ALL ALONE

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WINNER OF FLORIDA PEN WOMEN
MEMOIR LETTERS COMPETITION

"All history properly understood is the history of thought." (Robin George Collingwood) My history (*her*story) is based upon diary entries written during the late '50s and '60s. But memories tend to change with age. Time softens some, sharpens others, distorts and even extracts parts. This fabric of our memories, its threads weaving intermittently in and out of the realm of recall, is not quite the same as it was almost 50 years ago. Yet it is nonetheless the fabric from which my life was woven.

The French have an expression: the more things change, the more they remain the same. Remembering and researching for this memoir led me to that conclusion as well.

Reading the words written so long ago in my diary, I was astounded at what I saw and heard and thought about as a teenager and later a young twenty something living in Europe. Was that really me? Was Paris/Rome/ London really like that in the '60s? Yes, it is real. Real because I wrote it on the spot. No directives, no hindsight. Now I have integrated all those direct observations into a Memoir. It is for you, dear reader, to enjoy and, at the same time, perhaps gain some appreciation for the past. In this case, my past.

"*Anyone who believes you can't change history has never tried to write his memoirs*." (David Ben Gurion)

CHAPTER I

"*All this struggling to learn when all we have to do is remember*."
(Old Indian Adage)

June 19, 1962. I wrote:

Dispensing with any of the usual preliminaries such as the organization and planning for this trip, plans which were typically Highleyman Haphazard, I shall commence with the fact that this is being written in a car going at a high speed—with some jolts. Irma is at the wheel, dark glasses on her little pixie nose looking quite stern and serious (since this business of 75 mph is a strain on her nerves.)

The car is a Mercedes-Benz 180. After classes ended at Vassar, my room mate and I flew via Frankfurt to Stuttgart to pick up the car at the Mercedes factory. So far, it has been sufficient for our needs but lacks any desirable luxuries such as a sun roof or a radio.

To announce our nationality, we placed a small U.S. flag on the dashboard. It also explains our not being German since the Italians for one hate the Germans. Next to the American flag, we placed a black, yellow and red flag for Belgium. I will be attending Louvain University beginning this Fall. The second purpose is to let people know this is also a French speaking car, a handy language anywhere on this continent.

On the *auto-strada del sole* (Milano to Firenze), we remarked about a grand feat of engineering. There were round tunnels and bridges and side tunnels cutting the way of the road through mountains and hills of northern Italy. There were also women weeding the center section of the four-lane highway. As for the drivers, Italians are like a flock of geese honking their horns one minute and passive the next.

Residential Italy is imbued with the aroma of the heavy, hard rolls which all Italians seem to eat for breakfast. The smell lingers throughout the day. In Rome, there is much poverty and I imagine this roll which I toss away so impatiently, is for them a stable diet, starch being their only nourishment. We are on our way to the home of the McMurrough sisters who have graciously agreed to rent us a

room. Heavily involved with the Vatican, they know my Great Uncle William well.

Rome 1962

The hot, dry Roman sun beats down upon the rooftops of the oldest residential section of Rome. It melts the asphalt of the highways and glistens among the cobblestones of the narrow streets of St. Francis' time. It scoops out the shadows from the piazzas that appear scattered about the masses of chipped walls and faded paint of the old palaces, hospitals, apartment buildings. It glows upon the silver toned plates dedicating the old buildings. Most every large building is itself a monument to history.

At 7:30, the bells begin to toll announcing the mass about to begin. Where we are living, here in Trastevere, some seven churches surround us and quite often, in the evening, their bells clang together. The noise drowns out polite conversation; it causes men to stop work; it makes the shopper hesitate and remember the churches hidden in the side streets.

It is best to see Rome in the early morning when it is still cool from the night breeze. Most Romans rise at six. The streets are crowded by seven. Any new day in Rome is a pleasure, but the stillness of Rome at dawn affords more than pleasure. Only then can a visitor enjoy peace on the streets and piazzas of Rome.

We are staying with three sisters in what used to be the hospitus of the church. It is a square building surrounding a courtyard of flowers and lemon trees that radiate out from a 4th century Roman well. Behind the columns of the second floor colonnade is carried on a life unique in itself. Here is Rome different from anything a tourist would see. It is a life of serenity and peace where most every event involves the Church.

I came here to meet the last living relative on my mother's side. Her uncle, my great uncle, is the only American Canon of St. Peter's Basilica. However, Msgr. William A. Hemmick does not live in the confines of the Vatican. He told the sisters with whom I am staying that he did not wish to live with the "old ladies" behind the walls. A friend of Principessa Doria, he was given an apartment in the Palazzo Doria facing the Mussolini "wedding cake", a monster monument dedicated to a man, the so-called *Duce of Fascism,* whose philosophy great uncle William had fought against during the Great War.

Called the Patriot Priest of Picardy, William Hemmick volunteered to join the troops, to give last rights, and to bury the dead, all this under

intense shell and machine gun fire. In May, 1919, the Washington Post reported: "Father Hemmick enjoys the honorable distinction of having been sent by His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons, on a mission to the war-swept zone of France. He joined the 'Croix Rouge' with the rank of Captain in Paris." For two years, he "rendered invaluable service to the allied cause owing to his familiarity with the French language and his unselfishness in the many missions sent by the Red Cross." But it was actually in August, 1917, having arrived in Paris only weeks before that he had warned "unless one is in Khaki and connected with some organization one can get nowhere, and do nothing." Meeting with Mr. Charles Carroll of Baltimore and Bertie Hoffman, he was able to get into the Red Cross. His concern was the troops. "There is great need of more priests for our armies. If only the Government would appoint them in proportion to the number of Catholics in the Army, and not in proportion to the population of the country at large it would be all right." He also lamented the lack of "machines over here" and requested a Ford be donated. The men in one village don't know there is a priest in the next village without some means of contact, he wrote, and "they MUST have the Sacrament if they are going to risk their lives." If the troops are calling for a priest and there is none, he wrote, then "it will be the eternal shame of our Country and our Church that this want is not supplied." As the fighting progressed, my great uncle spent more and more time on the front lines. This is what he wrote to his sister, my grandmother in Washington, DC.

> "It seems as if Hell itself were let loose; the roar of the battle is so terrific. I am scrawling this in a cave right near our front lines. Several officers share it with me and we sleep on straw and live the lives of moles . . . Never in all my life have I seen such days of horror. We are constantly under shell fire day and night . . . The strain is something terrible. At midnight the food wagons come by and we get a hot stew and coffee as most of the men's work is done by night and we sleep during the day when we can. Then at dusk I crawl out and bury the dead in a deserted garden by a ruined house. There are no coffins even, but just a big trench and there the poor mangled bodies of our men are laid, and I hurriedly read the funeral service over them and sprinkle them with Holy water. I seem to be sort of numb with horror and the tragedy of it, but manage to get through it somehow. The battle is raging all

> about of us and it sounds like the crack of doom. God knows what the outcome will be. Our men are splendid, courageous and enduring and are putting up a splendid fight and I am glad to have a chance to be with them and help them . . . The ruin and desolation all about are beyond words as a perfect hail storm of shells is falling. The tragic prevails, of course, as they bring the dead and wounded by stretchers . . . I was also quartered in the same town on the second line, where Lt. Col. Griffiths was killed, and whom I buried."

Truly if what many had said, that "Father Hemmick was like a welcome sunbeam in the semi-darkness of the dugouts and in the mud and water-soaked trenches and the shell holes of no man's land," then I was both honored to be his great niece and frightened to claim such a special and renowned man as my Great Uncle.

Uncle William in Uniform

The sisters McMurrough also told me something else eerily prophetic about my great uncle. The apartment in the Palazzo Doria had a chapel. Many years before my uncle came to live there, Gioacchino Vincenzo Raffaele Luigi, another priest, had been the resident. This priest later became Pope Leo XIII. What is more amazing is that it was

this Pope who had told young William's parents that he would not only survive TB, but that one day, he would return to Rome. Uncle William's father was the Consul (now called Ambassador) to Switzerland. He and his wife had eight children, seven boys and one girl. Uncle William and one of his brothers were educated in Austria. But when William became ill, his parents, ardent Catholics, refused to give up hope for their son's survival. They took the sick boy down to Rome. The meeting with Pope Leo XIII proved more extraordinary than they could have imagined. Not only did he survive tuberculosis, he was back in Rome and was living in what had been the Pope's apartment prior to his pontification. If ever things were thought to be preordained, this was proof.

I will be meeting Great Uncle William tomorrow. Today was spent walking the ancient streets of Trastevere.

The three sisters McMurrough live in the cloister of the Confraternity of Genova. The youngest sister, Francesca, is a nun. Esther is the oldest and Carola is the middle sister. All participate in activities of one kind or another at the Vatican. They also rent rooms to people like me who are related to someone they know.

A view of the Cloister Courtyard
from the McMurrough's rooms

Near the McMurrough's *hospitus*, on the Via dei Genovesi, is one of the most majestic medieval landmarks in Trastevere. It is the church of Santa Cecilia. Built above the Roman house of this martyr and patron saint of music, it is a blend of beauty and antiquity. History, ancient history is everywhere. I had brought along my sketchbook and hoping my worn out old beatnik like walking shoes would hold up, I headed for the Isola Tiberina

Insola Tiberina

I crisscrossed through alleys and byways, through such narrow passages that I doubt the sun has ever warmed their pavements. Dark doorways, dampness, and inevitable Roman cat are clues of the home life of most waitresses, ice cream maids, bell boys, and garage men that Americans usually call the "real" Romans.

Cutting across as I did from the Tiber to the old city of Rome, I suddenly found myself approaching the side of the Victor Emannuel "wedding cake". I spied three converging stairs leading high enough that I knew the view must be beautiful. Up the simple semi-steps on the right I climbed and came upon Hadrian on Horseback, a gigantic tribute and particularly impressive from just below the horse's hoof. Behind this monument are the ruins of the Forum which seem from here almost tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the Corso and the Via Nationale. Next I mounted the steps to the left. These are marble. In

their antiquity, they look austere and respected. It is to their tribute that the new steps to the right are so imposing. Above me stands the blank façade of St. Maria in Oglio in which is housed the Santo Bambino, a doll richly dressed and crowned in costly jewels. The interior of the church is dark and empty of populus but there are works of art and treasures to see if you venture inside. Before me, in front of the church are little passages stretched out in all directions and the buildings which gloat over them. I descended the marble steps and redirected my steps to the Corso. After a half hour, I came upon the Four Fountains, these being four reclining men statues taking their leisure beside four fountains. Between them, traffic speeds through with more assurance having passed these landmarks. I continued down to the Quirinale Palace where guards stood in ready attention, probably waiting for the President of the Philippines to arrive. I still had far to go if I were to meet Irma at the Fountain of Trevi as planned at six.

When I look back at that day of exploration, although I was intrigued, seeing the city with the eyes of an American youth, there were many moments when my mind was whirling elsewhere, focused inward, in the land of memories.

CHAPTER II

"*There is nothing stable in this world; uproar's your only music*."
(John Keats)

Washington, D.C. 1961

The telephone was ringing. I could hear it through the door. Quickly, I turned the key with one hand and, juggling a pile of new textbooks under my other arm, pushed open the front door. This was the Georgetown house I shared with my mother. In the haste to answer the telephone, my arm slipped and all the books were left scattered down the length of the hallway.

The telephone was on the wall in the kitchen at the end of the hall.

"Hello?" I gasped after grabbing the receiver.

"You must come over right away." There was a sob in the voice. "She had seizures during the night and . . ."

I knew the rest of the sentence. I knew, and I didn't know. And that's how I wanted to keep it. The caller was Mrs. Walsh, my mother's best friend. Of course, Mrs. Walsh would expect me to come immediately to the hospital.

After hanging up, I retraced my steps and gathered my books off the floor. Denied entrance due to the 'boys only' policy established at the Georgetown University campus, I had begun my first day of study at The Institute of Languages and Linguistics just across the street from the University entrance. Hastily, I piled the books on the piano in the living room and grabbed the keys on the front hall table.

Assured the front door was locked, I dashed down the steps to the Ford sedan parked in front of the house. Then it came to me. It was only yesterday.

Yesterday I had called our good friends the Whites to help. My mother was so weak, I was afraid to walk her down the steps to the car by myself. Larry and his mother were only too glad to come over. With Larry taking one arm of the frail invalid, his mother taking the other, and me in front in case she tripped or fell, we progressed slowly, step by step, down these same steps, to the car for the drive to the hospital. It was my mother's first time outside in weeks. Every step, every move was made with great hesitation. She was weak and unstable. Perhaps it was from the

medication or perhaps, something she would never admit to me, she was in so much pain that the short path down to the street almost exceeded the limits of her ability. Finally, settled in the front seat, she seemed to relax. We waved goodbye to the Whites and began the short drive to the hospital. Seconds later, she was tense and scared.

"Please, slow down," I remember her whispering, her voice quivering. The speedometer read only twenty five miles an hour. Although I had been driving over three years, I was not old enough to obtain a license until last year. However, long before the law allowed, Mother had taken me to the disserted Camp Callan on a hill just north of our other home in La Jolla, California. There, she taught me to drive. The empty grounds were perfect for learning to use the stick shift, backing up, and parking. Only now did I understand why. It wasn't to entertain me that my mother had chosen to give me driving lessons at such a young age. She knew. She had known for a long time.

"Slow down," she begged again. "Please, slow down." I can hear her feeble cry even now.

It was only a half-mile drive to the hospital, but it seemed like an eternity. I remember every moment. Was it only yesterday? Yesterday! I had been so excited about the new college. Excited for myself while my mother was dying. How could I be so selfish?

We lived in a part of Washington, D.C. called Georgetown, a town within a city. In the sixties, it was a quiet place where many old families lived along side government officials and diplomats. No one spoke of their exalted positions in life, but it was understood.

I stopped at the corner of 35th street and Reservoir Road for the turn. The Quonset huts put up during the war on the west side of the street were still in use. The light changed. I turned left down Reservoir Road, the huge Georgetown University Hospital complex looming straight ahead. Next door was the hill where I used to go sledding as a child. That seemed so long ago.

We registered at the Emergency Entrance. A nurse came to put the patient into a wheelchair. I realized this was a moment of total surrender for a lady who had hidden her pain for so long. Asking the nurse to stop a moment before entering the elevator, Mother looked up at me and exerting her last vestige of authority, requested, "Please, Patty, leave me now. Go back home." I was acutely sensitive at that moment our behavior with each other, conduct we considered normal, was really a way to hide our true emotions. Obediently, I turned without daring to look back.

Later, I did return. Was it only last night! I took the elevator to the floor where she had been given a room. A bouquet of mixed purple and yellow flowers, probably from the Walshes, placed in a simple green glass vase on the side table was the only bright spot in the stark white single room. I remember standing at the foot of her bed. I didn't know what to say. The silence weighed heavily. Finally, Mother gave a weak smile. "Don't worry. I'm comfortable, dear." I nodded. Again, silence reigned. Then Mother mumbled, "You can go now." Summoning up my courage, I edged toward the pillow. My lips touched the cool skin of the almost transparent forehead.

"I hope you sleep well. I'll be back tomorrow."

Mother nodded her head imperceptibly and waved wearily towards the door. Once again I was dismissed. The visit had been too brief. Mother knew her time was up.

By this time in my musing, I had arrived back at the hospital. I slammed the car door with a bit more vigor than intended and locked it. Yes, Mother knew, but she didn't know how to say goodbye!

Coming into the waiting area across from the nurse's station on the floor of my mother's room, I stopped short. I had run up the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator. Panting slightly, I remember having to grab the back of a chair to keep from falling. Then I looked up. There were Mrs. Walsh and her husband, the General. One was sitting on the sofa, the other in an armchair. Both stared at me but I wasn't sure they really saw me. The General's face was strained and gaunt. He sat erect not touching the back of his chair, his hands tightly clasped in his lap. His lips formed a tight line. His usually twinkling pale blue eyes were glassy. He and Mother had been so close. Mrs. Walsh, composed as usual, at least to the casual eye, her fair, almost porcelain face framed by shocking white, short hair, gave no betrayal of her emotions. These were stored in many layers of body fat. I had always wondered how those spindly little legs and tiny feet could support such weight. My mother and Caroline Walsh had been best friends all their lives. It was because of their governesses that they first met, two babies peering at each other over the edges of their prams.

At first, no one spoke. No one had to speak. It was over. It was like a dream, like a scene from some melodrama. In my mind, I really was not in the little room with the Walshes. I was outside of myself, outside and looking in.

"Give me beauty in the inward soul, and may the outward and the inward man be one." Socrates. Since the age of thirteen, I had been intrigued by philosophy. Mother always worried that her daughter would

become an intellectual instead of a wife and mother. She had wanted so much to be a grandmother. When John John Kennedy was born, she treated the news as if it were her own grandbaby, gushing over the little one in letters to me at Vassar.

At eighteen, somewhat Irish looking with brown wavy hair and blue eyes, I favored my father's family in looks. But, despite the lack of communication, I adored my mother and liked to think that if I didn't have her looks, I at least inherited my mother's mind. To describe the pedestal on which I placed my mother, I wrote a paper in seventh grade extolling her virtues. With no grade, the paper was returned with the comment: "Not a realistic mother-daughter relationship." The teacher didn't, couldn't, understand. Even with no exchange of confidences, there was love and respect. It was a silent understanding. To share private thoughts was inappropriate. We never did and now we never would. Tears threatened to start. Clenching my fists, I knew I had to hold myself together. Outwardly, I hoped to appear calm and respectful. Inside, I was terrified of loosing control. I grit my teeth to the point of pain. I could feel my heart pounding. Strangely enough, at the same time, I wanted to laugh.

When the General and Mrs. Walsh began to speak somberly and softly, I listened, but there was something gnawing at me. I will never forget that strange sensation. I was trying desperately to squelch the laugh, that unbidden relief that was welling up bigger and bigger inside my chest.

"Now, Patty dear," Mrs. Walsh began, "you must go in her room." She took out a handkerchief, wiped her eyes and continued. "You need to, need to, um, pay your last respects." Satisfied that she had said the right thing, the grand lady crossed her arms high over her large stomach, clenching the hanky in one hand and waited for my reply.

"No, I can't do that."

"Then perhaps, you might want to stop at the chapel for a few moments. It's on the ground floor near ," offered the General.

"No, I think I'll go now." Those words, barely above a whisper, came out very slowly.

"Where?" they asked in unison.

"Out." One word. That was all I could manage, just one word. I remember I simply had to get away, away from the whole scene. That unspeakable laugh was bound to escape. I had to leave quickly. The Walshes wouldn't understand. How could they? I didn't.

In minutes, I was back outside, heading for the car. The full realization had not yet hit. I had done everything by rote. Someone else or something

was in control as I found myself behind the wheel driving home. Then I was back. I was back in Mother's house . . . my mother's house . . . Suddenly, it hit. My mother was never coming home.

The laughter never came but neither did I cry. Psychologists would call the laugh 'denial', the cry 'acceptance'. I was somewhere in between.

CHAPTER III

"*I wonder why life brings us things that should but cannot be. And why we find ourselves enmeshed in bonds we should but cannot free*."

(Daly Highleyman)

These were the memories I was carrying around, repeating over and over, attempting to resolve themselves but never coming to a conclusion. It had been less than a year. I was still unsure of who I was and what I was supposed to do. I was not prepared to be without my mother. Now I was about to meet her Uncle.

At 5 PM, a breeze enters Rome from the sea, from Ostia. Relief from the day's heat can always be expected. Inside, we, the guests of the McMurrough sisters are gathered for a relaxing chat before dinner is served. One of the other guests is Bishop John J. McEleney from Jamaica. He was here for the Second Vatican Council (twenty-first Ecumenical Council). Originally from Boston, the Bishop is a warm and gentle man. Later that night, he confessed to me how hard it was to be celibate. I was stunned but did not say a word. Why should priests be celibate? I imagine he was hoping that the Ecumenical Council might have this issue on their agenda. It was my understanding that celibacy was a manmade decision. Perhaps it was true that it was based on the cost of maintaining married priests. I heard that some of the early priests who were married actually kept donations made to the Church for their homes and households. But here was a handsome man who was dedicated in his service to God and thus was forced to follow rules made by men.

Later, in bed, I went over in my mind what to tell my Great Uncle. How much did he know about me? How would he feel about changing the rules pertaining to celibacy? Should I say anything about this? The whole idea bothered me and since he was my Great Uncle, should I not be honest about my thoughts? Irma said for this first meeting with my uncle, she would remain behind with the McMurroughs.

Pope John XXIII and my Great Uncle William

Washington, DC 1960

My mother, a fourth generation Washingtonian, had insisted that I become a debutante. Both she and her mother had been "presented to society" in this fashion. It was 1960 and I had graduated from The Bishop's School in La Jolla, California. Although my mother wanted me to attend Sweet Briar College in Virginia, I chose Vassar College in New York. Students at Sweet Briar, she said, were "ladies". I am glad she never came to visit me at Vassar. She would have been shocked. Girls wore jeans and sweatshirts.

While I was settling in at Vassar, my mother planned to rent out our house in La Jolla and move back to Washington, DC. Going from California to Washington had become a pattern. Every other year, we moved West to East and West again, the routine beginning when my

grandmother died in 1954. I attended seven schools in seven years repeating Bishops School twice, once in seventh grade and again in twelfth.

In October, I received a telegram asking if I could fly down to Washington to meet with my mother for the weekend. She was flying in from California and wanted me help her move into a house she had found in Georgetown. I took a train to New York City and then a bus to La Guardia Airport. The round trip flight cost $38.28.

In my diary, I wrote about the first time my mother and I came to Washington, not just to visit my grandmother this particular trip, but to really make Washington, D.C. home. It was also the first time my mother and I had been able to fly straight across the country. Before, with propeller powered planes, the trip had gone as far as Chicago before needing to come down and refuel. The time between flights often allowed us time to visit Chicago, see the Planetarium or go shopping at Best & Co. Now with jets, the flight was non-stop from coast to coast and took only eight hours.

In 1953, I wrote:

> The plane circled around the city of Washington twice before it landed. My heart pounded with excitement when I saw the monuments of our nation's capital from the sky. Even before we landed, I could feel the change of atmosphere, the sedate, sophisticated quality of the East.
>
> The airport was swarming with hip, well-dressed ladies and gentlemen all looking as if they had walked out of the latest issue of *Vogue* and *Squire*. I loved this formality and appreciated its value. I was from California, the land of casual customs and casual people. I had come to Washington to visit my grandmother. I had also come to try out a new life, the life my mother was brought up in, the life of etiquette and social distinction. Life where the family is important and the personality develops from there. Here I was going to stay, in the midst of family tradition.
>
> My grandmother's chauffeur, Hans, carried our bags to the car and then drove back to pick us up at the Washington National Airport entrance. The ride to the city was like driving through a dream. We may have passed forests on the left, but all I could remember was the Potomac on the right and the city outline along the far shore with the rectangular back of the Lincoln Memorial and the towering monument manifesting itself beyond, and further, the towers of Georgetown University perched on the hill.

The formality of the airport was intensified in my grandmother's apartment. Under the Oriental rugs, behind the tapestry, among the antique chairs and under the mahogany baby grand piano crept tradition. All the rooms reflected another life, the era of the late 1800's. Here and there, certain objects caught my attention and have remained symbolic of my stay with my grandmother. In the library, standing against one wall, was a large, heavy oak table. The dark texture of the wood and the simplicity of the carving reminded me of the furnishings you might find at a typical English Hunt Club. On this table was a heavy iron statue of a Springer Spaniel. These two objects, the dog and the table, had belonged to a man I had never met, my grandfather.

At the end of a long hall was my grandmother's bedroom. My grandmother was an invalid and her room was her world. It was a long room and had many windows looking out over Connecticut Avenue and the ever-enlarging city. During the day, the room was filled with warm sunlight, which gaily sparkled on the mirrors of her dressing table. At the far end were a Victorian couch, a low antique table, and the general makings of a sitting room. A large, important looking desk partitioned the middle of the room. My grandmother had a key for each drawer. Severe solemnity hung over the family gatherings whenever one of those drawers was opened. A stranger would have thought my grandmother was hiding the crown jewels inside.

The guest room where my mother and I stayed was a cheerful pink with heavy down quilts on the beds. Two important procedures took place in that room. One was being served breakfast in bed. The other was taking a bath in the huge tub with feet holding it above the black and white tile floor. The tub was big enough for me to swim in it.

Katharine Hemmick Johnson

These passages brought back so many memories. I could close my eyes and almost see my grandmother. Nicknamed Monnie, she was an imposing figure. To me, she was positively regal. To others, perhaps, pompous. I remembered her as tall, her carriage erect despite the need for a cane. Maybe that image came from photographs I have seen, because by the time I was old enough to remember, my grandmother was an invalid spending most of the day in her huge sleigh-like wooden bed. Propped up with lots of puffy pillows, Monnie surveyed her kingdom: a cluttered room with a huge desk at one end and windows looking out at the city from two sides. Grandmother's grey and white hair was pulled back in a bun, but I knew it was quite long. The nurse who came every day spent time brushing the thick lustrous mass. Next to the bed was a table with a brown radio box on top of which was a small porcelain bowl filled with colorful and tasty sourballs. If I vowed I had been behaving properly, I was allowed to extract one sweet from the bowl. Those sourballs personified tokens of recognition, of being a veritable member of this prestigious family.

Lunch at Grandmother's was a formal affair, served as dinner in the middle of the day. When she felt up to it, grandmother herself would preside

over the table. Three, often four courses were served by the maid who appeared through a swinging door from the kitchen that was partially hidden by a French hand-painted screen. I learned to use a finger bowl but only after first embarrassing my mother by attempting to drink from it. Rarely was I permitted to speak and then only to respond if a question was posed directly to me. But I enjoy listening to the repertoire and observing the mannerisms of the adults.

The large, elegant, high-ceilinged apartment had room after room furnished with antiques. I particularly liked the library. With massive wooden double doors, it could be opened onto the music room. This is where I would dance for grandmother. Sometimes a relative or friend would play the rich red mahogany Steinway piano or turn on the gramophone and play classical music on the spinning 78 rpm records. I would twirl and plié, arms rounded, fingers extended gracefully as I had seen at the ballet and had been taught by my ballet teacher, Sarah Woods in La Jolla. I remember being completely absorbed by the music. The mazurkas and polonaises of Chopin created the mood for the would-be ballerina. My mother and grandmother loved to watch the completely uninhibited child glide and whirl. These brief and happy moments were really the only times that young Patty was allowed to express herself freely. When adults talked, children were expected to remain still. Often my mother and grandmother conversed in French. I guessed this was so ‘the child’ would not understand.

So many memories drifting through my mind as I sauntered through a much more ancient history, the twisting and turning maze of narrow cobble stone streets that contribute to the charm, on foot at least, of Trastevere, walking alone, putting in time before heading for my Uncle’s. Finally, finding some stone steps to sit on, I looked out at the Tiber River as it flowed past the Isola Tiberina, the island that separates Trastevere from the ancient City of Rome, and my mind returned to that fateful day.

CHAPTER IV

According to a quote I found in my diary, "*They say that a child raised without one of his parents is marked irremediably, but he suffers more from the absence of a mother than the absence of a father. The modern world was built without a mother. It has suffered from the absence of a mother. It is inhuman*." (This is a translation but I do not know its origin.)

Only months before that dismal day, I was in New York City at the Lexington Hotel. This is what I wrote:

March 29, 1961. I have been reading Katherine Mansfield's Journal. Like her, I feel inspired to write. Yet, will I be able to? As I walk through the streets of New York, I talk to myself and tell myself what I could write. I observe and feel and yet, unless I took up my pen on the spot, I doubt if anything good would be written. I have so many thoughts and so wish I could plan and organize my mind to focus on one thought long enough to jot it down. Constantly, I feel the strain of wanting too much in too little time.

Life is in every way but one, a trial, a kind of Hell. Only love is still sticky from its birth; its source, the Divine. The Divine is something unknown to us and impossible to know, although we all have theories. So too is love. It cannot be described or planned or organized. When a man and a woman embrace because of love, neither one is aware of the world. She does not think how good it feels in his arms. No. For a moment, it is indescribable bliss. So many novels are cheap because they try to describe love. Some are vulgar. But a true description of love can only be a blank page with a footnote saying: trust your own experience.

Should I write his name down yet? Or is it too soon to tell? Yes, I think I can. Baudouin has been so much on my mind. His name comes to me when I am not prepared and that confuses me. Once I read that to judge love (if judge one may), ask yourself, do I love him because I need him or do I need him because I love him? I can answer for both and this upsets me.

Love can not in any way be categorized. Then how can one tell if this is true and genuine? I guess I would answer that as long as this love for Baudouin makes me happy, as long as he gives me a sense of security when I am with him and when I think about him (the difference between *penser à* and *penser de*), then that love, for me, will be true and wholesome and good.

Now I have said his name. I only wish and pray I can be his forever. Baudouin, I think I love you and need you too.

Mother adores him and, so far, she has always judged right. Is this a sign?

It is funny that, until now, I have not spoken about Mother. For she is my primary concern. I am in New York because she is now at the Memorial Hospital. And yet, I don't want to write about that. My feelings are so mixed. Please give me time.

Tinkling
Sounds, movement, magnified dread
Resounding long after the streaks appear:
Parabolic immobility:
Reality.

The breeze blows.
The simplicity of silence reigns once more.

I call these lines 'Reflections of Man's Image'. It gave me a way of transferring my emotions into verse. "Now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are opened." Poetry always expresses thoughts so well and so succinctly.

Carl Jung had said in a book I read recently, "Look at the image concealed within the emotion." I dabbled in words looking for an image, something to describe what I was feeling. But what was my mother feeling right now? What was she experiencing? To her daughter, me, she was an enigma, her life a puzzle. How I wish I could put those pieces of her personal puzzle together. But humans, by their very definition, are an enigma. Aren't they?

That is what I wrote not knowing it was only months before I would loose her forever. In my diary, I wasn't looking to be a writer. I was a writer. A writer watching myself watching myself.

On that day, the day I came home from the hospital and found myself alone, it struck me like a blow in the face. My mother was never coming home. I phoned Baudouin.

Baudouin suggested he come by and we take a walk along the C & O canal, then up to the Mickey Tavern for tea. He always knew the right thing to do. Maybe it was his European heritage; he was Belgian. I was grateful for his thoughtfulness. Many years ago, my mother had a European beau. He was French. That was when she lived in Paris, several years before I was born. I remember one time in 1954, just two years after my mother's divorce, some news had arrived in the mail. Someone dear to my mother had died. For one week, I caught mother choking back tears, but no explanation was ever given. So many unanswered questions. Questions I wish I had asked. But in the last eight months, illness had dictated our conversations, which, though never confidential, were even more short and benign.

So on that depressing day, instead of soaking in gloom, I was enjoying myself in the last rays of the evening sun on the terrace of the little tavern overlooking the C & O Canal. Through the trees, the Potomac River pounded its way over the rocks and down to the Atlantic. The weather was pleasant, not hot as it can be in early September as we strolled along the path that parallels the canal. Baudouin never pressed me with probing questions. We talked about his dog and his studies at the University. It wasn't until he drove me home and I walked through the door that the present came rushing back and with it, shame and embarrassment and confusion. To think that I had enjoyed myself on the very day my mother died.

On a positive note, someone said maybe having a foot in the past helps you live in the present better. I hope so.

Call it denial, but I did not think the months since the funeral had wrought any major inward or outward changes. Two of my friends came to share my house—yes, now it was *my* house—until the end of the first college semester. Then I returned to Vassar College. It was January 1962.

My professors recognized what I could not and, although nothing was said, my course load was lightened. However, beyond the grief and behind the façade of nonchalance, I harbored thoughts unrelated to myself and, unfortunately, not relating to my studies either. I was consumed with a desire to know more about the lovely and lonely woman who had been my mother. What had become of the French beau? Why had mother left Paris?

Some of my questions were answered during spring break. According to mother's will, I was summarily instructed to sell the house in Southern California. I had been so happy there. I pleaded with the attorneys and the Walshes, now my appointed guardians, to allow me to keep the house in La Jolla.

"Couldn't I at least rent it?" I begged.

But the law was firm and my mother's intentions very clear. She wanted her daughter to remain in the East.

So I flew back to California. The pink stucco ranch house with its open beamed wood ceilings, its first-ever (according to my father) room divider, its tall brick fireplace and built-in book shelves, this comfortable California home now felt lonely and quiet. I sat down on the window seat, the one my mother and I used to share with Fritzy, our cocker spaniel. Fritzy died just weeks before mother. He had been sent to a kennel ostensibly to get away from the Washington summer heat, but it would haunt me for years that I was not there when he needed me most. He died alone at the kennel in Falls Church, Virginia. When he first came to live with us, he was four months old and I was four years old. He traveled everywhere with us. Then at age fourteen, he was sent away. Mother's nurse couldn't watch over him and my mother, though devoted to Fritzy, couldn't even get out of bed those last few weeks to pat him. I was attending school and only walked him when I came home from classes. Tears well up even now as I think about Mr. Foo as I called him. Sitting on this window seat, looking out at the Pacific and the shoreline, memories swirled, memories of happy times and lonely times. Now, without my mother and without Fritzy, the house no longer felt friendly. Without mother, there was also an eerie feeling of mystery. Yes, the house was mine, but it was only mine to sell.

Fritzy in La Jolla

Sadly, I roamed through the rooms, taking note of what could be shipped and what could be sold. One place I had never explored was the closet at the end of the hallway. Mother always kept it locked. Now I had all the keys. Timidly, as if mother were watching, I tried each one. Finally, I finally found the right key and opened the forbidden door. Behind a fur coat and various woolen winter clothes was a huge cardboard carton. Pressing a sharp key against the tape, I pried it open and, inside were bundles of letters. There were hundreds of them, each tied with a narrow faded blue ribbon. The black ink script was unfamiliar. Looking more closely, I saw that the letters had a French postmark. With mixed emotions, I untied the top bundle. My fingers trembled uncontrollably as I slid the yellowed paper out of its opened envelope. My knowledge of French was adequate enough to understand almost all of the words and definitely the substance of the letter. I opened another. With a glance, I knew the contents would be as intimate as the previous letter. No, I simply could not bring myself to read any more. Riffling through the pile, I discovered all the letters were from France and all were from a person named Amédée. Years and years of love: a literary affair. Without hesitation and armed only with the wisdom of an eighteen-year-old, I carried the big box to the living room. I lit a fire in the fireplace. First one by one, then taking several at a time, I tossed the deepest, most secret part of my mother's life into the devouring flames. Instantly, they were transformed into ashes—ashes to ashes—dust to dust.

Now here I was in Rome about to meet a man who, I did not know at the time, could have helped my mother so many years ago.