would be very easy there to degenerate into immorality or drugs. But, if you can avoid that, then it is a good place to be at. Also it is fun to feel you are living close to some real action.’

So Milly had more-or-less confirmed what Alfie had told me before. We then talked for ages about our various interests and activities. She was a very active member of our gymnastics club. Apparently this club played a very friendly form of rugby as its relaxing activity at the end of each practise. In one version of their game, a person actually played the part of being the ball. And in this version, Milly was the favourite ball. It sounded quite fun. I told her a little about Angus and Alfie and also about my clubs. Milly had actually wanted to go climbing in her first year but then the times didn’t fit. And now she felt it was a bit too late.

I felt I had found a very genuine friend in Milly. And, because I had this new friendship, I felt I didn’t need to worry about extricating myself from Mort quite as much. But, of course, I had an agreement with Alfie that I had to respect.

So we arranged to now meet at least once a week in similar circumstances. We would continue to be very careful not to be seen by anyone together.

‘Now I have a good friend,’ she said just before leaving, ‘I think I can afford to take a slight risk.’

‘So what is that,’ I replied.

‘I think the really evil form of Mort’s behaviour only started to occur when Vivian became his girl friend. If I can separate those two then maybe he won’t be so bad. So I will go and have a talk with Vivian and try to get her to give him up. I will tell her that her association with him is demeaning her position in this college.’

‘That would be a bold move. All the best.’

‘Thanks, I might need it. Vivian is a very tough nut I think.’

But a few days later Milly then popped into bed with me again in a very distressed state indeed.

‘I’ve just seen Vivian,’ she said. ‘I am afraid she really tore me to shreds.’

‘So what did she do?’

‘I had better tell you how all the conversation went in detail.’

I, Milly, went to her room when she was doing her rostered tutoring duty.

‘I am afraid,’ I said, after the usual greetings, ‘that I am calling on you about a very personal problem.’

‘Oh, goody, goody, goody,’ Vivian quickly replied, without giving me a chance to continue on. ‘No one has ever come to me with a personal problem before. But I am sure I shall fantastic at it. I did a course in psychology at university but I have never had an opportunity to use the wisdom I gained in that course at all yet. But now, this is my golden opportunity to really use my expertise. So I want to do the job well. So the first thing we need to do is to make ourselves comfy.’ So she turned her door knob to say ‘engaged’ and led me over to sit in the settee, which all such study rooms have.

‘Some people,’ she continued, ‘think me just a bit haughty and sarcastic. It is terribly important you don’t feel this way.’

‘Oh certainly not Miss Hopeland.’ I replied. ‘I think you are simply kindness personified.’ This, of course, was an absolute lie but that is the sort of thing one has to say in those sort of circumstances.

‘First we need to sort out what we call each other. My correct family name is Hopeland-Brown but, when we moved to this part of the country, my dad thought we ought to drop the ‘Brown’ bit because it sounded a bit snobbish. Perhaps he was right, but I much preferred the full name of Hopeland-Brown. I don’t like to be called Miss Hopeland by itself at all. So, can we be nice and friendly, and you just call me Vivian and I will call you Milly?’

‘Yes Vivian. That would suit me fine.’

‘I know from student records that your proper first name is actually Melinda. But Milly is not really an abbreviation of Melinda. When I was a girl I used to read the Milly Molly Mandy stories and am rather hoping that you are called after my heroine.’

‘Yes, I am afraid I was.’

‘Why, that is absolutely wonderful. And did you like little Billy Blunt as your special friend?’

‘Yes, just a little.’

‘You make a perfect Milly Molly Mandy yourself. I am sure you are full of good intentions. But how can I help you now, Miss Milly Molly Mandy.’

‘A lot of us students look up to you as a beautiful and wonderful person. Also our dean clearly thinks well of you because you often go sailing with him. But you also associate with Mortimer Gonzales. Now a lot of us students know him very well and, when you really get to know him, he is not a nice guy at all. Your association with him is demeaning you in our eyes. It would be far better if you were to break off your friendship with him totally. We students would think a lot more of you then.’

‘It is very good of you to come and tell me all this. You are a brave little girl. But because of my superb understanding of psychology, I can understand where the problem really lies. But first Milly let us hold hands so that you can tell that I am really your very dearest friend. So give me your hands.’

I didn’t like the way this conversation was going at all. But I couldn’t avoid holding her damn hands.

‘Now look in my eyes,’ she said.

So I had to look into those sparkingly wicked eyes of hers.

‘You really are happy to share our problems with each other.’

‘Yes.’

‘My psychological analysis of the problem,’ Vivian continued, ‘is that you have tried to project your own personal problem from yourself to me. It is quite a common practise among the weaker mortals. You have allowed yourself to become too involved with Mortimer yourself and this is a dangerous situation to be in because, as you have said, Mortimer is not a very nice sort of fellow at all. I myself have been careful to keep him in at arms length and am not worried by him at all. I am even very proud to say that I never lock my door. I can keep all people well under control. As to whether I demean myself with Mortimer, I fear I have no other choice. There is no one here that is worthy of me – not even the dean, although he is a reasonably pleasant guy. But it is fun to consort with someone of the opposite sex and at least Mortimer does project a fine image. I also like being associated with the student body. I like to feel at one with the student body. Do you feel at one with me?’

‘Oh, certainly.’

‘Then I can tell you what you must do. Because you, my sweet Milly Molly Mandy, do have a nasty problem. In circumstances like these, there is only one thing you can do. You must confess your weakness to me and have a good cry. I will clasp you to my bosom. It will be a new experience for me and I will enjoy it. So be my guest and have a good bawl on my beautiful bosom.’

‘You are a horrible sarcastic bitch,’ I cried and I fled, choking back my tears on the way.

Thank heavens that I have a nice ordinary sensible girl like you, Ellie, as my friend now.’

Then Milly and I comforted each other. I was really glad of our friendship. I certainly wasn’t going to have anything to do with Vivian at all. She was clearly a very tough nut indeed.

I thought we were now so close that I could afford to tell her about my interest in the self-sufficiency movement.

‘Could Mort,’ I asked, ‘have been a party of the group that moved against the movement.’

‘He could well have been against it,’ Milly replied, ‘because the movement would tend to undermine the position of power that he holds at present in the college. But outwardly he said he was in favour. I was a member of the movement and was very disappointed when the whole thing folded. I will help you us much as possible.’

So Milly would be another helper in my mission.

So far in this narrative, my water sports club has hardly had a mention at all. But now, rejoice, this club is finally due to take centre stage. The high light of our water sports’ club year is the great Lilo Battle - and the subsequent campfire and booze up that always follows. This event occurs close to the beginning of the year because it is also a bit of an initiation for all us new members. It occurs on a Friday night and we all paddle over in the afternoon to a distant part of our lake with food, booze and camping gear for the night. We don’t really have enough tents so the tents are just in case it rains. In this case we would all try to squash into the tents as best we could. If the weather is fine, we will mostly sleep outside. We four friends, that is me, Choon, Liz and Rochelle, went as a party. Two of our party went in a canoe with all our gear while other two of us went on the lilos. We took turns on going on the lilos so that all of us would get some practise in managing them. One paddles the lilo just with one’s hands and they are not all that easy to control. {In case you don’t know, a lilo is the common name for an air-mattress. }

After putting up the tents and getting ready for the night, we started the serious work of getting ready for the battle. The battle tended to be guys against us girls but this was certainly not a rule. Anna LeFay, as president, was the leader of the “girl’s” team and a guy called Damian, as vice-president, was the leader of the “guy’s” team. The leaders then picked their teams. This choice didn’t have to be on sex, but it mostly was. This was done very fairly because the leaders had taken a small weighting machine and the total weight of each team was chosen to be the same. So our team, being mostly girls, had more players because on average we weighed less. Everyone in the club was included in the two teams. Fortunately the four in our little group were all chosen to be in the girl’s team.

Each team has a rubber dinghy with a flag and the object of the game is to capture the other team’s flag. On each dinghy, two players guard their flag and also propel their dinghy (again only with their hands). All the rest of the players are on lilos and they either attack or defend the two dinghies. In this process, the players on opposing lilos attack each other with

the object tossing their opponents into the water. When a person has been tossed into the water then they are out of the game until they go back and run around the campfire. They can then remount their lilos and join in the game again. But such people are then usually out of the battle for at least five minutes. Because it is easy to push someone off a lilo and because the battle lasts forty minutes, most people end up by being tossed into the water several times. To check that our players didn't cheat, the club had managed to get the student representatives, Lance and Jenny, to come along. They also sat in the dinghies and so they had a grand-stand view of all the action and so they were in a good position to pass judgement.

When our teams had been chosen LeFay led our team apart to form our plans.

'Before describing our plan of attack,' she said, 'Let me give some pointers of individual technique. Firstly it is best if we can go two on a lilo. Two people can paddle a bit faster and it means that, if one person comes off, then the second person can still look after the lilo. The second point is that, because in general guys are stronger than us girls then they will usually win a two person contest. Our best strategy therefore is to be aggressive and so when we fight we must get in close and drag the guy into the water with us. This fairly easy to do because sitting on a lilo is fairly unstable. Then our team can gain supremacy through our superior numbers.

Now for our plan. Two years ago, we won the contest after forty minutes on the basis of superior numbers remaining on the lilos. But last year, the guys used their superior brawn to capture our flag. This year I think we need to make a concerted attempt to capture their flag. But we can't simply rely on brawn. We will only succeed if we can make one concerted effort when we are in a good position. But naturally it will be very hard to co-ordinate such an attack. So I need to be able to tell you when our concerted attack will occur without the guys knowing. So my plan is this. When I loudly call one of your names it will mean something. So: Choon will mean - we attack in two minutes; Debbie - we attack in one minute; Nicole - in thirty seconds; Sandy - in 10 seconds; and Vera - we attack with all our might right now. This means that everyone can get themselves prepared for the coming really full-on attack. Of course things can go wrong. So Abbie will mean - we abort the current attack. Is that clear?'

'Absolutely,' we all replied.

'I am sure it is not,' she replied, 'but I will check you know the meanings later. For the time being, I nominate Liz to be in charge of defence. I will lead the attack. So we will now divide into two halves and each part will work out their particular positions.'

Our little group went naturally into the defence half to support our friend Liz. But I won't try to give any further details because the actual battle was a very complex affair. Suffice to say that LeFay, our gallant leader and hero, led us to a great and glorious victory. And I played my part very well. I naturally shared a lilo with Choon and from this I was tossed off four times. But each time I took a guy with me. And one of those guys was really big. So I was pleased with myself. My only regret now is that I may not be able to take part in a lilo battle again. And this is the very reason I have described the form of this battle in detail. I hope that you then, the reader, will remember what I have told you, so that, when I move back into the outside world, there will be people there who will know about the glories of lilo battles. There is no better preliminary to a boozy night than a great lilo battle.

The night then proceeded as you might expect. First we dried off in front of a roaring fire. Then we ate, and this was followed by a considerable amount of drinking. Finally we indulged in a lot of bawdry song and skits. So we sang songs like 'In Mobile', 'Samuel Hall', 'Maids when you are Young never wed an Old Man', 'The Bastard King of England' and 'Roll me over in the Clover'. And for his bit, Damian, our 'vice'-president, recited Eskimo Nell. I had never before realised that Eskimo Nell was a real hero - in fact quite a woman's

libber in her own little way. So this evening then was my first introduction to a slightly wilder form of living.

Finally everyone got quite inebriated and started discussing past misdeeds. This then was my golden opportunity to further my mission.

‘Jenny and Lance,’ I asked of Liz and Rochelle, ‘now appear to be models of propriety. Have they always been as perfect as this?’

‘Last year they both joined this club,’ Liz replied, ‘when neither of them had shown much interest in our activities before. We suspected that they joined us because this would be a convenient place to have a clandestine affair. There are several spots along our lake where you can carry on very easily without being seen.’

‘Also,’ Rochelle continued, ‘it is strange that LeFay was able to get them to come today to be referees. I suspect that Anna might have known about a possible affair and this is how she managed to persuade them to do their social duty today.’

So this could be why Lance and Jenny had ceased to support Matt. I would have to follow this idea further.

I was keen to discuss the Lance/Jenny problem with Milly. So I went to her room a few days later and there I told her what I had heard on the Friday night.

‘The trouble with what heard,’ I continued, ‘is that it seems to imply that Anna rather than Mort would have been in the plot to convert Jenny and Lance back to establishment’s desires. But Anna is my hero. I don’t want her involved in that sort of thing.’

‘You need not worry.’ Milly replied. ‘Gerald, the secretary of your water sports club is very much one of Mort’s minions. He would have far more opportunities to see what is going on than Anna. He is in the boat-house most of the time checking on boat bookings and whether the boats have been taken or returned at the right time. But, from what I have seen, Anna is a very sensible girl. She leaves all the hard work to Gerald and simply enjoys herself doing water sports herself. Jenny and Lance probably agreed to be referees simply because they enjoyed watching the lilo battle action. Also they are probably friends of Anna.’

‘Ah, that is a relief. So how do you know that Gerald is one of Mort’s minions?’

‘One of my chief joys is watching what goes on in this place. And the main thing I keep an eye on is Mort and the people he associates with. And Gerald has an hour long session with Mort once a week same as you do. And I take that to mean that he is one of Mort’s minions.’

‘You are probably right about Gerald. But I hate the implied slur that I could be one of Mort’s minions. I’m not yet and I don’t intend to be so. But I do tell him what goes on a bit. I can’t avoid it. So when and where to you see Mort yourself and how much do you tell him?’

‘I, myself, try to avoid being seen with Mort too much. But I do see him weekly. I spend a night in his room with him once a fortnight and, on the other week, he takes me home. On that trip we usually stop and have a talk on the way. It is hard to avoid telling him what goes on because he also does a lot for me. But at least I manage to appear not to be one of his minions.’

‘We are in an awkward situation but at least we now have each other. Thanks for telling me about Anna. What can I do for you in return?’

‘I need a bit of sympathy at the moment.’

‘What is the problem?’

‘I think Vivian is using Mort to take revenge on me.’

‘What is he doing?’

‘He is talking about babies.’

‘But surely that is good thing. It means he is being responsible.’

‘You don’t know Mort. He is teasing me. He is implying that I should have a baby.’

‘But that is easy. You simply won’t.’

‘Yes, it should be easy – but it isn’t. Somehow I always eventually do what Mort wants me to do. This time, of course, I won’t. But Mort has a sadistic streak to his nature and he likes to see me suffer. He likes to play the cat with me as the mouse. And he knows that just the implication of having a baby is enough to get me scared. And I am a bit scared. Just give me a kiss and a hug, and tell me we will always be close friends and so there is nothing to be afraid of.’

So I did of course. But I didn’t quite know what to make of the matter. The whole thing didn’t seem to make sense to me. After all, neither of them should want to have a baby. But, then again, perhaps Mort just liked playing games.

My next move was to use the information that Milly had given me about Gerald. So I talked with Choon and told her about my mission in general and how she could help. And the way she could do this was to become Gerald’s girl friend. Now most normal people would regard Gerald as a rather wet nerd. But on the contrary, Choon regarded him as a good, sensible, hard working guy. So she was more than willing to become his girl friend if she could. So on the following Saturday we asked Gerald if he would mind teaching us to sail. I mixed this with a lot of flattery about how capable he was and how eternally grateful we would be for his help. He swallowed it all and within a couple of weeks Choon was firmly ensconced as his girl friend.

And Choon, strangely, was very grateful for my help. Perhaps I was on my way to being one of networking/facilitators useful people that people talk about. So I am on my way to becoming a saint.

On the following Sunday then, I had a lot tell Matt about. But, before that, I needed to keep Matt happy and talk about self-sufficiency.

‘I actually read your section on finance twice.’ I began. ‘It is a very important section and it requires a lot of careful thought. And I am pleased to say I thought it was very good indeed.’

‘I worked on the section,’ he replied, ‘for quite a long time. It is hard to get a balance between all the various parties. So the older people, who must initially fund most the initial capital cost, must receive a reasonable return on their investment and be assured their investment is secure. And the younger people must be assured of being able to obtain work so that, as they grow older, they will progressively take over the ownership of the community’s assets.’

Hopefully that last little speech of Matt’s will make you, my reader, realise that finance is a very difficult and important subject indeed. And I certainly have no intention at all of trying to describe a difficult subject like that here. But at the end of this book, I have included the contents of Matt’s final treatise on the subject. And there you will find a section called “Membership and Finance”. If you really wish to understand this subject you need to read this section carefully. This book can be bought easily. I will continue now with my discussion with Matt but, if you haven’t read that section, it must now be a little bit meaningless. But it will at least give you an idea about the problems are and what true self-sufficiency implies.

‘Did you like my balance?’ he continued.

‘Yes, I did. It is not the solution that I was expecting because it is not the way the world runs at present. But I think it is the way the world ought to run.’

‘People in this world tend to think there are only two ways of organising things i.e. either capitalism or socialism. But neither of these systems is compatible with our concept of self-sufficiency. So that meant I had to work out a different system.’

‘Yes, and on the whole you have proposed a very sensible system.’

‘What did you think about my restriction that the older richer members have to be limited in the amount of work they can do. Otherwise the younger members of the community will find it difficult to increase their equity in the community.’

‘This is very contrary to the way the world works at present but, as you say, it is essential for young members to be able to increase their equity. In general all people in the world must be encouraged to have a reasonable amount of wealth so that they are capable of looking after their own individual welfare in old age.’

‘Is there anything you dislike?’

‘I think you should miss out that bit about the community having no insurance. Most people in this world think some form of insurance is essential. Why put peoples’ backs up about a subject when it is not necessary.’

‘You are quite right, but I just couldn’t bear to do that. One of the advantages of a genuine self-sufficient community is that it can look after itself independent of the outside world. But to say you must have insurance is to say you can’t do this. This is because, when a calamity hits your community, you are saying you will need the outside world to help you in the form of an insurance payout. But I have carefully designed my community so that it can successfully deal by itself any conceivable calamity. I have my pride. I think the community I have designed can deal with any calamity. So my community does not need insurance.’

‘OK – you should have your pride. But we have talked enough about finance. In the water sport club, we have just had a fantastic lilo battle. You yourself should join in the fun sometime.’

‘I would love to but it is too difficult. Last year Jenny and Lance joined in and they had a great time in the battle. But they were active with the club for several month in order to justify their presence. I couldn’t afford to spend that amount of time. The lilo battle is that club’s great thing and we outsiders simply have to stand back and envy them.’

‘Fair enough, I will just let you envy my great experience. So you suffer from both pride and envy two of the seven deadly sins. And, when I first met you, I used to think you were perfect.’

I had though at this meeting I would tell Matt about the possibility of Jenny and Lance having had an affair. But, as he had said, they may have joined the club simply to join in the lilo battle. Also, after our great love-fest of agreement on the subject of finance, I didn’t feel like introducing a discordant element between us on the very touchy subject of Jenny and Lance.

On the following Monday, Alfie presented his completed findings on the subject of last year’s exam results. They were very much as Alfie had predicted. Apart from the exams marked by Dr Martin and Vivian Hopeland, the raw marks were as normal. Alfie explained that Vivian worked under Dr Martin in the Economics department. So Dr Martin could have put pressure on her. Thus these results indicated that the poor result last year was probably false. But because of the complex scaling process, the situation was certainly not sufficiently clear-cut to justify an official complaint. But it was a useful result to know. Alfie left me with all the multitude of evidence to look after.



So I now had to keep my side of the bargain and break up with Mort. And this wasn't going to be easy. When I am actually with him I tend to get very keen on him. In fact I was just dreading trying to break it up.

## 7. THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Fortunately I wasn't due to see Mort till Thursday. So I could put off the evil hour till then. In between time, I spent a considerable amount of time thinking up a plausible excuse for breaking up with him.

'I have been thinking.' I began, after we had sat down together on the settee in his room.

'Always a dangerous thing to do.' Mort replied.

'I am not at all sure I want to do law when I leave Corbenic any more. In my course on Laws of Land Tenure, I have come to realise that law is very often simply a means by which the ruling class and the wealthy maintain their ill-gotten gains and power. Also you yourself are very much part of the wealthy, ruling class. Now I know you have been very good to me and you have never misused the wealth or power that you have. But I now have no desire to be associated with either the elite class or to study law any more. And this means that my association with you must come to an end. I have enjoyed my friendship with you very much and I am sorry it must come to an end. But I am afraid that this is the way I think it has to be.' I was rather proud of this little effort of mine. Of course it wasn't entirely true. I'm not that altruistic. I am always quite prepared to accept the benefits of wealth and power provided that there are no strings attached.

'I imagine that there must be more personal things that are worrying you as well. There always is. But let us take our time. I am due to take you home later this afternoon so let's leave early. We can then stop at that scenic spot at the top of the rise on the way back. That will be a much more pleasant place for you to tell me what is worrying you. I assure you I shall not pressurise you in any manner to do anything you don't want to do.'

'That would be nice,' I replied. I was glad to put this horrible discussion off for another half hour. As in everything, Mort appeared to be very considerate and caring. So maybe there would be no problem at all.

'So what else is worrying you?' Mort asked, after getting to the scenic spot and stopping the car.

'I am worried that we are getting too close. When I am with you I get very keen on you. And then I might do things with you that I will later regret. So I need to stop seeing you. I'm sorry.' I had to say something more. As he had pointed out, I needed to say something at a more personal level.

'But that is no problem at all. I have no intention of doing anything with you that you will later regret. So what we need to do now is to actually get close together and I will show you I won't let things get to far. So let's get out of the car. No more talking now - I am in charge of you for the next little while.'

So we got out of the car and Mort took out of the boot a yoga mat, a thick blanket and a couple of cushions. He was clearly well prepared for this sort of thing. We then went behind a good hedge where we wouldn't be disturbed and we made ourselves comfortable. It was autumn time and the air had a nip to it. But the sun was shining and the spot he chose was a natural sun-trap. We then laid the mat, cushions and blanket out so that we would be very comfortable. And then we took off our shoes and our warm outer garments.

'I would like to start by giving you a little thrill.' Mort said. 'It will break the ice and put you in a good mood.'

So he took me in his arms and he simply tossed me into the air. I suppose he didn't toss me very high. But it was certainly high enough for me to feel air-born. I squealed and clung to

his neck as I came down. I didn't want to hit the ground. My uncle had done this to me when I was a young girl. But that was many years ago. Mort was certainly very strong. He repeated the operation several times. The process left me flustered and excited. Then finally we lay down for a bit of closeness.

When I think back about what actually happened then, I often wonder why I allowed it all to occur. I certainly would not have allowed Alfie to act in the way Mort now acted. But Alfie is not like Mort. I was a bit in awe of Mort and he had taken charge of me. Perhaps I was intrigued as to how far things would go. And I did trust Mort that he definitely would not go too far. Also Mort was much bigger and stronger than me and so I had to do what he wanted to whether I wanted to or not. Maybe I felt that my life would always be much safer if I managed retain Mort's friendship. So I don't really know why I let things go so far. But what did happen was that, as we kissed and cuddled beneath the blanket, he gradually removed all our clothing. And I can't honestly say that I put up any resistance to this development at all.

'I don't think,' he said, 'that you ever have been in a situation like this before.'

'No, I certainly haven't,' I replied.

'So let us get used to it. How about we sing together for a while. It will help us to relax with each other and feel comfortable with our new physical proximity.'

So we sung the Brahms lullaby together. We both liked and knew the tune but neither of us knew the full words. But after a considerable amount of time we managed put a version together. Our voices blended well with each other. Then, after much searching, we found we both knew most of words to Cockles and Mussels. So this was another song we could sing together. As he said, the process made us feel more at ease with the situation.

'Are you comfortable and happy now in this situation,' Mort asked, 'and feel safe that I will go no further?'

'I suppose I am.'

'We can enjoy ourselves then. You have a wonderful sexy female body and I would like to know it better. And, if you like, you can check out my male peculiarities. We won't go any further now but there is nothing wrong in imagining what it would be like to go the full way at sometime in the future. Sex is supposed to be fun and so, just for the moment, we can anticipate possible future pleasures.'

And so I am afraid we did. He, of course, had a very fine male body indeed. And I started to feel very sexy towards him indeed – particularly when I could feel he was erect and ready for me. After all, I had never been in such a situation before and he was so different from me. It is hard to control oneself in those sorts of circumstances.

'We might as well do it now,' I said at last when I couldn't bear the tension any longer. 'You are ready and I am ready. I have done all that stretching that you advised so I really am prepared. I want do it sometime. We are both very keen on each other. So let's do it now.'

'No, this is definitely not the correct time.'

'But I am feeling terribly sexy towards you. I want to get it all over right now.'

'It is wonderful that you are feeling sexy towards me and I feel exactly the same way towards you. But we have to control ourselves till we are certain we are ready. It will help you to calm yourself down if you talk about some of your problems.'

'But I don't have any problems.' Of course I, like everybody, do have problems. But none I thought that Mort would know about.

'I have known Alfie for quite a long time. He is quite a flirt and you are just the sort of girl that he would like to flirt with. And I think that, after having coffee with him, he would

have persuaded you to go for a walk and carry on a bit. There is nothing wrong with that and you certainly should use an opportunity like this to enjoy yourself. But just tell me about it.'

So I had to tell him most of what really went on.

'Now I suspect the real reason why you think you should to split up with me is that Alfie wants to have you all to himself. Is that true?'

'Yes, more-or-less.'

'And do you want Alfie to have you all to himself?'

'No, I certainly don't. But he said he would split up with me if I don't split up with you. And I would prefer for that not to happen as well.'

'Don't worry about that. I am fairly certain that I can deal with that problem. I will go and see him and tell him he has no right to split up you because of me. I am fairly certain he will listen to me.'

'Yes, he probably would.' I said but I didn't tell him the reason. Alfie is terrified of Mort. He tries to avoid him like the plague. 'But you don't need to bother to see him. He would be terrible embarrassed by that sort of thing. I will just tell him that this is what would happen if we split. Then he will agree to continue on as normal. Thanks for the help. He won't like the situation but he will have to lump it.'

'So that is one of your little problems solved. You have also told me about the slight interest between you and Angus. But I know you. The main figure in the climbing scene is Matt and he is a terrific guy. I am sure your main interest must be Matt – he is much more your kind of guy. Your other worry probably is that your interest in me might interfere with your friendship with Matt. I can assure you it won't. I like and completely support Matt. So I want your friendship to continue. But, in case you have not noticed, Matt and I are remarkably different. So you can continue your interests in both of us and appreciate us both in our very different ways. You can appreciate Matt as a hero and me as a sexy guy that really fancies you.'

'Yes, that is all very true. You are very perceptive. So perhaps I have worrying about nothing. So I suppose we should continue our relationship as before. The other stuff doesn't really matter. I can do law or not irrespective of you. And similarly with respect to the elite class that you belong to.'

'So there really are no genuine problems. There is no reason why we can't continue to enjoy the feelings we have for each other in the future. But that is enough talking. Let us continue to enjoy ourselves.'

So we did and I got even more sexy than I did before. He seemed to appreciate this little body of mine ever so much. And I am afraid I got completely carried away again and tried to go the whole way. But he, the noble fellow, again refused. So he seemed to be taking good care of me.

So I was a lucky girl. I could have as many different associations as I liked. And Alfie would have to continue seeing me whether he wanted to or not.

'I would like to celebrate our continued friendship,' he said, when we had finished, 'by doing something rather special. There is a very good company doing the musical Chicago in our city at the moment. It is a great show. It would be too late to organise to go this Saturday but the following Saturday should be OK. Would you like to go?'

'Yes, I certainly would. I have seen the film and liked it very much. But it would be wonderful to see the live show.'

'I will take you there of course. We should do the full thing and so we should dine beforehand and go dancing afterwards as well.'

‘That would be terrific. But my family are bound to hear about the trip and they will be very keen to see more of you. They are always bugging me to get you to come and eat with us. We are going to be a bit late today so would you like to come and eat with us today? Is that asking too much of you?’

‘Yes, I would love to. It is the correct thing for us to do and so we should do it.’

On the way to my home, we again sang the two songs we had practised. We also we found we both knew ‘Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag’ as well. So that is another song we could blast out together as we travelled home with the wind blowing our hair into the air. For some reason I was in a very elated state indeed. At home my parents were delighted to have Mort to eat with us. As before they thought he was wonderful. He could certainly put on a good show of being the perfect gentleman. And I certainly wasn’t going to go into any details of what he was really like. Besides, I wasn’t that certain I knew myself. He was still very likely the villain in the whole episode. But most people are villains in some way – it just depends which side you are on. I had grown to be quite keen on him. Other sensible girls like Milly clearly enjoyed his company. So why shouldn’t I.

I didn’t spend the night at home because I wanted to be back at college early in the morning to make peace with Alfie. In case you haven’t noticed, I wasn’t entirely truthful in my conversation to Mort about Alfie. After all, I had promised to break up with Mort because Alfie had done all that hard work on the exam results last year. So I wasn’t keeping the promise that I had made him. So I needed to plead my case with him. But before doing that in the morning, I popped in to see Milly in the evening and tell her my bad news. But she was delighted. She was very keen to keep me as a close friend in the same situation herself. And now I was almost as badly entwined with Mort as she was herself.

In the morning I went to Alfie’s unit and let myself with my key while he was having breakfast.

‘I presume you have come here,’ Alfie said, ‘to bring me the good news that you have finally washed your hands of Mort.’

‘I did my utmost best,’ I replied, ‘but your flirtatious reputation caused my down-fall. It was all your fault.’

‘I don’t believe you for a moment. But tell me what happened.’

‘I went to Mort’s room to tell him my decision. But he suggested we talk about the problem on our normal ride on the way home. And I had no good excuse to refuse to do this. We then had a long discussion and, because of your flirtatious reputation, he guessed we carried on a bit on Monday nights. And from this he assumed that you had demanded that we, that is Mort and I, must break up. And I wasn’t in a position to deny this. I couldn’t tell him about our deal about the exam results because that has to be a deep secret.’

‘You really have got yourself into a mess.’

‘But that is not all. He said you and I must continue together. Otherwise he will come and see you and probably take you for a ride like he did for me.’

Alfie then went white with fear so I gave him a big hug. But he managed to regain his self control in a couple of minutes. He then told me that he would continue with me just to make sure I came to no harm. And I, in turn, played my part and pretended he was doing this for noble altruistic reasons rather than simple fear of Mort. Mind you there probably was just a grain of truth in what he said. Maybe he really is getting slightly keen on me. So perhaps I am becoming a bit more than just his current sexual interest.

On Friday night, Mort and I went to the disco as normal. I thought, on our walk down to the creek, that he might want to go a bit further this time. But no, he was still the perfect gentleman. He put no pressure on me at all. So it still seemed that I had nothing to worry about. He suggested we go to the college, Tuesday night, ballroom dance practise. We could then learn what we could do together in ballroom dancing should this be needed on the following Saturday night after Chicago. I like all forms of dancing so I was pleased to agree to this.

On the following Sunday you will be relieved to know that Matt hadn't written up any more work. So I won't be boring you silly about difficult self-sufficiency problems for the moment. The first thing I had to do was to tell him about last year's exam results. So I could bask in the praise that Matt generously endowed upon me. Then I had the problem of how much to tell him about my attempted split with Mort. But I rapidly decided I wouldn't tell him much at all. It would all be far too embarrassing.

'It might be a while before I can disengage myself from Mort.' I said. 'In fact I might not be able to do so till the end of the year. I feel I am sort of committed to him till then. How are you getting on with Fiona? I would like to feel you have a minor female interest while I am not available.'

'Fiona is fine and good company. But I am not at all interested in her. All I care about is trying to form a self-sufficient community and having you, as a friend, to help me do so. I am a terribly simple fellow. I was never all that interested even in Jenny.'

'Have you never had a genuine female interest.'

'I think I am just the same as most guys. I used to be interested in Vivian. She is so glamorous and one wonders what she is really like beneath her sarcastic ways.'

'But surely you hardly know her. You don't move in her world at all.'

'She wasn't always as high and mighty as she is now. We were both new to Corbenic at the same time and we both joined the climbing club. The staff are welcome to join our clubs - they are just not allowed to stand for officer positions. We were both keen on climbing and we both climbed at the same standard. So it was natural for us to climb together a lot. I grew quite keen on her but she did not return my interest at all. Fairly soon she took Alfie up as her boy friend and I have to admit that I was jealous of him. During our Summer trip, she was associated with the staff group and that is how she got to know our dean Stan reasonably well. So during the second year she joined the elite with Mort as her new boy friend. So I saw no more of her. But I still think of her as an interesting if dangerous sort of person to get to know.'

So I personally was very pleased she gave up climbing and joined the elite. I certainly didn't fancy having her around in our climbing scene. Fiona was a far more suitable person to partner Matt - even if he wasn't interested in her at all.

On Tuesday Mort and I went ball-room dancing. We first worked out a quick-step routine between us. We then found we both knew and liked the Swing Waltz. So these routines together with our disco knowledge should cover most dancing occasions on Saturday night. As normal, Mort was a superb partner.

After the session was over, we went for our normal walk, except this time we went to the lake. There we stood on the jetty next to our boat house and we watched the moonlight lighten up the little ripples on the lake making ever changing patterns. So it was a situation very similar to that romantic night when this whole story all started. And I am afraid I then got a bit over enthusiastic in our kissing that followed.

‘At night,’ Mort said, ‘I often think of you. What I would like to do then is to give you a night once a week when you could come to my room for the night. My room is on the ground floor and it is easy to pop into my room through the window. It is too early for you to think of doing this. But I would like you to know that I am there waiting and thinking of you on that special night - should you want to come.’

‘Thank you for the offer,’ I replied, ‘but I don’t think I would ever want to come. I know I got carried away with you a bit last week and I still have sexy thoughts about you. But I am fairly certain I can resist the temptation of going to your room for the night.’

‘I am glad you feel that way and it is probably best for you never to come. It is just that I would like you to know that the opportunity is there. My room is on the far side of the men’s residence hall and there it is second window from the far end of the building. My window has a large bush in front of it and so you can walk behind the bush and enter my room without anyone seeing you. I’ll make the first night to be tomorrow and I will be in my room from ten o’clock onwards.’

‘Thanks again for the offer, but I won’t be coming.’

Then we kissed again but this time I curbed my enthusiasm. I was proud of myself. I had told him I wasn’t going to come and I certainly had no intention of ever doing so. So this apparently was what Milly did once a fortnight. But I had no intention of ever doing that sort of thing.

On the following night at ten o’clock, I was lying on my bed thinking about these matters. I had no intention whatever of going to his room at all – but on the other hand, it would be rather fun to see what the physical layout looked like. So I put on a top and went down to a point where I had a good view of his room but where I was also partially hidden by some trees. It was a room very well suited for this sort of thing. There it was on the ground floor perfectly situated for someone to enter and leave easily without being seen. Mort certainly organised his life exceedingly well. A little thrill went through my body thinking how iniquitously clever he was. Nevertheless I could deal with him.

But at that moment precisely, his window opened and Mort gave me a little wave. He must have been standing back from the window looking for me. And of course I had to wave back. He blew a kiss at me and so I had to blow one back to him. He then kindly closed his window again. I took this to be a sign that he was not trying to persuade me to do something I did not want to do. So everything was OK. But I couldn’t really kid myself that he and I weren’t rather heavily coupled together. Too close for safety in fact.

On the next night, I had another visit from someone who was in a more dangerous situation than me – Milly of course. It is always cheering to see a person that is in a worse position than yourself. She looked distraught.

‘What is the matter?’ I asked.

‘Mort has just taken me for a ride, same as he did for you.’

‘That sounds awful. Tell me all that happened.’

‘It is impossible to tell you all that happened. He said so many things and I replied back in so many ways that I am not even sure what the outcome was.’

‘At least give me the gist of what happened. I presume it about you having a baby.’

‘Yes, it was. We left at lunch time and we went for a walk in our nearby national park. So he took me for a much bigger ride than he did for you. Then, as we walked and talked, he kept on harping on that horrible subject of what I am supposed to be doing with my life. And, of course, I am like most people and I don’t know. All I really want to do is to enjoy myself

watching the world go by. But this isn't really a very good reply and one has to say something else. But then he would pull everything I said to pieces and then come back by saying that I might as well do what every normal woman does and have a baby. And I, of course, refused and said I was much too young in any case. But then he would come back and tell that, in fact, I was at the healthiest time in my life to have a baby - unless there was something else I wanted to do. And so the argument went on forever and ever until eventually I said things like 'I'll think about it' or 'maybe I would', just to get him off my back. You must remember he just loves to play the cat with me the mouse. I have never seen him enjoy himself as much in his life before. He does have this horrible sadistic streak in him.'

'But you should just have told him to simply go and jump in a lake. What you do with your life is your business and nothing to do with him. You didn't need to put up with all that telling-you-what-to-do stuff.'

'It is not as easy as all that. It would be terribly easy for him to make me to disappear from this little world if he wanted to. In the boot of his car, he has this large carryall with his judo and exercise equipment in it. But the carryall could also be very easily used to carry the body of someone like myself. Also on his family's farm, they have a considerable amount of earth-moving equipment for digging drainage ditches and adjusting the terrain. This equipment could also be used to bury a human body where it would be very hard to find. I don't think I was in any danger today. But I think my life would still be much safer if I continue to be friends with Mort.'

'So what are you going to do now?'

'I shall do what I always do. I shall go to chapel on Sunday night and hope that God will remember me and so look after me.'

'Do you really believe that that will help you?'

'No - but it makes me feel better.'

'But don't you object to be associated too much with the religious set?'

'The chapel service on Sunday evening is not like that at all. The religious set all go to long religious services on Sunday morning. The Sunday evening service is for just half an hour. It consists of three hymns, a few readings and a short prayer. So the service has no sermon at all. Julie Weston, your group tutor, runs it and she keeps it simple. I find it helps to sing the well-known old hymns and to remember that people of past times often had a very rough life indeed. Your friend Matt even occasionally comes.'

'I wonder why he should go.'

'Remember that Jesus was rejected by his crowd. Matt would have empathy with that sort of situation.'

'Yes, you are right, I get the picture. I suppose remembering these things would help a bit. So what would happen if you should get pregnant?'

'I would go to their family's entertainment centre and hope for the best.'

'It would be far safer to stay here among friends, like me, that could help you.'

'Yes, I know it would. But it would also be very embarrassing for me and cause an enormous amount of fuss. After all, as the world would see it, I am in the wrong. I go to Mort's room of my own volition. It would be easier to go to the entertainment centre. I should just hate being the centre of an enormous amount of fuss.'

'Yes, I see what you mean. But I still think that a baby must be most unlikely. It can't be in Mort's best interest. He must be just playing games with you.'

'I hope so.'



Life in the city is not what this story is all about so I will be brief. I will only relate what is relevant to this story. We first ate at a swanky restaurant close to the theatre. This I suppose was the appropriate thing to do but I am afraid that 'fine dining' is not my kind of thing. So I didn't appreciate the experience. But the musical Chicago was terrific – I loved it. The only thing I had against it was the ending. In the film, the two wicked heroine murderers end up by trying to make a crust by forming a duo cabaret act together. But in the musical it is implied that they come to a sad end. I am one of those eternally optimistic people - so I preferred the film ending.

At the interval, Mort introduced me to four friends of his and they arranged to join us at the night-club afterwards. They were quite pleasant people and I was glad that he had organised this little party. Initially the party appeared to consist of two couples, namely Derek and Pauline, and Brian and Sandi. But I learnt later that they weren't. They were all clearly from the upper crust of society and the girls in particular were very glamorous. But, as opposed to Mort, they were actually quite normal people and quite friendly to me. At the dance we changed partners a little and so we got to know each other quite well. At the breaks, we naturally drank a bit and once some pills were passed around. I followed everyone else as to how much to partake in these things. One sort of has to do what the whole party does in these type of circumstances. Derek and Brian explained they owned a yacht together, and they invited the whole party to join them for a weeks sailing during the next Summer holidays. The yacht had sleeping berths for six people. I, like everyone else, was very pleased to accept. After all, boating was part of my thing now and I could always find an excuse for dropping out at a later date if there was a problem. With all the alcohol, drugs and excitement about the proposed trip, I am afraid we all got rather high.

Soon after this, however, I had a memory lapse. I awoke to find myself alone in bed in a hotel room. Beside me there was a note, which was signed by Mort. It said.

'The alcohol and drugs must have been too much for you and we needed to help you to bed. I am in the next room. When you are ready, ring the bell next to you and I will come in.' Mort as always had been the perfect gentleman and I was safe and well. We had a leisurely breakfast together and then drove slowly home.

'You may be worried,' Mort said, 'about the use of drugs on our coming yachting trip. I assure you there nothing to worry about. During the trip we will have the odd glass of wine or beer with the evening meal as you might expect. But definitely no drugs – it would interfere with our sailing. At the end of the trip, people might indulge a little more. But we won't expect you to join in. Are you still happy to come on the trip?'

'Yes, that would be fine. I have really enjoyed the night out. The musical and the dancing afterwards were terrific.'

'But, by implication, I assume you didn't enjoy the meal quite so much. Is there anywhere else you would like to choose for us to eat together?'

'There is a place I would really love to check out. On the general notice board outside our town library, there is a small notice. It advertises a small restaurant called the 'Snarler Parlour' in our neighbouring town. I just love the name. I couldn't get there without transport myself. But if you would take me I would love to go and see what it serves up.'

'It will certainly be good place to check out. How about we go there this Friday before Disco night?'

'That would be perfect. You do simply everything for me.'

'There is one thing,' Mort continued, 'which I would like us to do together. This is to read each other's favourite books and discuss them with each other.'

This was the last thing that I was expecting Mort to suggest. But I suppose it is the correct thing to do if you want to get to know each other. So I had to pretend to be keen.

‘Yes, we should do that.’ I said, ‘So what is your favourite book?’

‘Over time I have had many different favourites. But, at the moment, my favourite is “The Moon is Down” by John Steinbeck. I like books that have an effect on the world of action. So what is your choice?’

‘My favourite at the moment is “Wind in the Willows”. But you probably have already read it.’

‘Yes, but I would like to read it again. I have mostly forgotten it’

So we organised to swap copies when we got home. “Wind in the Willows” wasn’t actually my favourite because I like some of the romantic novels of Georgette Heyer best of all. But I didn’t want to tell him that. And I certainly do like “Wind in the Willows”.

‘On the following Saturday,’ Mort continued on, ‘a party of reasonably important people will be visiting Corbenic. As usual they will attend the Saturday night dance. I will closely be associated with the group and Brian and Pauline will probably be in the party. Do you wish to be seated with this group?’

‘No, I certainly don’t. I will sit with my usual water sports crowd. I am very happy to dance with them if I am asked. But don’t ask anymore of me than that.’

‘I thought that you would think that way, and I approve. A group like that would not really be your scene.’

When we finally got back at Corbenic, there was still time to go climbing for the afternoon. But I was fairly tired. I curled myself up around “The Moon is Down” for the afternoon instead. It was nice relax all by oneself and indulge in a good read.

While I had been trying to tackle the presumed main villain of my story, Choon had been busy beaver away and dealing with one of his minnows, namely Gerald. And, when I saw her next Monday morning, she had finally come up with the goods. She had become Gerald’s firm girl friend for some time and as such she had been received into all his confidences. Firstly, Gerald had confirmed that Lance and Jenny had definitely had an affair during their stay in the water sport’s club. Secondly he had offered his services to the club as the photographer of the club’s various activities at the time Jenny and Lance had started their affair. Choon seemed to think that Mort could well have asked Gerald to become the photographer in the club so that he have been in a good position to take a photo of the transgressing couple. Also Gerald had a computer and, like most people these days, he would have down loaded the photograph onto his computer. Then, at my suggestion, she had managed to get a copy of the key to his room. She gave this copy to me at our tute group and so now the game was in my court. I had to break into his room and try to get a copy of this crucial piece of evidence.

Even with a key, this wasn’t going to be real easy because girls aren’t allowed in the guy’s residence hall. I needed to call upon the services of my younger brother Percy.

‘Michael,’ I said, ‘I have an absolutely fantastic project for which I need your help.’ Percy is what we always call him at home. But now that he is older, he hates the name. Michael is his second name, and this is name he is known by at college. We were at home, but I used the name ‘Michael’ as an attempt to try to get him on my side.

‘I am on tender hooks as to learn what my dear elder sister calls “an absolutely fantastic project”. When I have heard about it, you will probably leave me on the writhing on the ground suffering from in a terrible fit of hysterical laughter.’

I nobly curbed my temper. 'It is actually a very serious project and, before I can tell you anything about it, you will have to swear to absolute secrecy on the subject.'

'OK, so you have got me intrigued. I will be bound to secrecy.'

So I told him everything about Choon, Lance and Jenny, the probable existence of a photograph and how its possession could help our self-sufficiency movement. He was duly intrigued.

'You can now help in two different ways.' I finally said. 'Firstly I will need to borrow some of your clothes so I can dress up as a guy in order to enter the guy's residence hall. Secondly I need you to come with me on that expedition. You know a lot of people in the hall and so, with you, an unknown face in the hall won't stand out too much. And then, when we get in the room, I will need your help on the computer.'

'So how will we know whether Gerald will be in his room or not?'

'Choon will go out sailing with him tomorrow afternoon. So that would be the best time to do the job. She will also have her mobile phone and I will have mine. So she will ring me if he is coming back. Thus there should be no problem about being caught. So are you prepared to help me?'

'I could be persuaded. But what is there in it for me?'

I was prepared for this sort of reply. Percy is not exactly an altruistic kind of person. 'Do you know Fiona Blackwood?'

'You mean the prettiest and most popular girl in our year. Only a little bit unfortunately.'

'Well I know her very well. We often climb together. She is a strong supporter of self-sufficiency. If I was to tell her how noble you had been in helping me to obtain the photograph, then I am fairly sure I could persuade her to take you climbing.'

'A more suspicious person than me would probably think could be sucking me in without any intention of introducing me to Fiona. But I, an innocent, am prepared to believe you and help you. But I am slightly suspicious.'

The expedition then went as planned. Percy took quite a long time to find the photograph on the computer but he eventually did. We took a small USB stick with us and we copied the photograph onto that. The photograph was very explicit - certainly not romantic at all. I thought it would be best not to show it to Matt for the moment. It would just upset him. I would leave it till a more appropriate time. Besides, there was nothing that could implicate Mort or Dr Martin in the matter as yet.

When I went climbing next, I told Fiona about what I had done and asked if she would help.

'I approve of what you did.' Fiona said. 'But I do have my pride. Your brother is a painful character. He is always getting up in lectures showing off what he knows. It would be demeaning to have to associate with him.'

'I only promised I would get you to climb with him.' I replied. 'But you don't need to be friendly to him. You have my blessing to make his climbing experience a good soul-uplifting bit of suffering. His real name is Percivale and, at home, we always call him Percy. You can play on that. And you can have a great laugh at his highly inept attempts at climbing. Just enjoy yourself.'

'I hadn't thought of it in those terms. I shall look forward to a new experience. He does need a bit of suffering to put him in his place.'

'Shall I introduce him to you?'

'No, that is not necessary. I will tell him what you have told me and start with a bit of praise, just to get him sucked in for some climbing. Then I will start to enjoy myself.'

The following night was the weekly night that Mort said he would wait for me in his room should I like to come. I couldn't resist the pleasure of doing the same as last week. So I came out and gave him a wave. So I could give him a thrill and let him think that I might come in. But I had no intention of doing so.

On the following Friday, Mort and I went to the Snarler Parlour as planned. I thought it was terrific, - Mort wasn't quite as enthusiastic. A German and his English wife ran it and it was organised like a Bavarian beer house. So there was lots of beer and sausages of many different kinds. The wife played a small button accordion and her husband encouraged us all to join him in various German folk dances with lots of clapping and slapping of legs. All very hearty and good fun. It was the sort of situation where you are expected to make a fool of oneself. But Mort wasn't very keen on making a fool of himself. So we mostly sat and ate and watched everyone else make a fool of themselves. Besides we had a lot to talk about on the subject of our favourite books.

'So how did "The Moon is Down" effect the actions of the world?' I asked of Mort.

'The book was written specifically to encourage the conquered populations of Europe to resist the German occupation. And the book was highly successful in doing this. I think it is good for all of us to consider what we should do in very difficult circumstances like these.'

'I suppose we should. But I don't think it was really necessary for Molly to murder the German officer.'

'She had no choice about it.' Mort replied. 'She was forced into doing it. It was expected of her.'

Then we argued about the matter for ages. Then we got onto "Wind in the Willows" and I got onto my hobby-horses about what a magnificent character Toad is and that Badger was really a bit unfair to Ratty. And so the evening passed quite quickly.

We returned to college at about ten and then we had our usual session at the disco. Then we walked down to the creek hand-in-hand in a very affectionate mood indeed.

'Don't you think that is this the most romantic spot imaginable,' I said, 'with the lovely gurgling brook and the quaint ancient bridge. We are so lucky.'

'It is,' he said, 'a wonderful romantic spot. But it is not a matter of luck. In this country, streams mostly only flow either during or immediately after rain. The reason that this brook is flowing at the moment is because of the nature solar energy. When the sun shines one has an excess of energy and, when it doesn't shine, one runs short. Thus, in general, a self-sufficient community needs to have an excess of energy collecting capability. Thus today has been a sunny day and so we have an excess of energy. So this excess of energy was used to pump water up to a little dam upstream during the day. And so tonight we have the pleasure of beautiful gurgling brook.'

'Oh, I see. But it is still very nice. What about the quaint ancient bridge?'

'That is the result of student engineering exercise that I actually helped with. We were being taught the mechanics associated with arched bridges. And it wasn't easy. One has to take one's hat off to all those ancient civilizations that built all those magnificent arched bridges.'

'Well I am very appreciative of all that hard work. So I would now like to show my appreciation by being romantic here.'

And so we were. I asked Mort about his life when he was young and his family were setting up the Entertainment Centre. He told me all about it.

‘I am told,’ I said, ‘that your elder brother disappeared. That must have been awful for you.’

‘Yes, it was but one has to accept it. I think he took risks and he paid the price.’

‘You wouldn’t do that sort of thing would you?’

‘Under some circumstances, all people may be forced to take a risk. Molly had to take a risk in “The Moon is Down”. I would not like to think that I would shirk on the duties of life simply because I was afraid of taking a risk. So I must be prepared to take a risk and that risk might involve losing my own life.’

We then changed the subject to our early lives again – a much safer subject. We talked for a long time about our family foibles. And then, after a while, I started to feel very sexy towards him again.

‘I think I might be falling in love with you.’ I said. ‘I have never felt like this with anyone else before.’

‘I am most definitely in love with you.’ He replied. ‘Perhaps you are beginning to reciprocate my feelings. Don’t worry about it. We all fall in love and it is thing to be enjoyed. It won’t last for ever but, while you have it, enjoy it. I am not trying to pretend that I have never been in love before. But at the moment I am in love with you and I am enjoying it. It was fun to tell each other everything about each other. So you should do the same and enjoy it as well.’

So I gave myself over to love and became horribly lovey-dovey in his arms. But I was quite safe. He took me back to college before I could go too far.

The following Saturday night the elite group from the city were due to arrive. I sat as normal with my water sports friends but I had plenty of partners from elsewhere. Thus Matt, Mort, Alfie and Brian from the city all wanted me as a partner at least once. So I, in my little way, was becoming quite a grand person. But, as I watched Mort being the absolute perfect host to all his numerous friends, I started to get revolted with myself. He definitely wasn’t my type at all. He was so suave, good-looking and polite to everyone. The last person that I wanted as a boy-friend. And besides this, he could still well be the arch villain in the movement against self-sufficiency. And yet I had said I loved him. Obviously I didn’t love him at this moment but I knew that, as soon as I was with him again, I would be in love with him again. I had to do something about it. I, like Fiona, did have my pride. Fortunately Alfie, the noble fellow, cordially detested him. I would have to join forces with Alfie next Monday and try to work out what we could do together about the situation.

I thought it best not to mention any of this stuff to Matt the following day. It would be too embarrassing. We had a leisurely climb together, as normal, during which we had the pleasure of watching Fiona bating Percy. She was doing a fine job. We then had lunch together resting against the two very large boulders at the top of our crag. Then I had the hard job of discussing the work Matt had done over the past fortnight. And this wasn’t going to be easy. It was all about remuneration, officers, exams, meetings, voting and horrible things like that. I am sure you hate these subjects just as much as I do. But, if you are going to form a self-sufficient community that really works, then these are the sorts of details that need to be decided out before hand.

‘So how did you like my latest bit of work?’ Matt asked.

‘You covered a lot of terribly difficult subjects.’ I replied. ‘And, on the whole, I think you did very well. But I wish your proposals were a bit more like current day common practise.’

‘Yes, it would be better if I could follow common practise more. But, when I started to think about some of these problems carefully, then I started to realise that a lot of our common practises are simply inadequate. But I wanted to be sure that my community would work in a proper democratic egalitarian manner. So I needed to propose something different. I tried to follow standard practise whenever I thought it was right.’

‘Whenever you propose something different I usually think initially that you must be wrong. But, after reading all your explanations, I start to realise that you could be right. So, when you proposed that everyone would be paid at the same rate of pay, I thought that that was ridiculous. But then you explained that people couldn’t slack too much because then they wouldn’t be offered any more work. And also you explained that there is no point in paying our leaders extra money because then the only thing they could do with this excess money would be to spend it in the outside world. And so they would set a bad example to every one in the community. And I agree with you on the subject of labour. Money earned in the community should be spent in the community and the money that a person wants to spend outside should be earned outside. And your community form gives everyone plenty of opportunity to work outside as well.’

This conversation then went on for ages about all the other subjects. But I won’t try to give any more details. As I have told you, Matt’s work is readily available. This story is about my life and I don’t want to put you off by raving on too much about the harder problems of self-sufficiency.

‘I hope you are not working too hard.’ I said at the end of our discussion.

‘My aim in life, at the moment, is simply to show clearly how a self-sufficient community could successfully function in practical terms. This is my dream and I suppose I enjoy working out my dream. But I do relax. I have taken to coming to this crag on Thursday evenings as well, and then I practise my climbing technique on these top two isolated blocks. It is what climbers call bouldering. I like the peace at that time of day. But I like to think I am continuing to obey one of my golden rules of my life. This is that I should not work too hard. The current world has gone mad and is doing a lot of unnecessary work. I don’t want to be like that.’

Matt, as you can see, is a fanatic. But perhaps he has to be if he wants to form a genuine practical self-sufficient community.

## 8. RE-THINKING

Since my ride with Mort, a lot of the passion had disappeared out of my Monday evening encounters with Alfie. I suppose it is hard to remain enthusiastic over a person when you know you have to see her whether you want to or not. So I didn't need to wait till after we had a tussle on the ground before I told him about my problem. Then I explained how I had "fallen in love with Mort" very much against my will. Alfie sat and thought for quite along time. In fact he became quite the brooding Jeremiah in Michelangelo's famous painting.

'You are in a mess.' He said. 'I feel you need to take drastic action. You have "fallen in love with Mort" because he has played upon your fascination with your first act of full sex. But, when you get used to it, sex is no big deal. So what you need to do is to go the whole way with him and continue with him till until you get him out of your system – or he gets bored with you. When it is all over then we can continue as we used to. It will be difficult – but I think you have to do it.'

'It is drastic step, isn't it.' I replied. 'But I think you are probably right. I need to think about it for a while. But you will promise to continue to see me as we do now.'

'Yes, I promise. I seem to be lumbered with you.'

Then we talked about other things. When I got home, I thought over the matter again. The surprising thing about this bit of conversation was that Alfie seemed to have grown genuinely quite attached to me. Surely no guy would tell his female interest to sleep with some else unless they had that female's best interests at heart. He wasn't very romantic about it in saying "he was lumbered with me". But at least he still wanted to continue seeing me. I also rapidly came to the decision I would get this whole deed over as soon as possible. I was sick of this ghastly situation. I was due to see Mort tomorrow and I would bring up the matter then.

When I awoke in the morning, I started to view the matter in a different light. After all, Mort wasn't all that bad a guy and he was good looking and sexy. If I had to go the whole way with him, I might as well enjoy myself. As I have told you before, I am one of those good sensible, positive people that believe that life is here to be enjoyed. I vaguely remember Tolstoy had something to say on this subject. So I might as well enjoy my big act with Mort and show a bit of enthusiasm about the thing.

So I dressed myself up as sexily as possible. In fact in a similar vein to way I dressed on my first interview with Mort.

'You look wonderful.' Mort said on seeing me. 'Let me inspect.' And he did so carefully admiring all my good features. 'I think this means something rather special. I am rather hopeful that you are now ready to go a little further in our relationship. Am I right?'

'Yes, you could be. Let's have a kiss.' He gave me one of those really sexy kisses he can do so well. And I responded as fully as I knew how. I preferred to send the message in this way and he was good at getting the message. I would find it demeaning to actually have to ask him to go to bed with me. Also in this way I could feel that I actually never did anything really wrong.

'Do you now completely trust me,' Mort then asked, 'and are now quite certain of your own mind.'

'Yes, I am.' This reply is horribly like a wedding vow response. I hope you haven't interpreted my reply in this manner.

'Tonight is the normal night when I will be waiting for you. Instead of just waving, you could simply come along into my room.'

‘I have been thinking,’ I replied, ‘about that for a while and I don’t like it at all. That way, the whole blame would lie completely with me. Now suppose instead that you were to pop out of your window and you were to come to me and give me one of your passionate kisses. Like the one you have just given me. Then I am fairly sure that I would rapidly be overcome by your passion, my knees would grow weak, we would collapse to the ground and then we could consummate our love for each other among those beautiful trees that I try to hide in.’

Mort smiled. ‘Those trees are certainly not the appropriate place for us to spend our first night together.’

‘Well, maybe not. But perhaps instead in my weakened state after the kiss you would find it very easy to take me to your room.’

‘I am certainly not doing anything to you that could be construed as forcing you to do something against your will.’

‘OK, fair enough. Then I might just be persuaded to walk back with you to your room hand-in-hand.’

Mort thought carefully for a while. ‘The way I understand you at the moment is that you still have a few doubts about this whole matter. But you are nearly ready. I suggest that we continue our waves as we do at the moment and then you can always come into my room if you want to. But, when I think you are ready, I will be waiting, not in my room, but hidden in those trees just a little further back from where you normally wave. When you wave then I will pounce upon you and take you in a very passionate kiss. If you find you cannot resist me then we will walk hand-in-hand back to my room. Will that be OK?’

‘Yes, that would be rather good. Much more exciting than anything I had thought of.’

‘I shall find it rather exciting myself.’

‘What should we do about protection then?’ I asked. ‘Our horrible college makes life terribly difficult in that respect.’

‘Do you know why our college takes this position?’

‘No. I assumed they were just being old fashioned and sucking up to some of our over protective parents.’

‘No. The college board has thought about this matter very carefully indeed. In their view, in the past fifty years since the pill was introduced, general interest in sex has actually declined. This can be seen if you compare the popular films of the fifties and the popular films that are seen now. The board thought that our sexual interest has declined because the pill had made sex less exciting and meaningful. They believe that this general sexual interest has been replaced by an increased interest in work and materialism. Hence their desire to let the natural process designed by nature to take its course. And so we might return to being healthy humans again. And I am inclined to agree with them.’

‘Are you suggesting we use no protection then at all!!!’

‘No, I am certainly not.’

‘Then what are you suggesting?’

‘The board never thought for a minute that students would stop using protective measures because of their rules. It would just make it a little more difficult and hence a bit more exciting. And I again agreed with them.’

‘Stop putting me off. So what are you going to suggest for us.’

‘For a start, when we had our bit of intimacy on our ride home, protective measures didn’t seem to enter your head.’

‘That is true. But that was a very special circumstance.’

‘But it was very exciting.’



‘I admit that.’

‘I can look after the protection problem very well. I have had a lot of practise and I have never made a mistake in these matters at all. But I specifically do not wish you to think there is no chance at all of you getting pregnant. It is this possibility that makes the sexual act meaningful and exciting. I want our time together to mean something.’

‘And I am to have no control at all.’

‘You have all the control in the world. If you are worried, you simply don’t come. But I can at least assure you that the chance of you getting pregnant will be very small.’

‘So what would happen if I did get pregnant.’

‘That would be awkward for us both of us. But it wouldn’t drastic. I can easily support you.’

‘You don’t intend to marry me.’

‘Neither of us would want that. We are both too young and we both want to keep our options open.’

‘That is very true.’

‘So do you trust me? Will you give me a wave tonight?’

‘I will go out and give you a wave. But if you should pounce upon me from behind, I won’t necessarily come with you.’

‘That is the spirit. Let us have another kiss.’

So we had another of those very sexy kisses. But you can see that I certainly wasn’t making much progress in disassociating myself from Mort. Moreover I couldn’t honestly say that relationship with Mort would finish in the near future. I found Mort terribly exciting.

So that evening I went out as normal and gave him a wave. Fortunately he returned the wave from his room. It was much too early for him to pounce on me. He wanted to build up the tension. But I knew it would happen fairly soon and then I would go with him to my possible doom.

Straight after that, I went to Milly to commiserate with a fellow sufferer. She at least would comfort me. I popped into her bed. She, as always, was delighted to see me.

‘I am soon going to be,’ I said, ‘in the same horrible position as you are in already. Comfort me.’

‘Why, that is absolutely wonderful news.’ She replied. So much for the comfort I had hoped to receive from her. ‘So tell me all that happened.’

So I told her everything.

‘You won’t be in the same position as myself in fact at all.’ Milly replied. ‘When Mort and I got together the conditions about protection were similar. I would imagine the same would apply with other girls. He is only now getting serious about me becoming pregnant. So he is probably not serious about you getting pregnant. He just does it to give you a thrill.’

‘Thank heavens for that.’

‘I wouldn’t count your blessings too much or too soon. Mort never does anything without a purpose, and he has spent a lot of time and effort on you. He has spent much more time on you than he has spent on me. But, you are just a normal girl, same as many other girls that he has known. You are no better or worse than me. I very much doubt if all this effort of his has been spent simply for your personal benefit.’

‘When you put it that way it doesn’t sound too good. What should I do?’

‘We are both in a very dangerous situation.’ Milly said. ‘We have to join our forces completely. We must agree to follow each other into whatever situation Mort places us in. So,

if Mort gets you a job in the city under his thumb, I will join you and get a similar job in the city. And, if pregnancy forces me to go to the entertainment centre, you should do a similar thing with me. So we can then be certain of us being safe.'

'Yes, I agree to that completely. Thank heavens we have each other.' And we had a big tight hug on the basis of our new agreement.

'Of course,' I continued, 'I wouldn't want to stay at the entertainment centre for too long. A place like that is not really my kind of scene.'

'My little plan,' Milly replied, 'is for you to become pregnant same as I would be myself. That way we will both wish to stay there for the same amount of time.'

'Don't be ridiculous. I couldn't possibly do that.'

'So what else have you got planned to do for the two years, after this year at college and before Matt can try to get a self-sufficient community going. Remember, you can't stay at college, there isn't much work in our town and going to the city, where Mort will be, would very dangerous for you indeed. And you now have no ambition to do law or any other specific type of employment. So having a baby would simply fill in the spare time.'

'But I'm not ready to have a baby in a place like that. You can because you can make friends with anyone. But I can't. Besides how would I get pregnant. Mort probably doesn't want me to get pregnant.'

'I will be with you and I will help you to make friends. It is not all that difficult. Besides in any normal job you have to suck-up to your boss and that can be horrible. Getting pregnant is no problem. Angus is your friend and he will sleep with anyone, no questions asked. And the centre is a friendly place, green, well run and has a crèche. You can do it.'

'There is just no way that I am going to get pregnant and go to the entertainment centre of two years. That is definite.'

'I'm afraid you will have to think about it from my point of view. The centre is perfect place for two friends like us even with babies. But for one person, pregnant without a partner it would be awful. I would get depressed, take drugs and eventually very likely suicide on an overdose. You would do the same wouldn't you if you were in my position.'

'Yes, I could do the same I suppose.'

'But you know what I would do. I would write to your friend Matt who I also know through our chapel service. I would write to him and tell him I was suiciding because my friend Ellie deserted me in my hour of need. And you know Matt. He would certainly think that fear of pregnancy is no excuse to desert a friend. And he wouldn't mind you having a baby. A self-sufficient community is a perfect place to bring up children. So you will just have to join me. I will shame you into it.'

'Damn an blast you. You have got me cornered. I will have to do it. Matt I know would want me to do that. And I would be safe from Mort. Give me a cuddle.'

So she gave me a cuddle and I had a little weep. It would be farewell to my nice comfortable life I had lived so far. But soon, my good old positive side started to burst through again. The centre didn't sound so bad with lots of things going on and plenty to do. And Milly was the perfect friend to be with there. And I had to have a baby sometime - and those years would be a convenient time. I know it sounds terrible to have a baby at the centre like that, but, in practical terms, it would actually be quite good. After all, under normal circumstances, one has a baby in a house in the suburbs with your husband out working all day. You sit at home, with no friends, nothing much to do and no one to give you advice. But at the centre you would have lots of friends, plenty to do, a crèche on hand and plenty of people to give you advice. And Milly was right - it is what Matt would expect me to do. So it really was OK. And it would solve my problem about what to do for those two spare years.

I spent a long time in Milly's arms thinking about all these things and a bit more as well.

'I suspect you planned this whole thing right from the start.' I finally said. 'You chose me as a friend with this final circumstance clearly in mind.'

'Yes, I did. I believe that, when a person finds themselves in a hole, then the best thing to do is to go out and find some nice person to share that hole with them. So I went out and found you. I am very happy with my choice. I hope you are happy with me.'

'Yes, I suppose am. Mind you, I didn't seem to have much choice about the matter.'

So Alfie's plan for me hadn't worked out at all well. Not that I could really blame him. I had thought it was the sensible thing to do myself. So now instead I would have to go to Matt and tell him everything. Well not quite everything. I would omit that bit about my not going until Milly put the really hard word on me. But, if I told him everything, he would feel responsible for me and appreciate my difficulties. He might even be able to give me some useful advice. But I didn't want to wait till Sunday. So I needed to think up an excuse so that I would be left alone with Matt late on Wednesday evening climbing session. As I was so closely associated with Mort now, Matt and I were more careful than ever not to be seen too much together.

My solution was to ask Matt to do "The Corner" climb with me. This was one of our easiest climbs because there are jamming holds for one's hands in the crack and one can bridge with one's feet on small holds on both walls. This means one can climb in balance and hence one needs to use very little arm strength at all. I, like most people, had done the climb several times already with a top rope. I was now ready to lead it. But this particular climb was also our best climb for natural protection, which I hadn't tried to use yet. But this also meant that this was the perfect climb for me to do with Matt because he could then teach me how to use natural jam protection. Also, learning how to use natural protection takes for ever and so we would be left alone at the end of the night.

This plan worked perfectly. The only thing against it was the learning to use natural protection. All the gear is so cumbersome, awkward to place and it doesn't look all that safe even when it is in. Fortunately on this climb there were also a few bolts. So I could at least rely on these if I had a fall.

'I have a serious problem.' I told Matt when we had finished. 'It will take a long time to tell you. Where can we go where we definitely won't be seen.'

'The old road, which was used initially to carry out the quarried limestone, leads out past our slabs. It is overgrown now but there is a small grassy track where it used to be. This leads to a quiet country road that goes up to the lookout above our crag. It is an ideal place for a quiet walk.'

We found the track and it was very suitable. It was almost dark then but I had taken a torch with me. We found a little open space with some wild flowers and a large log.

'I'm in a mess.' I told him. 'Somehow I have become more and more attached to Mort and now I'll probably even end up by getting pregnant. I'm awfully sorry.'

'This is terrible for me. I suppose you must have fallen in love with each other and so I must congratulate you both. Having a baby is a wonderful thing and I hope all goes well.'

'Oh Matt, for heavens sake, act your damn age. You are not an ancient grey beard loon full of the wisdom of countless ages. You are young, we love each other. Hit me, beat me, do anything, but act your age . . . '

But I had to shut up. Tears were streaming down Matt's face. In his own way, he is a very tender soul. I burst into tears as well and we clung to each other for a long time. But eventually we sat down on the log and I told him the full story.

‘It is not so bad.’ Matt said. ‘You have done exactly the right thing. You had to agree to join Milly at the entertainment centre and have a baby with her. I will support you both as best I can if there is any money problem. And hopefully eventually we will get a self-sufficient community going which will be an ideal place to bring up the children. And, best of all, you are not too attached to Mort.’ In telling my story, I had found it convenient to omit the bit about using Angus to get me pregnant if Mort didn’t. That sort of thing would be distasteful. Besides it would very much depend on the circumstances at the time.

‘You are sure you don’t mind.’ I said.

‘No, I don’t mind. But we need to think about the situation for a while. We haven’t spent much time with each other for a while, so let us continue our walk and we can talk as we go.’

So we continued our walk, hand-in-hand, along the track to the road and then up the road to the lookout spot. We had to turn the torch off there because the light could be seen from a distance. Fortunately, there was a slight amount of moonlight then so we could follow the track down to the top of our crag. And then we could sit at the best place of all. Between the isolated blocks, where Matt does his bouldering practise, and the top of our main crag there is a two metre strip of grass where people normally belay. It is very convenient because the belay bolts can then be above the belayers on the boulders behind them. But the spot also has a perfect view of our college, our grounds, our lake and the lights of the town can be seen shining in the background. So we sat there with our backs resting on one of the blocks and enjoyed the superb view.

‘I am very happy,’ Matt said, ‘to know absolutely nothing about what goes on between you and Mort. I have to admit I have now taken a very strong dislike to Mort and I don’t want to hear about him at all. What goes on between you and him is your business. You can have him. But, on the other hand, I would like, that what goes on between us, to be a complete secret between us and have nothing to do with him at all. What do you think?’

‘Yes, I think that is absolutely right. I have said very little so far about us and Mort has not asked me to do so yet. But it must not happen.’

‘All people should have the right to have secrets purely to themselves. If Mort does ask about us and tonight for example, you should completely and utterly refuse to talk about it. You should take a firm stand with him.’

‘I will.’ And we had a solemn little kiss confirming our agreement.

‘Matt,’ I said, ‘I have now told you a lot about myself tonight and my down ward path with Mort. Now I know there are no juicy interesting things you can tell me about your personal life because you are working too hard to have much. But are there any juicy tales of your past life that you can tell me now which can the form a special secret bond between you and me as well?’

‘There, alas, is one ghastly horrible secret about me that I keep a secret from absolutely everyone.’

‘How glorious. Come on then, it will be a complete secret with me. So spit it out.’

‘I fear Mathew is only my second name. My first name is Arcturus.’

‘What a weird name.’

‘It is worse than just being weird. Arcturus is the major star in the constellation of the Great Bear and it is the fourth brightest star in the heavens. Arcturus is a Roman name for a bear and Arthur has the same meaning as well. So Arcturus is just a snobby, sophisticated way of calling me Arthur with all those connotations.’

‘So what is wrong with that? It is not as bad as Percivale, which is what my brother is called. It is good for your soul to bear a minor burden like that.’

‘I have always detested the Arthurian legends. They were made up in the twelfth century for the nobility of the time just to justify their power and land ownership. A knight riding a horse in those days is the modern equivalent of a wealthy person driving a large, petrol guzzling, 4-wheel drive car. I hate all the various association.’

‘So who is your hero.’

‘Alfred the Great is my hero. He is a real person who did a hell of a lot of good. He managed to persuade the Saxons to really work together and defend themselves against the Vikings. As I understand it, England really developed under Alfred. And I have always been jealous of Alfie for both his name and his association with Vivian. Some people have all the luck.’

‘Arcturus is a fine name for you. I shall henceforth, visualise you now as the fourth brightest star of the heavens who shall go forth into the world and show it how the world should live in a sensible, comfortable, green, self-sufficient manner. And, if no one is listening, I shall now call you Arcturus. The name has a fine, heroic ring to it.’

‘But be very careful. I have no desire to be a hero at all. Let us get back to more practical matters. Next week is a holiday - so are you going away?’

‘Yes.’ I replied. ‘I am going away with the water sport’s club on an extended canoeing and camping trip. But we don’t leave till Monday. So I shall be here on Sunday to review with my hero, Arcturus, his latest piece of work on self-sufficiency. Is that OK?’

‘Yes, that will fit in well with me fine. I shall be away for the full week afterwards, so I won’t see you on the following weekend. But I have done quite a lot of work which I will put in your pigeon hole tomorrow which I would like you to think about.’

We then had a final kiss and this kiss represented the bond we had made between us on this very special night. We would always come to each other’s aid irrespective of any other relationships. We then made our way back to college, but no longer hand-in-hand. I really did love my hero Arcturus. But this didn’t in anyway stop me looking forward to a night with the evil Mort. With Alfie, Milly and Matt all as close friends, I should be fairly safe.

On the following day, I then felt brave enough to do a job I had been thinking about with trepidation for a long time. This was to speak to Jenny. It would help enormously if she could confirm that our photo had been used to force her hand in dropping self-sufficiency. In the tennis club, I had got to know her a little bit. So I summoned up all my courage and I went to her official room that afternoon.

‘This is a surprise, Ellie.’ She greeted me. ‘So what brings you here?’

‘We both have a few things in common that you may not realise. We both have been strong supporters of self-sufficiency, we both have been good friends of Matt and we both have been the cause of some suffering by Matt. I have come to you in the hope that we might be able to alleviate some of the suffering we both have caused Matt.’

‘What you say is correct. I would love to help you but at the moment my hands are tied. I have unfortunately agreed to an arrangement with the college, which I deeply hate. I am in a particularly difficult situation because Julie Weston, your tutor, is my mum and she takes these things very seriously. So for the moment, there is nothing I can do.’

‘At the moment, I am not asking you to do anything. I understand your position and you don’t even need to say a word. Let me just say what I think actually happened. This is that last year you and Lance had an affair which was photographed. This photograph was used to force you and Lance to give up self-sufficiency and stand for the student representative positions you now hold. Now I have managed to get a copy of this photograph but I, like you, would prefer to keep this whole matter quiet. I also don’t think that there was anything wrong in you

and Lance having an affair. Matt is a terrific guy but mostly his thoughts are up in the clouds. You and Lance probably wanted a normal relationship.

But, for the moment, everyone is happy with the current situation and so we need do nothing. But, at some time in the future, it would be nice to know that, if the time was appropriate, you would acknowledge what actually happened and return to supporting self-sufficiency. But you need not break your word, if you say nothing then I shall simply assume what I have said is roughly correct.'

'Thanks enormously for coming. It is a huge relief now for me to know that the true situation can eventually become public. I would welcome it. But for the moment it is best to let sleeping dogs lie. I am terrible grateful for your help.' And she gave me a great hug.

And I, of course, was pleased how well everything had gone. I could now rest in peace about that side of the whole episode. And, like the good girl guide I used to be, I had done a really good deed for Jenny.

That task went well. But my next task on Sunday with the great Arcturus wasn't going to be so easy at all.

'Your latest piece of work,' I said to him, 'has so many numbers in it that any normal person will go completely bonkers. No doubt you understand what all the numbers mean but no normal person will have sufficient patience to deal with them. You have to think about your reader.'

'I am only doing precisely what you yourself told me to do. Remember you said on that Sunday when we planned this whole task that "I must write everything down in detail". But numbers are just a means of defining the essential detail. So I need to tell the reader what food we will grow and how much of it. This then leads on to how much land and water we will need. Similarly I have to work out how much accommodation we will need and how much energy. Finally I will need to use all this information to work out how much whole community will cost to form per person. And all this is must involve a very large amount of numbers. I know nearly all readers will skip all this detail and hope that my numbers are correct. But someone has to do the work. What we would all like, of course, is to be able to see a finished community in a working form. Then we would all know what we would get for our money. This is what we do when we buy a house. But unfortunately no modern working self-sufficient community exists at all in the world at present. So I have to work everything out in detail from scratch.

Furthermore, as you said on that Sunday, everyone will have far better ideas of how it should run. But again I will have to follow your advice. All normal people are far too lazy to write their ideas down in a complete detailed plan. So, with a bit of luck, my plan might prevail. It might not be the best plan. But at least it will be a complete plan that will be worked out and costed in every detail.'

'I can see you still have a chip on your shoulder about your ideas being described as "airy-fairy, communist rubbish that has been shown many times to be impractical". I suppose you are right. You must continue to describe everything in detail and this must involve a large amount of numbers. I won't try to understand the numbers but I can see they have to be there. You must continue the good work.'

'Thanks for your support. On another subject, I have been thinking about the problems that you and Milly are having with Mort. Please tell me immediately if anything important happens. It is possible that I could help in some manner.'

'I will.'

So that was the last I would see of Matt for ten days or so while he was away. I would also be away myself with the water sports club for five days, but this is not part of my story. But Mort and my association with him is very much part of my story. I didn't want to miss out on my wave night with him while I was away on holiday. So I arranged with Mort to change my normal wave night from Tuesday to Sunday. I got a tremendous thrill thinking that he might pounce on me from behind, enclose me in a passionate kiss and lead me to my doom in his room. But, sadly, both that Sunday and the following Tuesday he just waved from in his room. Somehow I had become very keen on the evil fellow. But everyone should be allowed to have his or her fun. I felt that I had done a sufficient amount of good work on behalf of Jenny and Matt. So I was due to have my bit of dangerous fun with Mort.

## 9. A TIME TO ACT

After my wave with Mort I went back to my room to contemplate several fascinating questions. What would “it” be like, when it finally did occur? What would Mort and I talk about during the whole long night? Did Mort really have an evil plan up his sleeve for me? But then, suddenly, a light knocking on my door interrupted these interesting contemplations. A small well-known figure entered my room and jumped into bed with me. She snuggled up into me and gave me a very tight hug indeed. In fact it was more than just a hug. I think she was making a statement that I belonged to her. So I would have to stick by her as a very best friend always has to do.

‘What is the matter?’ I asked.

‘The worst has happened.’ Milly replied.

‘But surely it is too early for you to get pregnant? You only sleep with Mort once a fortnight. It seems unbelievable that you could be pregnant already.’

‘You are forgetting that Mort knows everything about me. This includes when my monthly periods occur. Thus he also knows when my fertile periods occur. He chose my last night with him to be in the middle of my fertile period.’

‘You should have refused to go to him in the middle of that period.’

‘It is not all that easy to refuse to do what Mort wants you to do. You yourself have not been all that successful about limiting your time with him. I know he will eventually get his way in this matter. So what is the point of my kicking up a fuss about when it occurs.’

‘Are you sure you are pregnant?’

‘Yes, I have had the test.’

I had adjusted myself to the fact that I might have to get pregnant myself and follow Milly to the entertainment centre on the coast. But I had not thought of doing this before the end of the year. But now Milly would have to leave before the end of the year. So what should I do myself? Fortunately Matt had told me to come and see him if anything happened. So I would go to him and see what he said. I explained all this to Milly.

‘Fortunately I think Matt is quite likes me.’ Milly replied. ‘So there is no way that he will allow you to re-neg on your duty to come and help me.’

Unfortunately Milly is very clever at getting people to like her – myself included.

I saw Matt at climbing on the following afternoon and I told him about Milly getting pregnant.

‘I have been thinking about that possibility.’ Matt replied. ‘During the holidays I adjusted my write up of a self-sufficient community to a form that could now be presented to our college board. And, in this form, I have included a proposal to start a small self-sufficient community that would be close to and be supported by the college. It is very fanciful thinking on my part with the college feeling so opposed to self-sufficiency. But given time the board might accept it. But such a place would be the perfect place for Milly to go and keep her close to us.’

So this was now the appropriate time for me to tell Matt all about the photograph. And also how Jenny had confirmed that the photo had been used to force Lance and Jenny’s hands to give up the self-sufficiency movement. He was very appreciative of what I had done.

‘You really have done incredibly well in solving what happened last year.’ Matt said. ‘Thanks enormously. And I have also been doing a bit on that score as well. Last year there was a girl in our climbing scene called Colette who I suspected of having an affair with Mort. She finished last year and she got a surprisingly good job with a law firm. But I also



suspected that this was with the aid of Mort and Dr Martin. I went to see her last week and she confirmed that the good job was the result of her collaboration with Mort and Dr Martin. She now hates her high-flier job with the law firm. She would far rather have obtained a down-to-earth job associated with green living and self-sufficiency. So she would now be prepared to testify that Mort and Dr Martin were in league against self-sufficiency and in favour of big business.

So I think the time has now come when we should act. We have a reasonable case to present to the board. Our case is not conclusive but it should be sufficiently good to force Stan, our dean, to investigate more carefully the affairs of Mort and Dr Martin. And this in turn will force Mort to tread far more carefully as regards you and Milly. It is just possible that they might even agree to start a self-sufficient community. And that would be perfect for Milly.'

'Milly will hate all the fuss that this will involve.' I replied.

'Milly won't have any say in the matter. Our case rests on: the questionable exam results; the pressure brought to bear on Lance and Jenny by the photo; Colette's evidence; and a complete practical self-sufficient plan by me. Milly, although she is the reason for our action, is not part of our evidence. Milly will just have to lump the investigation whether she likes it or not.'

'So what are you going to do now?'

'I would like to take the complete case to the dean before the weekend. But I would also like to persuade Mort to come with me to see the dean so that I will have the pleasure of seeing Mort's face when he himself has to face the music. Everything has gone Mort's way over the last six months. So it will be pleasant for me to see him himself face some awkward problems. In order to persuade him to come, I thought I would go to him and tell him about Colette, the photo and the questionable exam results. He could be involved in all these matters. So I should be able to persuade him to come along. So I will go and see him tomorrow.'

'So my great Arcturus is now going to show the world his true colours. My hero is now going to set our little college world on fire on a very touchy investigation indeed.'

'Sometimes a time does come when one does have to act. I think the time has come when I ought to act.'

We then arranged to meet again in our coffee lounge on the following afternoon so Matt could tell me how things went with Mort.

'So did Mort agree to accompany you to see our dean on Friday?' I asked of Matt when we met again on Thursday afternoon.

'Yes, he will come. He didn't like it at all but he did agree to come. So we will both go and see the dean at eleven o'clock on Friday.'

'I'm glad that you have avoided getting either Milly or myself involved in the whole investigation.'

'It is best that way. But you had better go and see Milly now and tell her what will happen.'

So I trotted off to see Milly. Fortunately she was in her room. As expected she was horrified at this turn of events. But she had to lump it.

'Matt could now be in mortal danger.' Milly finally said. 'Mort could be really dangerous when he thinks he is being cornered. What will Matt be doing this evening?'

'He always goes bouldering late on Thursday afternoons on those two blocks at the top of our climbing crag.' I replied.

‘That could be terribly dangerous. Those would be the idea circumstances for Mort to bump Matt off. He could knock Matt off the rocks and then toss his body over the main cliff. And people would think his death then was just a climbing accident. I think you had better follow him and warn him should Mort appear.’

‘I don’t really think Mort is like that. But I suppose I do need to go just in case.’

I hated having to do a thing like that. But it had to be me because I knew the cliff and where to go. And if nothing happened and Matt did see me then I could easily make up an excuse for being there.

We had half an hour before Matt was due to leave. We first went to check if Mort’s car was still there. It was. So that was a good sign because it meant Mort hadn’t gone already. Winter was now coming on now and the weather was cloudy and cold. I was rather hoping that it would rain and then so the whole outing would be off. But no such luck. And Matt is not the sort of person so be put off, if the weather is only slightly inclement. So finally Matt left and I followed about a hundred meters behind him.

When Matt got to the glade in front of the major cliff, he naturally followed the major track to the top of the crag behind the broken crag on the left. I couldn’t follow him there because he could see me from where he would be bouldering. So I went right at the glade and then followed that track Matt had shown me on that special night that we had had together a couple of weeks ago. I then cut upwards into the trees to arrive at the top a little behind the bouldering blocks. There I found a good position among some bushes where I could see what Matt was doing without being seen myself.

Matt is very methodical in everything he does. He was just finishing his warm-up stretching exercises when I arrived. He then slowly put on his climbing shoes and chalked up. He then did a few of the easy little climbs on the back of the boulders. He then moved round to the front of the boulders where I couldn’t see him. He would only do the relatively easy climbs there because, if he fell in an uncontrolled manner there, he could lose his balance on that grass ledge where we had sat together a fortnight ago. In this case he could fall over the main cliff with fatal consequences. So he wouldn’t be trying anything hard there. At least I hoped he wouldn’t. From there he came back and did the harder routes on the left hand block. This block wasn’t quite as big so the routes were less important. From there he went onto the final bit of his workout, which was to do the harder routes on the right hand block.

So the evening was progressing and still there was no sign of Mort. So all was well. But soon after that I heard what I thought could have been a car going up to the lookout and parking there. This wasn’t so good. In my position, I had a reasonable view of Matt but not a very good view of the track that came down from the lookout. I listened very carefully but couldn’t hear anything. Then suddenly Mort did appear and unfortunately at this stage he wasn’t very far away from Matt.

‘Matt, you are in danger.’ I cried to him. ‘Jump down immediately.’

But the stupid ass didn’t jump down and Mort kept advancing upon him. Mort had a baseball bat in his hands, which was raised for action. At the end of the bat a largish rock had been taped. Mort also paid no attention of me. A vision of utter disaster passed in front of my eyes. This vision was that Mort would kill Matt and then force me to help him to throw Matt’s body over the main cliff. And I would then be an accomplice to an appalling crime. And I am not the sort of person that can resist doing what Mort would order me to do. I am just not built that way.

But then a real whirlwind started from behind me. A figure appeared suddenly moving at great speed and hurled them selves violently at Mort. His bat and rock flew into the air and

Mort himself crashed heavily to the ground. My ultimate hero had come save me. Morganna LeFay herself had appeared in the nick of time to save a desperate situation. Thank heavens there are a few genuine heroes in this world. And I certainly aren't one of those.

Matt jumped down at the noise. 'What in the heavens is happening?' Matt cried.

'Only that Mort was about to murder you.' I replied. 'Fortunately Anna LeFay appeared at the last moment and managed to save you.'

'So I owe my life to you Anna.' Matt said. 'I rather enjoy my existence on this planet Anna so your intervention is very highly appreciated. But how did you know that there could be a problem?'

'Milly rang me.' Anna replied. 'Before you went on holiday last week, you had told Milly to contact me if she thought Ellie could be in danger. I am afraid, Ellie, that Milly didn't entirely trust you to be able to deal with this problem. So she rang me to act as a backup to you Ellie.'

'But why didn't you jump down when I called you Matt, you silly idiot?' I said.

'I thought that you meant the climb was dangerous. And I was in the midst of doing a very delicate balancy move, which I had never managed to get before. So I didn't pay any attention to you. However you will be pleased to know that I finally actually made the tricky move.'

'But how did Milly know to contact you Anna?' I asked.

'I know Mort very well and he is very dangerous.' Anna replied. 'I suspected that Mort's interest in you, Ellie, was because he thought that you were helping Matt in his self-sufficiency work. He wanted to remove you from the scene so that Matt would be isolated again and lose his self confidence. But I, in my quiet way, am a very strong supporter of self-sufficiency and so I wanted you to remain safe to help Matt with his work. So I went to Matt a couple of weeks ago and told him about the problem and that I would help if necessary. So Matt told Milly to contact me if there was a problem, particularly while he was away on holiday.'

'Well I can now see that I must now really thank my two wonderful guardian angels that have been looking after me.' So I gave both Anna and Matt a big hug.

All this time Mort had been lying on the ground nursing a sore elbow, which was bleeding. He had clearly fallen very heavily onto the rock after Anna had thrown him to the ground. The big evil villain of my story now appeared to be a very forlorn figure indeed.

'I suppose we now need to call the police about Mort.' I said.

'There may be a simpler and easier solution to this problem.' Anna replied. 'Even in prison, Mort could pose a problem to a community. The easiest thing is for me to marry him. I know him very well and I can easily deal with him. We can still keep the bat and rock with his fingerprints on them as evidence, just in case he has any intentions of getting up to his evil ways again.'

'You wouldn't mind?' Matt asked.

'No, it would be a pleasure.' Anna replied. 'Mort does have some good points. He is no fool and he probably has some rather useful genes as regards our future children. And I shall enjoy supervising him when he changes our children's nappies. There is no way that I shall allow him to use those disgraceful modern disposable nappies whose production is currently absorbing the resources of our world. I have very high green ideals myself and I will make sure that Mort now adheres to my true green principles of life. The first thing to go will be his flashy sports car. A homely life is what he needs. So are you Matt and Ellie then happy to give over Mort to my gentle and loving care?'

Matt and I naturally agreed. This would be the ideal solution in every way.

‘So Mort,’ Anna said addressing herself to Mort, ‘are you now prepared to take me, Morganna LeFay Richards, in holy matrimony, to be beholden only unto me and, from now on, to follow only the simple green principles of self-sufficiency? This will be in return for a some discession on our part about your homicidal intentions towards Matt this afternoon.’

‘I will naturally agree to anything you want.’ Mort humbly replied. ‘I do know when I am beaten and wrong. I have always genuinely liked you Anna and we are well suited for each other. To help things along, I think I should still accompany Matt to see our dean tomorrow. There I will correctly confess that this whole plot against the self-sufficiency movement was largely orchestrated by Dr Martin and myself. I will now support the self-sufficiency movement completely. But for the moment my elbow is horribly sore. Let us get back to the college and get it bandaged up as soon as possible. I really am in pain.’

So everything appeared to have worked out well. But we weren’t taking any chances. The four of us then walked back to the lookout where Mort’s car was parked. Matt and I removed Mort’s judo carryall from the boot and Anna then drove Mort back to college. Matt and I walked back to the crag to put the bat with its rock into the carryall. We took care not to smudge Mort’s fingerprints. Mort had planned his crime well. The rock had been taped to the end of the bat so that the intended injury to Matt’s head would appear to have been gained by a fall onto rock.

It was then getting dark. But Matt still had his climbing shoes on and he couldn’t resist the pleasure of showing off the new move he had worked out on the bouldering block. We had a fond kiss and then walked back to college in the dark. When we were back, Matt called at the dean’s unit. Fortunately Stan was in and asked us to come in. Matt explained all that had occurred. Naturally Stan was very taken aback by whole affair. But he accepted what happened and he was very friendly to us. He kept the carryall with bat and rock as evidence if it should be necessary. Finally we had to call in on Milly and tell her about all the momentous events of the day.

Next day Matt and I met Mort and Anna just before eleven o’clock in the coffee lounge. Matt and Mort then went to their important meeting with Stan the dean. This meeting would now include Dr Martin as well. This left me to chat with Anna over coffee.

‘So what did you and Mort do last night?’ I asked of Anna.

‘We did the correct thing as a newly betrothed couple. So we went to see his family to announce our happy engagement.’

‘So what did his family think about it all?’

‘They were delighted. They were even more delighted when I told them that our lives were now to be devoted to forming self-sufficient communities and having babies. His parents were glad that Mort would now have to forgo his connections in the city and entertainment centre. They had lost one son and didn’t want to loose another. Grandchildren was what his parents wanted.’

‘So when will you get married?’

‘I have no intention of letting Mort go back to his old wicked ways. So we slept together there last night without contraception. We will go on holiday now for a fortnight and during the holiday we will get married when convenient.’

‘You always have been my hero and now even more so. But how did you get to know Mort to begin with?’

‘Like many girls I had an affair with Mort during our first year. But I really got to know him when I worked at the entertainment centre during the holidays. My family are not well

off and I am proud to say that I supported myself here completely by working at the entertainment centre. I have left many satisfied clients there.'

Anna then asked about Matt and myself and I told her how I had helped him write up his work on self-sufficiency. She was pleased to realise that we now had a specific plan, which we could follow in building a community.

Finally Matt and Mort returned. Mort and Anna said goodbye and we wished them well on their marriage and honeymoon. We then parted with formal handshakes. I don't think I shall ever know what makes Mort to tick. Since then, I have avoided contact with Mort as much as possible. I couldn't cope with giving him a kiss.

That left me with Matt and of course I asked him how the big meeting went.

'With Mort on our side now, there was no problem at all. Dr Martin resigned from his position and will leave immediately. Mort also resigned from his position as organiser of the debating forum. Which means that Stan himself has to take charge of the debating forum this afternoon. Mort and Dr Martin then left. Stan then told me that Vivian would have to leave as well because she was implicated in the whole business as well. I was surprised about that. I found it hard to believe that Vivian could be all that involved. Besides, with Dr Martin and Vivian leaving, there would be no one left to give the economic courses. It didn't seem to make sense.

I then gave Stan our work on self-sufficiency. He was most impressed. He said he would copy it and circulate it to the board and staff. They will talk about the work at the assembly next Wednesday. So next Wednesday is going to be a big day for us.'

'My part in the work was very minor. Please don't get me too involved.'

'Your part was very important to me and I want that work to be recognised. But you won't need to do speak or do anything like that.'

'Thank heavens.'

I met Milly for lunch to tell her how our big meeting went. It was a relief to be able to see one's best friend whenever I wanted to now. I gave her all the news,

'I am now going to enjoy myself as I have never enjoyed myself in my life before.' Milly said. 'I shall go and see Vivian when she is free this evening and then I will have the most glorious gloat over her great downfall.'

She came back to my room later in the evening. This is Milly's account of how her meeting with Vivian went.

'I knocked on her door. No answer. But I knew she was in because I could just see a bit of light coming through the crack at the bottom of her door.

'It is your dear friend Milly come to comfort you in your trials.' I said. 'Please let me come in.'

'I am most definitely not at home.' Vivian replied in her very poshest English accent.

But I had remembered that Vivian had boasted that she never bothered to lock her door because she could deal with all possible visitors. So I just walked in before she had a chance to get up and lock the door against me. And here she was in her dressing gown, sitting in front of an electric radiator, eating a box of chocolates with a half empty bottle of wine beside her. The back window was open. She was being degenerate. She glared at me.

'As you no doubt have guessed, I have come to gloat over your downfall.' I said. 'But there is no fun in gloating over a slob. I am afraid I will have to take you in hand.' So I snatched the chocolates out of her hands before she could stop me. I trampled them heavily till they were thoroughly squashed and then put them in the rubbish. I took the bottle of wine

and emptied it down the sink. I was expecting a fight over the bottle but Vivian had given up. The spirit had left her. She lay back on her settee and just forlornly watched on. I turned the radiator off and closed the window together with the insulating panel. Finally, just to make sure, I went to the fridge and emptied the extra bottle of wine that was waiting there. Then I sat down on the settee next to her.

‘Remember just over a month ago,’ I said, ‘you took me, “your very dearest friend”, in hand to tell me about my psychological problems. Today I am going to have the privilege of doing the same for you. So I shall follow your excellent example at our previous meeting. So let us first hold hands.’ So refused but I grabbed them in any case. ‘Now you have to look in my eyes.’ She shut her eyes tightly in defiance. But I still managed to prised them open. She was in a beautifully weak state so it wasn’t all that difficult. I then took her hands again.

‘First I have some good news to give you.’ I continued. ‘Your evil plan for Mort to get me pregnant has in fact succeeded. Here, in front of you, you are beholding a very pregnant miss Milly Molly Mandy. You should rejoice. So let me hear you rejoice.’

‘You know very well Milly,’ she said, ‘that it is very hard to rejoice when you are about to be kicked out of the college you love in utter disgrace.’

‘That is just a minor point. Many people would say that getting pregnant in circumstances like mine was much worse than simply getting the sack from a job. But for the moment, you needn’t rejoice. But I haven’t finished yet. I still want to have a little boast to you. Before I came to see you a month ago, I already had my contingency plan in order. I knew what a cunning person I was up against. So I had already chosen Ellie as my very close friend. So, if you did develop an evil plan for my downfall, I would have had Ellie to stand by me. And, when I did know the plan, I had got Ellie to agree to come with me to the entertainment centre and have a baby with me. So I was safe in spite of all your cunning. The fact that Matt actually came to our rescue made no difference.’

‘I have to admit you are a clever Miss Milly Molly Mandy.’ Vivian replied.

‘And now for my psychological analysis of the great Miss Vivian Hopeland-Brown; – a woman, as you have said, for whom no man is good enough; - the brain behind the evil Mortimer Gonzales. But you are neither as evil nor as clever as you imagine you are. So, when I take in my arms in a few minutes time and clasp you to my breast, you will crack. Somewhere within your clever brain, there still remains a human soul. It will burst forth and it will want to be redeemed through tears. Your soul is sick of your proud evil ways. But, just to show there are no hard feelings on my part, I will give you a kiss first.’

So I gave her a kiss and then we had a tussle as I brought her head down to my bosom. But she was weak. When I finally got her head in place, she cracked. She wept all over me. My triumph was complete and I savoured the moment for quite a time.

‘Now, dry your tears.’ I continued. ‘I have had my gloat over your downfall. But the rest of the college are due to have gloat as well. It is not often that a person as beautiful, clever and exalted as yourself comes crashing to the ground. So I can’t let you hide away in your unit. The wages of sin must be seen by all. Our college is thirsty for entertainment. Now, get dressed and come and eat. I don’t suppose that you happen to have some sack cloth and ashes in your wardrobe?’

‘Not just at the moment. Alas I am afraid I didn’t come prepared for this possibility.’

‘Never mind, something like mission brown will do. But, wash yourself and put on some makeup. Even I can’t bear to watch your red and tear streaked face any more.’

So she washed and dressed in some suitable sombre clothes.

‘Now I have my pride.’ I said. ‘I don’t want to be seen walking next to someone as disgraceful as yourself. So I will walk a few yards behind you and check that you go to our

refectory and eat a standard healthy meal where everyone can see you and have a good gloat over your down fall.’

She smiled wanly and did what she was told. She played the part she had to play. She is not all that bad. The only trouble with my plan was that it was still much too early for the rest of the college to appreciate the full significance of Vivian’s disgrace.’

I am not at all sure that I understand what goes on in either Vivian’s or Milly’s weird brain boxes. I hope you do.

The big event coming up now was going to be our college assembly on Wednesday. The only significant change of my normal routine till then was my climbing on Sunday. Milly joined us and I had the pleasure of teaching her to climb. With her experience with acrobatics she took to it very easily. Also now, with Matt’s writing all finished and being circulated, I had no difficult self-sufficient problems to have to consider. So I had a fun, carefree day. I deserved it.

## 10. THE BIG ASSEMBLY

On Monday morning large notices appeared on all the various college notice boards. They announced that a very special assembly would occur on the following Wednesday. Everyone associated with the college must attend. The assembly would start this time at two o'clock and last for an hour. So the normal study period, which normally followed the assembly, would be abolished this week.

Everyone was terribly excited about what the meeting was going to be all about. Phoon was a bit worried that her part in finding out about the photograph might become public knowledge. She and Gerald were now very much an item and she didn't want that to be upset. I could assure her, correctly, that this would not be a problem. In fact the new situation would be good for her because Gerald would no longer be under Mort's thumb. So that would be good for her. As time passed, people began to suspect that the meeting would be about self-sufficiency and also people started to look at me with wondering eyes. In particular this applied to Liz and Rochelle and they asked me many leading questions. I pretended I knew nothing. But there really was a mounting buzz of excitement everywhere.

Then the big day dawned. Matt and I ate together in the refectory before the all-important meeting. Matt was going to speak there and he was terribly nervous about the matter. He wanted me around just to calm him down. I didn't mind calming him down. But I was jolly glad that I wasn't going to be involved myself. Finally we went to the main hall where we parted ways. He joined all the important people sitting on the stage. I joined Phoon, Liz, Rochelle and Milly standing at the back of the hall. The hall was so full it was hard to move. The noise was so intense one could hardly hear oneself think.

Finally Lance rose and in a thunderous voice called for silence. And everyone duly shut up. Lance had a real air of command. Stan Rabidowitz, the dean, then arose himself.

'Over the past year, I am afraid some appallingly bad mistakes have been made.' Stan said. 'And, because of this, Dr Martin has already resigned and left. Mortimer Gonzales has resigned from his position as convener of the debating forum and he will be away for the next fortnight. And Vivian Hopeland has resigned and will leave on Friday. But I, as the dean, must take some responsibility for these mistakes as well. So, with the approval of the board of governors, I am resigning from my position as dean and I will be replaced by our current social vice-principal, Dr Mary Chudleigh. Julie Weston will take over Dr Chudleigh's position and I will take over Dr Martin's position as academic vice-principal. So I will now sit down and let Mary Chudleigh take over. But before doing that, I want you to join me in applauding our new dean and our new social vice-principal.'

So we applauded. The applause was restrained because we were all very shocked about the dean stepping down. Stan Rabidowitz had been dean of the college since it was founded twelve years ago. And he had been an exceptionally good dean. So no wonder we were shocked. Not that there was anything wrong with Mary Chudleigh. I knew her well. She was very active in the Arthurian society and she was my lecturer in my "French Revolution" course. During this course, she gave one particular lecture on why we all need to study history. And this lecture made a big impression on me. It was partly because of this lecture that I lost any desire to study law and become a high-flier. In fact, when I started writing this story, I was going to give you a synopsis of this lecture. But I have had to include so much heavy stuff about self-sufficiency that I felt I couldn't include any more. So you are spared. So Mary is OK. But most people thought that Stan had been a fantastic dean and were sad to see him step down.



‘I have no desire at all to become dean.’ Mary said. ‘But Stan said I had to - and so I have. However I am a very good delegator. Now this whole affair is associated with the self-sufficiency movement and Stan was connected with this movement right from the start. I know very little about it. So I, as a good delegator, now command Stan to take the floor again and he can explain to you what exactly went wrong last year.’

So Stan arose again amid great applause.

‘You may remember,’ Stan said, ‘that there was a big meeting last year where I, supported by the board, instituted measures to stop student interest in self-sufficiency. That was an appalling mistake. The major reason for this measure was that student results in the relevant year appeared to be low. This was false. Dr Martin produced the results helped by Vivian Hopeland. They have both now admitted that their adjustments were biased and have now resigned. Also there was some personal wrong doing that Mortimer Gonzales was involved in. So that is why he has resigned. But it was my job as dean, to check Dr Martin’s result and so I was in error as well. So that is why I have stepped down a rung.’

But Mary Chudleigh rose suddenly to speak as this stage

‘It is horribly hard to check the scaling process. So Stan can be forgiven. I am the new dean and I certainly have no intention of checking the scaling process. Besides Stan, as our new academic vice principal, will now be in charge of the scaling and I would never have courage to tell him he was wrong. But, as I have said before, I am a great delegator. So I hereby nominate Dr Eilbeck to do the checking process. He has always had far too much spare time to pursue his own very personal interests. So arise Dr Eilbeck and accept your due applause from a lot of grateful students who will appreciate that you will now be busily engaged most of the time.’

So Alfie, red faced, arose to receive rapturous applause from all. Alfie’s flirtatious activities were well known. Then Stan continued.

‘I have now reconsidered our position on self-sufficiency and I am now entirely behind it. And so are the board and all our staff. But, more than that, we are now actually going to do something quite concrete. We are now in the process of buying twenty hectares of land behind our college. And this land should support a self-sufficient community of one hundred people. We will try to develop such a community and so all you students will have the option of learning how to become completely self-sufficient in food, water and energy.’

So this was fantastic. Everyone cheered madly.

‘But the person who has brought all this about is not me but Matt O’Sullivan. He is the person who has done all the work and he is the one that knows all about it. And he has written everything up in a substantial booklet and it is this booklet that the board and staff have based their decision on. This booklet will be given to all you students at the end of this assembly. In a few minutes, I will introduce him and he will tell you how everything shall work out in detail. But before doing that, Lance and Jenny are itching to speak about their roles in this matter.’

Lance and Jenny then arose and Lance spoke.

‘Jenny and I were among the original supporters of self-sufficiency and we still are totally committed to the concept. But last year, some nasty circumstances conspired against us. We had to give up self-sufficiency and take up the positions we now hold. But it was a personal matter and our lips must be sealed on this subject.’

But then the members of the water sports club, who were clustered around me, heckled and shouted things like.

‘Tell us more’. ‘Shame.’ ‘Fancy you and Jenny.’ ‘Ooh la-la.’ ‘What was she like.’ ‘But we do it all the time.’ ‘Whack-Oh.’ ‘Are you still at it?’ ‘Go on – have a good boast.’

I was horrified. Fancy my own friends saying things like that. But Jenny was cool. She smiled and slowly raised her hands.

‘We appreciate those wonderful sentiments that you, from the water sports club, are expressing to us.’ She said. ‘But, we are terribly sorry, we are not worthy of them. We are far too innocent to know about things like that. We simply would not know what to do. But it appears that you all do. But we do have to know thus things, if we are to join a self-sufficient community. So clearly we now must join your club and have you teach us about these things. Also, we heard about the wonders of your campfire a few weeks ago. We would love to hear about the heroics deeds done by people like Eskimo Nell and the Bastard King of England. We feel we are culturally deprived if we do not know; what ‘the seagulls who fly high in Mobile’ could do; - or the problems of ‘the Fukawee tribe who live in the tall grasslands of Africa’. It is all a great wonder to us.

But, we have a plan. Your great Lilo battle is probably the best single event that occurs at Corbenic. Everyone who goes to Corbenic should be able to join in the battle at least once in their life. So our idea is that there should be a Lilo battle for everyone who is leaving Corbenic at the end of the year. I would like to lead the guy’s team and Lance would like to lead the girl’s team. And this would be the perfect opportunity for you students to teach us about these matters of which we are so profoundly ignorant. You, the water sports, club can organise the event and teach the rest of us the necessary skills.

So what do you all think about it?’

And of course it was a simply fantastic idea. As Matt had said, all our students would simply love to take part in a great lilo battle at least once in their lives. And the thought of tossing oneself at either Lance or Jenny was simply gorgeous. They were such perfect people. Perhaps I might even be able get off with Lance. It was a delicious thought with his superb black body. So all us students were rapturous with support for the idea and expressed it loudly in many different ways.

Then Lance spoke again.

‘Since Jenny and I have taken over our positions as student representatives, we have lived excessively saintly lives. Last year this situation was unfortunately sort of forced upon us. We were caught in a terrible position and had no other choice. But now the situation has completely changed. We are now very happy to live a perfectly saintly life as regards being green and not degrading the world. But in other matters, we want to live life to the full and extract as much fun out of life as we can. So let the good times now begin to roll again.’

We cheered. Then Stan arose to speak again. But first he turned to Dr Mary.

‘I wish you, Mary Chudleigh, the best of luck in limiting any excessive animal spirits among the young in the coming years. I am glad it is your responsibility now and not mine. In a moment it will finally be Matt’s turn to speak. But, before that, I have something rather wonderful to tell you about him.

Matt’s dad and I were close friends at college many years ago. And we have continued to be friends and to share our secrets with each other ever since. And my most treasured secret is that Matt’s first name is actually Arcturus. Arcturus is the major star in the constellation of the Bear and this contains the North pole. And the North pole was the guiding light for ancient travellers. Now both Arthur and Arcturus are Latin words for the Bear. So Matt has been named Arcturus by his parents in the hope that he, like the legendary Arthur, shall become leader and a guiding light to our world. And so I believe he shall.

So, bearing this in mind, let us greet him in a manner worthy of this high calling. I have made up the following two lines to the tune of the first lines and last bar of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” -

*Arc, our herald angel sing,  
A great green world, you now will bring.*

- to greet him with.'

And so, after a bit of practise in getting the words and tune right, we greeted Arc our new hero with great enthusiasm. Mind you he didn't look much of a hero when he rose to speak. Among all those important people, he appeared to be a very insignificant figure indeed. He also looked terribly nervous.

'Thank you all, for your superb greeting.' Arc said. 'But I am still just a perfectly simple normal sort of person. So don't expect too much from me. I am no hero. But fortunately I don't need to be, because I am a very strict egalitarian. In the communities that I am proposing, there will be no great leaders. My communities will be genuine communities where all the responsibilities of leadership will be shared. So I bring you bad news – all you people are going to have to think very carefully about how an egalitarian community can successfully work. And don't kid yourselves. There are no good egalitarian communities in existence in our present world. It is not easy. But is also not hard. The reason that there are no good egalitarian societies is because our current leaders like their current positions of power and so they persuade their people not to think about these matters. But you people will have to think about these matters.

So have now brought you all down to a more sombre mode of thinking?'

We all quietly assented.

'Well rejoice,' he continued, 'you don't need to worry about these matters at the moment. I have written down how a community can run in an egalitarian manner in my booklet and you will all receive a copy. You need to study the booklet carefully – but you can take your time. It will take at least a year before a self-sufficient community has any hope of forming.

The major thing I want tell you all about is all the advantages of belonging to a self-sufficient community. But, before doing this, I need to talk about our degree of self-sufficiency. I want my community to be as self-sufficient as possible because then all members could live there if anything went wrong in their outside world. So I have made my community to be completely self-sufficient in food, water and energy and also to do most of the construction work itself. This is very self-sufficient and so it gives a lot of self-employment. But the form will be quite practical as I describe in my booklet.

The first advantage of this form is that we would live in a very green manner indeed. We, at college, live in what we imagine to be a green manner. But we forget about one important aspect of life. We import all the grain we use, and grain is the major item in both our own diets and also our animal's diets as well. And producing grain is expensive in both water and energy. So, if you take this into account, we aren't so green. But in my community will be completely self-sufficient in food, water and energy. And given this, we can work out how much land and other resources we will need to support our self-selves. And from this we can show that we will need, per person, less than a tenth of the land and resources that the rest of the world finds it needs to support itself. So we will be incredibly green. So members of my community will be able to boast that they are almost as green as it is possible to be in this little world of ours.

The next advantage might seem strange to you. We will have much more spare time than we do in the current world. You will need to check all my calculations in my book about this very carefully. But all the work associated with my community could in done in less than a day per week per person. So we will have a huge amount of spare time to do other things.

The next point is more obvious. We will live a very healthy lifestyle. Thus our work time will mostly be spent outside doing useful, practical jobs. And I have organised that all this work can be done on foot using small machines. And then we will have plenty of time left over for leisure, sport and other exercise. So we will have no excuse at all for getting unfit and overweight.

This environment will be absolutely perfect for having and bringing up children. Our community will have about a hundred people so there will be plenty of other children for our children to play with. Our community will be enclosed and self-contained and so our children won't be able to wander too far. Also there will be no vehicles or strangers in our community for us to worry about. So our children will be very safe and so they can be left to their own devices. But it will also be far better for their mums as well. The community will have a crèche where mums can gather and not feel isolated. There they can also learn from other mums. And, of course, they can continue to work in the community if they like. They can even work outside if they desire. So life will be far better for our mums.

Not only will our community be safe for our children, but it will also be safer for us as well. So we will no longer need to worry about world recessions or losing our job. We can simply retire to our community and look after ourselves there until circumstances change. Then we can return to external employment as we wish. Also it will be much safer as regards external diseases spreading.

One of the reasons that our self-sufficient movement was rejected last year was because the college thought it was very insular concept. And so the movement would interfere with college's major objective, which is to fight climate change. This is completely untrue. My communities are so efficient in their usage of land that we will be able to live quite close to all normal villages, towns and cities. Thus, if everyone lived in the same manner as we would, then our community would be less than ten minutes walk away from a large village centre; our village would only be about five kilometres away from a town centre; and our town would only be about fifty kilometres away from a large city centre (i.e. of more than million people). So with any reasonable public transportation system, our community members could easily get to their local village, town or city daily.

So our community members could continue to work and socialise in their local population centres very easily if they wished to. And in doing so, they would continue to spread the good light to the local people and persuade them to change from their wicked ways. In fact, our members could do a much better job now because they would be in a situation to demonstrate how the local populace ought to be living. But better still, we could now carry out this job with "neither fear nor favour of the crowd". Currently, if our boss doesn't like what we are saying, then we have to shut up. Similarly, if our friends ostracise us when we complain about their petrol guzzling cars, then it is best for us to keep quiet. But, if we live in a self-sufficient community, then these things won't matter. We can just return to the safety of our self-sufficient community and work or socialise there for a while. We can return back to the outside world when the circumstances there are more receptive.'

At this stage, Arc took a ten-minute break from the main stream of his talk to sort of chat with us all on masse. He asked us lots of questions about the benefits of living in a self-sufficient community. Arc took his job very seriously. He wanted to make sure we really were remembering everything he said. As you can see, Arc is no great orator. But he is keen – he keeps going. He patiently bludgeoned us into submission and so he forced us to remember what he was saying.

‘That is all I want to say about self-sufficiency in general for the moment.’ Arc said as he continued on. ‘The actual details of how everything works are best read in silence when you have time to think about everything very carefully. So what I want to talk about now is the nature of the course that Corbenic will run when they have acquired that land that lies behind us.

The actual course will run for three years and there are three quite clear-cut levels of activity that are appropriate for each year.

In the first year, the students will learn to do all the day-to-day tasks that must be done to keep the community running. I will quickly read through the list. You don’t need to pay much attention to them but it will give you an idea about the sort of mundane jobs that need to be learnt about.

- Preparing the land (ploughing), sowing, nurturing and harvesting our crops.
- Breeding, feeding, milking and slaughtering our animals.
- Preparing our produce for our consumption.
- Maintaining our accommodation (cleaning, painting and fixing).
- Driving and maintaining our own small buses and vehicles.
- Organising and running our own social activities.
- Looking after our pre-school children and also any infirm members of our community.
- Maintaining our PV and hot water panels.
- Maintaining our hot water system.
- Maintaining our dams and irrigation systems.
- Recycling our waste organic matter and excreta (by composting) and returning this material into the soil.
- Fixing all our appliances.
- Maintaining our communication facilities.
- Using our workshop facilities.

So at the end of the first year, everyone will have learnt to do all the normal tasks associated with the community. But our students will need to learn a lot more than this. The really hard task is how to build the community facilities to start with and then how to extend them when the community gets more members. This is what the students will learn to do in the second year. These tasks include:

- Building our accommodation units.
- Building and extending the community facilities buildings.
- Levelling the agricultural land and building up the soil quality.
- Building level, paved paths in our agricultural land so that we will have easy access when we use small hand-controlled carts and implements.
- Building our dams and irrigation systems.
- Building our paved water collection areas.
- Installing our PV and hot-water panels together with their associated electricity cables and pipelines.
- Installing our communication system.
- Learning how to purchase appliances and vehicles that we can service ourselves.

So, at the end of our second year, all the students should have learnt how to do all the physical tasks associated with the community. But there remains a yet more difficult task. This is how to run the whole community in an effective and yet egalitarian manner.

In my plan, there would be ten officers in charge of small departments and these officers would supervise the work done in their areas. These ten areas are:

- Agriculture,

- Building,
- Transport,
- Social Activities,
- Care and Education,
- Energy,
- Water,
- Recycling,
- Communications,
- Workshop.

Besides these ten officers, there would another five executives officers doing the normal general control functions. These are:

- President – chairman and external representative,
- Treasurer – finance and banking,
- Membership – hence also in charge of discipline,
- Secretary – internal affairs – thus chiefly in charge of employment,
- Analyst – takes on the function of the opposition i.e. criticism.

These fifteen officers would be elected yearly by the community members and they would thus run the community. So in my plan for the course, the third year students should be the officers of the community and hence actually run the whole show. There must also be regular general meeting, which all students must attend. All major decisions and elections would be made by the students at these meeting. Running the whole show will not be the easiest of tasks but, in a self-sufficient community, it is essential that all the genuine members are capable of making sensible decisions and taking on the officer functions.

Thus, when this whole course has been fully set up then, all the students will be doing all the work. And this work includes doing all the teaching. Thus the third year student officers will be teaching all the first and second year students how to do their jobs in their departments. So, when the whole course has been set up, it should be a very cheap course to run because it will require no lecturers.

The major work, involved in setting the system up initially, will be to set the exams for all the officer positions. And I believe in having a fully open system. This means that all students must know what sort of questions they might be required to answer in their examinations. Thus there need to be about ten times as many sample questions available to the students so they will know how to prepare for the exams. So this is a lot of work. But when this work has been done and everyone knows how everything should be done, then the course should look after itself. Students in the course would then be graded on a combination of:

- how well they functioned in the community,
- their exam results in the various officer exams that they took, and
- how well they functioned as an officer.

At the end of such a course, I think most of the students would be capable of, not only functioning in a self-sufficient community, but also capable of setting up and taking a leadership role in a new community. At least that is what I hope.’

Arc then took another ten minutes off while he grilled as all about what he had covered. He is a slave driver. This was a new side of him to me. He was just about sum up the whole thing when Lance mercifully intervened.

‘We have dutifully remembered everything you said.’ Lance said. ‘But have you remembered Arcturus, our hero, what we asked you to do?’

‘You surely didn’t ask me to do anything.’ Arc replied.

‘Yes, we did. Remember our greeting song. There we asked you “Arc, our herald Angel sing”. So you must fulfil your role as our hero and sing.’

‘But you know me. I only know one song. And it is hardly suitable for an occasion like this.’

‘No, it is a fantastic song and it will do for now. We all want to let our hair down.’

‘OK.’ Arc said. ‘You’ve asked for it.’ And loosened his tie, undid his trousers a bit and then walked to central stage. There was a new glint in his eye as he looked at us all.

‘Like all true good songs, this song has a chorus. And you, absolutely everyone here, must sing this chorus. And you must sing the chorus with real passion. So let us first learn it.’

And so we duly learnt it. It goes

**Yer losin’ ‘em,**

**Yer losin’ ‘em’**

**Hitch ‘em up before they fall,**

**Who’s are they? Are they yer father’s?**

**They can’t be yours at all.**

It wasn’t too difficult to learn. The tune comes from a reasonably well-known song called “The Holy City”. And in our song, the words “Yer losin’ ‘em” correspond to the word “Jerusalem” in the original song. It was rather fun. But Arc, as the tyrant he now was, insisted we all knew it very well to sing it with real gusto. We had to sing it many times. But it was fun.

And then the song started and Arc did his bit:

*‘I got an invite to a do, a really fancy ball,’*

Arc sang with a cockney whine and acted out the part as well. So he pinched a sheet of paper from one of the board members and pretended that this was his invitation. He then swaggered with pride.

*‘So I got myself a new dress suit, top hat, bow tie and all.’*

Arc grabbed the fancy hat that Alfie was wearing that went with the doctorate gown he had put on. Arc put it on and admired himself.

*‘The bloody pants was far too big, King Kong would fit them well,’*

Arc looked in dismay at how loose his trousers were.

*‘So I hitched ‘em up with a safety pin, my God I did look swell.’*

Arc grabbed a brooch that Jenny was wearing and used it to pin his trousers up.

*‘But as I walked out on the street, I heard I school boy yell . . .’*

Lance then did his bit and, while Arc was singing, he told us to sing the chorus in either a nasal or falsetto voice appropriate for a schoolboy.

**Yer losin’ ‘em, yer losin’ ‘em, . . .**

So we all duly belted out the chorus creating a perfectly hideous din. Arc encouraged us on.

Arc then carried on:

*‘I grabbed the schoolboy by the neck, and I wrenched off his tie.’*

Arc, most unceremoniously, wrenched off Stan’s tie.

*‘I tied the tie around me pants till they was high and dry.’*

Arc did this with Stan’s tie.

*‘I put me hands into me pockets, no ‘arm in makin’ sure,’*

Arc put his hands in his pockets and hitched his trousers a bit higher.

*‘But as I walked up to the hall, and shook hands at the door,’*

Arc, very differentially, shook hands with Mary Chudleigh.

*‘A mighty choir of voices rose from the ballroom . . .’*

Lance told us this time that we were now a mighty choir. So we must really raise the roof with the chorus.

**Yer losin’ ‘em, yer losin’ ‘em, . . .**

And we did. Arc also waved violently to encourage us on. I am sure the whole college has never acted before in such universal accord. We was fantastic !!!

At the end, Arc applauded us for our great effort and we in return applauded him with prolonged cheering and shouting. It was a great song and Arc had given us a great rendition. We forgave him for raving so long about self-sufficiency. But alas we still had a bit more of his raving to suffer. He is an absolute fanatic.

‘Soon this assembly will be over and each of you then will pick up my booklet on self-sufficiency.’ Arc said as he continued on. ‘But you must not expect that reading this work will be easy. Most people believe in rather simplistic concepts. Our current capitalist world has encouraged us to proceed forwards by telling us about “the wonders of economic growth” and that “we have never had it so good”. Similarly the socialist/communist movement had catch cries like “all for one and one for all” and “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”. In this work, there are no such easy slogans. You will have to think very carefully about whether the lifestyle I propose really is a better and healthier lifestyle than we have in our modern world. You will need to think even more carefully to decide if my financial system provides sufficient incentive to our members to do the necessary work and yet prevents some people becoming too rich while others become too poor. You will also have to decide if everything I have said is practical. These are not easy questions. You will have to think long and hard about problems such as these.

No one in the world at the moment thinks that it is possible to form practical self-sufficient communities that will give all the comfortable facilities that we expect in this modern world. But, if we can show them that we can, then we can really change the world. When we have learnt how to form them, then groups of us can go out and create communities throughout the country. And, from these communities, we can teach the world, not only how to avoid climate change, but also we can demonstrate a lifestyle that will give the people more freedom, independence and use far less of this world’s resources. Then, as more people learn how to do it, our movement will spread. It will be the new religion. So it will eventually change the world. If we try, we can do it. It is a truly inspiring goal. So let us have a go.’

And of course we all cheered wildly.

‘Now, before I finish, let me thank the one person who encouraged me to continue on and write all this work up. She was terribly important to me. Out you come Ellie. None of this would have occurred without her.’

So I walked out, received a big hug and also received a huge applause. I myself was now someone. Little me was now one of the elite. Not that I was sure that I wanted to be one of the elite.

The meeting then returned to its normal business and so all the various clubs and sociétés had their normal great raves about their past and future activities. During this time, I had an opportunity to talk to my water club friends about their distinctly “off” remarks about Lance and Jenny. But, as you might have guessed, it was all a put up job. Lance and Jenny wanted the college to think correctly that they had been forced to give up the self-sufficiency movement because of an affair that they had had between themselves. But naturally they didn’t want to actually say this publicly - particularly with Jenny’s mum now being the



college's social vice-principal. So they had asked the senior members in the club to say these things and then Jenny's form of denial would imply that it was actually true. So it was all a put up job. Our water sports club in return received a lot of great publicity.

## 11. ON TOP OF CLOGGIE

At the moment, I am sitting on top of Cloggie belaying Arc - but mostly I am just watching the world go by. Arc can look after himself. A little more than six months has gone by since that important assembly gathering, and now the end of my year at Corbenic is approaching. And so therefore is my story. Not the story of my life obviously I hope. That hopefully should go on for another fifty years or so. But at the end of this year, I shall be going back to live the normal life of the normal person I really am. But I have my fanciful dreams. Why shouldn't I? It is possible that the future aspirations of the world could be affected by my support of Arc over this past year. So, for this year, I fancy I might become someone rather special. So, for the rest of my normal life, I shall be watching to see if the rest of the world follows our sensible lead at Corbenic. Could we, led by our herald angel Arcturus, really become the Holy Grail to the rest of the world? A very pleasant thought for me to ponder over.

Our exams are all finished now. But life here is still quite busy. We still have our morning classes, but these are now devoted to class projects that we all contribute to. So everything in the morning is very relaxed. In the afternoons and evening, we are busy with our social activities. And these social activities will feature rather heavily in the individual testimonials that we will receive when we finish. So these activities are still very important.

There are still two big events coming up before we finish. In two weeks time, we are all looking forward our big lilo battle that Jenny and Lance are organising. So that will be fun.

And then a week later, our year finishes with a final great green ball. So I have been working at decorating my green vest. As in most things, I manage to organise other people to do most of the hard work. The water sports club already has an embroidered picture of a couple in a canoe. So naturally I have included that. I persuaded Alfie to take me back to the Snarler Parlour and there they had a picture of a German couple doing a slapping dance. So I was pleased to include that. As my group tutor, Julie Weston, is now the social vice-principal, I managed to persuade her to organise a picture of an Irish couple doing "Stacks of Barley". So that picture is rather special to me. Finally Arc, at my behest, has organised the climbing club to get an embroidered picture of Cloggie. And on this picture we can all add the climbs we has done – a line of green dots for top-roped climbs and a line of red crosses for the climbs we have lead. So I now have a well-decorated personal vest with very little work on my part. And I shall soon have the pleasure of showing this vest off to the rest of the world.

It is now fairly late on a Sunday afternoon. We are in early Summer now and the day has been fairly hot. So most of the days activities are now finishing. Thus, at the moment, the party from the city climbing gym, including Angus and Steve, are scrabbling up the track that leads to the top parking spot. I have just given them a good-bye wave. The major climbing party from College left before them and they are now wending there way back to college. I can see them just behind our college gardens. They left earlier so that they would have time to have for a shower and a rest before partaking in the evenings activities. I can just see Fiona gestulating at Percy. She never tires at telling him how hopeless he is at climbing. But she pays just enough attention to Percy to keep him interested and returning for more punishment.

On the lake, all the boats are returning to the boathouse and Choon is helping Gerald check that they are all in order. Unfortunately Choon still has an innate desire to work. Close to the boathouse are the jetty and our romantic creek. And these places remind me, of course, of my previous dangerous association with Mort. I tingle of horror runs down my backbone to think of what might of happened. But I think about these past activities many times and I

often don't feel the same way. I just love to think of what "it" might have been like with Mort. Mort features a lot in my fantasies and dreams. And my life at the centre would have been so different with Milly and babies. It might have been fun in a very different way.

Then, wonders of wonders, further away between the lake and the park associated with our crag, there stands our new emerging self-sufficiency community. I have a good but distant view of this. This development has taken place at a remarkably high speed. Thus there is already a hectare of land that is under crops and a further hectare is being prepared. There are also some agricultural buildings in operation sheltering a couple of cows and a few chooks and pigs. The centre's various community buildings are under construction. But, best of all, there is already a line of finished terrace houses with accommodation for about twenty people. And some people have already moved in. Several other terrace houses are also under construction at the moment and I can see some people still working on them at the moment.

The person responsible for all this fantastically fast development is actually Mort. Firstly, he has used all his family's extensive connections to supply the machinery and materials we need. So, when we need some more tiles or a bulldozer, they arrive the following day. But more than this, he has also had some very good ideas. Thus we have used a terrace house design that is similar to the terrace house design that our staff are currently using (which I have already described). But Mort has extended this form so that our units can be joined together (simply by opening some doors) so that any sized living accommodation can be formed. He did this by adding a central section and this contains the common or extensible facilities. And this section also gives all units access to the back garden. But the form is still very simple and so it is still very easy to construct. And, besides all this, he physically works very hard himself. Mind you this is just what Arc tells me. I am careful to avoid seeing Mort at all myself.

The first people to move into these building were naturally Anna and Mort themselves. But the next people to move in were Stan and Milly. Unfortunately, one of the disadvantages of this new terrace form is that the outside world cannot see to what extent two people are living as a couple or not. And so I don't know whether Stan and Milly are actually living as a couple. And Milly strongly denies that they are a couple at all. But they certainly do a hell of a lot of things together. Thus our self-sufficiency experiment has aroused a lot of interstate and international interest, and so we have a lot of visitors. Stan shows all these people around but Milly always accompanies him. There she always carries on about being pregnant, how noble she is and how she will be the first person to have a genuine self-sufficient baby. One would think she was the first person ever to have a baby. But in general, most of the visitors think she is gorgeous. And she also uses her pregnancy as an excuse to get everyone to do her work for her. Principally this is Stan. But she doesn't let pregnancy interfere with anything she really wants to do - like going climbing. And she still has plenty of time to see me.

Another couple that are living in the new community are Liz and Lance. Again we can't tell to what extent they are a couple. They certainly had an affair together and we all assume that Liz is pregnant with a nice black baby. And so we are all envious. But we also sort of disapprove of this sort of thing and we wonder if our new great green community should accept people who do this. But we don't know. I like Lance and Liz and so I am going to forget about the whole problem.

The people, who are currently living in our new self-sufficiency development, will act as some of the instructors and supervisors to the students when they arrive next year. But in three years time these people will need to move because then the third year students will want

to take their place. Fortunately, however, there are now plans to form a permanent self-sufficient community. Mort's parents would like to join such a community and they offered their farm as a possible site. Even Derek, Pauline, Brian and Sandi are talking of joining us. Thus land and finance will not be a problem. So there will soon be permanent self-sufficiency community, which we can all join.

But now two more climbers have emerged from the trees around the creek and they are heading up back to college. They are Milly and Vivian. And so, horrors of horrors, you can see Vivian didn't leave on the Friday after our big assembly as she was supposed to do.

On the Sunday after the big assembly, a very large group of climbers were gathered at our usual meeting spot in the coffee lounge. Because Arc was in favour now, anyone that had ever done any climbing before was keen to join up with the club again. And to this august company, a small innocuous figure slunk in and sat down quietly on the periphery of the group. She seemed a little bit like the shadowy evil Gollum of "Lord of the Rings". But one person didn't miss her entrance.

'Is this the ghost of Miss Vivian Hopeland-Brown,' Milly loudly asked, 'I see before my eyes?'

'It is more-or-less the real thing.' The ghost quietly replied.

'But you were supposed to leave on Friday.'

'By a bit of very diligent crawling to the powers that be,' Vivian replied, 'I'm still just hanging on by the skin of my teeth.'

'I know you used to be a good climber but you are now in high disgrace. You shouldn't be allowed to join us. But I have a soft heart. I will allow you to be my own personal "belay bunny".'

'I would be honoured to be your "belay bunny".'

And so, to my horror, she joined us. To begin with she simply belayed anyone that needed a belayer. But, after a while, she started to climb as well. And she was a very good climber. To begin with she kept a very low profile indeed – quite different from the glamorous girl she had previously been. But as the months passed, she returned to her old ways. So, when Vivian praised your belaying technique as "allowing your leader to appreciate the boldness of his situation", you would be wise to study what you were doing very carefully.

Also, as the club grew rapidly in size, Arc could no longer run the club single-handed as he had done before. The most important position in a climbing club is that of "Meets Secretary" as this person's job is to organise where the club will go each week and who will be in charge. And in practise, when the Meet-Sec can't get anyone else to be in charge, they usually take charge themselves. Now Milly offered to take on this position on the basis that she had a very efficient personal secretary called Vivian that could do all the work. So Milly got the job and Vivian did all the work. And she did it very well. I didn't like this at all, but I couldn't complain. Vivian did the job very well and even treated me personally as her superior. I couldn't make her out.

But I can hear Arc's heavy breathing now - so he hasn't far to go. So I had better finish my general musings about the world in general and get to the really important subject, which is about Arc and myself.

First I should tell you why I could afford to be so relaxed about belaying Arc. I wouldn't want you readers to go away with the impression that people can be slack about their belaying techniques. There are two ways of belaying a person from above. The keen way

is to belay from the cliff edge where you can see everything the second person is doing. This means you can give the second person some advice and also take or give extra rope as soon as you can see what they need. But the relaxed way is to sit back from the cliff edge and make yourself comfy and lean back against a suitable rock (which in my case is one of the isolated bouldering rocks on top). This means you can't give advice and you tend to be slow in giving and taking in rope. But Arc certainly doesn't need advice and he has a healthy tongue in his head to tell me what to do if I am tardy about taking in or feeding out the rope. So I chose the relaxed way. But my general musings have been periodically interrupted by slightly irate calls from Arc about the rope situation. But he is quite capable of looking after himself and waiting a few moments.

I was due to have a relaxed time because I have just finished leading my first ascent of Vember. This climb has always been my aim ever since I first watched Angus do it on my very first day at the crag. It has taken me a while. I have been working at the climb for the last six weeks during which I have taken a couple of genuine fliers. But today I finally led the climb clean. So I can now regard myself as a fully-fledged seasoned climber. And, as soon as I get home, I am going to take out my vest and stitch on it a line of little red crosses right in the middle of central part of the cliff, which till now has been bare. And, besides this, I will stitch on two blue lines going down on either side of my red crosses, which will each end in a blue cross. These blue lines will represent my two fliers of which I am excessively proud. This will give me the perfect opportunity to boast to absolutely everyone about my climbing achievements.

Arc belayed me for the climb and I am now giving him a top rope while he tries some incredibly hard variation route on the right of Vember. And he is taking forever. But I am glad about this slowness. I am due to have a serious discussion with him when he gets up. And I would like to put this discussion off for as long as possible. So I am happy to watch the world go by while he climbs.

This coming serious conversation also explains why we are still climbing when everyone else has gone home. When Arc gets to the top, we will be same situation as we were when we were "rethinking" about ourselves because we were in dire straights. We are not in dire straights now, but we do need to do some "rethinking". And I prefer to do this rethinking in a place where he will be reminded of the bond between us. So I organised Arc to do this climb with me at the end of the day when it would be a bit cooler.

Since the big assembly, the rest of the world has treated Arc and me as a couple and both of us have gone along with this situation. But the truth is that we have remained, as we have always been, just very good friends. But in one sense we do love each. So this is what our serious discussion is going to be about. And all such things are difficult.

Arc finally clattered over the top looking very sweaty indeed. He gave me a congratulatory kiss and then plonked himself down next to me exhausted. I first gave him time to rest and we just talked about the various details of the climbs. Then it was time for me to indulge in a bit of deep and meaningful.

'I have a few things I need to tell you Arcturus.' I said.

'I had a horrible feeling you were planning a discussion when you organised us to climb together at this time of day. I suppose we are due for a serious talk.'

'Good. You are prepared. That will make it easier for me.'

'I fear this discussion is going to be about Alfie.'

'Yes, that is right. I have continued to see Alfie most Monday nights. Just on a friendly basis. We had previously established a pleasant routine with each other and I saw no reason

why it should not continue. Also I'm afraid I have never strictly denied that I would spend the long holiday with him. I had never intended to spend the holiday with him. But now I find I would like to. It is so much fun taunting him with his sexual attraction for me. And we do actually like each other.

Going away with Alfie for a holiday will split us up for a while. But this is a good thing. You are the nicest guy I know and so eventually I might still like to marry you. But I would like to know other guys first. At present, we are treated as a couple and so this not possible. And the easiest way of telling the world we are not a couple is for me to go on holiday with Alfie. You do understand?

'Yes, I understand. We should both enjoy our freedom while we can. We don't want to be coupled together all our lives.'

What I wasn't telling Arc here was that Alfie has a lot more time for me. And he also listens to what I say. Arc is far too busy to spend too much time with me. He has continued to work on his booklet and now this is a full sized book. In it, he now defines what each of the ten departments and five executive offices should do in detail. And, after all this, he raves on how our communities could be combined together to form much larger green village-communities. And then he goes on to show how these village communities could be combined to form fully green independent town-states. So you see, our noble leader Arcturus always has his head in the clouds. But I can't tell him this. If I did, he will start raving on to me forever about his exotic ideas.

'Are you now going to join our self-sufficient community?' Arc asked. 'You still haven't signed up yet. Everyone is expecting you to.'

'I do want to join the community sometime, but not yet. For the moment I would feel constrained in such a place. I wouldn't know how to act with either you or Mort. I want to be a free agent for a year or two and then join the community when things have settled down.'

'Yes, you must do what you want to do. And I must get along without you.'

'You certainly don't need to be alone. Almost every girl in the college would love to be your partner. The only person I would object to is Vivian. I certainly don't trust her. But I'm glad to say that, in spite of the fact that you are both the major figures in our club, I have never even seen you climb together.'

'We have climbed together once. I think I should tell you about it. It will explain a lot.'

'This sounds ominous. But go ahead.'

'Remember four weeks ago, we had that really hot day and nearly everyone left early to cool down with a swim. Vivian and I, Arc, were left to clear up the gear.

'Would you like to go climbing?' I asked Vivian out of politeness. 'The cliff will be in the shade in a few moments and the heat needn't bother us.'

'I would actually love to.' Vivian replied. 'I am longing to have a go at Susbits, but I can't try it while anyone is watching. In my position, I can't afford to do anything that could be termed as "showing off" yet.'

'I will be watching with intense interest.'

'We have known each other for three years so you should know what I am like. So you don't count. But you will have to keep quiet about the matter.'

'I promise.'

So we finished putting all the gear away and then waited till the climb was properly in the shade. Vivian then led the climb superbly and I naturally followed. After I had congratulated her on her great lead, she said.

‘Yes I am quite proud of my effort as well. But now I want to rest and dream to myself. Do you mind leaving me? I will come down later.’

‘I will leave if you like. But I would like to rest and talk with you if possible. You know it is now almost two years since we have actually been alone together.’

‘It is not entirely by chance that we have not been together alone for two years. But now I am happy to be alone with you. But first, let me get really comfy.’

But she did more than just get comfortable. She made herself look very attractive. Since her fall from grace, Vivian had been careful not to look too beautiful. But now she did. She somehow fluffed up her hair by running her finger through it. The sun had now moved around so that it was now shining between the two blocks behind us. She moved slightly into the sun. She then had a good excuse for unbuttoning her blouse a bit and so let the sun fall on a lot of bare skin. She moved her legs to make sure I could appreciate their naked beauty. She had already taken off her climbing shoes so that her elegant toes could wiggle as they wished. She then smiled at me and said.

‘A girl should be allowed to make herself look attractive when her hero has deigned to talk to her.’

‘It is news to me that I am your hero.’ I replied.

‘You are every girl’s hero now and there is no reason why I should to be different from anyone else. But now, what would you like to talk about?’

‘I am just amazed how quickly you have returned to a very high standard of climbing. How did you do it?’

‘I have actually continued to climb all the time. I spent six weeks at Puket in Thailand last summer and that is a superb place to climb cheaply and easily. And during term time, I have quietly been going to the town gym quite regularly.’

‘But why didn’t you climb here?’

‘That is a very leading question. But everything you ask me will tend to lead the same way. Would you like to here the full reason for my evil deeds in the past?’

‘I absolutely refuse to believe that you are all that evil. But I would love to hear your full story if you don’t mind telling it to me.’

‘I would love to tell you my full story now. But I must warn you that the very act of your listening to my story will compromise you in a certain sense.’

‘It can’t be all that bad. Come on, spit it all out.’

‘OK, you have been warned. So here goes. Remember when we were climbing together in our first year, you were very keen on me, weren’t you?’

‘Yes, I was.’

‘Well I am not saying that I was actually keen on you. But I was very pleased for you to be keen on me. Furthermore I have my pride. There was no way that I was going to allow anyone to think that we were connected in any way. I was a teacher and three years older than you. I wasn’t going to have anyone accuse me of being a chicken snatcher. So that is why I went out with Alfie and so I could avoid any possible such accusation. When you would leave college everything would be a different. Also being a teacher, I had access to your home address and phone number. So I was already well prepared to chase you up.

But then came that horrible summer trip when that damn Stan Rabidowitz stuck his big nose into affairs that shouldn’t concern him. Just because he was keen on me. So there was no climbing on the trip – and I was stuck in teachers group and saw nothing of you at all. Then you took up with Jenny and also you became the college hero with your self-sufficiency movement. And my nose was very severely out of joint.

But I am a girl of spirit. I wasn't going to meekly go to a corner and there cry my eyes out. I am a girl of action. I knew that Mort was jealous of your prestige and that Dr Martin didn't like the way things were going. Self-sufficiency was bad for his big business friends. So I gathered us three together to form an evil alliance. But there was a lot more that I could do. I used Stan's enthusiasm for me and so I became his girl friend. And as such I could successfully bias him against your self-sufficiency movement. But I had to be very careful here. To make sure no one suspected the true state of affairs, I organised everything so that I appeared to be Mort's girlfriend.'

'So you were the main person behind my big downfall.'

'Yes, I am afraid that was precisely the case.' Vivian said, smiling at me.

'But Dr Martin was in charge of the marks.'

'Dr Martin was against the self-sufficiency movement but he wasn't at all keen on cooking the exam results. I had to do a put in lot of work to sting him into action. And even then I had to do most of the work myself.'

'What did you actually think about self-sufficiency yourself?'

'I'm afraid I never even thought about it. I was far too concerned about my own problems and bringing you to heel.'

'Did you actually go as far as sleeping with Stan?'

'As you know perfectly well that is not a question you are allowed to ask a girl. But I don't want you to think of me as being any better than I actually am. I went to all possible lengths to achieve my goals. Stan is actually a really nice guy. But I wouldn't risk sleeping with Mort. He is much too dangerous'

'How did Lance and Jenny fit in with all this?'

'That was just a bit of luck for us. And Mort kept tabs on everything that goes on at college so he organised everything about the photo. So I had nothing to do with that.'

'So what happened this year?'

'My first job this year was to create a new rambler's club so that our climbing and walking activities would be kept separate. I didn't want a repeat of what happened at the end of our first year. This also meant that you would lose a lot of members in the climbing club and so it would reduce your status. After that, I had intended to start climbing with the club again. But then Ellie appeared on the scene and stopped all that.'

'But how did you know that Ellie and I were friends? We were so very careful.'

'When I climbed discretely at the gym, my partner was normally Steve. And I used him to tell me everything that went on around here. And from his description of the first week's climbing here, it was obvious to me that you and Ellie were close friends of some form. So I delegated to Mort the task of attaching himself to Ellie and so to eventually remove her from the climbing scene. It is the sort of job that Mort loves doing and is very good at. Fortunately Ellie made the task easier by seeking him first. We guessed immediately that she was checking us out as her opposition. I was terribly pleased how everything worked out.'

'I'm afraid I thought Ellie was quite safe with Mort. I even encouraged her to proceed.'

'Mort's use of drugs is very subtle. The dosage he gave her was quite safe but it was enough to slightly impair her judgement. The drug gives a person slight high and the person tends to associate this high with the person they are with. So, if the circumstances are right, that drug tends to induce a person to fall in love. Mort tried it on me in our early days. Stan fortunately told me that that sort of thing could happen. Mort is very clever about such things. He also is very careful not too push things along too fast. He just lets nature take its course.'

'If you plan had succeeded what would finally have happened to Ellie?'



‘That was Mort’s concern. I was careful not to enquire too much about that matter at all. Our plan was that, towards the end of the year, I would start climbing here again. Ellie hopefully would climb less because Mort would take up a lot of her time. At the end of the year, she would work in the city with Mort. I then would become your friend and bring you to your senses about self-sufficiency. When Ellie found she was isolated in the city without friends, she would probably do the right thing and quietly exit from this world by overdosing on drugs. Mort is used to that sort of thing.’

‘Anyway your plan didn’t succeed. So what happened to you after I had put my case to Stan.’

‘On Friday afternoon, Mary Chudleigh gave me a ring and asked me to come to her office. Mary is a good friend of mine and is always pestering me to take a bigger role in the social life of the college. I always refuse because I don’t want to be tied down. But I am very careful in the matter and thank her for her interest and promise I will do more when I am a bit older and more established at the college. I assumed it was the same thing so it was with a lightsome I entered her room. But, as soon as I saw her terribly serious face, I knew something was up. She told me everything that had happened including the fact that she was now the acting dean. She felt that, although I was involved, I wasn’t so involved that I had to resign. However Stan felt I had to. But I said I must leave. Clearly neither Stan nor Dr Martin wanted to be too explicit about how I had twisted them around my little finger. So they protected me a bit. But I had to go. Then, of course, I burst into tears. Mary pleaded with me to stay for a week till they could get some replacement economics lecturers. Initially I refused. But she was very kind to me and I finally agreed. I’m terribly glad she did.

Then you know about Milly on Friday. That helped. On Saturday I got a copy of your work and spent all the weekend reading it, re-reading it and re-reading it again. During the following week, I was so busy giving all the economics courses I had very little time to think about these matters.

But I did go to the big assembly. I was hidden away at the back. Your talk and song made a big impression on me. I never realised that you could be like that. And you were completely correct. My opposition to self-sufficiency was utterly wrong. After all self-sufficiency is the opposite of globalism and this is what is causing our world’s current woes. I have always completely supported the college’s green principles and the ultimate in being green is to be self-sufficient. My anger had blinded me to the truth.

Then that evening I got terribly emotional. I alternated between thinking about these things and crying. Then, after the evening meal, I came to a decision. I got down on my knees and prayed to my innermost soul or God - which may or may not exist. And I prayed that I would, never, never, never give up. I loved this college. I loved what it stood for. I loved Milly, Mary and even dear old Stan. I’m not saying that I loved you Matt - but I certainly didn’t want to say goodbye to you. You don’t know it - but you are part of my life. And I now completely support self-sufficiency. And finally I loved climbing.

So I was going to be kicked out of college. But that needn’t be the end. I could still live in Minchinbury and go climbing on Wednesdays and Sundays. Steve at least would climb with me to begin with. Eventually you might talk to me and climb with me. And I could probably get a temporary job at the gym. I would learn absolutely everything about self-sufficiency and then keep trying and trying to join the new college self-sufficient community. People always eventually forget your previous misdeeds – particularly if you are young and pretty. So I would just never give up.

But first of all I had to make peace with Stan. I had twisted him around my little finger and caused his terrible disgrace. He had taken it very hard. So, on the following Thursday, I

went to see Stan and said I was sorry. I apologised profusely. We then chattered for quite while about my many misdeeds. After a long time, he finally forgave me. He does have a soft heart. He suggested then that I should continue at college giving the economics courses. I explained that eventually I wanted to have nothing more to do with economics. The subject tends to be associated with economic growth and globalism. Principally now I wanted to support the growth of our new self-sufficient community. And, if I was to continue teaching, it would be in something like materials science, which is more useful to people interested in self-sufficiency. But the college was having difficulty in getting replacement lecturers in economics. So I agreed to teach economics, but only till the end of the year.'

'So what you told Milly about "crawling to the powers that be" wasn't entirely true.'

'No. I didn't want the true state of affairs about me to be generally known.'

'But you were finally doing the right thing. So why not tell the truth?'

'You are forgetting about Ellie. Remember - I was trying to push her out of this little world of ours. She probably already has a vague feeling that this is what I was trying to do. And, if I spoke the truth, she would realise that this is exactly what I had been trying to do. This was an incredibly stupid thing for me to attempt to do. I have thought about the matter carefully, and it would never have worked. Thus suppose she had suicided through an overdose. You would probably guess what had happened and you would have ended up by absolutely hating me. Thank heavens I failed. But now I must be very careful not to publicly show any interest in you as all. Otherwise she may guess the truth.'

'I can now see your point. But I am glad you have now clearly repented of your past misdeeds.'

She smiled and took my hand in her hands. 'May I first kiss your hand as a sign that you Arcturus, as the leader of our self-sufficiency movement, are now my sovereign liege.'

'My hand is as your disposal for this excellent cause.'

And so she kissed my hand.

'Now I can give you the bad news. No, I don't repent of my evil past at all. My so-called misdeeds have resulted in you forming and writing all your great ideas up. And, as a result of this, a self-sufficient community is now being formed. What more could you want. Admittedly my actions have caused us both a good bit of suffering. But, both of us have also been properly ennobled by this great process. Would you have me repent of such a perfect outcome? I like to think I am the same Vivian that I've always been.'

'OK. Have it your own way. But lets talk about a different subject. Our big summer trip is coming up fairly soon now. Who will be your partner and what climbs have you got planned?'

'That is a question I have thinking about often for well over two years. You will be glad to hear you will be my main partner. "Grand Central Gully" is the main climb I have set my heart at doing with you. It is precisely the sort of climb that both of us would normally avoid like the plague. The climb was put up before the Second World War when all climbers had was hemp rope. And they had practically no protection at all. So the climb should be easy. But I know it won't be. Furthermore the climb goes on for absolutely ever. The climb will involve a lot of hardship, physical labour, danger and suffering - for no glory at all. But we will be doing this climb together and alone. And it is the sort of climb that will bind us together. It is the sort of place where I can finally unleash all the wicked feelings for you that I have been bottling up over the last two or three years.'

'But we can't do that - even if I was to agreed to it. As you have just said - Ellie would then immediately suspect your past intentions.'

‘Fortunately I don’t think there will be a problem about Ellie. I know Alfie very well and he lives in the unit beneath me. Through Mort, I know that Ellie and Alfie used to meet every Monday night. And my observations tell me that this association has continued ever since. Also, Alfie hasn’t been flirting with any other girls for the past year. And this means he must be taking Ellie very seriously. And besides this, Ellie hasn’t signed up yet for our summer climbing trip. So I don’t think Ellie will be coming. And, as we two climb at the same standard, it is natural we will climb together a lot.

And besides this, while we have been talking, I have been watching your eyes travel over my body - particularly the bare bits. You are still very keen on me. You can’t help yourself. And so sometime, when we are alone together, I intend move very close to you indeed. As close as any two people can get together. And I don’t think you will be capable of pushing me away. And then, as the bible says, we two shall be come one.

But now we have a problem. When I was thinking about this situation in our first year, I was only thinking of us climbing together. But now, as a true convert to self-sufficiency, I see this oneness must result in me having children. But children would interfere with my climbing. So I must suffer while you could continue to climb as much as you like.

But, fortunately, I believe I can deal with this problem. I, like Mort, I have a sadistic streak in me and I believe that it is good for all people to suffer. And so, in the same way that I have made you suffer in previous times, I will continue to make you suffer in the future. And, as you know full well, I have the skills you need to do this. So, Arcturus my hero, your future life with me will not be a bed of roses.

But I have told you enough for the time being. For the moment, we still cannot be seen together. You had better push off now and leave me alone to contemplate my future pleasures with you. I can put all the climbing gear away. So leave it with me.’

Vivian then took my hand again and gave it a final kiss.

‘Farewell, my sovereign liege.’ She said. ‘We will meet again properly in “Grand Central Gully” and then your sufferings will begin again. You can say farewell to your dreams of a pleasant comfortable life with Ellie.’

And I made my way back to college to ponder over all that she had told me.’

‘Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn.’ I, Ellie, said in frustration. ‘So my going off is going to leave you at the mercy of that poisonous bitch Vivian. You should have told me about this possibility earlier.’

‘I couldn’t.’ Arc replied. ‘You had to make your own decision about Alfie independent of me. Vivian is my problem. Besides she is not all that bad. She isn’t really a poisonous bitch.’

‘You are biased in her favour and I am biased against her. But what do you think about her?’

‘I am worried. I admit I am attracted to her. But she wasn’t entirely joking when she said that she had a sadistic streak in her.’

I thought over the whole matter carefully for a while.

‘I have just come to a very far-reaching decision.’ I finally said. ‘On my holiday with Alfie, I will get “accidentally” pregnant and so we will get married. Then we can move into our new self-sufficient community just like Milly and the others. You and Vivian will presumably join as well. But Alfie and I should beat you to it. There we will both be married to different people, but at least we will live close to each other in the same community. Also you and I still have that special bond between us that we made here just over six months ago. We agreed to be close friends irrespective of anyone. There I can make sure that Vivian never

gets the chance to get her claws into you too much. I will limit her so called “oneness” with you.’

‘Thanks. That will be the best solution. And then we can always stay as real friends.’

‘And now, since we are due to be separated from each other in the near future, I will make the most of our partnership while I can. I demand to do both “Stalks of Barley” and “Waves of Tory” with you at our final green ball.’

‘That will be good. Do you wish to do “Waves of Tory” now with the correct Irish stepping now.’

‘Yes, but not during the waves. Plain walking is better in the waves if we wish to swing our hips in time with together and separate with that nice little nudge of our bums. Just as we did when we first met.’

And so we went back to college hand-in-hand. I was now determined to make the most of my friendship with Arc while the going was good. Mind you, when we got back, I immediately called in on Alfie. I still had the key of his unit so I could get in whenever I wanted to. I had to make sure that Alfie still continued to be fully committed to me. I wasn’t going to take any risks on that score.

This is my first attempt at writing a story. The standard advice they give you at this stage is to circulate your story to your friends and see what they think about it. And then, in perhaps a year's time, you should return to the story and adjust it as you see fit. I think that this is excellent advice and this is what I am now doing.

In the intervening year, I shall try to write another story about the climbing scene around Sydney. This might be easier because I know the subject very well indeed. {Since breaking my back climbing eight years ago, my chief delight in life has been to dream up new stories. So I have quite a fund of stories that I can try to write. My writing skills might not be real good - but my imagination is really hot stuff.}

Of course, if any of you readers were to tell me you actually liked this story as it is, then there would be no holding me back. I would rush off to publisher immediately (or even try to self-publish it myself). So, if you like it and think some of your friends might like it as well, tell me. I would love to put this work before the world. But this is probably just a fanciful dream on my part.

There is also another possibility. This is that you might like to try to help me or to try to do something yourself. If you look at current novels, then you find that the heroes of most stories have large houses, have powerful cars, travel extensively overseas and in general have expensive lifestyles. And the readers of such novels are then stimulated to follow suit. The world needs a lot of "green" novels so that people can instead be stimulated to live in a better sustainable lifestyle. And this is what I am trying to do. But I'm not very good at it. And there are millions of writers who could do it a hell of a lot better than I can. You could be one of those. What I want to say here then is that I would love you to help me write this story a bit better. You could be a co-author if you like. Otherwise you can use anything you like in this story and then write your own story under your own name. Our world needs as many stories as it can get about "green living" to give a contrast to the bad and globalistic tendencies of our present world. So, if you believe in sustainable living, don't just criticise my attempt. Have a go yourself.

Thus anyone is completely free to use anything I have written and use it just as they like. Copyright does not apply to any of my work. I'll even give you a USB stick with my text on it if you like.

This is the first story I wrote. Here I have updated the story just a little.

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1/7/2010

A central theme of this story is that my hero is trying to write a book about how to form a self-sufficient community. This, of course, is fiction. But there is a real book that I have written that does precisely this. The front cover of this book is shown on my following back cover and the contents of the work are shown on the page opposite to this. You can see from these contents that this book is very detailed and that a wide range of relevant issues have been considered very carefully.

It is unfortunate that I have made my hero do what I have in fact done myself. Thus I am making myself out to be a hero - when I certainly am not. But this was hard to avoid. The story requires that the hero is very dedicated to this cause. And I personally found writing the book to be quite hard. I did feel a bit of a hero when I finally finished the book myself. So I hope you appreciate my problem.

Sometime I will try to get this "Green Living" book formally published. But, for the moment, I have printed plenty of copies and anyone can have a copy that wants one. Now I have finished writing this story, I need to return to this book and do some further revising on it. So, if you want a copy over the next couple of months, I can only give you an out-of-date version. Of course, one of the main purposes of writing this story was to try to get some people interested in reading this "Green Living" book of mine.

Bryden 6/8/08

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## GREEN LIVING

**This work shows how to form green communities that are completely self-sufficient in food, water and energy. Per person, these communities would use less than one tenth of the world’s resources that we use at the moment. They would also cause no pollution at all and so be genuinely carbon neutral.**

by

**Dr Bryden Allen**

## GREEN LIVING