

## THE DO IT YOURSELF PROJECT

### Saint George

This story occurs in the very late 1950s and continues into the early 1960s. The location is close to the area where Marsha and Harriet (characters from my 1960s novel) reside. Some of the incidents described did occur, but a few years earlier. Names and most of the dialogue have been changed. That means that it has been fictionalized sufficiently to hide any resemblance to anyone living or dead. While this story stands on its own, some of the occurrences MAY have had an influence on Marsha's thoughts on teens growing up.

**M**ary and Jeff were two good kids from good families. Their parents had moved to the suburbs from the city to experience the American dream. Jeff was a senior at the local public high school, Mary a junior at the area's parochial high school. Mary was an Honor student, always achieving excellent grades and was always respectful of her parents and teachers. Jeff's grades were not in the stratosphere like Mary's however, they were definitely well above average. He lettered in both Track and Cross Country. Mary and Jeff became a couple a year earlier when mutual friends introduced them. It seems that they had the same surname while not being related. For the sake of simplicity let's say that their last name was 'Smith', not actually but you get the gist. The name was fairly common. Their friends thought that if they got together they could pass themselves as married already if in 'name only'. Much to the delight of their friends they did hit it off, and after several dates began to 'go steady'. Both sets of parents had become familiar with their offsprings' 'steady' and approved of their choice.

However both sets of parents constantly reminded them that they were just dating and not married. They spent considerable effort in monitoring their child's and 'steady's' activities.

While neither set of parents was oppressive, they constantly reminded the kids that if they weren't careful, emotions could get out of hand. Should this ever happen they would have to reconsider the relationship. They were too young to understand yet. If they were to go too far, they would ruin their reputation and thus leave the children sullied. Besides which, it would reflect poorly on their parents. The parents 'knew' that the youngsters would 'control' themselves. A chaste goodnight kiss at the end of an evening was acceptable as was holding hands in public. However, anything more was reserved for after the marriage vows.

Even though Jeff always brought Mary home in time for her curfew, Mary's parents were especially vigilant. When Jeff would walk Mary to her front door there was always a subtle hint that someone was watching. The movement of a curtain or the flickering of the porch light were reminders.

One Sunday evening in the spring things came to a head. The couple had remained in

Jeff's '52 Chevy too long. Mary's dog came scratching at the windows, followed quickly by Mary's dad. The pair had finally progressed to first base when they were interrupted. The situation was becoming intolerable for the young lovers.

Jeff quickly opened his door and in an attempt to distract Mary's dad, began roughhousing with Mary's dog. Jeff was a 'dog person'. He had become friends with Mary's 'pup', if you are willing to call a 90 lb. Shepard/Husky, a pup. The dog, Smokey, was making mock attempts to attack Jeff while keeping an eye on Mary. At Mary's soft spoken command Smokey rolled over and presented his belly to Jeff.

Jeff spoke quietly to the animal as he scratched its unprotected underside, "I love her as much as you do. Together we'll be her protectors."

At the sound of Mary's dad approaching, Smokey sprang to this feet and assumed an defiant position between Mary's dad and the errant couple. Mary's dad did not intend to cause a confrontation. He stopped well back and said, "Mary, its time to come in: Jeff thanks for being a gentleman."

Jeff looked to his girlfriend's father and said respectfully, "We were just coming in, sir."

Mary's dad turned toward the house and as he walked, he motioned for the dog to follow. Smokey, however, didn't, he moved forward several feet then assumed the classic guard position.

Mary spent the time to smooth her blouse and make sure all her buttons were in order. Jeff went to Mary's side of the car and opened the door. Mary got out and took Jeff's hand as they approached her parent's front door. They stopped on the porch under the light.

Mary looked Jeff in the eye and said, "I loved the way you were touching me! I want to feel your hands on every square inch of me."

Jeff groaned, "Your and my parents will kill me. I want to squeeze my self into you, from my head to my toes."

"Luv, I want you to do that and more. But I don't want to become a woman in the back seat of a car. Next week could we watch the submarine races instead of going to the movies? Unless my parents ground me for tonight. I want to be yours for everything but a home run. And that last part will come real soon."

They kissed in a way that would only slightly offend her spying parents. Jeff pulled back and said that he would try to find a nice place to stop on Friday night. He was concerned with what had happened to several couples at his school. He told Mary that as much as he wanted to make her a complete woman, he was willing wait as long as she needed.

Jeff then made the most sincere statement of his young life, "Mary, I love you, even more than that, I trust you with my soul." Screwing up his courage he continued, "Please, tell me that you feel the same way."

Mary almost began to make a lighthearted comment until she saw the abject look of fear on Jeff while he waited for her response.

"Jeff, Luv, I am yours whenever you want. I love you, my body and soul is yours." She then punctuated the reply with a toe curling kiss.

Mary's father completely unaware of what had just transpired turned the light off and on again.

Mary and Jeff spoke at the same time, "Friday!"

When Mary opened the front door, she confronted her father. "Dad I respect you. It's time that you grant me the same."

Without waiting for a reply she walked toward her room. Her dad somewhat surprised by her comment, started to follow, an angry retort on his lips. He was stopped by Smokey blocking his path.

Somewhere deep in his primordial brain Mary's dad realized that Smokey had transferred his allegiance from him to his daughter's partner. *Daughter's partner? Where did that thought come from?*

Smokey did not have to think about it, the way his mistress had spoken to him and the way his new master had treated him he knew what his responsibilities were. He liked the older human in front of him. It troubled him somewhat that he had to confront this human; however, his duties were clear. All that prevented him from bearing his teeth was his mistress's old pack leader turning and walking in the opposite direction.

Alone in her bedroom Mary thought about what had transpired on the porch earlier. She knew what she meant and she believed she knew what Jeff meant. She needed reassurance. Mary went to the phone in the hall and dialed Jeff's home. She knew the hour but her need was greater than her fear of violating the taboo of calling too late.

Jeff no sooner had come into his parents home when the phone rang. His heart sang when he picked up the receiver and heard the words, "Hello, is Jeff there?" spoken by his mate.

"It's me, lover. Is something wrong.?"

Mary began crying quietly, "Jeff, I meant every word I said."

"Me, too", whispered Jeff.

"Luv, did you ask me to marry you tonight? Because if you did the answer is YES! A thousand times yes!"

Jeff himself was almost in tears at this point. "Mary I not only asked you, I made a vow to you tonight."

"Luv, I was afraid that you didn't mean it that way." Swallowing her tears, Mary continued, "mine were also a vow to you."

Jeff's next words surprised and pleased Mary, "Wife of mine, may I drive you to school tomorrow?"

Her spirits lifted, Mary said, "It is only proper for my husband to take me where I need to go."

They then reassured each other of their love and trust. With the connection broken, Mary went to her room got into bed and promptly fell asleep. Jeff went to his room. There he dug deep in his shirt drawer. He finally found what he had been seeking. He had not remembered the small velvet pouch earlier on Mary's porch. But when Mary had addressed him as 'my husband' long forgotten memories flooded back. Jeff opened the small sack and removed the contents. Two rings that were once his grandmother's. An engagement ring with a blood red ruby as its center piece. The main stone was flanked by small diamonds on each side. The other ring was a simple gold wedding band with his grandparents initials engraved on the inside. The rings and pouch were a bequest to him on his grandmother's passing. As was the tradition in the family, they were passed to him for safekeeping, to be given to his future wife. Tomorrow he would complete his task when he put the rings on his 'bride's' finger.

Jeff stripped down to his underwear and climbed into his bed. He set his alarm back an hour to give himself the time to drive Mary to school. He took with him the velvet pouch. He slept that night with his bride's treasure clutched in his hand.

In the morning when he awoke he discovered that he had made quite a mess of his underwear. He remembered dreams of the passionate mingling of naked bodies and quiet moments walking with his lover.

Jeff hurried to the bathroom. There he showered, then shaved his face for the second time in as many days. Normally he would shave about once a week, usually Friday or Saturday evening just before he went to pick up Mary. Upon returning to his room he dressed not in his usual jeans and polo shirt opting instead for a dress white shirt and his best pair of pants. He did however skip the tie. Before going down to breakfast he checked one more time that the velvet pouch was safely in his pocket.

His early appearance at the kitchen table, and the way he was dressed alerted his Mother that something was up.

"Jeff, what type of mischief are you up today?" asked his mom.

Tired of his mothers constant surveillance, Jeff stretched the truth only a little when he told his mother that he had a job interview at the big USDA building after school. He had already talked to some people there. His biology teacher had made the introductions. Jeff had done extremely well in his class and Jeff had made known his interest in the field. The teacher had once worked at the facility and knew that they were in need of bright, hardworking people. Jeff could fill a technician job in one of the labs. The teacher found it a rewarding task to help his best student find employment in his field. Unbeknownst to Jeff his former teacher had been told that a job offer was being held for Jeff. All it lacked was Jeff's successful graduation.

The little white lie satisfied his mother's curiosity. However, when Jeff asked politely if he could have a cup of coffee this morning, he was told rather strongly, that beverage was reserved for adults. *Oh and by the way don't forget to discuss the job with his father, his father would 'help' him make such an important decision.* Jeff's resentment level rose exponentially. He had made the most important commitment of a lifetime last night and his mother was upset about not discussing a *JOB* with his dad? Why couldn't he talk with his parents? He was worn out being talked at, not with. He put his hand on the small lump that the velvet pouch made in his pocket and drew strength from it. He ate his breakfast in silence, ignoring his younger brothers and sister. His father had left for work earlier.

Jeff took his dishes to the sink, rinsed them and placed them in his parents new dishwasher. He then left his former home with a simple statement, "I won't be here for dinner."

At Mary's house things were more troubled. Last night after Mary had phoned Jeff her parents had argued. Not that they had disagreements over the inappropriateness of the young couples behavior. Mary's mother maintained that her daughter was a baby, ill suited to be exposed to '*THAT*' aspect of life or to maintain herself against the onslaught of male aggression. Her father's concern was her defiance of his god given authority; furthermore, no self-respecting girl would put herself in a situation where her virtue was in jeopardy. What the parents missed was that God, or Nature if you prefer, had been preparing their daughter's body and emotions for this event for the past five years.

Mary's getting ready for school was simpler than most of her contemporaries. Her school required that she wear a uniform. Hers consisted of a white long sleeved blouse and a maroon jumper. Thus, Mary was spared the effort of deciding what to wear. Mary came to the breakfast table in a joyful mood. In her mind, the minor incident with her father was overshadowed by her feelings for Jeff.

It was her mother who shattered the mood, "Just what foul things were you two up to last night in that car?" Then without a pause to let her daughter answer, continued, "Do you think your father and I were born yesterday? You are still a little girl. You need to

preserve your innocence."

Her father then continued as soon as his wife stopped, "While I like your Jeff he is still a boy. And I was once one myself. Let me tell you he has only one thing on his mind. If you give him what he is demanding, he will drop you like a hot potato. On top of which your body is not mature enough to withstand that type of assault. And one more thing while we are talking, you will not sass me again like you did last night or I will turn you over my knee and tan your hide!"

Mary was about to say something in Jeff's defense; however, she was stopped by her mother's command, "No back talk, eat your breakfast".

Not willing to let well enough alone, her father continued, "Considering this is a first offense, and I do like your boyfriend, he at least was respectful last night, you may continue to see him. But when he brings you home he must immediately bring you to the door. You have one minute to say your good nights, either your mother or I will be watching. He may kiss you. Your arms are to remain at your sides and you must keep your lips closed."

Mary's emotions were in a turmoil. The insults to her she could handle. But the things that were being implied about her mate were on the very edge of her ability to restrain from answering. What finally tipped the scale in favor of silence was her own self-respect. She would not reduce herself to a quivering child. Mary picked up a piece of dry toast and proceeded to eat it in silence.

Smokey, was confused at the antics of his humans. His new pack leader was missing. His mistress was happy earlier but now seemed upset. His old pack leader was making unpleasant sounds. Smokey had almost intervened once when the old one made some especially ugly sounds at his mistress. Smokey had refrained from acting. The old leader did not realize that a move in the direction of his daughter would have resulted in his throat being ripped open.

Jeff arrived at Mary's residence, parked his car and approached her door. He always gave his love the courtesy of coming to her door and escorting her to the car. It was a little thing, but it was a way of demonstrating that he realized that she was not at his beck and call.

At the sound of Jeff's knock, Mary stood, picked up her books, then said over her shoulder, "Jeff is taking me to school this morning."

It was a simple declarative sentence - a statement of fact, with no indication of a request for permission.

With Mary at his side Jeff drove off in the direction of Mary's school. The route took him past the supermarket where he had been working. He even had been able to save some money. Entering the lot, he stopped the car. Turning to Mary, he brought out the

velvet pouch and clumsily removed the contents. Addressing her he said, "Mary, these rings were once my grandmother's, and if you haven't changed your mind, will you wear one as a token of our love?" Jeff had been rehearsing this speech since early this morning.

"Jeff, my love, I will not only wear one but both if you will permit it."

Jeff managed to get first the plain gold wedding band on Mary's left ring finger. He hesitated with his fingers holding the ring. Aren't I supposed to say something when I am doing this?"

"Jeff, only say it, if you mean it for real. When I said yes, I meant it is forever, no reservations."

Jeff was stung by Mary's words. The hurt of her question readily apparent on his features. In a very troubled voice he said, "Mary! Give me the words first, then we can make up!"

Mary began with "Jeff don't let a nervous bride spoil this moment," she then prompted Jeff with the phrase that every girl dreams of from the fourth grade on. "Repeat after me; With this ring I do thee wed."

The gods who inspire poets must have been whispering in Jeff's ear at the moment. "Mary, I love and cherish you above all others. This ring is but a small thing before what I feel for you. Wear it to keep me close to your heart. **For with this ring I do thee wed for all eternity and with no reservations.**"

"Jeff, this ring is now part of me, like my husband, who just said the most wondrous thing I have ever heard."

Mary began to cry tears of happiness, "Love, *sniff*, I never doubted you, my fear, *sniff*, was that I was not worthy of such, *sniff*, emotion. You have never, *sniff*, pressured me to 'prove my love'. Now I want to experience our love completely."

"Mary, I have waited, and will continue to wait for you to be ready. I have been afraid to ask. I was scared that you would be offended that I desired your body. We have talked of how many little feet we want in a family. Studying biology has indicated to me that here is a very enjoyable way of starting them. And Mary I am dying to start. I just think we have to practice a lot so that we can be sure we are doing it right."

The couple would have liked to continue down that path right then and there but reality reared its ugly head in the form of the manager of the store pulling into the lot.

"My love, if we don't hurry I will be getting you to school late." said Jeff.

"Luv, hurry up and put the other ring on my finger." sniffled Mary. "I want to wear it for a

few minutes. I will have to take it off before the nuns see it. They would try to confiscate it. Remember we have a no jewelry rule at my school. Do you still have the first aid kit under your seat?"

"Yea, but I think it is on your side," he replied. "What do you need it for?"

"Luv, can I borrow a band aid? I am going to hide my wedding ring. Now that it's on my finger, nobody is going to try to make me take it off."

"Mary, take what you need, and please, stop asking to borrow what is already yours."

The last remark gave Jeff pleasure, it felt good when he could do small things for his mate. Mary delved under the seat and retrieved the kit. She was now giggling. "I guess we now have our first household item? A first aid kit? I was kinda hoping for satin sheets, or maybe just a bed with some privacy."

Jeff drove the remaining distance to Mary's school. The couple comfortable in their actions, spent the time in silence enjoying the new found unity. At the entrance to Mary's school Jeff pulled to the curb. He got out and came around to open his wife's door. On the sidewalk Mary removed the ruby ring and asked Jeff to keep it safe for her. She would wear it whenever she could safely do it. As they parted Jeff leaned into Mary and lightly kissed her. The kiss was much like the peck his father placed on his mother before his dad left for work, a sign of affection not an attempt to cause arousal. This heinous transgression of school discipline was duly noted by the entrance monitor, a novice nun who was still under the impression that those who were celibate held the high moral ground.

Jeff watched Mary enter the building then left for his school. Jeff felt ten feet tall. His other half was pleased by his offerings. They had set a common course and the ship had left the harbor. The rest of his day was unremarkable.

For Mary things were not progressing nearly as smoothly; first her parents harangue, now the school disciplinarian was lecturing her on the disgrace she had brought to her uniform. This morning, her public actions had not only shown flagrant disregard for God's law but had set a poor example for her sisters. *Where was this crone coming from? Was she so death dumb and blind, she did not know two of her stalwart students, who were seniors, had not only gone all the way with several members of the football team but, they wore their "loss of virtue" like a school letter?* Unfortunately, the crone noticed the cloud of uncertainty cross Mary's face. The nun took the look as an act of defiance.

"Mary, you have been a good student up to now; however, that will not save you. Your penance is going to be: No attendance to your junior prom, and a one thousand word essay on chastity and its importance to young ladies. You will read your essay to the assembled girls after next Tuesday's Mass."

To further her humiliation, Mary was sent to the schools Religious Guidance Councilor for a guidance session. Mary had not yet met the new priest who took over the position last September.

The new priest for he was a NEW priest, having been ordained the previous May, was not what Mary expected. Father Timothy was a man in his late 50s. He came to the priesthood from a successful law practice. He had been married to his childhood sweetheart, Katharine, for almost 37 years when the Lord had called her home after a long illness. Although both had wanted children they were never blessed with them. And the Lord knew it wasn't for the lack of trying. The bishop had 'parked' him at the school so that would have him available to solve legal problems for the diocese. This somewhat irked Father Tim for he had become a priest to minister to the faithful and help them lead a righteous life. He had already filed enough briefs for a lifetime. Father Tim had wanted to get into marriage counseling. He thought that his successful marriage gave him a fresh perspective. In the last seven months he could not say he helped anyone other than the church's coffers. And now he had to counsel another of Mother Superior's miscreants.

The counseling session was scheduled for the last period of the day. He thought, why do the good sisters have to play these head games with the students? Keep them in suspense all day just to create some anxiety. Father Tim picked up the folder with the student's record and began to read. Miss Mary Susan 'Smith', a junior (class of '60), Baptized Saint Raymond Parish, 1942. First Communion, St. Ray's 1950, Confirmed, Bishop McCarthy again at St. Ray's 1953, The more he read the more he wondered what sudden turn of events had led this child astray. There was nothing in her file except reports of exemplary conduct. He took a quick look at her grades, First honors every grading period since she started high school. Well, Father Tim thought, let's see what Mother Superior thinks she did wrong.

A kiss while in uniform? And in front of the school to boot! Must have been some kiss to cause all this fuss! Father Tim reminisced for a moment of kisses he and his wife had exchanged. He even dreamt of where some of those kisses led. Down Boy! That was in the past. Then he prayed to his personal Saint, *Thank you, Katharine, for all the good times. Please put in a good word for me with Him. Katharine, help me to help this young woman.*

At the appointed hour Mary knocked on the door of the Religious Guidance Councilor. Father Tim opened his door to admit, a trepidatious young lady. Father Tim closed the door and gestured to the chair in front of his desk. He told Mary to relax he didn't consume young ladies for dinner.

"Tell me child, why you are here. Your version - I already have seen Mother's."

Mary had been thinking all day for a safe answer to that question, while suffering the taunts of her classmates, which ranged from several of the younger girls chanting "Mary has a boyfriend", to a comment by one of the self-righteous senior girls saying that,

"Only a slut would do something like that in front school." In the end she decided that an honest answer was probably the best. Mary swallowed her fear and began.

"Father, my hu....er, bo....er, Jeff drove me to school this morning. When he opened my door and I got out, he kissed me. All he was doing was to wish me a good day and to say he loved me. He doesn't attend school here, so he wasn't aware of the no-displays-of-affection-while-in-uniform rule. It is my fault for not stopping him."

Father Tim's extensive courtroom experience dealing with reluctant witnesses told him that there was more to the story than was being told. One of the techniques he often employed was the 'pregnant silence'. He played that card now, by saying, "Humm" then reverting to silence.

Mary felt that she was under the glare of an extremely bright spotlight. She started to fidget, worrying at the band-aid on her left hand. Father Tim's attention was drawn to Mary's repeated touching of her hand. Then the picture of his wife laying on a hospital bed touching a bandage-covered wedding ring sprang to his consciousness. The staff had secured his wife's ring with strips of tape to prevent its loss.

Father Tim broke his own silence. "Child, there is a ring under that band-aid, isn't there?" Then very quietly, "A wedding ring."

"Mary, before you answer," Father Tim then picked up his breviary and removed a purple stole that he always kept handy. He kissed the center portion and placed it around his neck.

"Mary, I am not asking you to confess anything. Remember how sacred the seal of the confessional is. I cannot ever reveal anything you say."

Mary's reserve broke; she began crying for the umteenth time that day. "Father you can't have it, I won't take it off!"

"No need to cry child, of course it's yours. I would not dream of asking you to remove it."

Then Father Tim thought to himself, *Mother Teresa, you have out done yourself this time! I am willing to bet the house and the farm, that the boy who gave it to her is the same one who kissed her this morning.*

"Mary, will you please show it to me?"

"But Father, then I won't have anything to cover it with. And if one of the sisters sees they will try to confiscate it."

"Mary, we will think of something. I promise that they won't do anything of the kind."

Mary removed the bandage and held her hand forward for the priest to examine the

ring. Father Tim came around his desk and sat on his haunches beside Mary. He took one look at the ring and said, "That's a beautiful ring. The young gentleman from this morning, Jeff I believe you said his name was, gave it to you, right?"

"Yes he did and he also gave me an engagement ring. That he is holding for the time being."

"Mary, tell me about Jeff. When did you meet him? What is he like? Since he doesn't go to school here I take it he is not a Catholic."

"But Father he is! His parents were at one time. They have raised him mostly in the Faith."

"Mostly?" queried the priest. Damn it, stop pushing he thought. (*Timothy you are supposed to be helping her not playing prosecuting attorney!*) (*Sorry, Katharine, I'll try harder, Tell Him I didn't mean that curse word.*)

"Father, Jeff went to CCD classes up to high school. He has received communion and has been Confirmed," reported Mary.

"Father, there is something that he did but doesn't tell many people about. Just after we first were introduced, Jeff's father was injured in an accident and couldn't work for six months. Jeff supported his parents during that time. He is the one who put food on the table and kept the house warm. Father, it was a long half year. He still found time for me. He didn't have any money to spend on a date so we would take his little sister to the park and sit and talk while she played."

"The way you describe him he is an outstanding young man. But that doesn't tell me how or why you are wearing a wedding ring. Or is it simply a misplaced friendship ring?" asked Father Tim.

"No!!!! It's a wedding ring. We made our vows to each other." exclaimed Mary.

"Child, (*careful Timothy*) were the words real or is he just trying to obtain your prize?" (*Oh, Timothy, do I have to get Him to intervene? Get your mind out of the gutter!*)

Father Tim continued, "Or have you been holding out waiting for a ring as prepayment for services to be rendered?" (*Timothy, don't be so crass!*) (*Sorry Katharine, but the question need asking.*)

Mary spoke, "Bless me Father for I have sinned, It has been, Oh! about three days since my last confession. I have led Jeff into sin. I have put his hands on me in some 'wrong places' I begged him to do more. He has been reluctant. It has been at my insistence that things are where they are at. He told me that he trusts me and is willing to wait."

“Mary, are you asking for absolution? For what, the touching, the kiss, or your feelings? For me there are critical differences.” (*Getting better Timothy*) (*Katharine! please give me a chance*) “This morning’s kiss was ‘chaste’. Your desire is yours and not a matter for confession. The touching is a different matter.” (*Keep going Timothy, you are on a roll*) (*Please, Katharine give me a chance I have priestly duties here.*) (*Well if you are going to invoke that, I’ll take my advise elsewhere. I might even go speak to Him about the way you are behaving!*) (*OK, OK let me think for a moment*)

Father Tim then put on his best lawyer cap and began thinking. (*Go get ‘em, Timothy*)

“Mary was it your intent to arouse yourself or Jeff?” (*Doh, Timothy ask her a question she can answer and keep her dignity*)

“Father all I know is I love Jeff and want to be connected to him as closely as possible” was Mary’s response.

“I suppose, that since you didn’t intend to break God’s laws, we can call it a minor transgression.” (*Not good, but getting better, Timothy. Just what did you think He built in all those hormones for?*)

Father Tim then finished the ritual by saying the words of absolution. He then took off the stole and said to Mary, “I would like to meet your betrothed. Can you ask him to bring you to the rectory tonight or tomorrow night?”

“Yes he will! What time Father?” replied Mary.

“Whoa, hold on; don’t go making commitments for him until you ask.” (*Now, Timothy you know that isn’t the way things work in real life*) (*Well, Katharine, maybe it should!*)

Father Tim told Mary that anytime between seven and nine o’clock would be fine. Then he inquired if she would have any difficulties with her parents letting them go out on a school night. Mary related that it might be a problem for her but Jeff’s parents usually didn’t expect him home until after work at the supermarket. Father Tim suggested that he send a note home with her, saying that she had a special project to work on and he would be helping her with it.

“Mary, that is the absolute truth. Remember your essay.” (*Very good Timothy! Priestly duties and helping her in one thought*)

Father Tim took out some school stationary and composed a short note to Mary’s parents. He folded it and placed it in an unsealed envelope, which he handed to her. The priest then suggested that they figure a way to keep her secret from Mother Superior. What they came up with would at least get Mary out of the building. Father Tim gave Mary his handkerchief, the corner of which she wound around her finger obscuring her ring. The remainder she bunched up and dabbed at her tears.

As Father Tim escorted her to the exit he said, "Mary, one more thing before you go. Please remember in the eyes of God you are not quite married yet. So keep the heavy stuff at bay for now, please." (*Katherine, I know you were going to say something save it for a few minutes*)

Back in the Guidance office Father Tim sat in moody silence. (*Katharine, ok to talk now.*) (*Timothy I know what your thinking. Yes, she is so much like the daughter we could never have. We could adopt her you know.*) (*Good idea Katharine, we may even wind up with a couple of grandchildren as extras*)

As Mary rode public transportation home she contemplated ways to hide her ring from her mother until she could get to the medicine cabinet and retrieve a band-aid. The best solution she could come up with was continue using the handkerchief, then make a quick bolt for the bathroom. Her dilemma was solved when Smokey came bounding down the sidewalk to greet her. She reached deep in the fur that surrounded his neck and grasped his collar. Her hand was almost covered to the wrist. All she had to do was to hang on until she could get the band-aid.

Mary walked nonchalantly into her parents' kitchen. She was so embrazoned by her ruse that she lingered long enough to put down her books and hand her mother Father Tim's note. While her mother was reading the note Mary released her pup and slipped quietly down the hall and into the bathroom. Mary then went to her room, removed her school jumper and donned a long pleated skirt. The changing of one item of clothing completely transformed Mary. No longer was she a mousey school girl but a vibrant young woman ready to take on the world.

Returning to the kitchen Mary was surprised and pleased to find Jeff and her mother talking.

Her mother spoke first, "Oh there you are Mary. Jeff stopped by to drop off the book you forgot in his car this morning."

Jeff moved to Mary's side and brushed his lips on her forehead, then said, "Hi, Honey. How was your day?"

"Busy to say the least, Luv" began Mary.

She was interrupted by Mary's mother's loud throat clearing. Followed by, "A little less familiarity, you two."

Having given the couple sufficient direction, Mary's mother went back to the livingroom to watch her afternoon drama.

Mary and Jeff seated themselves on opposite sides of the kitchen table. "Big trouble at school," whispered Mary.

Jeff first thought was that the nuns had stolen Mary's ring. He looked, seeing the band-aid he released a sigh of relief. Mary noticed his look and heard his sigh. "No they didn't see the ring. But they saw the kiss you gave me out front this morning."

Jeff looked perplexed so Mary explained the 'no-signs-of-affection-while-in-uniform' rule. Then Mary related the episode with Mother Superior. She finished by telling him they had a meeting tonight with Father Tim.

"What about?" said Jeff inclining his head in the direction of the living room.

"Jeff, you'll like Father Tim", said Mary in a voice loud enough to be heard by her mother. Then even more loudly, "Mom, I asked Jeff to drive me over to Saint Luke's for my project meeting with Father Tim."

"You are just going to the rectory then coming straight back here, correct?" replied her mother.

"Yes! Mom, straight over and straight back."

"Ok with me then. But ask your father when he comes in."

Mary and Jeff quietly made plans to meet at the rectory if her father insisted on driving her. When they had finished, they sneaked a quick kiss. Jeff left after saying goodbye to the other Mrs. 'Smith'. He had been hoping to take Mary out to eat at the local hangout, but what he got was even better, some private time in the car with Mary on the longish drive to St. Luke's. Jeff went by himself to the subshop. There he met his and his wife's best friends, Terry and Patricia. Pat and Terry were the couple who had introduced him and Mary. They started to tease Jeff about getting Mary in 'trouble'.

Jeff said, "You mean the kiss this morning?"

They kept at it stressing 'trouble'. When Jeff finally caught the double entendre he became upset.

"You two should know us better than that! I would not do that to Mary unless we're married", retorted Jeff with a secret smile to himself at his hidden meaning.

Pat gave him a fleeting tight smile. When Terry persisted in making innuendoes, Pat put her hand on her boyfriend's arm and gave him one of those womanly looks that said drop it now, or else! Terry being an intelligent young man caught the message and promptly changed the subject. They talked for a while then Jeff excused himself telling the pair that he had to take Mary over to St. Luke's to meet Father Tim.

"Guess it has something to do with this morning" concluded Jeff. He was correct. Only he was wrong about what part of the morning that Father Tim wanted to discuss.

When Mary's dad arrived home she asked him about the trip to Saint Luke's. He was willing to let Jeff drive her under the same conditions her mother had set. At the dinner table her father repeated the 'one-minute'-for-good-nights rule and reinforced the 'straight over - straight back' dictum.

Jeff knocked on Mary's parent's door for the third time that day. Mary's dad opened the door. Seeing it was Jeff he turned and called out, "Mary it's Jeff to take you to your meeting" then turning to Jeff he said, "over and back-nowhere else, understood?"

The young man was astonished by the curtness of the greeting but simply replied, "Yes, sir."

Mary came out the door carrying a notebook. No sooner had they exited Mary's street when Mary snuggled closer to her husband.

"Luv, do you have the big ring with you"

Jeff nodded in agreement. Mary tore the band-aid from her finger. Waving a fresh one in the air she said, "I brought a spare. Can I please have our ring?"

"Our?"

"Yes silly it's our symbol of love."

"Is it safe? Won't this Father Tim notice it?"

A somber Mary said, "He already knows. Forgive me for not telling you before. I couldn't risk saying anything back there. The rings are why I think he wants to meet you."

Mary felt her mate tense at her last words. She thought to herself, I wonder if this is what Father Tim was talking about when he spoke of "asking first."

"Luv, he helped me hide my wedding ring from the nuns this afternoon. I don't think he is set to burn us at the stake."

At Mary's last statement Jeff relaxed somewhat. If his soulmate was comfortable with this meeting, he would endure it to please her.

Jeff told Mary about the teasing he took from Terry and Patricia. He said that he wanted to tell them everything but wanted to let Mary have the pleasure. "Mary, I don't think they meant anything by it. I know Terry too well to believe that would say anything to harm your reputation."

They rang the door bell of the rectory. The housekeeper gave them a cheery greeting remarking that they must be the young couple Father Tim is expecting. She showed them into the parlor and told them that Father would be with them shortly. The

housekeeper left to fetch Father.

When Father Tim was informed his guests had arrived, his Katharine started chattering in his mind. *Come on, Timothy, hurry up! She's here! I can't wait to meet our future son-in-law.*

Mary and Jeff stood as Father Tim approached them. Father Tim said, "So glad you could make it," as he hugged Mary and shook Jeff's hand. "I would like to talk to both of you together, but first, Jeff, may I speak to Mary privately?" (*Timothy, what are you up to? (Priestly duties, Katharine)*)

The respect that Father Tim was affording him astonished Jeff. He focused his attention on Mary and with a slight widening of his eyes and an almost invisible shrug communicated to his partner 'your choice and ok with me'. Mary's lips turned up at the corners replying 'Thank you'. The body-language discussion was not lost on the priest.

Father Tim said, "We'll be but a moment, Jeff. Make yourself comfortable." as he led Mary into his office. Closing the door he continued, "Mary, I consider everything you told me this afternoon to be covered by the seal of the confessional. That presents a problem for me. I can't use anything I learned then. That technically means I shouldn't have even known you were coming over this evening. Will you please pardon my slip and give me permission to use what I learned when the three of us talk?"

It was Mary's turn to be amazed. An adult, not only an adult but a priest was asking her for forgiveness and permission. "Father, I have no secrets from Jeff. I don't think that is a way to treat your mate. Just don't use the information to hurt him."

*(Timothy, You are getting this priestly duties thing down well. I am going to talk with Him right now about the adoption.) (Thank you Katharine hurry back with the papers.)*

Father Tim opened the office door and asked Jeff if he would like to join him and Mary in the office. Jeff continued to be astonished; again he was being asked instead of being told. As soon as Jeff came into Mary's field of view her face lit up. Jeff, catching her expression, darted his eyes in the direction of Father Tim then narrowed them slightly. Mary replied with the slight raising of one corner of her mouth. If one was not as practiced in observing people as Father Tim, Esq. was, the second silent conversation would have been completely missed. (Translation: I love you, everything is ok. What about him? Good guy, tell you later) (*Katherine, how long did it take us to be able to do that? (Timothy, I was busy talking with Him. It's official she is our godchild. Timothy, He stressed we had to watch out for her spiritual as well as her temporal needs. As for the mind reading it took us a year or so.) (Katharine, what are you not telling me?) (He said, 'Remind Tim that I built into her certain things on purpose.) (Katherine, she is truly in love with this young man. Let's find out more.)*

It was Mary who actually started the conversation, "Father, this is our engagement ring that I told you Jeff was holding for me." Mary held up her hand to display the ring.

“Mary I noticed it when you came in. Jeff, is it an heirloom?”

“Yes, Father, it is. It was my Grandmother’s; now it is Mary’s.”

“No, Luv, it is ours! I wear it as a symbol of our love. Jeff, my silly husband, like with the band-aids it’s yours too. My wedding ring is another story. That is my commitment to you.”

*(Katharine?, Katharine where are you? I need help here!)*

“Jeff do you realize just how much trouble you have gotten Mary into with that kiss this morning?”

Jeff had been expecting a big lecture and argument about the rings and being too young et cetera . He started to answer but was interrupted by Father Tim continuing. “You could have at least made it worth her while.”

Jeff did a double take at this latest pronouncement from the good Father.

Father Tim chuckled, “Jeff, You came in here with the look of a man being led to the gallows. I said that to get you to loosen up a little. The good, well, lets just say ‘The Nuns’ would have a fit if they ever find out that I said it, but there is truth in that. There is nothing wrong in giving your fiancee a good solid kiss.” (*Katharine, Where are you?*) (*Timothy, I am here. You are doing just fine, keep up the good work.*) (*But Katharine, I think they just did it again!*) (Yes, they did dear.)

During the next hour Father Tim used his skills as investigator to test the couple’s intent and understanding of what they were getting themselves into.

Father Tim, kept coming back to test their commitment. He explained that sometimes life throws some very difficult situations at a married couple. He was convinced in that time that his adopted daughter had found herself an excellent partner. The only difficulty he had with the pair was their insistence that they were already married. The closest he came to lecturing them was to beg them not to consummate their ‘marriage’ until they had married according to The Church’s teachings. Father Tim told them he understood the difficulty in that. Adding that he had some first hand knowledge in the subject. He related that he and his Katharine became engaged at Christmas time of their senior year of high school. Their marriage took place the day following their graduation, he and his now Saint Katharine’s union had flourished for 37 years. It would still be flourishing except God had made other plans for each of them. So he asked Jeff and Mary to try and strike a balance between frustrating each other and jumping the gun. He asked how their parents reacted to the way they behaved toward one another. Father Tim was concerned that the couple never had dinner with either set of parents. Mary told Father that she had never been allowed to eat at a friend’s house or have one of her playmates over for dinner. Jeff shrugged his shoulders and said that social matters were Mary’s responsibility. Father Tim had a laugh at that telling Jeff he was a

quick study and not to worry it only gets worse from here on out. Father Tim suggested that Mary try to have Jeff over soon so her parents could see how well they complimented each other. And more important so they could see how much they were in love. "My children if anybody knows anything about people they can see how deeply you care for one another."

At the end Father Tim did something unusual, he said "The pastoral session is now over. A short social meeting perhaps?"

Father continued, "The pastor here, Father Stanislaus, visits his sister and her children every Sunday that leaves me to have Sunday dinner by myself. Mary, would you and your intended care to have dinner with me occasionally, please?"

Mary looked to her husband, with a droop in his eyelids he indicated it was fine with him. Mary said that they would be happy to dine with him on Sundays.

Father Tim then took out two of his calling cards. On the back of each he wrote the phone number of the rectory and his private line at Mary's school. He told them that the number on the front was the diocese's legal department. He told them to call him anytime, stressing the anytime, if he could be of any assistance, even if it was a shoulder to cry on.

On the way home Mary and Jeff discussed what Father had told them. They decided that Mary would attempt to have Jeff over for dinner Wednesday. For the time being Mary would take the public transportation to school. And Mary would fill in Patricia what was happening. Pat was to be told to bring Terry up to date but no one else. By silent agreement the subject of Friday's submarine races was not brought up. Mary for her part was feeling a growing need to affirm their bond. Jeff desired Mary to his very core, but it was her decision. He thought any pressure on his part would harm their sense of mutual trust. When they were stopped by the next traffic light they kissed and clung desperately to one another. The process was repeated each time they stopped. These stolen moments enabled them to abide by the 'one minute rule' when Jeff walked Mary to her door.

Tuesday morning Mary informed her parents that she and Jeff were to have Sunday dinner at St. Luke's with father Tim. Then she asked if it was possible for Jeff to come to dinner Wednesday evening. Mary was reminded that dinner in this house was for family only; outsiders were not welcome. Anyway, Jeff should be having dinner with his own family.

Mary left for school in a somber mood. She met Pat in the hallway after homeroom. She told her friend that they had to talk at lunch. The tone of voice that Mary had used caused Pat to fret all morning. Pat was afraid that Mary was upset with her and Terry for teasing Jeff last night. By lunch time when the two women met their moods were reversed. Pat was awaiting her execution and Mary was gleefully wanting to share her secret with her best woman friend. As soon as grace had been said Mary produced a

band-aid. She handed it to Pat and said "I need help with putting that on. Open it up and get it ready to put on my left hand."

Pat was thoroughly confused but complied with the request. Mary had her hands under the table. She surreptitiously removed the band-aid hiding her ring. Bringing her left hand out she said, "quickly, on my ring finger over the ring".

Pat took one look and began giggling. Mary had to prod her to get the band-aid put into place. Pat started out with, "That's a wedding ring!"

Mary smiled and nodded in response. Pat wanted to know all the details. Mary related about their little 'do-it-yourself project.'

Pat broke in with, "You mean you two have done IT?"

Mary's smile faded when she replied, "No, not yet, no opportunity"

Mary then related their meeting with Father Tim and what had occurred this morning over breakfast, she concluded with, "I wish Father Tim was my father instead of what I have."

Then Mary cautioned Pat that what she had just been told was for hers and Terry's ears only. The women were prevented from more talk when the bell signaling the end of lunch period rang.

After school the young ladies had no chance to continue as they were put onto different busses for their trip home. Mary got off the bus and was greeted by Smokey. They walked to the house. When she came in the door Mary discovered her mother engrossed in her afternoon television shows. Mary went to her room and changed out of her uniform. She thought to herself, if I make the dinner I could try again to see if they will let me have Jeff over tomorrow. She went to the kitchen and opened the fridge to see what she had to work with. Mary found a whole chicken and a package of ground beef. She thought the chicken is large enough to feed four I'll leave that for tomorrow. I'll make a meat loaf with the ground beef. With that Mary added the seasonings and bread crumbs to the beef and mixed it, put it into a loaf pan. She placed it in the oven and turned it on. She decided that she could wash some potatoes and put them in the oven to bake with the meat loaf. She retrieved a can of corn from the pantry and set it aside for heating just before dinner was served.

Mary was just finishing the preparations when her mother darted into the kitchen and stopped short.

Her mother exclaimed, "Good! You got something started. I was tied up in there and I forgot the time."

"That's ok, Mom, I know that Tuesday is your night to cook but I had the time with Jeff

at work and all. I thought that I would do something nice for my mom and dad." (hint! hint!)

"Well since you have this under control, I might as well clean up and get dressed for the Altar and Rosary Society meeting tonight. Your father will take me over when he goes to his Holy Name Society meeting."

Mary began setting the table as her mother went to her room and started her preening. Her father arrived just as Mary finished putting the vegetable on the burner to heat.

The three sat down and consumed the meal in virtual silence. Her dad finished his food and looking at his wife said, "That was a nice change dear, I do love your meat loaf. Its much better than your usual hamburger casserole."

Without skipping a beat Mary's mother replied, "Thank you dear, I'm glad you liked it."

Mary saw what she thought might be an opening and began, "Dad, could we make an exception and have Jeff over for dinner tomorrow, Please?"

Her dad scowled at the request and said, "I thought that we settled that this morning. The answer is still NO! Now why don't you clean up the dishes so your mother and I can get going to our meetings."

Her parents gathered their things and promptly left for the parish. Mary complied with her dads 'request', cleaning the table and putting the dishes in the dishwasher.

Mary killed the next two hours by doing homework and tidying her room. She knew her partner would call as soon as he got to his parents home. He usually finished work at the supermarket at 9:00 o'clock. After this afternoon's and evening's disaster she had reached the same conclusion as Jeff. She and Jeff simply resided in their parents' home, they themselves were homeless; until they could, together, establish one of their own. When Jeff called, Mary seized the helm of their ship, then on the telegraph rang-up flank speed.

"Jeff, could we get an early start on Friday, If you can pick me up around 5:00 I'll treat you to dinner at the Arches. Then if you are willing, we will find someplace to put paid to our promises."

Jeff could not resist teasing his mate. "I don't think so. Remember it will be Friday. You know how I hate fish, and they have the worst fish I never ate at the Arches."

Jeff heard the sound of utter despair in Mary's sigh in response.

"Love of my life, Could I have the pleasure to taking you to dinner at The Harbor Ballroom," naming the most elegant eatery in the area.

"Luv, can we afford it?"

"For this special night, it is a must. It will be our wedding reception" added Jeff.

They continued to make plans for their first formal dinner. They bemoaned the fact that they wouldn't be seeing each other the rest of the week because of school and work schedules. They ended the conversation with promises of undying love.

At breakfast the next morning Mary announced that Jeff was taking her out Friday night for an evening of dinning and dancing at The Harbor Ballroom. Mary's mother immediately began ouing, ahing and making suggestions about how to dress for the occasion. Mary was relieved when she got out of the house and on her way to school.

At lunch she and Pat exchanged knowing smiles when they talked of Mary's upcoming formal dinner.

Later in the day Mary stopped by Father Tim's office and told him about the lack of success in having Jeff over for dinner. Then she told him about some of the plans for Friday night.

The rest of Wednesday and Thursday passed quickly for the couple.

When Mary arrived home from school Friday afternoon her mother began fussing over her. Her daughter's first dinner date was a milestone for her. Her young daughter was taking her first little steps in the dating game. Her suitor was beginning to show the first real signs of true appreciation. All that 'steady' thing was just teenagers playing at being grown up.

"Mary hurry up and take a shower and wash your hair. We'll set it. I have some hair spray to keep it in place. For make up we'll..."

At this point Mary simply shut down and let her mother fuss on. While her mother blathered, Mary considered the ring problem. How was she going to keep the ring hidden during this process? Mary's problem was solved when her subconscious warning bells suddenly went off. "Mom, what did you just say?"

"Jeff gave you a friendship ring the other day, didn't he? That's what you are hiding under that band-aid."

Mary was scared and it showed on her features. She was at a loss for words. If her mother only knew!

Her mother continued, "I think you are a little young for such gifts; however, if I don't actually see it I won't have to tell you to return it. Just don't let your father see it. That shouldn't present much of a problem; you would have to hold it under his nose then point to it before he would realize that it was there."

Mary was too stunned to argue. She let her mother prepare her for her dinner engagement.

Jeff came to Mary's door and knocked. When the door was opened he was greeted by Mary's father. He told the young man that he thought that taking his daughter to a fancy restaurant was a little too advanced for the couple, the malt shop was more in line with what was appropriate. He added "Remember that suit and tie doesn't make you an adult just because you look like one."

Jeff was spared further lecturing when Mary and her mother arrived. He had never seen his love look so stunning. He presented his love with the bouquet of flowers that he bought that afternoon. The couple left for the restaurant after being reminded of the curfew and the 'one minute rule'.

The couple drove to the restaurant. During the drive they nervously reassured the other that tonight was going to be 'The Night'.

The Maitre de must have noticed Mary's rings for, when he had seated them his parting words to Jeff were, "You and your lovely wife have an enjoyable repast." This brought huge smiles to the lovers. Mary ordered shrimp scampi and Jeff avoided both meat and fish by ordering Fettuccini Alfredo. During the meal the musicians set up and began playing dance music.

After dinner and a few dances where they reveled in holding each other tightly, they paid their bill, leaving a generous tip and left the restaurant.

Jeff tried to get a room at a motel. He was dismissed out of hand; the establishment didn't want to get a reputation of being a 'hot sheet' place. He was told to, "Take your conquest elsewhere."

The young lovers wound up deep in the local park. I wish I could describe a romantic overlook on the city, but this is reality, not a fairy tale. It was just a secluded area away from most traffic. This was the place Jeff had been trying to avoid. A classmate had been assaulted and his date had unspeakable things done to her at this place. But, he and his love had nowhere else to go.

They had been parked for only a few minutes, when their world took a sharp turn. Something shattered Mary's window. At the same time Jeff's door was ripped open. Jeff was pulled from the car by a thug. Jeff was certainly not a ninety pound weakling, but surprise took its toll. He found himself lying on the ground staring up at his car's front fender. There was a commotion around Mary's side of their car. Jeff struggled to his feet, in doing so his hand found itself on a loose rock. He picked it up. When he rounded the front of the car he saw two animals ripping at Mary's clothes. At this point all rational thought escaped Jeff. Shot putting is not that different than rock hurling. And a rock was an effective weapon as many people would learn years later in the Mideast. The rock left Jeff's hand and connected to the thug who was tearing at Mary. Jeff

scrambled and found a second rock this one he launched at the assailant who was restraining his Love. The attacker dropped in a heap as if he had been poleaxed. The third coward fled with Jeff in hot pursuit. Then even though blood lust was upon him, he stopped. An even more primitive instinct had taken over. He abandoned his chase and ran to Mary's side. Her clothing was torn and she was bleeding from glass cuts, she was moaning. "It hurts, make it stop, arggg it hurts" over and over. What concerned Jeff the most was that her arm and shoulder were at an odd angle.

Jeff scooped his love into his arms and began to carry her toward his car.

"Stop where you are! Put the woman on the ground!" came the commands from the cop who had been patrolling the area. He came too late to prevent the attack but he was in time to attempt preventing the clean up.

Jeff simply looked at the obstacle preventing him from getting help for his beloved.

"Open the back door!" was all Jeff said.

The policeman looked into Jeff's demeanor and saw his own mortality. The man was unarmed and his arms were busy carrying the injured woman. But, there was certainty about the man's actions that bespoke that noncompliance would have him joining the other bodies laying on the ground in agony-if he even survived long enough to be in agony.

The cop opened the door. Jeff placed Mary on the seat with as much care as he could muster. He turned to the policeman and said "Thank you, I am taking her to St. Celia's" naming the closest hospital.

The cop was upset that he was letting this civilian take charge and leave the crime scene with a victim. In an attempt to reassert himself he hollered at the departing automobile, "I'll have someone meet you there!" Then almost to himself, "and arrest you."

TO BE CONTINUED

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