

Anna



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Edward. F. Tablak \

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Prologue

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Refugee Camp in Jordan

Anna drew off her gloves, tossed them into the bin, untied the mask and tossed it too. Her green scrubs were dripping wet. Dr. Griffiths helped her pull off the top and tossed it onto the laundry pile.

Anna literally dropped onto the bench across from the lockers. She was sweating over every square inch of her body. Her shoulders sagged as she looked up to thank her friend and colleague.

Nurse Slavich handed her a fresh Turkish towel.

“Congratulations, Doctor. That was absolutely brilliant. We all thought that there was little possibility that you could save her right eye.”

Anna's voice was hardly louder than a whisper as she responded with, “Thanks, Marie.” She felt Mark Griffiths’ hand on her shoulder and gave him a weak smile. She recognized the voices of other team members as they murmured their congratulations, and nodded her acknowledgement.

She knew that the entire team was fatigued from the grueling five hour stretch in the operating room. And she knew they shared her joy in the success in spite of the extreme efforts.

She must have fallen into a momentary trance, she thought, when she realized that the men had moved into their own locker room and that her female colleagues were already in the showers. In fact, she noticed that two of them were already toweling down, ready to dress and head for their sleeping quarters.

Anna wearily dragged herself to her feet, dropped her clothes and grabbed the towel Marie had given her.

Her spirits brightened as the water washed away her fatigue and the aroma of the body oil replaced the smell of the operating room.

She was looking forward to a quiet evening with her husband, Fred, who was working with the Maternal and Child health mobile at a neighboring camp.

She got into her converted golf cart, the best means of transportation around the refugee camp. The path from the mobile unit to her quarters took her near the residential center where she had been taken care of in a foster home when she was four years old. Fortunately, she had been there for only a short time before being adopted by her American parents.

The drive through the area brought back memories of the precious love that she had received at a time when it had counted for so much. She felt emotion welling up as she remembered how frightened she had been and the immense relief to be saved by those two.

Even after twenty five years she had a clear picture, one that she had nourished for all those years. It was the day that Diane and Ben had taken her for a visit to Amman.

I was practically bug-eyed viewing the homes and buildings as we drove into the populated area surrounding Amman. Diane answered almost every one of my questions in Arabic. When she pronounced some word that sounded a little off to me, I began to help her speak like I did, correcting her mispronunciations. I remember that we began making a game of the pronunciation variations and laughed a lot at Ben, who was taking a crash course to brush up. He got the most laughs!

I marveled at the television picture before I went to bed. I was so delighted with the large bed, I jumped up and down like the little girl I truly was.

I loved the day that Diane took me shopping for some play clothes and some undies. We stopped by a children's bookstore, where I was allowed to browse and choose two books. I must have spent a half hour, looked at more than a dozen books, chose one and could not decide between the next two. I can't remember how that ended up.

Anna sensed tears forming behind her eye lid as she recalled the next day.

Diane and Ben took had taken her for a walk in the beautiful gardens of the embassy. They sat together on a stone bench and Ben lifted me onto his lap. Diane asked, "Anna how would you like to come and live with us for a long, long time?"

"You mean forever?"

"Yes, if that is all right with you. We love you and would love to be your new parents. We want to adopt you."

Tears gushed out while I nodded my head up and down. I was so choked up with emotion, I just couldn't say anything. I wrapped my arms around Ben's neck and my tears dampened his shirtfront. Diane wrapped her arms around the two of us and let her joyful tears join ours.

Chapter 1.

Jordan, 1991

Little Anna was cradled in the arms of her foster mother. She had no way to know that her world was about to change once more.

She had not realized that she would never see her parents again. Each day, she awakened with the idea that her mother or father would come by to pick her up.

As the days passed, slowly the hope began to fade, and the images of her mother and father began to blur at the edges.

Her tears had dried as she listened to the humming of an old Palestinian folk tune emanating from the lips of her temporary Mama. At that very moment, the SUV brought Diane and Cookie to the Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. This was their second visit to the camp.

They had stopped to register with the gate attendants. Diane said to her friend, "Cookie, I am going to section 40 to visit the several foster homes for children. Where are you headed?"

"I have gifts for nine children below the age of twelve. I can join you if there are children in that age range."

"As I remember there are at least a half dozen in that age range."

"Good. Let's ask to be dropped off together."

"That will be wonderful. You can be my interpreter, since my Arabic is rather formal."

"Cookie said, "Your Arabic will pass, and I hear that one of the girls, Anna, is extremely bright."

"Yes," Diane replied. I believe she is."

Diane was a member of the American Embassy staff in Jordan and Cookie, her friend, was the wife of the Egyptian ambassador to the king.

Little Anna was napping when they arrived so Diane and Cookie met with and distributed gifts to more than a half dozen other youngsters. Most of them had been in a study hall, making it easy to engage them in conversation and ask questions. Cookie found two who were struggling with arithmetic problems, so she and Diane spent twenty minutes helping the girls with their homework.

Just as they were finishing, Anna, accompanied by a teenage girl, walked toward the seated group. Anna gave a shy smile to Diane who stood and greeted Anna. Diane said in Arabic, "It is nice to see you again, Anna. How are you feeling?"

Anna, using the same inflection that Diane used, said "Very well, thank you." The rest of the conversation was conducted in the same formal manner.

"Have you found a dolly yet?"

"No, I haven't."

“Would you be kind enough to accept a replacement from me?”

“Yes, thank you! That would be very nice.”

Diane turned to the large bag she had placed at her feet. She pulled out a box containing a very nice rag doll, well made, but not too expensive. It would not do to have an expensive gift, something none of the other children would have. Anna calmly accepted the box and slowly began to untie the gift ribbons. She removed the lid and shouted, “This is just like my dolly that I lost.” She hugged the dolly and said, “Thank you. You are a special gift maker.” She curtsied and then came forward and wrapped her tiny arms around Diane’s neck.

Both had tears of joy spilling over their eyelashes but neither bothered to wipe them as they stayed wrapped in each other’s arms. Anna uncoiled herself, took Diane by the hand and led her off to a slow walk away from the others. No words were spoken or attempted but the wordless communication of love flowed and spoke volumes.

When they returned, Diane told Cookie what she hoped to find out. “I need to distribute the rest of the gifts to the other children and ask you to see what you can discover about Anna’s family.”

Forty minutes later she was back. She sat at the table, taking Anna into her lap, giving the little one a coloring book that Cookie had brought for her. It seemed only minutes before she heard Cookie calling, “Time to leave, Diane.” Anna turned and clung to her, repeating “Thank you. I love you” in her native tongue.

Diane and Cookie said little during the first part of the return trip. Diane was deep into introspection. Her mind drifted back to the day she was told by the doctor that giving birth was no longer an option.

After some time had passed, Diane said, “Every once in a while I awake and can’t get back to sleep, thinking about a little girl for my husband, Ben. And the way I would dress her. Silly of me, but there are times when I feel I let Ben down. I know he would scold me for that kind of thinking, but I can’t help the thoughts seeping into my mind. I’m sure he would love Anna if I can arrange for him to meet her.”

In response, Cookie put her warm hand on Diane's arm and shared something very personal with Diane. Diane placed her hand over Cookie's to acknowledge the shared intimacy, but her thoughts were with Ben and Anna.

Noticing that Diane continued to stare in space, Cookie finally said. “Tell me, Diane. Are you dreaming of Anna?”

“Yes I am. If there were some way to work it out. I would love to adopt her.”

“If you do, I can tell you that you will have a brilliant, sharp little girl, smart beyond her years. She has been schooled early by a loving and doting set of parents, who were obviously well educated and probably both professionals. We had quite an adult conversation when you left the two of us together.”

“That is very special news, but I would hope to have her as our own regardless. I wonder if it is at all possible.”

“It is probably unusual but not unheard of according to what I know happens occasionally in Egypt.”

“I need to find out the procedures.”

“If I may make a suggestion, why not discuss it with Queen Rania. Her passion for the welfare of children will give you a straight answer. If she thinks it is best for Anna, she will not only guide you but probably would move the earth to see that it happens.”

Diane mulled over the idea, and then said, “I hardly think that would be appropriate.”

“Of course it is appropriate. She had a deep sense of gratitude for the role you played in saving her children. She would love to have a way to say thanks, but only if it would be the right thing for Anna.”

Diane’s thoughts drifted back to the incident in which she had help uncover a plot to kidnap the King’s children while she worked undercover with a security agent of Jordan. It had been part of her task as the naval attaché at the American embassy. Her boss, the Ambassador, had been proud as he watched Diane being feted by the King and Queen.

Her boss had become aware of the deep personal relationship that had developed between Diane and Queen Rania. She was often a guest at the palace for lunch or to play bridge. He knew that Rania relied on fashion advice from Diane. Recently he had been informed by his chief of intelligence at the embassy that a plot to kidnap the royal children was rumored across the underworld. His chief, who was a close friend of the head of the King’s security team, had recommended that Diane was a natural to team up with a Jordanian security member to work undercover. He had said, “It is a great opportunity to seal our relationship with Jordanian Security, which has better access to Midwestern intel than we do.”

It had been planned and executed to the last detail, with Diane playing a key role in discovering and thwarting the plot.

Three days later, the three friends were on a special shopping trip, not an unusual activity for them. Rania loved to find just the right clothing “off the rack” although her personal tailor could have copied any dress she had seen in the boutique shops.

Cookie was saying, “You have saved a fortune instead of having all those gowns tailored and hand made especially for this affair.”

Rania giggled, “Maybe you are right, but we will still be standouts, thanks to Diane.” She turned to Diane and said, “By the way, I understand that you were planning to pay for lunch, but it has all been handled. Why would you even think of it? You know the unspoken rule when I invite you.”

Cookie interjected, “It was my idea. I knew that Diane has a request of you and was not certain how to approach you. I called to tell her that this luncheon was a good time to introduce the subject and teased her by saying she could repay us by buying lunch.”

That brought a smile to the queen’s lips. “Cookie, you are a tease and good for a laugh, but I was planning to call both of you just as I heard your call coming in.”

She looked at Diane. “You must never hesitate to call me. “

“It is such a personal favor, nothing to do with State affairs.”

“That is of no consequence. In any event, we are here now.”

“All right. Do you remember the three or four year old that had been left at the gate of the camp just before our visit to the foster home area of the camp?”

“I do. She appeared to be very sweet and intelligent, and I could see your compassion for her.”

“Yes. Well, I had another visit with her when you arranged our visit when Cookie and I distributed gifts. My visit confirmed what I felt the first five minutes I had spent with Anna. I feel this desperate need to care for her as if she were our own.”

“Even if you know nothing of her background?”

“Without question. My husband agrees. He says no background check is necessary. Whatever problems she may have, we will work with just as we would with our own child. In real life, one can never tell what problems may come for any child.”

“You do understand that the very color of her skin will be a question for your acquaintances when you return home. In fact, in public here, eyebrows will be raised.”

“Yes, I do understand. Ben and I have spent hours trying to explore every facet of such an adoption. We have seen several very successful cases of Asian children being adopted by our citizens, dating back to the Korean War.”

As Diane continued her plea, Rania listened carefully, not only to the words from Diane, but she listened to the tone of voice, the passion and the empathy. She wanted to be certain that it was not only sympathy at work.

Diane finally lapsed into silence. Rania let the silence linger for a full minute before she said, “Not only because you are my friend but because I do believe that it would truly benefit Anna, I will try to help you to become the adopted parents of Anna. First, I must tell you a secret.

“A secret?”

“Yes. I felt that this request might be in your heart from that day we met her together. I have taken the liberty to try to discover any information possible about Anna. It seems that her mother was a schoolteacher and her father a medical doctor. We found a neighbor who identified the little girl from a picture our investigator took before he traveled to two areas recently identified as places where Palestinians had been arrested and taken into custody for defying the Israelis.”

“Were the neighbors able to help much?”

“Yes. You could see for yourself that she appears to be in good physical health, which was confirmed by our own doctor. The neighbor served as a part time nanny when the mother was teaching. She

also confirmed that the mother spent hours reading and conversing with the young one as though she were an adult.”

“You mentioned arrests. Is it possible her parents were arrested and may still be repatriated and want to find Anna?”

“No. Our investigator confirms that they were both killed during the raid while some survivors were arrested. I understand and would not even consider your request if there was evidence of either parent being alive.”

“Was your investigator able to discover how the youngster arrived here?”

“Not actually, but he speculates that a friend of her grandmother brought her here. The grandmother already has four grandchildren she is raising as a result of her children being killed and leaving orphans.”

“Rania, I thank you for all this information and anything you can do to make this wish come true.”

“You know that it will take some time. You must submit this paper work.” She smiled as she reached into her bag to produce a sheaf of applications and information forms. She also had a booklet describing the adoption procedures. You will undergo the same process any of our own applicants do. I have no doubt that all will be approved up to the point when a decision must be made regarding your status as a foreigner. At this the application will be submitted to the King’s administration office, and it is there where I can be of real assistance.”

Cookie added, “It may take time but it will happen. I am sure.”

The Queen said, “You should know that the scrutiny will be detailed, the investigators asking for much information from the embassy.”

“I thought so and I’m sure that there is nothing that might prove either of us untrustworthy.”

“Good, now let’s finish our coffee and head for home where we can daze our husbands with private modeling shows, starting with some of those special, what was that word,? Oh yes, “skimpy” garments that Diane believed necessary to complete our ensembles.”

It took six weeks to complete the adoption process. Diane and Ben were taken to the camp by a limo provided by Rania. Mrs. Ghass, Anna's foster Mama, was rocking Anna on the front veranda when they arrived. To no one's surprise, a shy tearful Anna was clinging to her 'Mama.' She unwrapped herself slowly and asked, "Will I ever see you again, Mama?"

Diane interjected, "Definitely, Anna. In fact we are going to have Mama be with us for your fourth birthday party in June."

Anna squealed with delight and hugged Mama before slowly moving to put her arms around Diane's legs, burying her face into Diane's skirt.

Anna curtsied to Rania as she entered the casual sitting room of the palace. “Thank you, Anna, and welcome. I understand you graduated as the valedictorian of your high school class. You are so young to be a graduate.”

“Yes, your honor.”

Forgetting her shyness in front of the queen, she burst into a wide smile. “This visit to your land is a reward from Dad and Mom for my achievement. I am so excited. Thank you for having us.”

Rania smiled. “It is my pleasure, dear.” She turned to hug Diane and then put out her hand to Ben. “Please have a seat. “Tea will be served shortly.”

Anna was eyeing a large book that was placed on a side table. Rania noticed and said, “Anna, you might find that book to be very interesting. There are twenty four paintings of scenes at the camp where you were living with Mrs. Ghass.”

Anna was so absorbed in the paintings that she was unaware that someone had entered the room. She finally tuned into Diane’s voice, sharply calling. “Anna, please rise and curtsy to the King.”

She rose, flustered and blushing a deep red, did an awkward curtsy and stood erectly, lips locked as she was struck dumb. The King smiled, put out his hand for a shake to welcome her to Jordan. “Thank you for the honor of your visit, Anna.”

She finally composed herself, curtsied again and said, “I am delighted to meet you, your Highness. The visit is our honor.”

The king moved to greet Diane and Ben, and then invited them to take their seats. He said, “I have only a few minutes but while I am here I want to present some official papers to Anna.”

He moved to a side table and picked up an envelope. He held out the envelope to Anna, saying “Since all your life records were never recovered after you were brought to Jordan from Palestine, our government has decided to issue a Jordanian birth certificate showing the date of June 1, 1987. That makes you a Jordanian citizen. Also enclosed are a passport and some other official papers. You are accorded the privileges enjoyed by all our citizens.”

Anna was speechless, the tears gushing from her eyes as she took the King’s hand to kiss his ring. He pulled her to his chest and held her for a long moment.

“We are making it possible to bring into citizenship as many of our Palestinian brothers and sisters as we can. Welcome, Anna. Now I must be excused.” After brief handshakes, he departed for his official duties.

Tea and sweet cakes were served. The conversation centered on the recent lives and events occurring in the two families. As the time for leaving neared, Rania turned to Anna. "I assume you would like to visit with your Mama, Mrs. Ghass."

Anna blurted, "I was just trying to find the words to ask you if that would be possible."

Rania smiled. "It has been arranged."

She turned to Diane and Ben. "With your permission, I would like to have your bags brought to the palace. With two of our children married and living elsewhere we have plenty of room."

She overrode all objections, saying, "I want to spend some private time with Diane, and, Ben, I understand you want to visit and consult with some of our medical professionals."

She rose and walked to Anna, who rose to meet her. "I have arranged for a ride with my personal driver to the camp. I want you to spend whatever time you desire. In fact, I think it might be well for you to visit other sections of the camp. Abdul will be your driver and personal guard. How does that sound?"

Anna forgot her official visiting manner and said, "Wow. That will be cool." She realized her error and began to apologize, but Rania said, "I hoped you'd think it would be cool."

Word had been sent ahead so that "Mama" was waiting on the small veranda. She stepped down to ground level and waited to wrap this tall, lanky and beautiful young woman in her arms. Tears flowed abundantly as love passed from one to the other.

Several hours passed as Anna brought her up to date on the last few months since her last very long letter. Except for one visit in Amman with Mama about ten years ago, Anna had written long letters about four or five times each year.

Mama was especially delighted with the news of being the valedictorian of her class and learning of her plan to study pre-med at Stanford. "Have you decided what kind of doctor you want to be?"

"Not yet. I just want to be serving needy children, which means that I should be thinking about a field we call pediatrics, but I have plenty of time to plan."

Mama said, "I'm certain you will make a good decision. She looked at the clock on the wall and said, "Come, walk with me to pick up the children, who will be getting out of school in a few minutes."

Anna stood and took Mama's hand in her own, then started for the door. On the way, Mama explained, "The children are twins, five years old. They have been with me for just a few weeks."

Badran and Abbass were just emerging from the school ground as Anna and Mama neared. Badran was scowling but Abbass was wearing a wide grin. They paused when they realized that Mama had a visitor. Badran said in a wary tone, "She doesn't look like one of those nosy welfare workers. She's wearing jeans and a t-shirt and sandals. Is she a new inmate? Do we have to share our room with her?"

Anna noted the anger in his tone of questioning. Mama answered with a mild voice, "Badran and Abbass, meet our temporary guest. This is Anna who lived with me about twelve years ago."

Still in a smoldering tone, Badran said “So where will we be sleeping while she is here?”

Anna gave them a smile and said, “I brought a sleeping bag and plan to sleep on the floor, if that is okay with Mama.”

That seemed to mollify Badran. Abbass gave her a smile and asked, “Where did you come from? You are dressed well than we were when we arrived from Ramallah.”

Anna hesitated. I came to visit from Amman. I am staying there now.” Mama noticed the clever evasion and nodded her approval.

Badran asked “Did you live in any other part of the camp before you came to live with Mama?”

“I was so young but I don’t think so. Why do you ask?”

Abbass interjected, “We lived in a shack without water or electricity with an older tough guy. He was the one who brought us from Ramallah when our parents were killed.”

Badran shouted, “Shut up. I don’t want us to talk about that.”

Mama thought it might help to tell them about Anna. “This young lady’s parents were killed when she was not yet four years old. She was brought directly to me by some stranger.” She, too, knows the same pain that you do, Badran.”

He turned silent and within the minute dashed for home.

Abbass was full of questions about Amman during the rest of the afternoon. Anna was most accommodating with full responses, digging into her memory of the visit there ten years before. Badran spent the rest of the day with his nose in several books.

After the boys were in bed, Anna conferred with Mama and Abdul, who was planning to sleep on the veranda. She asked them, “Do you think I could visit the areas of the camp that Badran was discussing?”

Mama started to object but Abdul asked, “Why, Anna?”

“I’ve read much information about refugee camps and most of what I read does not fit what I have seen so far. Here you have mostly buildings for housing and schools and a clinic. I would like to see what less fortunate refugees have to endure.”

Abdul said, “Let me think about that. I want to do some exploring first. If I can be sure I am not risking our lives, I will do what I can.

About eight thirty the next morning Abdul appeared and said “I have a plan that I think will work. I will introduce you to a young lady who is just about your age who comes here to go to school but lives with her family in sector sixty five.”

Mama tried to put a halt to the planning, but Abdul said, "My job is to protect her and I will, even with my own life, but there is no danger. Yes. There are hoodlums in this camp, but the security people will work with me to keep Anna safe.

So it was arranged. Anna, with a small hand-held recorder, was able to record almost every conversation. The following pages are from Anna's journal of that visit.

Abdul explained that the continuous influx of refugees was faster than the government could improve facilities. Therefore what I was about to see was the real plight of refugees across the Middle East. Fortunately some of the ones who come here from Palestine may eventually have the opportunity to move to better quarters and some will earn citizenship as Jordanians. "You do remember that the Queen's family was from Palestine."

Abdul introduced me to Rona, who was a senior in what passed for their high school. The building wasn't much but the teachers must have been exceptional. She was shy but well-spoken in English and she was a great interpreter. I explained that my Arabic was rusty although I planned to study Arabic at Stanford. I asked her how she came to be so fluent at so young an age.

She said, "Two years ago there was a young lady, Martha, from California who volunteered here as an English teacher. We became good friends. She took extra time to tutor me. We worked hard on my learning the idioms of your language.

"She often came home for a meal with me after which my brother would see that she got back safely. The area between here and Section 60 can be very dangerous at night."

Rona agreed to give me a good introduction into life as she lived it in the camp. She was determined to escape this life eventually by earning her citizenship as a Jordanian.

As we entered that sector of the camp, I felt it was worse than entering a ghetto in the States. I walked along a narrow alleyway, avoiding an open sewage ditch. I saw a lot of very small makeshift houses, each leaning on the other for support. There were no streets, sidewalks, gardens, flowers or trees. I saw no shops.

The smell was anything but sweet. It was a mixture of sewage combined with the aroma of various spices used in their makeshift outdoor kitchens.

I met and saw an uprooted, stateless, scattered people far from home struggling for survival. I passed dozens of small children. I learned that some were the third generation of Palestinians born in some other camp and eventually arriving here.

Abdul encouraged me to talk with some of the older men who sat silently in front of these buildings that served as their homes away from home.

Some of the children were clean and neat although in well patched clothing, while others looked like the pictures that some of the television advertising displayed in order to draw sympathy for contributions. Their clothing was tattered and soiled and they had the look of ragamuffins. I felt tears rising but fought to control any display of my emotions.

Rona noticed and tactfully turned away to give me time to recoup as we headed for her home.

Rona eventually led me through the door of a shabby dwelling, not unlike the hundreds of others like it. I saw a woman on her hands and knees, in pants and shirt, scrubbing a concrete floor. She arose, somewhat laboriously, as she was very pregnant.

Rona's mother was seated, kneading some dough. Two women, using their time and energy by endlessly making do in a makeshift home, a home that is only this room with a concrete floor and blankets stacked against the walls for beds. The toilet was a closeted hole in the floor.

I learned that this family has never known the convenience of a tub or a toilet, nor did any members of her family enjoy the luxury of a room or even space in which a person might find some solitude.

Rona told me that she was the lucky one. She was able to shower in the public shower at the school once a week and could use the tap water in the girl's restroom to wash each day before leaving school.

"Our family is only eight," Rona told me, as we sat on the floor.

She told me that members of the family, in addition to Rona, her parents, and her brother Ahmad, include another brother and wife who were pregnant and two younger brothers.

Rona said that the United Nations provided funds to meet basic needs, such as medical clinics and schooling. But no one had extended the kind of help that would allow all the people to find a way out of this morass.

As gentle as she was, I saw her passion as she told me that, on the other hand, Americans annually gave five hundred and twenty-eight dollars per capita to the Israelis and three dollars per capita to the Palestinians. She said, "I know that life improves a bit since Jordan keeps asking and getting more funds for us in the camps."

We shared some very weak tea and bread that her mother had baked the day before. The four of us discussed a myriad of matters, especially about my life in America. By the time Abdul called me, my heart was aching. If nothing else, I was committed to finding a way for Rona to fulfill her dream of escaping this life so that she is not the mother of another generation of children born in this camp."

I was silent and Abdul did not press for any conversation as we drove back to Mama's. When we neared Amman Abdul said, "I presume your recorder has most of your conversations as well as the notes."

"Definitely," I replied.

"I am sure the Queen would be interested to hear the unabridged tape. She has a deep sensitivity to the lot of her Palestinians, especially the children who have not yet benefitted from her efforts to expand the government assistance. By the way, your Palestinian Arabic is improving nicely."

"Thank you Abdul. Your English is almost impeccable."

He laughed and asked, "How do you feel?"

“Sad and moved to make some contribution. Thank you for making this happens. I suddenly realized that I am one of the millions of Palestinians in exile, even if vastly different from the ones I met today.”

She noticed that Mama had waited dinner. She was aware also that Badran had a few tears escaping as she described the living quarters of Rona’s family. His attitude had evaporated.

Abbass said “That is the same kind of room we lived in before they brought us to Mama.”

They seemed deeply impressed with Anna’s description of how Rona managed to earn her way to the good high school and of her dreams to become a citizen of Jordan.

Abdul got into the act with some stories from his youth and the way he had become a security agent for the King and Queen. The boys were wide-eyed as he told stories about Anna’s new Mama saving the royal children from being kidnapped so many years ago.

Anna asked the boys if they would read a story from their text books. Both hustled to be first. Abbass read beautifully as did his brother. She had a special curiosity about Abbass’ ability to read with his “lazy eyes.”

She saw him as a very attractive boy who probably had to defend himself against bullies who viewed him as some sort of freak.

She was thrilled to see that the problem did not affect his ability to read but she wondered if this would affect his future. It could limit his outlook on life; limit his progress since his peers would always be uncomfortable in his presence.

She was to say later that perhaps that was the moment that eventually led to her decision to major in ophthalmology in medical school.

When they were ready to leave in the morning, Anna said she planned to write to them. Both boys gave her warm hugs. She felt that a kind of kinship had sprung up after sharing her story of the trip to Rona’s home. They both promised to answer her letter. Abbass said, “I will try to write some American words but the letters will be in Arabic.”

“”That’s fine. Be sure to write clearly so I can understand all the words.”

Anna Peters, M.D. was in her last year of residency preparing for a long day of surgery at the Veterans Medical Center. She was the youngest graduate of Stanford Medical School in history and the youngest in her current residency at Yale.

Her last call during the prior evening was a chat with Dan Foster, a retired thirty year veteran of the Marine Corps. Dan was the proud owner of dozens of medals including a purple heart with five clusters, and the Navy Medal with one cluster. His career had begun in Korea and ended in Afghanistan just three months ago.

He had given out a quiet wolf whistle as he eyed her long beautiful legs and lifted his eyes to see the patina of tan that covered her arms, throat and face. She had laughed and said, "Down, Boy."

He laughed, saying "I know I'm old enough to be your grampa but it's the Marine in Me."

She flipped her stethoscope into her ears and placed the other head over his heart. She laughed, saying, "I must not be that special. Your heart rate hasn't risen very high." That wasn't quite true. His heart seemed to be racing. She listened to his breathing and was pleased.

She reached for his hand so that she could take a pulse reading. His fingers were as stiff as the tines on a fork. Touching the tight muscles of his lower arm, she realized that he was tense and probably scared. A second look at his eyes revealed a bit of terror that he was attempting to mask.

"Hey, Danny, relax. I'm just your sweetheart, ready to help you see and read a bit more easily. Why are you so wound up?"

"Doc, I keep having these thoughts about being blind. I still remember awaking after the Taliban raid and being unable to see for two days. I'm afraid that may happen again when I wake up after the operation."

Anna placed one hand gently on his arm and the fingers of her other hand on his cheek. "Danny, I promise you that just the opposite will be the case. I will have to bandage your eyes but for just a few moments. After you awake you will have no bandages so that you will know that you are not blind. I will be there to see your eyes opening. Your vision will be good. That's a promise."

She sensed the easing of his tension with her left hand but kept her fingers on his cheek for another minute.

His face broke into a grin "Thanks, sweetie. I know my lover girl will turn out to be my angel."

It was now two twenty five the next afternoon. Anna had responded to a call from the recovery room that Dan was about to awaken. She had not been there more than five minutes before she noticed him stirring

She entered the plastic tent in which he had been placed. “Dan, can you hear me?”

He mumbled something unintelligible. She moved to lift the gauze that lay gently across his eyes. About thirty seconds later, his eyes opened and, slowly, a grin spread across his face. “Doc, you’re kind of fuzzy but I’d recognize you anywhere.”

She placed the gauze lightly over his eyes and said, “Dan. All went beautifully. I have to run but you are in good hands. I want some light bandages on during the night. I will be back in the morning when it is time to remove the bandages. We will let you have them off for a few minutes. Tomorrow evening, they will be off for good. You do understand that we need to keep your hand strapped so that you do not accidentally injure your eye.”

He nodded and gave a thin lipped smile.

The next evening after his eyes had been uncovered; Anna sat with Dan just to keep him company. She found that an hour or so visit with a recovering patient was restful, easing the muscles that had been working so hard in the operating room on any given day.

Dan was alert, excited and talkative, realizing that he was on the road to a life with great vision after months of worry and fear. Anna asked, “Dan, do you want to talk about the day you were injured?”

“I have relived that day so many times but have never discussed it, except for during my sessions with my shrink. Would you really like to hear? It’s not very nice.”

“I, would, Dan. I have plenty of time and now am off duty. I won’t have another chance since tomorrow is my last day on rotation here at the center. I go on rotation at another hospital next week.”

“Okay. Here goes. This is the short version.”

“The day was steaming hot, just as every day was during that summer in the valley between the ranges in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We had been in firefights each day for six days running. We were entering new territory held by the Taliban. This is an obvious statement but it seemed that there was an enemy behind every rock on the mountainside so we sought to find the base camp of the enemy.

“The rule for every marine is to protect your buddy and yourself since you are of no value lying in a grave or a hospital.

“The going was tough, as my unit moved a few yards at a time. Each move was met by a fusillade of bullets. The enemy was in retreat but giving up territory only yard by yard. In between the flurry of rifle fire was the toss of grenades. Most of those exploded short of our positions and were not a concern.

Fortunately, the terrain makes it impossible to pull artillery

There are places where the protection of the boulders is a little sparse, which required our forward movement to be on our bellies, crawling like ants from rock to rock. The sand and pebbles were mixed with sweat on the body, presenting each of us in less than sartorial elegance

"That was the last thought that I remembered until I awoke in the medic's quarters about a mile to the rear. The pain was excruciating, despite the pain killer. My eyes and entire face were bandaged. The medic told me that a helicopter was on the way to take me to the hospital.

"I was told that a grenade had splintered a rock off to the right of my position, sending chips and splinter of rock directly toward me. Those splinters ricochet off every big rock, like shrapnel in a closed bunker.

The doc gave me a heavy sedative for the ride. At the hospital, I was told later, they decided to send me to Germany for a series of operations. I was there for seven months undergoing a series of surgeries and procedures.

It was all those weeks when my face and eyes were bandaged that I began to visualize myself as a blind beggar sitting on a corner selling pencils

I reached my thirty year service date during that period and took retirement the day I was discharged. I had a choice to get my final eye work done at Walter Reed or here. Since my family home is only ten miles away I opted for the VA facility and lucked out to meet you."

Anna's tears had been flowing from the moment she heard the word "ricochet." Dan's left hand had been in her hands and every tension from his body had been transmitted to her during the whole story telling.

Dan reached across to the stand on the side of the bed and found a tissue to hand to Anna.

She rose, leaned over the bed to kiss Dan on the cheek. "Thank you for telling me your story, Dan.

This is good-bye, Dan. Give my regards to your wife and granddaughter. I'm off to New York for the weekend and then across town for a few months."

Dan pulled her down for a warm and long hug. "Doc, something you said in one of our conversations led me to think you are a Presbyterian. Is that right?"

Somewhat surprised, Anna said, "Why, yes. My folks were members of a Presbyterian Church in Palo Alto in California. They were very active, particularly in the mission projects with the poor

communities nearby. I used to go with them to serve lunches and special holiday meals to the homeless. I particularly liked the youth group when I was in high school.

“I’m afraid I haven’t had much time for church since then. I have been so focused on study day and night including weekends. Why do you ask?”

“Our church, St. Mark’s, has a project serving meals in the poorest community in New Haven. We have families with young kids on the weekends. I thought you might enjoy working with us. I also think that if you were present, we could encourage the families to stay for brief talks on various health issues. Maybe you could be one of our first to do that.”

“Wow that sure came out of nowhere, but I’d be willing to try. You need to know that I am a very liberal church woman. I might be uncomfortable with the theology in your church.”

“I am not asking you to join our church, although maybe I should now that you mention it. We are associated with a group called “Progressive Christianity.”

Anna liked the sound of that and said, “I’d like to try your idea about the project.”

A week later, she decided to serve the meals at the Saturday session and was available to talk about eye health with as many as stayed for the gathering.

She was surprised that about twenty families attended the session. After a brief introduction and a discussion of various concerns such as sties, cataracts, lazy eyes and other minor eye diseases she instructed the mothers to examine the children present. It was a practicing clinic for the mothers. In the group, a child was discovered to have a developing cataract prematurely and another had “lazy eyes.”

Before the session was complete, excited mothers were talking about helping their neighbors do those same exams with their children.

Anna invited her friend, Foxy, and two residents in family practice to join the project, each spending two Saturdays a month over the next three months with varying degrees of success.

Anna was initiating a new three-month rotation at Hill Health Center, getting additional clinical and surgical experience in a public health care community eye clinic. She realized she would see a variety of surgical cases generated from this clinic, including 10-15 laser operations throughout her rotation. She might luck out with onsite diagnostic testing and laser treatment.

All through the three months she kept thinking about the next three-month rotation that combined Ophthalmic Plastic Surgery and Pediatric Ophthalmology/Strabismus (cross eyes, lazy eyes, and walleye.) She especially focused on the fact that 3rd year residents had the opportunity to hone specialized surgical techniques. Her chosen interest was pediatrics.

A unique aspect of this residency was the four-week rotation at Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau, Bahamas. She knew that, during this time, the senior resident provides a large portion of the eye care for the island's indigent population.

Two U.S. fellowship-trained ophthalmologists, who practice on the island, work closely with the resident in a supervisory and consultative fashion. This rotation would give her an opportunity to develop a newfound sense of autonomy in patient management, as well as honing her skills.

The more she thought about the experience, the slower the following days seemed to go by. It seemed that her departure day would never arrive. But finally the day dawned, January 1st, 2009.

"Dr. Anna Peters, I presume," greeted Dr. Philip Jones, the chief resident physician at the Freeport Free Clinic, located in the poorest area of Freeport, the second largest city in the Bahamas. Like all the major cities in developing countries, many Bahamian families who were experiencing financial difficulties migrated to Freeport. Their goals were often two pronged. They wanted to have a better life and they wanted their children to have a better education than was provided in the hinterlands of the scattered islands.

Many ended up still unable to improve their financial lot but did get their children somewhat better education or training.

Since poverty reigned among these people, their living conditions were meager and their incomes very limited. Free clinics were prevalent in such areas, financed in part by the government and by donations from non-profit organizations worldwide.

Ever since her experience at the age of sixteen in the in Jordan, Anna had wanted to contribute her skills to aid and support those living on the edge of or in poverty, especially the young ones.

Anna responded to the warm greeting with a grin and completed the handshake. He said, "Welcome. We have been looking forward to the next three weeks or more if you can stay longer."

"Anna said "I think we have 23 days. I hope to visit in Nassau for a few days before I return to the university."

“Good. Your luggage is being taken care of. It is just about tea time. With your permission, we can adjourn to the tea room where you may refresh yourself and then join some of the other members of our team.”

“Please lead the way, Doctor.”

The tea time turned out to be a casual staff meeting. Dr. Jones admitted that was the usual practice since the work load of the limited staff was so heavy and the members preferred no medical conversation at formal meal times.

Anna was asked to spend the first three days lecturing and training local families to understand and read the symptoms of variety eye diseases. Dr. Jones then explained, “By that time we will have lined up and scheduled probably more pediatric surgeries than you will have time to perform. All the adult eye surgeries will be handled by Dr. Phillips, who is visiting from Stanford. I noticed that you two had met sometime earlier in life.”

Anna acknowledged the fact and went on to ask more details.

The training room was packed with almost fifty mothers and a few small babies who could not be left at home. The room was abuzz when she entered and immediately dropped to total silence.

After introducing herself she had to face a question that often presented itself. “How is it that one so young is a surgeon?”

She avoided the why and explained all the studies and clinic work that she had under her belt. That seemed a sufficient enough answer to those attending.

She was aware that she had to translate the peculiar language of her trade into words that would be understood by her audience.

“Listen to learn as much as you can and please hold your questions until the end. There will be some terms that I need to explain.”

“One problem that may show up in young children is the blocking of the tear ducts. If you should notice no tears or just a few tears when your baby is crying, please bring the baby to see one of our doctors. This can become serious and needs professional care immediately. Massaging the tear duct may help. If symptoms persist, then the tear duct may be opened by an ophthalmologist when the child is six to 12 months of age.

“It is also common for the eyes of newborns to be intermittently out of alignment. If this persists longer than 3 months, further evaluation is needed.

"Most young children are farsighted. They can compensate for this farsightedness by focusing the lens within their eye and therefore, can see well at any distance. Although young children do not require glasses for farsightedness, even an infant can wear glasses if necessary for higher levels of farsightedness and nearsightedness.

"Strabismus is the medical term used when the eyes go out of alignment. One eye may be deviated in, out, up or down with respect to the other. This may occur at any age for many different reasons.

"All children who have strabismus (except for the intermittent horizontal strabismus in the first 3 months of life) should have a complete eye examination performed. Usually, this is an isolated problem, but occasionally it may be a sign of more serious eye conditions or neurological disease. Even an isolated case can cause permanent vision loss if untreated in a child with amblyopia (lazy eye.) Treatment of strabismus depends on a number of factors but may include patching one eye, eyeglasses, exercises and surgery.

"Headaches are common in childhood and are most often caused by other factors unrelated to the eyes. There are times when headaches may be caused by a need for glasses or difficulty using the eyes together. A family care doctor may request an examination to look for eye or vision related factors that may contribute to headaches.

"One of the most common reasons for a child to see a pediatrician is for a red eye, commonly referred to as "pink eye." The medical term for a red eye caused by inflammation is "conjunctivitis." It can be caused by bacteria, a virus, and an allergic reaction, an irritative source such as smoke or pollutants, or trauma.

"The most common type of conjunctivitis is viral and is usually associated with upper respiratory infections. It should be considered contagious. Viral conjunctivitis often starts in one eye and goes to the other. If yellowish or greenish discharge accompanies the redness and watering, then bacteria may be the cause of the infection, and antibiotic eye drops are often prescribed.

"In contrast, allergic conjunctivitis will show itching as its most common symptom. It almost always involves both eyes with a whitish mucus discharge and mild eyelid swelling. Allergic conjunctivitis can be treated with cold compresses and antihistamine eye drops for symptomatic relief, but it often recurs due to the chronic nature of the allergic condition.

"When a red eye occurs in one eye only, an early bacterial or viral conjunctivitis can be present."

Are there any questions?"

After a long silence she said, "I probably used too many technical terms. That is a habit with us doctors. I am happy to answer questions until each one is completely understood. If you want to talk personally, I will stay."

She was surprised when the women stood and began clapping.

During the afternoons, Anna worked in the emergency room. While her primary duty was that of resident ophthalmologist, she also rotated with the emergency medical specialists.

It was late in the second afternoon that she walked into the cubicle to attend to a teenage girl who had a deep gash across the inside of her left arm just below the elbow.

The patient was seated on the edge of the bed while a girlfriend was firmly pressing a white towel over the wound to stem the flow of blood. The friend was holding the arm high above the head of the patient in order to minimize the blood flow.

The nurse was bent over a low cabinet, obviously gathering the instruments and supplies that the doctor would require. She rose when Anna entered, saying, "No allergies and low threshold for pain."

Tears were flowing freely down the cheeks of the injured girl while her face was screwed up showing pain and fear. Anna picked up a tissue and wiped away some of the tears saying, "I'm Doctor Anna and I promise not to hurt you and then make you well very soon. Can you give me a small smile? What is your name?"

She offered a weak smile and said "Mimi."

Anna said, "That's a nice name. Why don't you tell me what happened while I work on your wound?"

Anna slipped on her gloves. Marie, the nurse, handed her a cold sterilized compress so that she could wipe away the blood in order to have a good look at the gash.

After a quick but careful examination of the wound she nodded to Marie, who squirted sterile water into the wound that, together with the now slowly flowing blood, would clean out any debris that might be present. Meanwhile Anna was dabbing the flesh around the gash with soapy water to sterilize the general area.

Mini whimpered but sat up straighter to gather her courage for the ordeal.

Anna continued to clean and then hold the compress over the wound while Marie laid out the instruments. She cleared away some of the loose skin just as she was ready to glue the edges.

Anna decided that the gash was too deep and ragged to use either glue or Steri-strips.

She opted to use stitches. She ran through the procedure in her mind, the way she had been taught. She said to herself, "*Stitches are used for wounds that are deep, bleeding, have jagged edges, or have fat or muscle exposed. The area will be cleaned with iodine.*"

After she injected a local anesthetic, she had Marie position a surgical drape over the wound to keep the area sterile.

Since the laceration was deep, stitches were needed under the skin. She knew that those stitches used under the skin would be absorbed by the body. They would not need to be removed.

Slowly and carefully with tiny tight stitches she closed the wound while Mimi told her about the fall and hitting her arm on the sharp edge of a rock on the cliff above her home. She said, "It was foolish, horsing around with two boys chasing Cici and me."

Anna asked, "Are they your boy friends?"

Mimi and Cici both blushed. Cici said, "Our parents say we are too young to have boyfriends."

Anna chuckled, "Obviously you don't agree."

Both girls giggled, Mini completely unaware of the treatment taking place, at least for a few minutes

When the wound was closed, saline was used to clean the area. A thin layer of antiseptic ointment was applied, as well. A non-stick gauze pad was placed over the stitches and an elastic bandage taped over the gauze to cover and protect the wound.

With a promise that after a few months her arm would not even show a scar, the happy patient offered sincere thanks. A minute later, Anna happened to look out the window and saw two handsome young boys join the girls for a walk back to their homes.

Just before her shift was ending, a young mother with a six year old boy entered the clinic. Anna was in the staff common room enjoying a cup of coffee when she was paged to come to cubicle 4.

There she found a lad of about seven with his mother scolding him for bouncing on the bed, but Anna laughed when he jumped off the bed. He bounced to the floor and stood at military attention, saying, "Tommy, here. Ready for inspection."

His mother started, "Thomas," but Anna smiled saying "At ease, soldier."

He laughed, "I'm a marine not a soldier."

All three were now laughing as Anna asked him to have a seat on the edge of the bed. Before she could ask a question, the mother said, "Tommy is always getting into fights. The other boys are teasing him and making snide comments. That infuriates him."

Tommy said, "I'm stronger than any of them, including the leader, but they gang up on me."

"Why?"

"They make fun of me, calling me funny names; mostly they call me cross eyes."

Anna had already notice his condition of Amblyopia, better known among lay persons as “lazy eye.”

She asked “Tommy “Do you have trouble reading?”

“No. I am the best reader in the class. The teacher told me.”

“Okay.” She looked toward the mother while saying, “Tommy, I would like to examine your eyes. Is that okay with you?”

Mother nodded affirmatively and Tommy also bobbed his head. “Will it hurt? I can take it but I would like to know ahead of time.”

“I promise that you will have no pain. First, I need to take care of that smashed lip. That’s quite a cut and bruise. I know you are strong but I need to deaden the lip because the pain of needle is very acute.”

Tommy said. “I must have bitten my lip when one guy held my arms and the other tried to hit me. I kept jerking away.”

Anna said nothing, knowing that he did not want to admit being punched but she knew that the cut was serious enough to require two stitches. She went to work and noticed that he did not flinch when he saw that he was about to be given a needle holding some sort of anesthetic. He watched calmly as she prepared the needle and thread for the suture. He was a tough kid.

Let’s go into another room where I have all my special equipment to look deep into your eyes.”

Ten minutes into the exam, Anna asked Tommy “Since I need to put some drops into your eyes, do you think you can stand a little sting?”

With probably more bravado than he felt he said, “No problem.”

When he flinched a tiny bit, she said “Good boy. Now I need you to sit there for fifteen minutes until your sight gets a little fuzzy. I want to talk with your Mom for a few minutes.”

“Okay.”

She went back to visit with Mrs. Beelafon. She asked “Has Tommy always been in good health?”

“Oh, yes. He is strong and eats anything I put on the table. The only problem is that I don’t have enough vegetables for him and his sisters.”

When did you notice that both his eyes are not aligned in the same way?”

“Ever since he was young. We figured it was a childhood thing and would clear up. The teacher says he is a good student and has mentioned several times that we should see a doctor, but we can’t afford doctor bills. My husband only has seasonal work and we have to save our money for the off seasons. I used the excuse of the cut lip to bring him to the clinic.”

“Well, thankfully, this is a free clinic. I haven’t finished my exam yet, but I can tell you that Tommy has Amblyopia. I’m sorry. That means what we call “lazy eyes.” It is easily fixed and will cost you nothing.”

“Oh, my. If that can be done, my Tommy will not have to fight with those other kids anymore. We would be so very thankful.”

“That’s fine. Now I need to see how he will react to my prescription.”

She returned to Tommy and completed her exam. She said, “Everything about your vision is perfect except for what I told your Mom. This is a problem called “lazy eyes.” That mean that one eye is much stronger than the other and they don’t line up as other person’s eyes do.”

“Doctor Anna is there any way to fix my eye so the kids don’t call me names.”

“Yes, but I need to ask you some questions. Do any of the other boys wear glasses?”

“Not in my class, but I know an older boy who does. He is the brightest boy in the third grade and the other kids like him.”

“Good. I need you to wear special glasses and when at home after school I need you to wear a patch over one eye, how does that sound?”

“I might have to fight Mick when he calls me a sissy like he does with two of the girls in my class. But if that fixes my eye I can whip him three times on any day.”

“If that’s the case, I will order the glasses with strong metal rims but if you fight, take them off first.”

“I think I would like to wear the patch part time at school. Those black patches look cool on John Wayne, the cowboy.”

Anna laughed. "I may have a better solution. I will give you the patch today. I want you to wear it only two hours a day until the day we get your glasses."

"I guess my good eye is enough if the patch is on the bad eye."

"Actually, the patch will be on the good eye so that you have to work the poorer eye harder and eventually strengthen it to be like your good eye."

"That doesn't sound right. I won't be able to see very good with my good eye covered. I try that every once in a while."

"I know but I am sure you can do it and the result will be worthwhile, believe me."

"Okay, if you say so, Doc. I like you and trust you. Will you give me a note to the teacher so that she understands why I will not be reading easily?"

The following week was mostly devoted to performing cataract procedures for some of the older citizens who came to the clinic, but she also did work with four children under twelve who had developed cataracts prematurely.

It was Friday of the second week when two new doctors appeared. Both were to begin their four week stint in the Bahamas. Anna met them in Nassau where she went for the weekend. One of the doctors was her friend Foxy who gave her a big hug and said, "You've got mail."

After a long visit and a couple of drinks with her friends, Anna checked into her hotel on the beach. She did not wait to unpack, walking to the veranda to open the letters.

The first was from Rona, her friend and host during her visit to the camp in Jordan when she was sixteen. She read quickly through the necessary but mundane scribbles waiting for the big news. There it was at the top of page three. "I just received notice that I have been accepted to med school at George Washington University in DC. How far is that from New Haven?"

Anna could not wait to write back to say that she was applying for a position at the Children's Hospital in Washington and almost certain of acceptance!

The other letter was from Badran, one of the twins who had been staying in the camp with her Mama during that same visit. That had been her home for a short time when she was four years old, after the death of her parents.

Her heart jumped when she noted the return address, a street in the city of Amman, not the address of Mama.

The heart of the letter was the news that they were being adopted by a family who had just lost their fifteen year old son in an automobile accident. That had happened over six months ago. "They seem to love us", she read with heart sighing.

"My brother and I apologize for not writing sooner. We have been so busy with all the changes in our lives."

"Our new parents had visited with us at Mama's five times and we came to spend two weeks in their home earlier this year. It is so hard to leave Mama but she now has a new seven year old girl who is staying with her."

His other big news was that he and Abbass had earned scholarships to a new special school that was near the American embassy.

He went on writing, "Ever since your first letter which said that your true home was in California not Amman, I have dreamt of having a chance to go to America. Both of us are working hard to see if that can come true for us. Maybe we both can become doctors like you. Are you planning a visit to Amman any time soon?"

She could hardly read the last lines through the prisms of her tears. She reached for some hotel stationery to answer both letters, giving an account of the last few days, specifically of her work with the children.

Although she spent most of the weekend on the beach or in the water, she did some study of the four major cases she would face during the coming week. Saturday night she got quite drunk and ended up in bed with one of the Nassau clinicians. The two of them separated at two in the morning, both realizing that going to bed was a mistake for both of them

When she rose about ten that morning it was with a severe hangover, only the second she had ever experienced. She decided it would be her last!

She spent the rest of the day with her friend, Foxy, before leaving for her temporary home in Freeport.

The phone jangled in her ear, causing her to jump into a sitting position. A glance at the alarm showed the time to be four thirty, a half hour earlier than she planned to awaken. The phone was hardly off the hook when she heard the hospital operator shouting. “Emergency needs you, Miss Doctor Anna. Little girl being taken into the operating room being prepped for your arrival.”

She tucked the phone under her chin and with one hand she was slipping into her panties while asking, “Do you know what kind of injury?” She listened as the operator said “Boss man said serious eye injury something about cornea and retina. That’s all I know.”

By this time she was hanging up and shrugging into a t-shirt. No time for a bra. She slipped into her shorts, stepped into sandals, grabbed her purse and was dashing across the compound, headed for the OR.

The chief of OR came directly to her as she entered the prep room. She was beginning to wash hands and arms while a nurse was helping her step into her green scrubs. Cliff was saying, “We have done some emergency repairs for her broken pelvis and ulna. That part is under control.”

He continued. “He was the passenger in a small sports car, driven by a friend. The auto plowed into a steel post at a very high speed. The driver had been using drugs but your patient is clean.”

“What am I dealing with? Two eyes or one?”

“Corneal damage in one and detached retina in the other. The cornea is the bigger and more urgent problem. There are multiple lacerations, both linear and stellate. Tiny bits of glass are present. We have stemmed most of the blood flow from damage in other parts of the eyes.”

“Okay. Have you been able to determine the type of retinal detachment?”

Not yet, but I think we have time. Dr. Ernst, your colleague in Ophthalmology, will assist you and we are bringing in another eye surgeon to stand by for the retinal repair. He will be observing from the balcony during your procedure.”

The nurse helped Anna slip on her gown and cap, pushing her hair to be fully contained. Anna walked into the OR, gasped as she always did when she saw a toddler on the table. She quickly steeled herself for the task ahead.

Peter Ernst said, “Anna, I presume sutures although I have all the other supplies on standby. It’s too bad that liquid hydrogel is not yet approved. It would have been ideal.”

Anna grunted an agreement while she began using all the visual aids to determine if there was anything imbedded in the cornea. She counted the number of linear cuts and then the number of star shaped lacerations. What she saw was ten tiny pieces of glass, and a very uneven surface with fifteen lacerations of various sizes and shapes.

“Pete, I’ll use sutures with the finest thread we have. Keep some one of those cyanoacrylates available, particularly for a backup in case the suturing is impossible.”

He said, “I had guessed. I have watched your deft finger work with sutures. I wish I had your touch.”

Anna could hear a murmur of voices. She looked toward the balcony, noticing that it was filled to capacity.

She looked to the head of the table to see her favorite anesthesiologist, Bill Baker, who winked and nodded. All the nurses were at station, the way that Anna wanted them.

The soft music in the background was Debussy’s “Afternoon of a Fawn.” The tension within her staff was very low, as they were taking long belly breaths to relax.

She looked each in the eye and then said, “First, the pieces of glass and then the long repair session. Fifteen lacerations. We’ll deal with the linear cuts after extracting the glass. The hard work will come last.”

“With the extra nurse in reserve, I need you to spell off each other as I will with Pete so that we are at our best when working on the stellate lacerations. Now, let’s go.”

Six hours later, every one took a deep breath when the last step had been completed. Anna and Peter then surveyed the retinal damage and decided their fatigue would keep them out of the game. Anna said, “This can be handled by any competent surgeon and I presume Cliff knows our new colleague has that degree of competency.”

When she and Peter entered the changing room, the entire staff stood and gave them a round of shouting and clapping. “Brava, Bravo.” Anna and Peter glowed with pleasure at the honor given them by their more experienced professional brothers and sisters.

Four days later, Tommy came in to receive his new glasses and a debriefing by Anna. After the optician had fitted him, Tommy, like a gentleman, as his mother had schooled him, said, "Thank you, Dr. Anna. May I have the pleasure of buying you a coffee or a coke?"

She laughed and took his arm as he led the way to the canteen. When they were seated, Anna asked, "How are you making out with the bully?"

"He's gotten worse, particularly when he saw me wearing the patch after school. He now had four other kids with him all the time. I can't start a fight with that many kids. I have to catch him alone."

"Tommy, do you trust me enough to take a bit of advice or at least listen to a story?"

"Sure."

"When I was bit older than you there was a group of snooty girls who formed a clique. For some reason, all the other girls in class that I knew wanted to be like them and be a part of the clique. I wasn't interested and that seemed to make their leader upset.

"My skin is darker than most typical American girls. You've seen them on television. Well this girl found out that I had been born in Palestine, a country in western Asia, a long way from California. She began calling me bad names in order to hurt me.

"I talked with my Daddy about the embarrassment they were causing me. He suggested that I make friends with one of the girls who were not the leader of the gang. He said "You know you are the brightest child in your class and I'll bet you know exactly how each of those girls stands in class. Choose one who looks like she needs help in some subject. Suggest to her that you are willing to help her and any others."

Tommy asked, "What good was that?"

Anna went on, "I did and when she saw how much I could help her with math, she invited several other girls, two more from the clique. It wasn't long before some boys wanted to come to our house to study with us.

Now, you are smart enough to see what happens when you decide on a better way than fighting the leader. You might want to share some secret you have or show them something you save, maybe baseball cards."

Tommy grinned and said, "I don't have a cards but I'll find a better way and come and tell you."

“Sorry, Tommy. I will be leaving Freeport soon. But you can get my address from the office if you decide you want to write to me. Now, I need to return to work.”

Tommy forgot about being the gentleman, rose and gave her a huge hug. She could sense the wet tear on her neck as he turned and ran off.

Chapter 5. Leaving New Haven

She arrived back in New Haven late on a Friday evening. She dropped her bags, stripped off her clothes and slipped her naked body into bed. Within minutes she was sound asleep, staying almost inert for ten straight hours.

She rose, perked some coffee, and took her cup to the balcony. From her tenth story chair, she watched the movement of naval ships and a few yachts on Long Island Sound. The water showed no white caps and the horizon seemed to melt into the blue heavens

The calm of the moment slipped her into a reverie that centered on Ben, her adopted Dad. She was thinking that he had never treated her like a little kid, even when she was a kid. That was also true of Mom. She had always seemed to be at ease with the adults in the extended family and the Sellech clan. She was asking herself if she had missed out on something.

Without understanding why her mind was centered on Rona, trying to fathom what it would mean to Rona to come to Washington for a minimum of three years.

She tried to recall those first months in the States, then remembered that she had been only a little girl while Rona would arrive as an adult. That thought reminded her to check her mail box and use Foxy's key to pull her mail and forward it to Nassau.

She had a half dozen pieces of business or personal mail along with the usual ad pieces from credit card companies, etc. She picked up Foxy's mail and took the elevator back to her unit.

There were two letters from her folks, another letter from Rona and on the bottom of the pile an envelope with the return address of the Children's Hospital in DC. Her fingers were being obstinate as she tried to zip open the envelope. When she finally took out the contents, she squealed with joy. She was being offered a position on the Ophthalmology staff as Assistant Chief Surgeon with some teaching responsibilities. There was an invitation to arrange a meeting as soon as possible to discuss details of her new position.

She dashed to the phone to call her folks, who became as excited as she. She heard her Mom asking, "Can you meet me this weekend in D.C. to do some apartment hunting. Dad and I would like to visit some old friends and I will be delighted to help you in any way."

The call took about forty minutes with Dad and Mom both on the phone getting a full run down on her Bahamas trip as well as the hole in her romantic life.

After reading all the other mail, including the letter from Rona, she wrote Rona, telling her of her appointment and inquiring about the possibility of living together for at least one year.

She took a cab to retrieve all her instruments in preparation for her initiation into her duties at Hill Health Center, where she would spend the next three months before moving to Washington.

The next three months seemed to drag along although she had some great challenges at the Hill Health Center, particularly with four special transplants and two emergency corneal repairs for two toddlers after a major smashup just outside of town.

Shortly after she arrived, she was invited to the director's office for tea and a conversation about the possibility of becoming a permanent member of the staff. She was thrilled but had to decline because of her acceptance in Washington, her preference.

A few weeks later she arranged for the interview at Children's Hospital and the visit with her family. The long weekend with her folks was a hit. They found a two bedroom apartment near the George Washington U. campus. Rona was excited to be sharing an apartment with Anna, whom she considered to be her big sister and resource for making the transition.

The wonderful surprise came during her conversation with Dr. Michael Jessup, Chief of Ophthalmology at the hospital. After the usual preliminaries he said, "Let's get directly to the purpose of this invitation. The title of Assistant Chief Surgeon for Ophthalmology is maybe a bit misleading. What we are recommending is that you become the Chief of our Pediatric Ophthalmology division. This is a new position resulting from an overhaul of our staffing organization."

Anna felt a brief but masked, she hoped, gasp. It wouldn't do to have a teenage reaction to a professional offer of employment at an important hospital, even if she was only twenty two years old.

He continued "We are aware of your youth but the governing board has decided that you have the ability, skill and maturity to lead us in developing an up-to-date unit. We have just received several new grants to modernize our Pediatrics services and Ophthalmology is at the top of the list."

"Sir, I am honored and delighted with the offer but also stunned. I am sure that I will be the youngest member of your staff. All of my fellow residents at Yale are older than I."

Dr. Jessup smiled. "There are several stories in the Old Testament Bible that speak to the issue of youth facing and succeeding in meeting huge challenges. We have thoroughly vetted you, with interviews of your parents and even members of the Jordanian government staff. We are sure you have the maturity and everyone knows you have the skills, including magic fingers in surgery."

"Thank you, Dr. Jessup. I am honored to say yes."

"Good. That's settled. Are you available to start on September 1st?"

"Definitely."

"Do you need some help finding living quarters?"

"No, Sir. I have rented an apartment near the George Washington Hospital."

“Indeed. That will be convenient for you. Now, one more thing. We are asking you to consider the possibility of retaining Dr. Moishe Gold after the transition. He is willing to defer retirement until you are certain that you have a strong grip on the position.”

Anna had no way of knowing why he had made a point of that. She had expected help from someone. She nodded an automatic yes while her mind searched for the name but with no success at the moment.

The med school staff at Yale held a bash for graduates and residents who were departing in July each year. Foxy, her amour, Anna and a resident surgeon she had met previously, shared a table.

His name was Fred Decker. He was taller than Anna; something she could not say was common among her fellow residents. His blond curly head topped a handsomely cut set of features and he danced with grace.

The conversation generally covered their fun experiences and some of the challenging cases each had faced during their residencies.

Fred was astonished to hear her comment that she would be living with a Palestinian med school student in Washington and pressed her for more information about her youth.

He told her he envied the fact she had a major change and dramatic childhood, being the daughter of a ‘spy’ as well as an adoptee. “On the other hand, my years were pretty dull. Private schools provide an education but produce a dull life. “By the way, where do you go from here?”

“Children’s Hospital in the nation’s capital.”

“Hey. That sounds great. I will be on the staff at George Washington University Hospital in the surgery department. Perhaps we can see each other on occasion.”

Anna said, “I expect I will be snowed under with my heavy schedule.” Yet, she was hoping he was serious

As the evening was ending he said, “I presume you will be listed on their staff registry. I’ll give you a call someday and surprise you.”

Anna’s first several weeks found her deep in consultations with architects, designing the new division quarters and talking with equipment suppliers as she prepared her proposal for acceptance by the governing committee.

The current operations were being administered by Dr. Moishe Gold, a thirty year veteran of the department. She had done her research and knew of his reputation as one of the foremost pediatric ophthalmologists in the nation.

He had deferred his retirement to serve as her guide and resource in order to make her landing as soft as possible. Within the first thirty minutes of meeting him, she knew that there was more gold to this man than just his name.

During her last meeting with Dr. Jessup, Anna introduced the question of her Division exploring the idea of a community program for early detection among children in the poorer areas of the District. She was delighted with his response. "I like it and I believe you will find the board receptive. They will appreciate your creative thinking."

While the building proposals were being reviewed and discussed, she began her proposal for the traveling Ophthalmology bus for which she hoped the financial development staff would find funds.

The first indications were not very hopeful, although a small fund was available from a new source. Typical of Anna's impatience, she decided to get proactive.

The chief development officer accepted her invitation to lunch at a quiet café several blocks from the hospital. She had eaten there four times during the last week, setting up a warm relationship with the owner/chef.

Pietro welcomed them and took them to a small dining room on the second floor. Her desire to move directly to the reason for the invite was obvious to Mr. Forsythe. He was amused and suggested that since they were both busy, Anna should state the reason for the luncheon.

She began the discussion in earnest when her choice of a California wine was served as the cocktail. (She had done some private investigation to learn as much as possible about Donald Forsythe.)

"Mr. Forsythe," she began.

He interrupted. "Please, make it Donald."

"Donald, are you free to tell me the source of the special funding for the expansion of my Division?"

He hesitated, but only for a moment. "I can't give you a name but the family is closely related to the National Presbyterian Church where I serve as an elder on the session at this time."

"Great. Thank you. By the way, what kind of mission projects is underway by your congregation?"

"We sponsor a number of feeding programs and clothing drives for the homeless and other less fortunate members of the greater D.C. area. As you might expect, mostly we fund the projects and hire members of those communities to run the programs."

"But you do have some hands-on workers from the congregation, do you not?"

"I guess so, but I don't serve on the mission committee, so I'm not familiar with the details. Why all the questions about National Church?"

Pietro knocked and asked if they were ready to be served. Donald looked surprised, expecting to order. Before he could say anything, Anna smiled. "I called your wife to inquire about your luncheon preferences. I hope I chose correctly."

She turned to Pietro. "Ten minutes. Perhaps another glass of wine for my guest?" Donald agreed and Pietro left the room.

“To answer your question, I have the pledge of an initial gift equal to twenty percent of the funds we will need. Since the source is from another part of the country, I was hoping that your congregation or some members might be willing to fund a local project.”

Donald smiled. “You know, clever young lady that I am already over the proverbial barrel. So, give me some specifics.”

“It is rather simple. Discovery of eye diseases and problems is difficult in areas where funds for medical needs are scarce. The District and environs have our share of those communities. I want to provide a mobile eye clinic designed with a sterile tent where simple procedures may be performed while the vehicle is in the area.”

“Do you believe that adults will trust you enough to be willing to submit to such treatment right on the spot?”

“I am sure of it. An older marine vet in New Haven talked me into providing information chats at free lunch programs such as the ones you are financing at present. I was surprised to find the intent interest and willingness by mothers of young children. I feel sure it can be done.”

“That is something to consider.”

Anna pressed. “We could begin some chats in the places you are supporting now, with someone from National monitoring the first ones.”

“Anna, you’re a tiger. Let’s set up some chats and you can begin planning the mobile bus. We will find the funds for outfitting the bus and enough funds to run the project for at least a year.”

As though he had been waiting to hear the good news, Pietro opened the door for the waitress to begin serving lunch.

While waiting for dessert, Donald asked, “Since your Ophthalmology Division is so small, how do you propose to staff the mobile?”

“I’ve been calling the department heads at other hospitals and med schools and am finding an eagerness to participate. I am sure that I can promise more volunteers than we can use.”

“Anna, I see why Jessup was so sure that what we were calling a “young squirt” was the right person to head the new pediatric Ophthalmology Division. I laughingly called you a tiger, but I should say that with all seriousness. I have no regrets about my promise to you.”

Three weeks later approval for the new quarters came with a few recommendations to enhance the original proposal. It was now important to focus on the task at hand.

Within that three week period, her prediction had come true. She had more volunteers for the mobile project, including nurses, nurse’s aides and doctors. A month later, George Washington Med School and hospital were planning to launch a pediatric general health mobile, borrowing Anna’s procedure for instilling trust via the chats at churches where meals were being served.

By that time Anna was scouring the country for three pediatric ophthalmologists and pediatric nurses to open up the new Division.

Within eight months, Children's Hospital Ophthalmology was the talk of the medical community.

Anna was invited to serve as an officer of the Washington Medical Association, but she thanked the inviter, saying she preferred to work within her special field. She, however, would be happy to become a member and attend their meetings.

She spent some time in consultation with the developer of the new hydrogel product to be used, specifically in corneal repairs. The firm was preparing for their second submission to the FDA.

Late one afternoon, just as she was preparing to leave her office, her desk phone jangled. "Good afternoon, this is Dr. Peters."

"Anna, this is Fred Decker from our Yale years."

Bewildered for just a moment, she finally remembered, "Oh, yes. You're at GW, if I recall."

"Yes, but at the moment I am in the lobby, having brought some papers to the head of your surgery department.

Any chance you're free for a drink?"

Anna decided to play it coy. "I'm loaded with paperwork."

Before she could finish her sentence he cut in. "All work and no play, etc., etc., although you can never be dull as I remember your days in New Haven."

She started to protest, but he laughed. "Just turn out the lights. Everything will be there in the morning."

She laughed out loud. "Fine. Give me fifteen minutes." That would be long enough to change into one of the dresses she kept in the closet and tidy her hair a bit."

She could tell by the look on his face that he was impressed. She had donned a flowered print, hemmed right at the knees to display her long sexy legs. The bodice was cut to show just a hint of the valley in her breasts. She could have sworn that he had emitted a quiet wolf whistle.

Fred was sure he had been gaping. He was thinking "*I can't believe she comes to work dressed like that but she certainly didn't have enough time to change. Maybe I should change to Ophthalmology.*"

Aloud he said, "Anna, you look stunning. Are you looking for a surgeon to join your staff?"

She laughed and thanked him for the compliment. She noticed he was wearing a soft cashmere jacket over a white turtleneck that made a beautiful frame for his handsome features.

"How would you like to hobnob with some of the power players?"

What are you suggesting?"

"Maybe a table at the bar in the Adams House so we can ogle some Senators or other VIPS."

"That sounds like fun."

He pulled out his cell, made a call. They left the building. Fred hailed a cab.

The first hour was taken up with exchanging information about their lives in Washington. After she finished describing the operation of the mobile clinic, Fred said, "By the way, I will be volunteering on our mobile clinic, which, as you recall, has used yours as our model."

"Great. I hear great things about the results you are getting during the first weeks. Congratulations."

"I was hoping to see you at one of the Washington Medical Association meetings."

"I am a member but probably will attend only a few times. I am under a lot of pressure getting the Division organized."

He said, "You may not know it, but there is great admiration in the Association for the girl wonder at Children's. You seem to have taken the town in a whirlwind."

She laughed, "That's what my colleagues keep telling me, but I am a simple girl with my nose close to the grindstone."

"Not that simple. I've read your papers and watched and listened to several of your presentations on the care and treatment of children regardless of their afflictions."

"Thanks, Fred. I'm surprised. I've never noticed you in an audience."

"I usually sat in the back row. By the way, I am sorry I didn't call earlier as I promised. I was in a complicated relationship along with my new work. The relationship is history and I think I finally have a firm grip on my work."

For some unknown reason, his news was welcome. She had been thinking that he was such great company. She was hoping to spend more time with him but she was not ready to rush that. Sensing that he was about to suggest dinner, she cut that short by looking at her watch. "I need to be going. I promised Rona to take her out to dinner as a reward for her hard work in med school."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I was so enjoying the evening that I was going to suggest dinner. I hope you will be open to another invitation."

"I'd like that, Fred."

He rose and helped her to rise, took her arm to walk to the entrance. He signaled the doorman, who hailed a cab. When she gave him the address, he burst into laughter. "What floor?"

"Eleven. Why?"

"My apartment is on seven."

She giggled. "Isn't this typical of Washington? You never meet your neighbors. How long have you lived here?"

"I moved in on the fifteenth of August."

As they parted in the elevator of their building, he took her left hand in his and put his lips to the back of her hand. "I'll call you and hope you're free for dinner."

Actually, Rona was staying with a friend overnight. Anna made some mac and cheese and munched her food while watching a rerun of an old *Have Gun Will Travel*, pure escape from reality for a little while. She knew once she was in bed, her thoughts would range over every moment of the time with Fred.

She was right. His soft voice was echoing in her mind even as she was brushing her teeth. The last thing she remembered before falling asleep was his smiling across the table just after they had been seated.

She decided to make her three mile run Saturday morning at the GW track. As she slowed to a jog to begin the cool down, his familiar voice called, "If you can slow down your jog, I'll try to keep you company."

She turned slightly, offering a warm smile. "Okay, I'll race you the last fifty yards."

"You're on."

They ran in silence. While she finished a second ahead after the dash, she knew he had not put out his best effort.

They walked in circles letting their heart rates slowly return to normal. He walked over to a bench, opened his bag and took out a towel. "Where is yours?"

Embarrassed, she replied, "I forgot mine. I usually run in the park near our apartment and finish at the door so that I can hit the showers immediately."

He moved next to her and offered half the towel, both giving a tug as they playfully fought for a bigger share of the towel."

They walked the half mile to the apartment building, chatting about the coming storm and a spoiled weekend. As they neared the door, Anna agreed to meet him a bit later for brunch at the deli round the corner.

She was smiling to herself as she toweled down after a long shower. She hadn't known he was a runner and the meeting was pure grace. "*It is strange but very special that I chose this morning to change the location of my run. Hmmm.*"

The conversation at the deli ran the gamut from work-related happenings to some of their childhood experiences during grammar school years. Reading between the lines, Fred grasped that she had been a very precocious child, smart as a whip - probably on the verge of genius.

While they were walking back home, Fred asked "Anna, would you consider being my partner at the Association's annual dinner and dance?"

She almost let out a yes, but held back for a minute. "What's the date?" She already knew the date but was trying to decide the tone of voice in which she would accept.

"A week from Saturday."

Giving him a big smile, she replied, "I'd love that. It will give me an excuse to go shopping, something I haven't done seriously for a long time. I am going to need some counsel."

"If you are interested, I know a fashion consultant who would be delighted to go shopping with you. I have been telling her about you and she is dying to meet you."

"Wow. What kind of persons do you associate with beside doctors and nurses?"

Fred beamed. Ruth is my older cousin. She lives in McLean but works here and in New York, advising various boutiques and department store buyers regarding their purchases for the coming seasons.

Anna was thinking, "*If he is talking about me with family, he sounds like he is interested in seeing more of me.*" She sensed a strange new feeling inside and a glow beginning to rise from her throat.

"That would be helpful, Fred. I was planning a day off this coming Tuesday. I wonder if she might have some time for me then."

He reached for his cell and hit a speed button. A moment later, "Cuz. How would you like to meet Anna?"

Silence, then "Tuesday for lunch. One o'clock at the coffee shop next to Bloomingdales. Great."

"I didn't mention the shopping in case you change your mind, but our times together are always open ended."

When she and Fred entered the coffee shop she saw two beautiful women sitting at separate tables. The one who was as blond as Fred smiled in their direction. She started to move in toward them, but Fred took her arm and steered her to the table where a raven haired woman stood and grinned, opening her arms to Fred. It took but a moment before she reached for Anna's hands, saying, "I have been looking forward to this moment since Fred took you to the Adams House."

The waiter moved to help Anna take a seat while Fred held the chair for Ruth.

Fred's cousin was very straight forward. "I can see why he is so taken with you."

Fred was blushing and scowling. Anna thought it was a picture worth savoring. He decided to make the introductions formal. "Dr. Anna Peters, may I present Ruth Rosen."

She was surprised to find herself asking mentally. "Jewish? That's a Jewish name, as is Ruth. I wonder if she is married to a Jew. She was a bit confused. She hadn't thought about people being Jewish for ages. Many of her colleagues were Jewish, if names indicated anything. She quickly switched her attention to Ruth, who was asking where her family lived.

"Northern California is our family home now, although we spent some time in the Middle East since Mom worked for our government attached to several embassies."

Anna did not mind the gentle probing by Ruth and did some of her own. She did find out that the parents were both deceased but that Ruth and her husband kept her elderly grandmother in a small apartment, next to their own in Georgetown. Ruth and Irv didn't have any children.

The subject moved to current affairs, and then Ruth was filling Anna's ears with the latest social gossip. She was eating it up, since she had little time for the social whirl, but she enjoyed hearing about it.

Fred guessed that the two women were becoming fond of each other as they began discussing fashions,

Fred interrupted. "Cuz, Anna will be going to the dance with me next week and is planning a shopping trip. I offered your services, if she wanted some help."

Ruth grinned, looking at Anna to see if she did want some help. Anna said, "I'm actually desperate. I haven't even bought a cocktail dress during the last five years. I'm afraid I've been all work and no play."

"I'll love it. Let's eat up. I'd rather shop than eat, anyway."

Eyes were glued on Anna and Fred as they entered the ballroom just a bit fashionably late. Most of the women were matronly and beautifully gowned, but Anna's off the shoulder cocktail dress, cut at the knees to show off her tapering long legs, had a few of the men gaping until their spouses put an end to that.

It had been a marvelous evening, more dancing than eating, with Anna besieged by Fred's friends and associates. Her legs finally gave out near midnight, so she sat it out until the last dance of the evening, which she had with Fred, of course.

During the cab ride she was tingling in anticipation when Fred's arm encircled her, snuggling her to his chest. She did not want this evening to end, but since Rona was home she could not invite Fred to the apartment. She found herself wondering how she would respond if he invited her over to his place.

At her door, he pulled her close, putting his lips close to her ears. "Anna, I am falling in love with you. I know you like me but I just had to tell you."

He did not give her a chance to say anything as he pulled her lips to his and took both of them out of this world as their kiss went on and on.

When they broke apart he took her hand and kissed the back of it before he turned toward the elevator.

Chapter 6. Washington D.C., 2010

Rona was asleep. But Anna, so excited to share her joy, awakened her, bubbling about Fred, the evening, his sister and her own feelings that were developing. Rona, sleepy-eyed with leaden lids tried to stay awake to share the joy, but she had to stop Anna, groaning, "Please, Anna. Let's talk at breakfast." Anna laughed, "Okay. Thanks."

Anna had two scheduled surgeries on Monday morning. The first was scheduled for nine a.m. She walked into the hospital at seven, hearing a page calling her to OR. The voice was calm, but Anna heard a slight tremor that, to her, said "Emergency."

The door had hardly closed behind her when an OR nurse rushed to her. "Anna, Steve is under duress. His examination of his four year old patient after a successful cataract surgery showed signs of a retinal detachment. This was his second operation of the morning. He is uneasy, not having dealt with a detachment in any child during his practice."

Another nurse was pulling Anna to the wash area and running hot water for Anna to begin scrubbing. A nurse's aide was holding greens to be donned as soon as she was scrubbed. Five minutes later, she was standing beside Steve, ready to relieve him of responsibility for this unexpected development.

She said, "Steve, take a few minutes to breathe and then return to observe. She looked into the balcony and saw Fritz Zoller, the recently arrived resident. She nodded her head in his direction. He caught the signal and ten minutes later stood beside her to assist.

She looked at the team. "Anybody need to be replaced? You know the rule. No judgment if you are tired or out of sorts in any way." Everyone nodded an assent to stay.

She knew that the operation was urgent, not critical. She figured there was time for a teaching situation. She knew her voice could be heard in the balcony.

"Some of what I have to say is old hat to some of you, but repetition does not hurt. All of you know that retinal detachments require treatment as soon as possible. Repair is needed to prevent permanent vision loss. There is urgency for the surgery, but the detachment has not affected her central vision

"If the macula had detached, the surgery would still be done to prevent total blindness, but her vision would not be as good. We could wait to do the surgery in that case."

She paused to take a deep breath, and then continued. "We will be watching out for certain problems, such as bleeding, or to determine if the detachment is not completely fixed, which will require more surgeries. We will be checking to determine if there is elevated intraocular pressure.

"We need to make sure there is no infection although there is little risk of that in this situation."

She felt the slightest nudge on her left arm from Dr. Zoller. The sound system went silent. In a short time, the crowd in the balcony could hear the sound of low voices, but not the words, as Dr. Zoller and Anna put their heads closer to the face of the young one on the table.

Several long minutes later, what seemed like an hour to the onlookers, Anna's strong voice came to life? "Dr. Zoller just picked up a very minute tear that had not been visible during the preliminary exam. Thank you, Fritz."

The chief operating nurse was already placing additional instruments on the tray and moving some rolling equipment into place. She knew Anna's process and wanted everything in place immediately, including the laser equipment.

Anna announced, "Minutes ago this looked like a cake walk for a group of veterans, but it has become a challenge to test all of us."

She turned to her team. "Ready. Let's have a little soft Debussy on the sound system. 'Reverie' would be very appropriate, I think. We can play the 'Dance of the Polliwogs' when she awakens."

This little bit of humor seemed to relax the team. Looking in his direction, she got a nod from the anesthesiologist at the head of the table, and then said, "Let's go."

Getting another nod from the head of the table, Anna's fingers moved deftly. As one of the observers was heard to say, "Her fingers move like a pianist playing a soft Debussy composition." The OR staff and the visitors in the balcony stood silently, watching as Anna performed the delicate procedure.

Dr. Zoller began to comment. "Dr. Peters is performing a Vitrectomy. This surgery is one of several commonly used to fix a retinal detachment. The vitreous gel, which is pulling on the retina, will be removed from the eye and replaced with a gas bubble. Sometimes an oil bubble is used but the doctor has opted for gas.

"The child's body fluids will gradually replace the gas bubble. Dr. Peters told me that she is planning to use the scleral buckle. She will place this flexible band around the eye to counteract any force that may be pulling the retina out of place."

A bit later his voice returned. "Notice that the doctor is now draining a bit of fluid under the detached retina. The goal is to have the retina settle back to its normal position against the back wall of the eye before starting the repair."

There were no more comments as a total stillness took over. Every eye was glued to the magical and rhythmic movement of Anna's hands.

When she signaled to Dr. Zoller to complete the procedure, the balcony burst into applause, causing Anna's face to flush with appreciation.

She invited Steve and Fritz to join her for some coffee and sweet cakes in the cafeteria. She wanted to see if both had memorized each step of the procedure and was pleased with the answers to her questions.

She returned to her office. She wanted to go over some planning papers while she waited for young Elizabeth to awaken from the anesthesia. She would be called immediately.

Her new Division was now complete, or at least per the original plans. Now she had a need for some amenities and a dream for some expansion. She had become close to a few other fund developers and managed to obtain some funds for equipment beyond the original plan.

Just before it was time for her to leave, she got the call. She dropped by to observe Baby Elizabeth breathing well. The nurse's aide told Anna that all was well, so that the attending physician had gone for a bite to eat.

She saw Fred locking his car door as she pulled into her parking spot. He saw her and waited for her just as she turned from buzzing the electronic lock. She smiled and waved. He reached for a hug as she neared.

As they broke apart, he asked, "Do you have time for a glass of wine?" She nodded and slipped her hand into the crook of his arm.

Anna was curled up in the corner of the sofa. Fred had filled her glass a second time and sat close to her. He put his arm on the back of the sofa, behind her. She recognized that as an invitation, unwound her long legs, sidled close and let her head drop to his chest.

After a silent moment, she lifted her left hand to his jaw, lightly caressing his lips with her long fingers. His right hand gently cupped her breast as his lips nestled in her hair.

She whispered, "I like where this is going. I'm surprised that you waited until now."

"I wanted it be special and the time never seemed right until now. I was sure you would give me a signal when it felt right for you."

"Thank you for that, Fred. There is this sensitive side to you that draws me. She rose, took his left hand in her right and headed for what she was certain was his bedroom.

They began making love to each other, gently and softly. Anna knew that this was to be her first important sexual experience ever. There was a caring tenderness as he probed every nook and cranny of her naked body, while she tried to emulate his actions.

When their mutual demands reached the boiling point, neither felt restrained, so that the crescendo took them both to nirvana.

They lay in each other's arms, whispering their love for each other and opening more of who they were, as lovers do in the opening days of their love affair. Anna wondered when she could share her full background. She hoped the timing would be such that nothing of her history would cause a disruption in their love for each other. As she lay with her body entangled with Fred, Anna was thinking, "*I don't want this ever to end.*"

It was dark when they rose. He led her to the shower, where he teasingly washed each and every inch of her body and got the same in return.

She looked in his closet for something to don, ending up with one of his light woolen shirts. He put on a robe, saying, "Come sit in the kitchen while I dish up some sausage and pancakes for which I have some real maple syrup."

As he headed for the kitchen, she hurried to catch up and placed a passionate kiss just behind his ear. She laughed. "That's just a reminder that we have another date before I leave."

Fred was draining the last of his coffee. Anna said, "I need you to meet my parents, but that means a trip to California. They will love you and I can hardly wait for that gathering."

"I want to do that as soon as possible. We should have lunch and bring our calendars. Perhaps we can work out a long weekend."

"Great. I have a better idea. Rona will be away this weekend. I would love to cook dinner and we can do some planning among other things." Her giggle was a promise about those other things.

Friday was everything they both had hoped for. Anna insisted he spend the night. "I want to have the experience of waking in the light of the morning to see your tousled hair and stubble chin as you get ready to pounce on me ... or vice versa."

Fred insisted on washing the dishes while Anna took care of the bed sheets and covers. When she joined him, Fred said, "I would love to have you meet my grandmother. Do you feel up to it today?"

She didn't hesitate, even for a moment. "I was going to suggest a trip to the National Gallery, but this sounds more exciting." She had been wondering about meeting his family.

“I’m not sure about exciting, but every visit with her these days is a learning experience, just as it was in the early days.”

Anna wondered what “in the early days” meant, then decided not to ask - it would become clear at some point.

Anna was impressed when the cab pulled up in front of a two story red brick home trimmed in very dark brown semi-gloss wood. The landscaping was definitely first class.

They were met at the door by a slightly bent male, probably in his seventies, sparse gray hair and a hand tailored black suit. His complexion almost matched hers. She was asking herself, “Could this really be?”

“Hello, Matthew. Meet Dr. Peters.” He turned to Anna. “Matthew has served Gramma for over fifty years. He has become part of the family, and he taught me my manners and honed my math skills since I was a tyke.”

Matthew bowed his head slightly. “Welcome, Dr. Peters. Please follow me.”

At the door to the sitting room, Anna could feel a sense of awe overtake her. The small room was furnished in a traditional European style, obviously of very high quality. The dark walnut wood gleamed, and the tea set in front of the seated hostess was intricately cast, surely handmade.

Fred's grandmother, in a large wing back chair, was a tiny wrinkled lady. Her hair was stark white. The light blue gown was precisely matched to her eyes, which seemed to sparkle a welcome to her guest.

In contrast to this small frail looking body, her voice was strong as she said, “Welcome, dear children.”

Fred bent to envelope her in a huge hug that caused his grandmother to gasp and then burst into laughter. He turned, taking Anna’s hand, leading her forward. “Nanan, this is Dr. Anna Peters. Anna, this is my gramma, Helene Silverman.”

Anna took the proffered warm hand that transmitted a heartfelt welcome. Meanwhile, her mind was whirling. “*Silverman is a Jewish name. Decker could be, although I thought it might be German. Have I fallen in love with a Jew?*”

Nanan saw the distress on Anna's face. "Child, what is it? Your features just turned pale and you have a look of bewilderment in your eyes."

Flustered as she was, Anna tried to cover her feelings with, "Decker. Silverman. I was confused."

Fred began to laugh, but Nanan said gently, "Young lady, there is something deeper. I see it in your eyes." She signaled Matthew, who immediately brought a smaller chair, placing it beside Nanan's.

Anna was grateful. She sensed her knees on the verge of buckling. She said, "Thank you, Matthew."

Nanan suggested that Matthew bring some sweet cakes. She began preparing the tea. She wanted to give Anna time to compose herself.

Anna's thoughts were a jumble. What she wanted to do was disappear. "*How could this have happened to me? Why am I so upset? Many of my colleagues are Jewish.*" It seemed like a myriad of thoughts were at war in her head.

Why should she fear or dislike Jews, just because the Israelis had accidentally killed her parents? Recent stories of mistreatment of Palestinians in Israel flashed through her mind.

Nanan noticed the first tears begin to spill over her eyelids. She motioned to Fred, who knelt in front of Anna and put his arms around her. To her surprise, she felt comforted, although just a moment before she didn't know if she ever wanted to see him again.

A minute later, reasonably composed, she apologized. Nanan said, "No apology is necessary, but I must ask the reason for your distress."

Anna took a sweet cake and reached for her tea cup, giving herself time to phrase her reply. She decided not to evade the issue.

"When I saw Matthew's features and then heard your name, I panicked. I have fallen in love with a Jew, the bane of my existence. Peters is the name of my adoptive parents. I am a Palestinian orphan whose parents were killed by Israeli soldiers."

Her voice choked, making it impossible for anything further to emerge. Nanan reached over to take her hand. "My dear child, I am sorry. There is no way for me to fully grasp the depth of your spiritual turmoil at the moment. Please have more tea and tell us more if you are so inclined."

Eventually Anna was calmed and told them what she had been told and what little she remembered of her stay in the camp in Jordan, the mystery of her arrival there and the subsequent events that led to her adoption by a doctor and an attaché in the American embassy.

The tea pot had been refreshed while she haltingly told her story. Anna felt completely empty when she came to the end.

In a gentle voice, Nanan said, "May I suggest that we walk in the garden. I would like to tell you a story."

Ten minutes later, Anna and Nanan, with her walker, were slowly making their way through a formal garden, a sort of miniature Versailles. Nanan had started a story from her own family history. She had said, "Freddie and I want to know as much as you care to tell, but first I want to tell you a condensed version of Freddie's and my story.

"I am a survivor of a death camp in Germany, one of the lucky ones out of more than seven million detainees. I was but a child of five when my sister and I were rescued. After coming to the States, I met and married Julian, a successful businessman. Fortunately I was able to give birth to one daughter and then discovered that I could bear no others."

Our daughter married Frederick's father, Michael Decker. He was a highly placed lay executive in the Episcopalian denomination, with an office in Manhattan. Nevertheless, I had some difficulty accepting Miriam's marrying a man of German descent after what I had suffered at the hands of Germans.

Just about the time Freddie turned four, Michael and Miriam decided to visit Israel. Michael also wanted to visit the small group of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank. He managed, through the cooperation of the American Jewish Committee, to get approval.

Freddie remained with a friend of Michael's in Jerusalem, and Miriam and he took a two day trip to Ramallah. Three days later we had a wire from the friend that my daughter and son-in-law had been killed during a raid on so-called rebels. It was thought that the rebels were hiding in a church where Michael was hosting a meeting with local church officials."

Julian flew to Israel to get Freddie and bring back the bodies for interment here. Freddie came to live with us and has been our pride and joy for all these years.”

Dad, I would re-write the next paragraph

Anna said, “Thank you, Nanan. As sad as your story is, it’s exactly what I needed to hear. Although I had that disturbing reaction, my love for Fred feels deeper. Now I know that we share the loss of our parents.

Nanan smiled a thank you, asking, and “Are the two of you talking about a wedding?”

“No. We are still getting to know each other. I think we have much to learn before setting a wedding date.”

“I understand. When that time comes, tell your family that I want to be a part of the big event.

They paused to have a seat. Fred joined them and Anna filled them in on her plans to help the refugee children in the Middle East minimize any physical handicaps so that each might pursue a dream. She spoke of Rona and the twins and their progress.

She noticed Fred perk up when she mentioned her hope of helping the children. She was about to ask him for his thoughts, when she noticed Nanan reaching for her walker, saying, “It’s time for my nap. Anna, I would like you to come for dinner tomorrow evening. Are you free?”

“Yes, I am not on call and would be delighted. Is there anything I can bring?”

Nanan was about to say "no" but changed her mind. “Bring your appetite and Freddie, perhaps a nice bottle of Claret.”

Fred had the cabbie drop them off at the strip mall where they purchased the wine at the liquor store. A stop at the deli next door was in order, too. Anna chose pastrami, Fred a Reuben sandwich and a side of coleslaw. He carried the package in one hand, holding her hand with his other as they strolled toward the apartment.

Anna started the coffee and set the table while Fred warmed the sandwiches in the oven. When they were seated, Anna said, “I need to say a prayer, Fred.” He nodded and took her hands in his.

“Creator and Redeemer, I owe you special thanks for today. I was befuddled and felt betrayed for a moment. I thank you for the ability to listen and not rush to judgment. I am asking for your blessing on the two of us as we seek to clarify our futures. I ask this in the name of Jesus, whom I have chosen to follow.”

Fred squeezed her hand, unable to say a word since his voice was completely choked up.

Chapter 7. Saturday, Washington D.C.

Anna called the hospital and was pleased to find no special emergencies in her Division. Fred was watching a DVR of “Charlie Rose.” She dropped onto the sofa, snuggling close, her eyes focused on the screen. Later they opted for an old time movie on TCM and then headed for the bedroom at ten.

Fred, realizing that she was exhausted, intentionally dallied in her kitchen for a bit, planning a surprise for breakfast. When he walked into the room at about ten twenty Anna was sound asleep.

After an early run, Fred created his surprise, Eggs Benedict with Mimosas! He had the orange juice and champagne ratio just perfect! She gorged herself, finishing her own serving and a part of Fred’s. He laughed. “I wish I could eat like you and keep my tummy flat.”

She patted herself. “I have to stay beautiful to keep those nurses at GW away from snaring my man.”

He grinned. “Anything on your agenda?”

“You choose, lover boy. Oh, this is Sunday. How about church?”

He asked, “Would you like to try the tiny Episcopal Chapel near GW? I show up there a couple times a month. The priest and I have created a nice bond and I would like to have him meet you.”

“That would be nice.” She chuckled, “As long as you don’t try to convert this Presbyterian.”

She was surprised with the meaningful sermon, somehow having the idea that Episcopalian priests were notoriously poor preachers. After, Phil England, the priest, invited them to a light lunch at the manse.

She was amazed how quickly he got her talking about her work. He was totally aware of her reputation as the "child wonder" in Washington medical circles.

Afterward, they took the cab to the National Museum, the creation of the Mellon Family. They stayed so long that they had to rush back to the apartment to dress for dinner with Nanan. Fred had lingered over several masters including Velasquez and Titian while Anna was studying the paintings of Turner. She focused on his “Rain, Steam and Speed.

Mathew served the cocktails. A half hour later, he came to assist Nanan to her place at the dining table. He served the dinner in a formal manner, a fine meal of perfectly roasted prime rib, mashed potatoes and green salad with a vinaigrette dressing.

When the dessert of ice cream and strawberries was served, Nanan turned the conversation to ~~ask about~~ Anna's dream for the children of the camps.

It didn't take long for Anna to warm to the subject. "When I was sixteen, my folks took me for a visit to the camp where I was when they found me and adopted me. I had a great visit with the foster mother, Mamma, who cared for me during those early months of my life after my parents had been murdered. I had had a variety of experiences. Dad, what experiences? This is a teaser hanging here with no explanation.

"My Mama had a set of twins who are now living with an adoptive family in Amman. The boys were her wards when I made a later visit to see Mamma."

"Rona, my roommate now, had been a high school student in that camp. On my trip, I visited with her family of eight in a hotel in the poorest section of the camp. All were Palestinians in a camp in Jordan. I spent a part of the day in that hovel and

Shade their meager meal. In that one day, I struck up a friendship with Rona. She eventually came to America and is now in the medical school at GW.

"On that trip, seeing the condition of that part of the camp, the plight of the children and then researching widely on the internet, I found out that there was a need I could help to fill. While there are a number of organizations working with the refugees, most are addressing immediate needs of food and clothing. Some, like Doctors without Borders, often short of staff, address the immediate health issues.

"There is practically no help for the potential long term disabilities of children. I am specifically talking about children with cataracts, cross eyes, "lazy eyes" and hooded eyes. Some of these can be a serious health problem such as blindness eventually or just an appearance problem, which leads to bullying and even a limitation of chances while seeking employment or even a mate later in life."

When she took a breath, Nanan interjected, "I get the picture. While these are not major procedures, each operation can loosen one of the bonds that may be imprisoning a child. That, dear Anna is a dream that should be pursued. If I recall, there is a saying that Jesus promised freedom for prisoners and sight for the blind."

Fred laughed. “Nanan, even after all these years you can surprise me with your knowledge. The quote comes from the gospel of Luke, the fourth chapter, if my memory serves me. I am delighted that you read the New Testament in addition to the Hebrew Scriptures.”

She chortled and said, “When your mother, a good Jewish girl, decided to marry an Episcopalian, I thought it wise to learn a bit about what may drive him. I have found great wisdom in both sections of your Bible.”

“Now, let’s adjourn to the sitting room. I love that room. It offers an intimacy in which secrets may be pried into the open.” They were all laughing as they rose for the short walk.

Anna sipped her Crème de Mint slowly as Nanan said, “Freddie, this is my day to surprise you twice. Your grandma has been hosting a small group of Jewish business men who hope to change some attitudes in Israel about the future in that part of the world. We believe that the present course is dangerous for the Israelis in the future and horrible for the Palestinians, under the current pressure from the domineering Israeli government.”

“Wow. That is a surprise. I knew you were only a token supporter of the Israelis but you’re working to bring about change does shock me.”

She nodded a thank you for the insight. “While a couple of power players are working on the State Department and the President, a small group of us have been exploring ways to help the victims of what we’re calling a war.

“You will eventually find this out. Every member of the group comes from a family in which one parent or both were survivors of Hitler’s extermination program. We are fed up with what we see our own people doing to the Palestinians, what had been done to us for centuries, even if it is taking a different form. Fear of those in charge can be a dreadful thing.”

Fred rose and walked to her and wrapped his arms around her. “I am not totally surprised. You always were an independent woman. I remember the good natured but serious disagreements with grampa about the use of some of the family foundation funds.”

Anna saw the pleasure in her flushed face as she said, “Pooh, Pooh. Sit down. I want to quiz Anna about her dream.”

She turned to Anna, “Do you have a plan worked out?”

“No. I have some ideas, but this first year at Children’s has been a challenge. I have been on a long day, seven days a week journey until the last several weeks.”

“Has that changed enough so that you can spend some time planning?”

Anna giggled, “I am sure I can find some time if your grandson co-operates and is a little less demanding.”

Nanan had one more surprise up her sleeve. She asked, “Wouldn’t it serve both purposes if you moved in together?”

Fred and Anna blushed right down to the roots of their scalps and were tongue tied. Nanan burst into laughter. “That was my idea of fun just to get your goats. I haven’t the slightest notion to meddle in your lives, but I do want to help. What can I do?”

Composing herself, Anna said, “I certainly would like to exchange ideas with someone who is interested.”

Nanan asked, “Are you free on Sundays?”

I am on "call" one weekend a month. Sundays are free unless Fred has something special planned.”

“Why don’t you type up a few notes of your ideas and come to lunch two weeks from today. Our group will be meeting in the interim. I will introduce the subject and gauge the response.”

Two days later, Anna had just returned from a morning in the OR and was ready for lunch. Her cell phone played a strain of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. She was laughing as she answered with, “Hello, Good Looking.”

It was Fred, but this was not a social call. “Honey, I’m on mobile duty, working the Washington Highlands. We believe we ran into a respiratory disease epidemic. It looks like flu, bronchitis and multitudes of both bacterial and viral conjunctivitis. We’ve called for help from the Medicine Department and I believe we need a team from Ophthalmology, adult and pediatric.”

She was already buzzing her admin executive in the outer office. “I’m on it. See you in a while.”

Dorothy was standing in the doorway. "Possible epidemic in the Highlands, Dorothy. See how many off-duty nurses and aides who are on the volunteer list are available."

"I'll call the pharmacy to get as much medication as they can spare. I am sure they will also find more eye drops and artificial tears from their suppliers. I will get a team of four doctors. When you have the tally of volunteers, call the auto pool. Hmmm, maybe you should have Barbara alert the pool to start arranging a large number of vehicles."

She paused to take a breath and began following through on her plan.

The four cabs disgorged nineteen volunteers next to their own mobile, which had arrived a half hour earlier. They were in a parking lot of a small medical clinic that had been operating for years. A tall woman, about Anna's height approached, "Welcome, Dr. Peters. I'm Dr. Ammin, Fred's colleague. I've taken responsibility for coordinating. We now have forty hands on deck."

"Wonderful. Who's doing triage?"

"Fred is, but he hopes you will assign someone to take over. He put two urgent surgeries on hold in the mobile. He is desperate to get back to those cases. By the way, my first assessment indicates a need for more help and for at least three to five days. If you agree, I think we should order a couple of tents to be set up with some cots."

Anna nodded her agreement. "Please call me Anna."

"I'm Samar. I feel like I've known you. You certainly are something special according to Fred. You know that you were the inspiration for our starting our surgical and family medicine mobile."

"Thank you, Samar. I'm on my way to relieve Fred. Try to find someone from Medicine to relieve me. I'll take responsibility for contacting as much of the medical community as possible. This will take a major effort. Has anyone called the Public Health Official?"

"I doubt it. I can do that," said Samar."

Anna was on the phone in the clinic office. Right off the starting block, she was shocked to find a stumbling block in the person of the chairman of the Washington Medical Association. His answer to her was, "I can't see bothering the doctors in practice with something that is the responsibility of the city."

Trying to keep her impatience out of her voice, Anna replied, “Doctor. No one sector can handle an epidemic, and that is what we have. If we can’t keep it contained, the entire Capital will be at risk.”

“I disagree. I certainly am not going to disturb my fellow physicians.”

Anna slammed down the phone. She hoped that she would get favorable responses from the hospitals. Just as she started to call a colleague at Georgetown, she thought about her own boss, Dr. Jessup.

He listened attentively and said, “Anna, you need to tone it down. Your voice is an octave above normal. Give me ten minutes. Give me your number.”

Within five minutes, she was regretting not giving Jessup her cell number instead of her landline. She figured she could be better help outdoors instead of twiddling her fingers waiting for the call back.

When twenty minutes had elapsed, she began pacing in the very small office. She practically jumped out of her skin when the phone finally rang thirty five minutes later.

“Hi, Anna. I called in a favor and moved around that stuffed shirt doctor

Emails are on the way to all members. You get outside and do your thing. I will call all the right people at the various hospitals and have someone call the non-profit clinics around town. While I was waiting for one of the calls, pharmacy called for permission to order more drops and other supplies. I will handle the financial end with the other hospitals and Public Health.”

Anna sighed with relief, leaned back in the chair and closed her eyes, giving thanks to God for his compassion. She spent the next eight hours either in triage or treating children with either the bacterial or viral conjunctivitis.

It was after midnight when Fred helped her out of the cab and walked her to the apartment. She was exhausted, feeling angry with the world and especially with the few physicians in private practice that had not volunteered.

She was at her desk at seven for the next four mornings. She cancelled all her non-urgent surgeries, returning late one afternoon to handle a retinal detachment emergency.

When she showed up Saturday morning, bleary eyed and not the usual "sharp" doctor, Samar asked the cabbie to wait while she and Fred convinced Anna to return home and hit the sack.

Rona came in about four. She noticed that Anna was rousing. "Tea will be ready in a few minutes. When Anna stepped out of the shower, Rona handed her a robe and a hot cup of tea. The aroma was soothing.

Anna grunted a thank you and seemed about to crawl into a shell. Rona led her into the den where she had set out biscuits, butter and jam. Anna was surprised when she discovered that Rona knew a great deal of what had been happening in the Highlands.

Rona explained, "Our professors decided that a few days on the line dealing with victims would teach us some skills that they could not do in the class. Our group was some distance from the clinic and tents where you must have been located."

Anna told Rona, "We did have more than a hundred and fifty volunteers in addition to some mothers who served as aides. Others brought tea and coffee from three coffee shops who insisted on providing coffee, tea and doughnuts all week. I'm still upset with the low participation by doctors in private practice."

Rona chortled. "Darn good coffee, too. Tell me, why does that make you so grumpy?"

"I guess I get grumpy when I'm tired. I have to get past that so that I can think clearly."

Anna changed the subject. She said to Rona, "Samar, the surgeon from GW, was the coordinator. She was right. It had taken the help of more than a hundred and fifty staff to ease the pain for thousands of affected victims, encouraging them to adopt clean habits to prevent the spread of the respiratory diseases."

Rona said, "I know it helped to limit the spread of disease but I was uncomfortable with the city's decision to restrict movement to other parts of the city, except for employees who had no choice. I must admit that it did work."

Anna observed, "The Public Health people had a wider view. I hadn't realized that the three hospitals nearest the Highlands recruited doctors and nurses from the suburbs. I would guess that the total staff volunteers exceed two hundred and fifty.

Anna smiled and changed the subject. “Rona, I have some news, something I have been holding back.”

Rona laughed, “You’ve met a man. The new and brighter glow before this week gave you away. When do I get to meet him?”

“Tonight, I hope. He had a surgery this morning and a consult this afternoon. I was planning to invite him for a drink so you could meet him.”

“Great. I’d like that. I need to see if he meets my minimum standards for a beautiful, brilliant and caring woman. Do you think he would stay to dinner? I was planning a spaghetti and salad dinner in case you were home.”

“Let’s find out.”

Before the cocktail time was passed, Anna got thumbs up from Rona. Conversation was sparkling. Rona admitted to Fred that all the women in her class idolized him, after his class appearance one morning three weeks ago.”

Fred blushed slightly and looked to see how Anna had taken this bit of news. She was grinning and then said, “I am going to have to dig my nails in deeply to keep him from straying.” They all chuckled.

Rona and Fred cleared the dishes while Anna stacked them in the dishwasher. Rona said “My date arrives at eight thirty. I’ll fill you in tomorrow.”

A minute later Anna moved close to Rona. “I’ll be at Fred’s apartment, just a few floors down, just in case.”

Blushing like a teenager, Anna continued, “I’m not sure I’m ready for that but it would be nice to have a chat with you. He is also coming tomorrow afternoon. It would be good to get a second opinion because I am beginning to have feelings for him.”

Fred called out, “What are you two females scheming up while you’re out of earshot?”

Rona called, “Just girl stuff. We haven’t seen each other for a week. Turn on the TV for a minute.”

Five minutes later, Anna joined him, carrying a small tote bag. "Ready?" He surprised both women when he swooped Anna up into his arms, heading for the door.

When she was breathing more evenly and her heart was at an acceptable pace, she put her hand on his chest.

"I apologize for my behavior the other night I was mad at the world after a day of strain, the tension, the limited vision of some members of the medical society."

"I knew that and had to give you space . . . You finally slept well and I'm guessing ready for the next day

Emerging from the late service at the Episcopal chapel on Sunday they opted to pick up lunch on the way to the Lincoln Memorial. Once there, they nibbled at their sandwiches while sitting on the steps, watching the other tourists pay their respects.

At home, Rona served tea and sweet cakes at four so that they could spend time with Ali, a fellow med student and an émigré from Iraq. His pronunciations were not quite as good as Rona but his manners were impeccable. He had a deep interest in American politics as well as International affairs.

He admitted to being a passionate Sunni and believed that the Shiites would never agree to a government run by the Sunnis. "There are more sectarian clashes ahead, I'm afraid."

After an acceptable passage of time, Anna changed the subject. "Ali, what specialty do you plan for your career?"

"I want to be an Internist, mostly to serve with the needier in any of the Middle East countries, not necessarily Iraq."

Anna, knowing a bit of Rona's hope, asked, "Are you talking about something like a camp in Jordan or Turkey or Lebanon?"

"Yes, in general, but not Syria or Lebanon where the governance is or will be Shiite. I know little of Jordan but it sounds like a place where I might be useful."

Anna said, "Well, Rona can help you learn more. She tells me that she hopes to perform some services there as a part of her repayment. I, too, am looking forward to possible service in one or more camps."

Anna thought she had turned an idea on for Ali, but he just smiled at her.

During cocktails at Fred's apartment, Anna opened her writing pad and asked, "Any first thoughts about plans as Nanan requested?"

"I have a few but this is your dream, so you should start."

She nodded. "It might help you understand my dream if I could point out some influences that left a mark on me during the formative years. Very briefly, my Dad, Ben, who, in addition to serving wherever called, devoted his medical practice to working with kids around the Middle East and in California."

"All through my childhood, due to the nature of their professions, it was Dad who had more time with me than Mom. I have fond memories of time on his knees while he was reading aloud and telling me stories. I particularly loved his real stories of working with young patients. I found out later that he maneuvered signups for new patients to include a good percentage of kids.

"Sundays, after church, the three of us often spent part of brunch talking about my Sunday school session. I believe that my compassion for poor kids and sick kids is rooted in those discussions as well as in some teachings that were included in those stories.

"Anyhow, from those early days on I was encouraged to give money to various charities. As I grew older and came to understand the grace of being redeemed from life in a refugee camp, I found myself thinking of ways I would be able to give back."

"That may not be the way it really happened but that is the way I see it."

As she stopped for a breath, Fred said, "Your folks must be special. When I do I get the chance to meet them?"

Anna grinned. "Soon, I hope, but let's stay on course."

"Okay. So, what has been running around in that beautiful mind of yours?"

"Up until recently my dream was rendering service somewhere in the Middle East, most likely in camps, but another factor came into play during our recent work in the Highlands. I figure I have three years to complete all that I have in mind for Children's Hospital. The first year has helped establish a real foundation, but now the task is building on that base."

“How does that tie in to Washington Highlands?”

“Well, two moderately successful projects are now operating in that vast area of underserved citizens. I say moderate because there is yet much to do. We are reaching only about thirty per cent of those who need general medical, surgical or vision services. Serving that other seventy percent is a real key to the future.

"Children are born to mothers who never had prenatal care or advice. Those same children often suffer from malnutrition during their gestation periods as well as in the first important years of their lives.

"Unless young mothers brought a child to our mobile or had need of your services, thousands of young women are giving birth to children whose very foundations will limit either physical, or mental health or both. You and I know the odds for a good life for children coming into a world with those handicaps.

“I may be overstating my case, but, if so, not by much.”

“I agree, Anna, but as large as that challenge sounds, I keep hearing more in what is yet to come.”

“Yes. If we can develop a good working model here in D.C., then it may be exported to various places around the globe.

“What I envision is another mobile, serving as an examining room, staffed perhaps by a nurse practitioner in Family Medicine, supported by an organized program of free advertising on television and radio, supplemented by fliers in the Highlands area. That would probably increase the demand for our other mobile services as well. The goal is to reach as many as can benefit.”

Fred laughed. “Now the wider dream.” Anna grinned. “I need a break. Let’s take a walk. I can tell you what I’ve been doing.”

She began on the homeward leg of the walk. “I have spent a lot of time doing research in books and on the internet. There are two groups of people, among many others, that are being shortchanged in their current circumstances. I would love to wave a wand and change all that but I know I am limited.

"The two groups I would like to help are, first, the refugee children who may find their futures limited because of some physical or vision problem. The second group includes those Palestinian citizens of Israel who are from the families that decided not to leave Israel either in the 1948 war or the 1967 Six Day

War. For political reasons this group will be extremely difficult to help. We will need the blessings of the Israeli government, which has not been very accommodating to date.”

While Fred fixed drinks, Anna took the time to organize her thoughts.

She was pacing the floor when he entered, but plopped onto the sofa when he handed her the drink. A few minutes later she continued.

“I am a product of that group and must have relatives either in the north, in Jerusalem or near the Negev.”

Fred was surprised. “During our few conversations I thought I understood the drive to amps, but I heard no hint of this.”

“The status of Palestinians in Israel as a Jewish state is problematic. From 1948 until 1966 the Palestinians in Israel lived under military rule and in fact under military occupation. Palestinians faced restrictions on the freedom of movement, restrictions on the freedom of press and opinion and legal confiscation of land and property. Under military law Palestinians faced the possibility of deportations, illegal detentions without trial, curfews, house arrests and similar plights. The end of military rule in 1966 did not end this discrimination.

"The inequality under the law is felt in almost all aspects of social, political and economic life, including a discriminatory educational system where curriculum is routinely biased in favor of Jewish customs and norms, at the expense of Arab culture. The notion of collective rights and protection of the Palestinian minority are absent from the Basic Law.

"This active policy of under-development also becomes clear in the case of the 'unrecognized villages.' About 100,000 people live in these villages, mostly in the Negev and in the North, which officially do not exist. This means that even the most basic services are not made available to their inhabitants, such as running water, health services, sanitation, electricity, safe roads, adequate education facilities or postal and other communication services.

“I realize that Wikipedia articles need to be looked at with some objectivity but even if half that article is true, my family, my extended family may be living under conditions that are worse than the Negroes in the south before the sixties.

“Honey, I’m not naïve enough to think that I can do much but I have this urge to know if my folks had any brothers or sisters who are survivors still in Israel.”

Fred said nothing, while she sat silently. His loving gesture of caressing her knuckles brought a smile to her face. “I found out that my father’s name was Bazzi and my mother’s family name was Kattan.

"I have no idea whether they accepted Israeli citizenship or not. If I ever get to Israel, I would hope to find the families and if they are victims, perhaps I can do some small thing to help."

An hour later, Fred completed writing up the detailed notes of their conversation. Scanning the notes, she said, "Nanan should be delighted. I wonder how she is doing with her cronies."

"Knowing my grandmother, I am sure she is working through any obstacles that have arisen. Anna, join me on the sofa for a few minutes." He rose, took her by the hand, led her across the room and pulled her onto his lap.

He sought her lips and planted a passionate kiss. Eventually he moved his head and pulled her head to his chest and whispered, "Anna Peters, my love, will you marry me to be your lover for life?"

He did not have a moment to wait before getting a rousing, "I will. I want to. When?"

His voice was lost when his lips and body practically drowned with the rush of her passion.

Chapter 8 Is It Feasible?

Fred had breakfast on the table when Anna joined him on the balcony that Sunday morning. The June morning was warmish with just a slight breeze, making it perfect.

“I’m happy you made it simple, Freddie. I can’t wait to finish eating so we can call my folks with the news.”

Fred grinned, “Slow down, honey. It’s only ten o’clock, seven in the morning in California. I know you said they rise early but I think we ought to give them until eight their time.”

Anna grunted approval but downed her juice in one gulp. He put his hand gently on her arm as she began to do the same with her coffee. She slowed down, giving him a sheepish grin.

She was fidgety, refilling her coffee cup twice, pacing into the living room and out. At ten forty she could wait no longer but handed one extension to Fred and began dialing on the other.

Her Dad answered the call. “Good morning”

His greeting was interrupted with the exciting voice of Anna. “Hi Daddy.” Suddenly the planned words failed her and she was tongue tied. Her eyes were tears as she pointed to Fred

He said, “Good Morning, Mr. Peters. I guess Anna is a bit tongue tied at the moment but she is wildly waving at me. I guess she wants me to ask formally for your daughter’s hand and a blessing for both of us.”

He heard Ben shout, “Diane, pick up the extension. Anna and Fred are on the phone.”

Fred waited until he heard Diane’s voice and then some response from Ben. What he heard suddenly was Anna’s voice. “Daddy, hurry up and say yes.” She sounded like the young teen age girl waiting her Dad’s approval that first date night.

On the other end, Ben was explaining the import of the call to his wife, who burst into laughter so infectious that it caused all the others to join in.

Ben brought the laughter to an end, saying seriously. “Annie. We trust your judgment and although we look forward to meeting Fred, the answer is an unequivocal yes. That does require a meeting very soon.”

Diane's voice was cutting in. "That goes for me too, Annie. Congratulations to both of you. How do we arrange the meeting? Here or Washington?"

Anna, now in complete control of herself, said, "How about next weekend in Portola Valley? I want Fred to get to know the whole clan who shaped my life, including Gramma Sellech, if she is well enough to party."

Diane said, "I'm sure she will be available. As she says, 'I'm only in my nineties.' As far as I know almost everyone is available. Let us know the arrival time so Dad and I can pick you up at SFO."

Then she said, "All right, you guys. Time for girl talk. Skedaddle."

That conversation went on for an hour, Diane milling Anna for every detail known to her of Fred's background. She shed tears while Anna related the story of Fred's parents' deaths. By the end of the phone call, Diane was almost as much in love with Fred as Anna was.

Later that afternoon Mathew opened the door for them at Nanan's house and took them directly to the sitting room. The hostess was gowned in a bluebird blue sleeveless sun dress with a fairly high neck line that set off her gray coiffured head like a bust of some Roman beauty.

Matthew needed no orders to serve this gathering, their preferences well ensconced in his head. When he retired, Nanan looked into Anna's eyes, smiled and said "I can see the excitement, child. Want to share?"

Anna chuckled. "I see now that there will never be any secrets kept from you, Nanan. Yes. I am delirious. Your wonderful grandson has asked me to marry him and is planning to meet my family next weekend."

Nanan's smile widened. She opened her arms. "Come, daughter. I want to feel the love and warmth of the newest member of my family." There was no denying the tears, even from this normally stoic woman.

After a dull debriefing, Nanan ordered a second round of drinks. "We have plenty of time before dinner so why don't we talk shop and then enjoy dinner as it should be enjoyed."

With full agreement from the other two, she began. "Anna, I hope you don't mind my choosing to do a full vetting job on you since we will undoubtedly be in some joint venture together and now even closer

as members of the same family. Fred may know part of what I am to say but some of it will be a broader understanding of the woman he loves.”

Anna smiled. “I have been vetted so many times I feel like an open book to the world of medicine.”

Nanan nodded and continued. “I had already decided that you were brilliant, but to be in the genius category even surprised me. That accounted for some of your early success, but I discovered what Dr. Jessup saw in you that surprised the world when he chose such a young woman to manage a division of a major hospital in the nation’s capital. Do you know that he is one of your greatest admirers and delighted with himself for seeing the real you instead of just a smart kid? Those are his words, by the way.”

Anna could feel the flush that was warming her cheeks and throat while she sat silently.

“He personally told me that even over and above the smooth way you have organized and now am expanding the Division; he admires the loyalty of your staff from doctors down to the custodial and maintenance staff. In fact, just recently he heard one of electricians scolding a fellow worker for spreading some tidbit of gossip about you. Of course you have a few detractors, but I discovered that at the root was pure jealousy.”

She took a sip of her drink and then continued. “There are numerous other things that impressed me, but one stands out. “ Did you know that you have opened the pocketbook of one of the largest charitable organizations in the country? No, you would have no way of knowing that, although you know one of the channels.

“That particular group has never even bowed in the direction of supporting medical causes or any support for poorer countries. Their gifts have usually gone to support ultra conservative organizations.

“You need to know that fact alone has deeply impressed my colleagues. They had been so worried of even considering working with some ‘young squirt of a genius.’ You will be welcome to work with us, if you choose. ”

Anna was dumb struck and did not know how to respond. Nanan said, “You needn’t say anything, Anna. I just wanted you to know how we view you. Now if you are comfortable enough, what ideas have you and Fred in mind?”

Fred handed Nanan the transcription of their conversation. After a brief glance, Nanan said “It would help me if Anna gave me a verbal run through. I need to hear more than facts.”

Anna understood that she as well as their thoughts were about to be scrutinized.

“Nanan, as you know we have, two moderately successful projects now operating in the Washington Highlands. There is more to be done, but building on that base we are hoping to build a model that can be taken anywhere in the world.

“What we believe would be a good next step is to add services aimed at good health for babies and toddlers. The route to the young ones seems to point to that vast number of young mothers-to-be who receive no prenatal or post natal care. You have a bit more information on that subject in the printout.

“With a successful third program working in D.C., I would hope to create similar programs overseas.

“I told Fred that there are two groups of people, among many others, that are being shortchanged in their current circumstances. I would love to wave a wand and change all that but I know I am limited.

“My choices of locations are, of course, personal. The first is the refugee children who may find their futures limited because of some physical or vision problem. I am sure that the reason is self-evident since you know of my early life.”

Anna’s voice was now half an octave higher as her passion began to show. She was perched on the edge of her chair.

“My second choice includes those Palestinian citizens of Israel who are from the families that decided not to leave Israel either in the 1948 war or the 1967 Six Day War. I am certain that research will prove that my family fits in that category.

“From my research I do believe that there are thousands of children, living as second class citizens, missing out on proper medical attention as well as educational opportunities.

“For political reasons this group will be extremely difficult to help, if at all, but I want to try. We will need the blessing of the Israeli government, which has not been very accommodating in helping those citizens as of this date.”

With those words, she let out a sigh and leaned back in her chair. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling, probably with tears that she would not allow to drop.

Nanan smiled, rang Matthew for refills. She turned to Anna. “Dear child, that is bold and magnificent. I am sure you have worked out ways of measuring success and setbacks.”

Anna responded with, “Thank you. I may be reaching too far. Each of the three steps will require barrels of money and scores of volunteers, mostly from the medical field. You asked for ideas and I decided not to be limited by finances as I laid out my dream.”

“That is what I wanted to hear, along with your passion for the dream. That became evident during your presentation. I believe that some, although not all, of my colleagues will want to help finding funds. A few will complain that this is not an exact fit tour mission. Others, like me, will appreciate the need for successful models.”

Anna hugged Fred and moved to offer the same to Nanan, who was obviously pleased, but said “Enough of that. It is time to get ready for dinner.”

Nanan made only one reference to the project during dinner. She actually had asked Anna about her health. Anna announced that a recent exam had shown excellent marks for good health. Nanan nodded and said, “My worry is that you may be taking on too much at one time. We never are able to evaluate ourselves as to when our load is getting too heavy.”

Chapter 9

Matthew, who was clearing the table, jumped as Anna's cell phone gave out a sharp signal. Anna reached into her purse which was on the floor beside her. "Dr. Peters here. Where? How Many? I'm on my way." After a moment Anna gave the caller her current location.

"Sorry, Nanan. Fred and I need to respond to a seven car collision. Most of the injured are being taken to Children's while some are on the way to GW hospital. Seven children have been admitted to Children's."

Nanan nodded, holding out her arms for a hug while Fred was dialing for a cab. As they exited the front door, a police cruiser pulled up. A voice called "Dr. Peters?" She nodded. "I was dispatched to rush you to Children's Hospital."

The cruiser peeled out, siren blaring and lights flashing. He dropped Anna at the Emergency door and sped off with Fred toward GW.

When she popped through the door, a nurse's aide called, "This way Dr. Peters. My boss, the Emergency Duty Chief, is performing triage. He needs your advice in regard to five patients."

She and Dr. Zuvic were acquainted. His eyes beckoned her from above the mask as the aide tied her gown and dropped the plastic hat over her head. "I have four children and one adult male, with serious abdominal and ocular damage. I need your judgment as to whether the ocular problems are urgent and require immediate surgery. In urgent cases my surgeons can do a patch job and hold off the bodily injury repairs. If you indicate not urgent we need to get the victims to surgery pronto."

They moved to cubicle 15. Within a minute, she said, "This child is all yours but we need to do some work within the next forty eight hours."

There were two cots in cubicle 16. A set of twin five year old boys were lying still but in shock. She lifted the pads from the eyes of the first, and with a motion toward the doctor. "We need him in surgery pronto."

A brief exam of the second boy took a bit longer. She asked, "What's your judgment about his other injuries. Life threatening?"

"I'd rather hoped you were willing to give him to surgery right now."

“Fine. I would like to see him in recovery as you feel it feasible.”

As they moved into the next cubicle she asked, “Max is Jessup here?”

“Out of town, I hear. You are the ranking member of his department.”

She took the pad off the eye lids of the adult male. “If it is safe, we need this patient immediately.”

Anna made the same decision with the twelve year old boy in the last cubicle. They separated, Anna heading for the two OR units that were assigned for Ophthalmology in this emergency.

In the changing room, she was delighted to see Fritz Zoller, one of her ace surgeons, and two doctors from adult Ophthalmology, Carol Burns and, Maria Pitt.

“Welcome, friends. We have three urgent cases, a five year old boy, twelve year old boy and fiftyish male. What we have are five injured passengers from a seven car pileup. Two are semi urgent and will be available probably within forty eight hours after other treatment.

"Three are urgent. The five years old has corneal abrasions in both eyes and will need transplants.

"The twelve year old had more severe damage but only in one eye. He has corneal scratches and at least two metal objects that are imbedded and possibly some glass.

"The adult male appears to have serious lacerations of the left cornea I could not find any objects during the triage examination.

"I would like the four of us to take another look and decide if I am right in choosing the 12 year old and the adult for surgery in the two OR rooms and delay the five year old until one of the OR rooms is available.”

Within a minute the others agreed that she had set the correct priority. Then she said, “Each of you decide which patient will be yours.”

It took seven minutes for the final decision. Carol took OR1 and James Forest, the adult male. Maria opted for the five years old, Jackie Field, while Fritz chose the twelve year old, Mickey Foxx.

At that moment, two doctors entered the changing area, both from the Ophthalmology department at GW. Nick Donald and Gary White introduced themselves. "Fred Decker said that all the vision cases had ended up here so we hustled over. How may we help?"

Anna said, "Just in time. Start scrubbing. Nick, why don't you assist Carol?" She nodded in Carol's direction. Gary, you can assist Fritz."

"Maria, why don't you join me in the control room? I will be monitoring both procedures on the computer screens and the closed circuit TV screens. You are familiar with the process. We can see what the operators are seeing and serve as a third set of eyes. If there are any questions, we will serve as the resource."

Maria nodded. Anna went on. "I will plan to assist you with Jackie's operation unless an emergency calls me away."

Four hours later, just as she began to scrub, she was called to the recovery room where the attending physician wanted her to see Johnny Field, the five year old twin. She examined his left eye carefully and then asked, "Who is coordinating surgery today?"

She heard a familiar voice from behind. She recognized Phyllis Curio's voice saying, "I am, Anna. Hold on one moment."

After a brief greeting, Anna said, "Young Johnny has a fracture of the left orbit, which needs repair within the next forty eight hours, if possible. Since he is your patient, do you want to continue with one of the surgeons or shall we take over? I am concerned that there could be muscular entrapment that will affect his future by limiting the direction of his vision in that eye."

"Since this will have to wait for partial recovery from his other injuries, I have a young surgeon who has had some experience with facial injuries. Why don't we take the responsibility while you assign one of your pediatric eye surgeons to assist? That way, we can have the better of two worlds."

Anna grinned. "It's great doing business with you, Phyllis."

With that she rushed back to the control room to observe and monitor the third procedure.

Late on Friday afternoon, Anna was straining at the edge of her seat in the first-class cabin as the plane edged closer to touchdown at SFO. She could see they had just passed over the San Mateo Bridge on their glide path. She glanced at the sun bathed hills where they would soon be heading down Interstate 280,

headed for home. She sensed Fred's hand touching her knee which was pumping up and down with excitement.

Just as the wheels thumped on the runway, she said to herself. "Calm down, Anna. You're acting like a ten year old."

She glanced at Fred who was grinning from ear to ear "Just a little excited. Are you, honey?"

"You betcha."

As he watched the bear hugs and tears when her folks greeted them outside the security gate, he understood her excitement. The love within that family was something he had never witnessed in his life, and the idea choked him for a moment.

The two women were ensconced in the rear seat of the Buick Crossover, while Fred and Ben were getting acquainted. For two doctors the easy path was discussing their practices. Ben was a skilled interviewer, with years of searching for answers as an Internist at a clinic. Within minutes he had Fred telling of his surgery practice at GW.

Twenty minutes later, Fred said, "Ben, I'm doing all the talking. Tell me about Kaiser Permanente. From what I read, your organization is one of the greatest health delivery systems in the country."

Thirty minutes later, Ben was still waxing eloquently as he pulled into the driveway. Before the car stopped rolling, a young Latino teenage boy was opening the back and pulling out the luggage. Ben called "Raol, first, come meet Anna and her friend from Washington. "He turned to Fred. Raol has been living with us for the last two years of high school, earning his keep as gardener and handyman."

Raol took care of clearing the dinner dishes while the four of them retired to the sitting room. Three of them took seats while Fred stood in the center. "Diane, Ben, if I may be so bold as to call you by your given names, I am very desirous of asking your blessing and willingness to allow me to take Anna, as my loving and beloved wife."

He burst into a grin and everyone laughed. Ben responded, "With such a beautiful and formal request how we could say 'no'." Both Diane and Ben stood and took him into their arms and soon they were joined by Anna and let their tears of joy mingle with each other's.

Diane and Ben were deeply moved as Fred told the story of losing his parents and living with his grandmother. He finished off his story with, "Nanan seems to have fallen in love with Anna just as I did. I hope you might invite her into a consult about the wedding plans. She is able to fly and I can make arrangements."

Anna said, "I've already taken care of the arrangements. I called Gramma Sellech earlier this week. She is looking forward to meeting and having Nanan stay with her. I did that after checking with Nanan. You may not know this, Fred, but Nanan is a big admirer of Gramma Sellech as one of the great woman pioneers of the twentieth century."

Ben chortled. "Just like Anna. Always ahead of the pack."

Diane cut in. "Tomorrow, with your agreement, I can have Uncle Pete, our jeweler, bring out an assortment of diamonds and settings for your choosing if that is still your plan."

Anna and Fred nodded their agreement.

"Tomorrow afternoon Alexis, my closest friend in life, her mom, Maria, and Gramma Sellech are hosting a large gathering of the Sellech clan and extended family members at Gramma's house, starting at two and ending whenever. Fred, after that, you can decide if you want to be a part of this family or not."

The invitation brought a warm feeling to Fred, who thought, "*Looks like I'm getting a large family, even this late in life.*"

When they retired to her bedroom later, she stripped off her clothes within seconds and began undressing Fred. She pulled him atop her and whispered, "All through my teens I dreamed of my white knight making love to me in this bed. It has taken more than ten years since that dream began, but here you are. I am all yours, sweet prince."

The big surprise for Anna was at the moment of her arrival at the gathering. She was greeted at the gate by her grandmother Cathy and Grampa John, Diane's parents. She had forgotten the close ties that her grand folks had with the Sellech clan.

Fred thought, "*I've been here for an hour and feel like I am part of the family.*" Anna had kissed him a few minutes ago as she took some of the younger children horseback riding a few miles up the road where another branch of the extended family had horses and ponies.

After a long chat with Anna's famous grandmother, Cathy Check, former journalist with the *New York Times*, he found himself alone with Maria Sellech Walter, corporate lawyer in Silicon Valley. He should not have been surprised to find that she too had been an orphan, adopted by Gramps and Gramma when she was three.

When Maria had to be excused to attend to something, he wandered out to the patio to look for a cool drink. He heard a voice call, "Young man, if you find some coke, I can use a cold one."

He was startled and looked around until he spotted an elderly woman sitting in a rocker in the shade. He smiled. "Coming right up."

"Pull up a chair close to mine. Thanks for the drink. In case you hadn't guessed, I'm Gramma Sellech, Sara to my friends. I hope you will address me as Sara. It makes me feel my real age not my bodily age."

"I'd be delighted, Sara."

She smiled. "Anna tells me you also lost your parents at a tender age. I didn't get any details but would be pleased if you could oblige me."

He explained about his folks accidentally losing their lives in Israel and being raised by his grandmother. "By the way, she is a great admirer of yours. She said no other woman in your time even considered a life of being the chief operating officer of a public corporation. But you were a real pathfinder. Those are her words."

"Tell me about her, if you please."

"She is a survivor of the concentration camps, a young survivor. She managed to find a loving husband after coming to the States. Now, a wealthy widow, she uses her wealth and positions as a weapon to help the poor and to seek a change of attitude within the state of Israel regarding their future with their neighbors, especially the Palestinians. I think of her as a woman ahead of her time, just as she sees you."

Sara smiled a thank you. "Care to share some ideas of your future with my adopted great granddaughter?"

"Well, we both want children but we also want to pay something back for the grace that entered our lives with people like my grandmother, Ben and Diane and the faith that doctors like Jessup, who have displayed faith in the Anna's abilities."

“How do you see that being manifested?”

“Are you familiar with her plan of mobiles in the poorer sections of D.C.?”

Sara grinned. “I am, mostly because she came to me for the first seed dollars. Interestingly, she hasn’t been back, having found some donors from within the District, I guess.”

“Yes, I think you are right. She has a reputation for being a great fund raiser as well as a brilliant surgeon and boss.”

“No. I hadn’t heard that. In fact, that child is too modest. I know she is a genius, and I read between the lines when I hear that she is a pioneer in the sense of being the youngest hospital division head in history.”

Sara continued. “Even as a preadolescent, she always acted with a maturity far beyond her age.” She laughed. “You do look like the man who can handle that. Not all young men might be that capable.”

Fred felt his cheeks flushing.

Sara said, “You do know that you will have two families ready to support you. I am not sure it is true of Anna, but I read that such genius and drive may be accompanied by brittleness or a fragility that is hidden even from those closest to her. I pray your sensitivity will be enough to keep her from coming apart if such an event were to present itself.”

Fred was stunned. That thought had never entered his mind. “Thank you, Sara. I promise you that I will always be there for her.”

Sara smiled. “I believe you. Now, come give me a hug and spend some time with Alexis, Diane’s friend since childhood. You may discover a few more secrets about the family of your future.”

As Fred walked away, he was reminded of Nanan’s comment at dinner about too heavy a load at one time for Anna.

After a fabulous western style barbecue with all the trimmings, the entire clan was treated to some juggling and magic tricks by Fred, who was pleased to be asked for more and more.

Diane presented the plans for the wedding four weeks hence, here at Gramma Sselect's home, followed by a rush of hugs and back slapping of the lovers.

Sara insisted that Anna tell the clan about her hopes and dreams of serving the children around the world with vision problems. She finished with, "My dream is large but even if successful will hardly make a dent in the vast need. But, as my Fred says, "Every child with one less limitation is a prisoner released to become something more in life."

Sara concluded the comments. "I want to remind you in the younger generations that there is no greater reward than serving others within your profession and with gifts of your free time. Anna and Fred, we are so proud of you."

Chapter 10.

It was the day before their return home. Anna and Fred had finished a long walk in the fields above Pearl Harbor. They were honeymooning at the Sellech home on Oahu, a gift from Sara's adopted uncle, Admiral Witty.

They were seated on the patio that faced southeast overlooking downtown Honolulu and Waikiki beach. The beach was dotted with tiny human beings, umbrellas and lanais. The water sparkled from the splashes of the swimmers and the commercial catamarans filled with tourists gliding parallel to the shore.

Fred took Anna's right hand in his. "Getting edgy, Honey? "

"A little, I guess. Ever since I awakened this morning, I've been trying to put my head around the sums we need to raise to launch the Highlands expansion. I was getting upset with your insistence on leaving our digital equipment at home, but I forgave you the moment your inviting hand moved to my breast and the beautiful denouement when I accepted the invitation."

She could see the beam break out on his face as he recalled the joy of the morning awakening. She lifted their hands to her lips and the invitation was not lost on Fred.

The flight was about an hour from Dulles Airport in Washington. Anna had just awakened, removed her hand from Fred's and began rummaging around her purse for a pen and paper. "Need help, Honey?"

She replied, "I need to jot down a few notes regarding fund raising. Something in my dream just triggered a thought. By the way, did I tell you that we have a pledge of funding from the Sellech and the Walter Foundations for the Highlands project and another from Rosalie's Ross-Silver Foundation? Did you meet Rosalie?"

"Just briefly. Apparently she knows my grandmother. I understand she is close to Sara."

"Yes, they go back to World War II and subsequently when they were in business together. She is planning to write to Nanan and will join in some way with that source, if they approve of our plans for Israel."

The next five days of Anna's life were focused on catching up on her management responsibilities. She assisted in OR but assumed no primary leads for the first two weeks. She was on hand for the testing of two new pieces of equipment that had been installed just prior to her return. Meetings with

her staff proved that her directions during her absence had resulted in no panic or chaos but, indeed, had been well executed.

She spent long hours in the evenings preparing the semi-annual report to Dr. Jessup which he would present to the hospital board meeting.

Starting the Monday morning of the third week after the honeymoon she began her telephone campaign. Her ambitious plan would require more volunteer doctors, nurses and technicians than were available from GW and Children's.

Her first phone call was to Georgetown U. Hospital. She was frustrated after an hour of being shuffled to various departments without talking with anyone who displayed the slightest interest. In frustration, she called Fred to see if he had a clue. Two hours later, she was stymied and somewhat embittered when Fred called back with negative results. He said, "I have no personal contacts there. How about you? Anyone you know in Ophthalmology?"

'Nope. I feel I need them aboard before I try some others.'

She decided to call Donald Forsythe, her friend, the development officer for Children's. He was out of town for three days. She slammed down the phone.

Her counselor and friend, Dr. Moishe Gold, was standing in the door way. "Tsk. Tsk. You know that instrument has feelings." Anna burst into laughter and turned to the phone, "Sorry for the mistreatment." They both laughed.

On a whim, she called for a cab. Thirty minutes later, she was striding up the steps at the front of the Georgetown U. Hospital.

The receptionist was polite and not forthcoming with information of staff names, even when the requester was a unit head from a sister hospital. Not to be put off, she asked to be connected to the public relations office.

Five minutes later she was seated at the desk of the head of P.R. for the hospital. He was embarrassed and flushed when she coolly spelled out her attempts to reach someone who could speak with authority about joining forces on a project with other hospitals.

Mike Cuomo listened until she apologized. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't take this out on you."

“Please. I should be the one apologizing. I see that I have some work to do with a number of departments. Please pretend that has not happened and tell me about this need for our cooperation.”

Twenty minutes later he was saying, “Of, course, we know about the vision mobile and GW’s surgery mobile and we applaud both projects. We have been doing our pro bono work in other directions. But I assure you, we can have someone from family medicine meet with your planning group and I, personally, would be pleased to join you. If you launch a new project, perhaps I can help with some P.R.”

With her usual confidence she said, “We will need you because there will be a new mobile in the Highlands.” She reached into her purse and handed him her card.

He gasped. “The receptionist misspoke your name. I didn’t realize that you were Dr. Peters. Wow! I am a great admirer for many reasons; including the way you have built the new Pediatric Vision Center at Children’s as well as the leadership in serving the Highlands citizens.”

Anna chuckled, “You mean the Girl Wonder of Washington?”

Mike laughed. “That goes hand in hand with all the other compliments.” He handed her his card. “If you like, I can help do some recruiting. I have close contacts at Specialty Hospital and should be able to get someone to attend your meeting.”

“That would be phenomenal.” She stood and offered a handshake. Mike had the secretary call a cab, walked Anna to the curb and waited until the cab arrived.

By Friday, she had agreement for representatives from GW Hospital, Georgetown University Hospital, Special Hospital of Washington, Howard University Hospital and St Elizabeth’s Hospital and a staff member from the Washington Medical Association to meet for general planning and questions on the following Saturday morning.

Three weeks later, the governing committee felt they had a good variety and the right number of volunteers to staff two mobiles. St. Elizabeth’s, the psychiatric hospital, agreed to have staff on call as they may be needed.

The Association promised to have one physician from the private sector available for mobile duty five days each week.

Mike Cuomo agreed to be the resource for the paid coordinating staff and handle the public relations. Fred agreed to chair the governing committee, while Anna took major responsibility for finding funds.

Saturday, Anna agreed to stand in for one of her Emergency Vision specialists, who was being married and off for a week's honeymoon.

The load was light that day, minor eye problems but one automobile accident that required surgery just before the end of her shift. She arrived home about nine to find a soup and salad dinner on the table. Fred met her at the door with a bottle of her favorite Sonoma Valley chardonnay.

They decided to attend the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church service at 11:00, lunch at a cafe in the same area and walk the Mall since the weather was still warm. Anna said, "I want to introduce myself to the young pastor. I understand that the congregation flies the Rainbow Flag, is inclusive and emphasizes justice as a main theme of their mission."

Both were deeply moved during the service and stimulated by the sermon, based on the Micah 6 scripture regarding justice. Anna, listening to the sermon, felt herself wrestling with the faces of millions of refugees across the globe.

They ended up having lunch in the social hall, being joined by the young woman who was the Associate Pastor, but they missed out on meeting the Pastor.

Anna picked up some literature in the narthex for reading on the mall. One item was a Presbytery newsletter in which they discovered that the pastor was the current moderator of the Capitol Presbytery.

Fred asked, "What is a Presbytery?"

"It's similar to the Episcopalian diocese. Representatives from each church act as a group, with moderators or chairpersons, in the same manner as a bishop. Those representatives are called Presbyters."

Fred said, "I understand, but you can teach me more. I was impressed with the service and would like to come back. I like our priest, but our church seems to be too focused inward."

Anna had a nice feeling at this turn of events.

Monday morning, after monitoring two major and urgent surgeries, she stopped in the cafeteria for lunch and a stroll around campus before returning to her office. There she picked up the newsletter of the Presbytery.

She had considered approaching the National Presbyterian Church again, but decided that she wasn't ready to go overwork that funding source. Perhaps there was a mission fund of sorts at the Presbytery. She decided to try.

When a female voice answered, she inquired, "In order to seek some mission financial support to whom do I speak, the Stated Clerk or the Executive Presbyter?"

She responded, "I'm sorry that we do not have an Executive Presbyter. I do believe you may want to speak with our Program Associate."

Anna thought about that, and then said, "That title doesn't sound like that of a final decision maker. Who is the ranking officer?"

The young lady stammered, having been taken back a bit by the authoritative sound of the caller's voice. "Perhaps the General Presbyter is the one you should speak with. She is out of the office but I would be pleased to have her call you."

"Thank you. That would be fine. I'm Dr. Anna Peters in the Ophthalmology department at Children's Hospital. She gave the woman her phone number and hung up.

She toyed with the idea of calling the pastor at New York Avenue but decided to hold that as a backup. She moved her attention to some administrative matters of the Division and became so involved that she hadn't been aware that three hours had lapsed.

She was startled when the phone jangled at her elbow. "Dr. Peters."

"This is Grace Mahon of the Presbytery. I understand you wanted to speak with me."

"Yes. I wonder if the Presbytery has a mission fund to which I could apply for a grant."

"Yes, we have some funds but the requests must come from one of our congregations or an agency already on our approved list. Are you a member of a congregation?"

"Yes, but my church is in Palo Alto, California. I'm fairly new to the District."

“Are you attending one of our churches in the District?”

Anna was getting impatient with the questions. She wanted a "yes" or "no" or information about applying, but decided to play along for another few minutes. “I recently attended New York Avenue services where I picked up your newsletter.”

The voice at the other end seemed to mellow just a bit when she said, “I would be happy to discuss this with you or you might want to get an appointment with The Rev. Dr. William Phillips, who also serves as our moderator.”

She continued, “What kind of mission grant are you seeking, if I may ask?”

“This involves medical services in the Washington Highlands.”

“That sounds like something that would get the attention of Dr. Phillips. If he is interested, he has a direct pipeline to our financial resources.”

Anna almost let out a sigh. “Thank you, Ms. Mahon. I’ll try that route.”

She dialed the church number and was surprised to hear his voice. She glanced at the clock.

Dr. Philips, this is Dr. Anna Peters from Children's Hospital..."

"I recognize the name. I noticed that you were a recent visitor. By the way, are you the Dr. Peters involved with the mobile eye clinic working in the Highlands?"

"Why, yes. Are you familiar with our work?"

"Very much. I would love to talk with you about that, but why are you calling me today?"

Anna could not help but laugh. She calmed herself and said, "In fact, I just talked with Ms. Mahon at the Presbytery office about finding some additional funds for an expansion project, and she suggested you might be of some assistance.

Phillips burst into laughter, too. "Are you free for lunch tomorrow?"

Two minutes later Anna hung up, delighted with the way that had worked out.

Fred was preparing a large vegetable salad for their dinner when Anna entered. "Hi ho lover." She dropped her purse, moved to stand behind Fred, slipped her arms around his waist, while kissing his left ear.

He laughed "ARE you trying to distract the chef?"

“Oh, no. I’m as hungry as a bear. That was just a hint of things to come. “May I get the drinks?”

“First, a kiss on the other ear, then my lips”

He received a bit more than he requested which was her usual style.

As was their style, they discussed their day with each other while they enjoyed a drink Fred saw the excitement in her eyes when she told him of her cu coming lunch with the Rev. Dr. Phillips “It looks like I got to the major decision maker. He also is aware of our work in the Highlands. I feel real good about this, honey.”

The evening was off to a good start and grew better. She was awake for some time after her lover was fast sleep. She found herself thanking God for sending her Fred. “I am the luckiest woman in the world.’ She then recalled her cynicism about his comment. “I will call you someday and surprise you” which seemed at the time like a hollow promise. He had and this was the surprise.

Dr. Phillips was waiting for her as she entered the dining room. With a huge smile, he approached and took her hands in his. “It is a pleasure to meet with you, Doctor.”

Anna gave him a warm smile and teased him, saying “Even when you know I will be trying to pry loose some funds?”

He laughed. “Especially.” Despite her warm smile, he noticed the tight grip she had on her purse and her body tension as she moved to her seat.

Over a glass of California chardonnay, she spoke of her young years in the Presbyterian Church in Palo Alto, pleased to discover that he was a class mate of her pastor.

He probed gently and soon had her speaking of her dreams of going to medical school and her choice of wanting to work with children’s vision limitations. By the time the food arrived, she felt that she had bared her soul to this warm human, who reminded her of Ben, her Dad.

A few minutes later, he said, “Anna, there is more to this story. You began your biography at the age of ten or so. I see a beautiful young woman, whose skin texture reminds me of some mysterious woman from the Middle East and who belies a name like Peters. I don’t mean to be intrusive, but I am intrigued.”

He began to apologize as he saw tears forming in her dark eyes. She hurried to say, “Don’t apologize. I seldom talk about it, but you should know with whom you are considering a partnership.”

“My birthparents were Palestinian citizens of Israel who were killed, accidentally, I believe, when I was about four. Someone whisked me out of Israel into a Jordanian refugee camp. Diane, a Naval Attaché at the American embassy, and Ben adopted me with help from their close friend, the Queen of Jordan.”

He began to interrupt but she held up her hand. “My folks took me for a visit to that camp when I graduated high school. My experiences during that visit have been haunting me, driving me to a point where I felt I had some obligation to do what I could for those children who would not be as fortunate as I.”

Her voice was steady even as the tears flowed and she dabbed at them with her napkin. She paused, but he waited, certain that she would continue.

“All through med school I debated within myself about what field of medicine would give me the greatest leverage to help the young in the world who are underserved. I chose my field because there are physicians the world over, who are dealing with the immediate threats to the poor but few have time to focus on the long range problems such as semi-blindness, lazy eyes, no peripheral vision, etcetera.”

By the time they were on their second cup of coffee, she was speaking of her plans to transfer the work of the three mobile models in the Highlands to Jordan and Palestine and perhaps inspire others to do the same across Africa. Fortunately, they had the funds to purchase and equip new mobiles. By this time, they were on a first name basis and Anna was asking, “Bill, what do you think?”

He sensed a need within her that was asking for approval.

“Several thoughts keep flitting around my head. The first is my admiration for your sensitivity, along with your drive to respond to a great need. I feel sure we will have little problem raising the funds for the expansion of the local work. I can assure you funding from the Presbytery and from congregations and individuals. The larger challenge is funding, but more importantly, the providing of personnel to sustain the projects in two or more places simultaneously in the Middle East.”

“Thanks. You have just put into words the fear that has been gnawing at me. Recently I have been entertaining some doubts but I drive myself to do the organizing and fund raising. I don’t feel comfortable sharing that fear or doubt with my husband, who is as committed to the project as I am.”

Bill listened carefully to the words and the tone of voice but switched the subject. “As I said, I am sure that, through the Presbytery, our own congregation and several other churches who have been involved with food programs in the District, we can find the funds to help launch the expansion.”

He saw the gratitude in her eyes even as her choked voice was unable to voice the words. He surprised her with, “My wife, who is actively promoting leadership skills for young women, would love to get to know you. Would you and your husband be willing to join us for a late lunch Sunday?”

What he did not tell Anna was that his wife, Liz, was a counselor, who years earlier had earned her Ph.D. in psychology. She was part of the staff at St. Elizabeth’s but was just starting maternity leave, a few weeks before the expected due date of their third child.

That evening he told Liz of the luncheon date and said, “You will be delighted to find a young brilliant woman who seems to be all you want to see in a woman. There is a caveat. Watching her in action, while stimulating, also was giving me signals of either anxiety or exhaustion. While we keep it light, perhaps you can evoke some signals of your own. This is a woman I want to help and I want her in our congregation, if possible.”

Wednesday morning, Anna showered after three hours of surgery, dressed for a jog and headed outdoors. Successful surgery and an hour to clear her mind was good medicine, she knew. The only therapy better was being intimate with Fred either at dinner time or in the privacy of their bedroom.

The following day was less pleasant. It was nearing the end of her work day, an afternoon of frustration, unreturned phone calls, tons of reports to be read and signed. She decided to head for home, when an administrative assistant came through the door with another tray of papers, followed closely by her counselor, Moishe.

“Dammit, Sue. Can’t that wait until morning? In fact, come back in the morning.” The young woman flushed, stammered, started to back away and bumped into Moishe. She dropped the tray, spreading papers all across the floor.

Anna bent down with her to retrieve the papers and suddenly was aware of her rude behavior. “I am so sorry, Sue. That was uncalled for. I was upset about another matter.”

They finally assembled a messy arrangement of the papers. Anna said, “Let’s do this in the morning.”

She turned to find Moishe seated in an easy chair in the far corner of the office. He smiled and waved for her to take the chair next to his. She took the seat.

He asked, "Do we need to talk?"

"Probably, but not now, my friend."

"It ought to be soon. You seem to be edgier as the days go by. Today was the first time you showed anger, which is much more than the usual impatience that we all expect and respect."

Anna sat silently for a few minutes. Moishe waited. She said, "I just had a bad day. I will be all right. Thanks."

Moishe wasn't ready to push, so he stood. "Perhaps, but I suggest we talk soon. I meant it when I said you are growing edgier."

"All right, but not tonight."

Fred was out of town until Friday evening, so she was alone. She didn't feel like cooking so she settled for a hot dog and more wine than usual.

She was feeling less strained by Friday evening. She had picked up some of Fred's favorites at the deli along with his favorite Italian Red wine. Fred was all excited with the things he had learned at the seminars and shared his enthusiasm with her.

She and Fred spent Saturday lounging until noon, took a cab to the Capitol Mall and had a sandwich on a park bench. They stopped for an early supper at their favorite bistro, preparing to do some long range planning at home.

A half hour into the planning session, Freddie said "Honey. Your heart isn't into it. Let's break for the night."

Her voice was a bit taut as she responded, "But we need to get this step complete before I can go on."

Fred saw her flinch as he reached for her but she quickly recovered, saying, "You're right. Let's see what's on the idiot box."

It was 3:00 in the morning when Fred heard a muffled shout from Anna. He turned to reach for her, but she was slipping out of bed. He bounced across the bed and found her hand. Her palm was sweaty. As he pulled her close, he could feel her very damp body.

He dashed into the bath to get a large towel. "What is it, honey?" He felt her shiver as he began patting down the towel on her back and neck.

"It's this damn dream that has been recurring recently."

"You haven't mentioned any recurring dreams."

"I know, and I am sorry. I just thought ... oh, hell, I don't know what I thought."

"So, tell me about it."

"It starts out with a little girl who has been found near the Washington Monument. She has fallen and hit her right eye on some ground object. The scene shifts and she is in a hospital OR. The doctor misdirects some instrument in her hand, penetrating the eye deeply. She knows the girl will be blind forever."

"Each dream is almost the same except the instrument varies and is nothing that would be used in an OR."

"You've never awakened me any other time."

"No. Each time I have been able to lie still and do some deep breathing until the feeling of panic subsided."

Fred asked "Do you think it might benefit you to see a counselor?"

"I'll give it some thought."

Fred took her into the shower for a warm shower until she seemed totally recovered, towed her and carried her to bed.

At 8:30 am she bounced out of bed, flipped on the coffee pot and pulled Fred into the shower. She teased him, laughing as usual. There was no lingering sign of the night's experience.

At breakfast she said, with a show of excitement, "I can't wait to have lunch with the Phillips. I wonder what she is like."

The six and eight year old boys practically inhaled their food and were excused to play their games elsewhere. Bill handled the serving, catering to Liz's very pregnant condition. When it was time for a second cup of coffee, Fred helped Bill clear the table. When those chores were completed, Bill, noting the deep conversation between the women, suggested Fred and he take their coffees into the den.

Within three minutes, he had Fred telling him about their plans for working in the Middle East and then talking about his own childhood, the loss of his parents and the love of his Nanan.

Meanwhile, Liz was listening carefully as Anna described her dreams of the little girl. Her gentle probing soon had Anna telling of the loss of her parents, the adoption by Ben and Diane and a little of the bullying during her adolescent years.

Liz asked, "Was that because of the color of your skin, indicating some alien background?"

"Oh, no. In that part of California, every school is populated with children of a multitude of ethnic backgrounds, from Indian to Chinese to Vietnamese to African and Latino. No. Most came because of my high I.Q. I couldn't help it. I was always miles ahead of my peers and driven to high achievement."

"How about your social life during your teens?"

"I went to some school functions with several different boys, but I did not have a boyfriend. Until I left for the university. I was close to Michael, a family friend from the day I arrived in the States. We were close buddies.

Even at a young age I was easier with adults and interested in adult subjects rather than the pop music or dating or going to the movies. I did a little of that, but my interests lay elsewhere."

Liz gave an intended light giggle. "I'll bet you never had the experience of having a failure."

Anna laughed. "Only the times I stepped on my partners' toes during a dance or missed the boy's lips during my first romantic kiss."

She became serious. "Liz, you've had me opening up even more than I do with Fred. I have the feeling that you are a professional in this arena."

“Yes, Anna. I should have said something but the moment to interrupt never seemed appropriate. I’m on the psych staff at St. Elizabeth’s Psychiatric Hospital, on maternity leave at the moment.”

Anna smiled. “You make it so comfortable. I might have gotten protective if I had known.”

“Anna, would you mind a bit more conversation?”

“No, I’ll appreciate it. I’ll try to be as open as possible.”

“Bill said he sensed that you were strung out a bit, perhaps a little brittle. He has an ability to read people much better than I do.”

“I admit I was a bit upset until I reached him on the phone. I get impatient with bureaucratic types, such as the Presbyterian who finally referred me to Bill.”

“Have you noticed any stomach or chest discomfort recently?”

“Well, twice during the last week I thought that I noticed a bit of tightening in my chest, but it passed quickly. I took my blood pressure and temp but there were no negative results.”

Liz nodded. “Do you get angry or overly impatient?”

“Not usually but there were a few instances recently. I shouted at my admin, something I never do. Moishe, my very senior associate with more than thirty years’ experience has twice suggested we need to talk. Although I felt he was right, I demurred.”

“Any self-diagnosis?”

“I seem to be getting a bit panicky and spend time worrying if we can finance and find enough personnel to take our three pronged mobile program to Jordan or Palestine. Up until recently, it never occurred to me to worry about the possibility of failure.”

“The worst thing has been guilt I feel about not wanting to discuss those feelings with Fred. I don’t understand my hesitancy and it makes me feel like some kind of traitor. We had promised each other to be totally transparent. This is a new and eerie experience.”

Liz said, “The guys will be wondering what we are doing. If you like, I think more conversation might be helpful. How about a couple of informal sessions with me during the next few days? I would like to help, if you want.”

It was agreed, including Anna coming for lunch on Friday.

Anna and Fred stopped by Nanan’s for a visit before returning home. The visit was easy and comfortable as usual, but when the conversation turned to Nanan’s work with her colleagues, she had little to report.

Anna was disappointed and seemed to fall into a funk. Fred was able to eclipse that by asking her about the visit with Liz. She brightened and waxed enthusiastically about the coming conversations.

The whole of Monday was consumed either in assisting two new staff members as they performed cataract procedures or later monitoring corneal transplants on two preadolescents.

Tuesday morning was spent in surgery and the afternoon reading and signing reports. Her scheduled meeting with Dr. Jessup was cancelled at the last moment. Although she was unaware of his attention, Moishe noticed that she was tense and seemed to flounder instead of going directly to her tasks. He took a seat across from her desk.

“Anna, you seem to be a bit lost at the moment. Anything I can do to help?”

“Not really, dear friend. A meeting just got cancelled, putting me at sixes and sevens.”

“This might be a good time for that talk that I have been suggesting.”

Anna began to demur and remembered how good she felt after her conversation with Liz. “Perhaps it is. I have been avoiding you for the last two weeks, and that is ridiculous. Your counsel has been invaluable since the first week that Jessup set up our relationship.”

He answered with, “Thanks, dear.”

She laughed. “I remember my cynicism when a young Palestinian whiz bang was being assigned a wizened old Jew to be her counselor. Oh, the folly of youth.”

Moishe grinned. “I remember those first weeks, but then I saw a youngster, wise beyond her age, open her heart and cross the chasm of fear and distrust to accept my friendship.”

Anna said, "That was very fortunate, and I have been the beneficiary of our relationship."

"Anna, for a young woman, you have offered and given me much. I thank you. Now I think you need some help."

"Moishe, what makes you say that?"

"You are edgier than usual. I noticed you losing your patience and even getting angry a few times. In addition, I've noticed your restraining yourself from expressing your impatience. This is not the brilliant self-possessed division boss that I had come to know."

"That obvious? I thought I had hidden my tensions."

"Oh, yes. You haven't noticed the change here in the office. From day one, our staff had been relaxed and even self-forgiving for their mistakes because you made them feel that way. For the last two weeks, even if you haven't noticed, people tip toe softly, almost as if they were walking on egg shells."

"I'll be damned. What kind of insensitive boss have I become? Something has to change."

Moishe nodded. "Perhaps you could do with some professional counseling. You need to discover what has brought about this change. I've noticed that you do not move with the same force you had since we started together. You are exhibiting some self-doubt and that is different."

She said, "Taking a hard look at the last few weeks, I can see what you are saying. I like your advice. I have a new acquaintance who is a counselor."

"May I suggest that it not be anyone on our staff?"

"I agree. This woman is on leave from St. Elizabeth's at the moment."

"Good. Now I do have a suggestion. Change your clothes and have a good run and let your mind wander over our talk. If you have more questions, you know where to find me."

Fred had the drinks and tidbits on the side board when she walked in. She dropped her purse and ran into his arms. She put her lips to his and held on for dear life. Fred felt her tears running down his cheek. He held her tight until she was ready to pull away.

He poured her a glass of California Merlot after she had taken a seat on the sofa. He took her wine and his to sit with her. He waited.

She stammered a bit then began. “Moise told me today that I have been short tempered and edgy with the staff. Has that been true at home?”

Deciding that frankness was the important ingredient in this conversation he nodded affirmatively/ “I guessed it had to do with your fund raising difficulties and that when ready, we would talk about it.”

“How bad has it been?”

“Let’s say that I would not put up with anyone else. I knew you would catch on and hate yourself. I also knew that spending time with a counselor would lead to some important self-discovery. Mostly, I knew that your efforts in fundraising would lead to success and return the real Anna to me.”

“You are a real love. I wonder if I could do the same if the situation was reversed.”

“Of course you would. The only regret I have is that you haven’t come to me with your worries. I promised to be there for you in any and all situations.”

“I know that and I apologize for that major booboo. I had some twisted idea that I was shielding you by not sharing but now I know how stupid that was. I owe you, honey.”

They both laughed when he said “and you will pay over and over again.”

Anna felt that her first session with Liz had gone well. At the end of their conversation, Liz and Anna decided that Anna would assign her work on the Highlands project to others for the next few weeks, concentrating only on her Children’s responsibilities. They further agreed on two more professional sessions, by which time Liz and Anna would probably have a plan of action.

It did work out that way. Liz was able to have Anna discover for herself the high degree of fatigue that was overwhelming her. She also learned that the side effects included some self-doubts about eventual success and increasing anxiety.

Liz had helped her find her way back to the confident brilliant young woman doctor and together they worked out an exercise to maintain that high level of confidence.

Anna was to remember that, if she found herself going negative, she should concentrate on remembering her successes.

Liz went on to add, “When or if your thoughts turn critical, try praising yourself for some recent victory.”

“Anna, if you are feeling overwhelmed by what you perceive as not going so well, take a break. A jog or a walk or even a coffee break can be helpful. Often your mind will find a new perspective during the break.

“Someone said, and it is true, 'It's easy to get lost in the sea of self-doubt when we forget to take care of our own needs.'

“Find time for play and rest and sleep. Always good advice.” She gave Anna a warm smile saying, “Loving sack time with Fred is good therapy.

“Remember our conversation about support. You have great support in Fred and Moishe and even Dr. Jessup. My Bill is a great pastor and a very good listener.

“Don't forget that I want you to use me, either as friend or as your psychologist. I'll email these notes. It would be wise to keep the list visible for reference the moment you sense a lack of doubt or any of the other symptoms. I have no doubt that everything you try will produce positive results, even if not perfect.”

Chapter 11. Full Steam Ahead

Anna was true to her promise to be wholly transparent with Fred. They made a compact that night to have a time for sharing each evening before going to sleep. It was so, sometimes over drinks, other times at dinner and on occasion in the bedroom.

The sessions with Liz and then discussions with Moishe gave Anna a new perspective on her role for fulfilling her dream. Moishe thought she should see herself as the Chief of Policy rather than the Chief of Operations and start acting that way.

As a result, she invited the Development officers of the participating hospitals to a meeting during which she asked if they jointly could raise ten million dollars for taking the project overseas. They assured her they could and then elected Donald Forsythe of Children's as their chair. She said she would approach The Gates Foundation for some supplemental financing.

Nanan had come up with the ideal candidate to head the operations, including the financial administration. Max Weber was a recently retired Executive Vice President from Goldman Sachs. He was the son-in-law of one of her colleagues.

After his interview with Moishe, Fred, Nanan and Anna, it was agreed that he was the ideal candidate with a passion for providing assistance to victims of the strife in Israel and neighbors.

Two big assignments were yet to be filled. They needed a staff of recruiters to find volunteer doctors, nurses, nurse's aides and technicians. As many as possible should speak Arabic. Since that limited volunteers, teams of interpreters would be essential.

Anna called the American office of Doctors without Borders to discuss recruitment strategies. She got some ideas but not too much help. What she did get was a promise of cooperation in Jordan if they were in the same area.

The committee decided to put ads in the Washington, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and New York papers.

To their surprise a phone call three days later proved to be part of their answer. A retired plastic surgeon from Pittsburgh, who had been a part-time volunteer with Doctors without Borders, was ready to offer his services as recruiter in areas, staff and interpreters.

Anna called Dr. Peter Fleck to invite him for a meeting on the following Saturday. His response was positive and he suggested he bring his grandson, who might have some ideas.

The group broke for lunch, having agreed on Dr. Fleck as the head of professional recruitment and now was ready to hear young Paul Fleck's ideas.

The group decided to wait until dessert time to listen to the pitch. Two minutes into the presentation they were each sitting on the edge of their seats.

Paul started with, "My major is Middle East languages. I am a senior in a department that currently has about 125 students. Almost all are members of the Middle East Language club. Among our activities are a series of debates with the clubs from Carnegie Mellon, Pennsylvania College for Women, Duquesne and Washington and Jefferson College."

By that time Anna was projecting at least four hundred candidates and that was only the tip of the iceberg. Sure enough, Paul began submitting his idea of a plan to approach the heads of the departments, who could grant extra credits for volunteers who took tours of duties with the mobiles.

She was sure a call to her professor at her Stanford would provide some additional ideas.

Someone asked, "How about other class studies while the students are away?"

Paul laughed. "All you need do is providing access for computers. The students and their professors can work out ways for study on line."

Anna and Fred hosted a small dinner for the Flecks. During the opening drinks, Peter said, "Dr. Peters, you are the talk of the Ophthalmology Department at two of our hospitals. Both are impressed with the way you have grown the Pediatric Division at Children's. Some of my colleagues in that field would like to come and visit Children's."

"I would be delighted. Our board and my boss like to hear kind words and share our results."

A bit later, young Paul asked, "Pardon my curiosity, Dr. Peters; I am taken with your beauty and the texture and color of your skin. Are you by any chance Arabic?"

She said, "Thank you, Paul. Yes. I am a Palestinian. My birth parents were killed in Israel, our home. I ended up as a child in a Jordanian camp and was adopted by my American parents, who were serving the American embassy in Jordan."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I am the lucky one. It is all those children since and even now who are not as fortunate as I. That has been my focus for a long time."

He asked, "Have you decided on a name for your project?"

"Not yet. Any ideas?"

"Well, I thought that we might run a contest with students who will be considering serving."

"That sounds like a good idea. I'll recommend it to the governing committee."

Anna spent several hours researching the Gates Foundation's Children's Health focus. She read with interest the article about the Global Development Division.

"Every year, complications from pregnancy and childbirth claim the lives of nearly 300,000 women and permanently disable many more, mostly in developing countries. Mothers suffer primarily from hemorrhage, sepsis, obstructed labor, and disorders caused by high blood pressure.

"In addition, more than 2.6 million babies are stillborn, another 2.9 million die before they are a month old, and many suffer neurodevelopmental disabilities and impairments. Most neonatal deaths are caused by preterm birth, asphyxia during birth, and infections such as sepsis, pneumonia, and meningitis.

"Effective, low-cost interventions are available, but they are not reaching all of the women and babies who need them. In developing countries, many women deliver at home and rarely see a trained healthcare provider before or after the baby's birth. Skilled providers in poor countries often lack access to current tools or do not use them. Families may not seek care or follow medical advice."

Anna decided that her project was certainly in alignment with the goals of the Foundation. She picked up the phone and dialed.

“Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.” A real voice was answering Anna’s call.

“Yes, this is Dr. Anna Peters from the Children’s Hospital in Washington. Would it be possible to speak to someone of authority in your Global Health Program?”

“One moment please.”

Thirty seconds later a voice was introducing her. “This is Martha Volka, managing director of Global Health. Good morning Dr. Peters. How may I help you this morning?”

“On behalf of the governing committee of Project Health for Children, I am hopeful of making a connection with your foundation in which we might serve currently as a small arm for extending long term health benefits to children displaced from their homes or families as a result of wars or other disasters.”

I don’t recognize the name of your project but I know who you are. You have been involved in an experimental project in the Washington Highlands. You are that Dr. Peters, I presume.”

“Why, yes. I am surprised you have me on your radar, but I take that as a good sign...”

She thought she heard a soft chuckle at the other end. She asked, “Would it be possible for me to meet with you at the Foundation to explain the long range plan that has emerged from our experiment? As far as I can determine, it is not a direct fit but I believe it can be a first step toward something that will be in line with your general objective.”

“You needn’t fly out here. I would be delighted to visit with you in Washington. Bill and I are arriving in Washington within the next ten days. That would give me a chance to actually visit your work and validate your reports for the last few years. If I can find time on Bill’s schedule I am sure he would like to meet with you.”

Anna could feel her heart racing. She had thought the call was a long shot and suddenly she is hearing a decision maker willing to explore a relationship. She said, “That is very satisfactory and welcome. What may I do in advance of your arrival?”

“Send us all the metrics. Hours of service by class of volunteer, source of the volunteers, manner of reaching potential patients, results recorded, etc. Give us a full picture of work from the beginning.”

“How about our plans looking forward?”

“Plenty of time for that detail after we hear your presentation in person. I know that Bill is acquainted with your history. He is always interested when young people make a dent in the establishment. If you know his history, you can guess why.”

When she hung up, Anna dialed Moshe’s extension to announce her good news. Then she called Fred and suggested a celebratory dinner at their bistro with a special bottle of California Merlot.

Three days after emailing off the info to Ms. Volka, she had a request for some additional data. The day before their expected arrival she had a message that the trip had been delayed. She would be informed of the new date.

Four days lapsed with no word. She was beginning to feel angry with Ms. Volka. She wanted desperately to initiate a call, but knew that would be unwise. She lost her appetite and thought she could feel pressure in her breast.

She spotted the memo from Liz Philips, picked it up and felt a sense of calm overtake her as she started to think positively. She took two dozen deep breaths. She was reminded that Liz was due to deliver soon. She dialed Liz's number and got Bill on the line. He said, "Hi, Anna. You called at just the right moment. Liz's water just broke and we are headed for the hospital. Hope to see you in the waiting room." Then he was gone.

The change of focus was welcome. She had something else to consider for the time being.

She arrived in the main reception area to see Liz in a wheel chair entering the hospital. Bill and the two boys were tagging along behind, the boys jostling each other. She heard Bill say, "Knock it off, guys."

He spied Anna, gave her a smile and said, "Mrs. Banes, our sitter, wasn't available but she should be here shortly. I left a message on her voice mail."

Anna grinned. "Bill, go with Liz. The boys and I will find something to amuse us until Mrs. Banes arrives."

"Thanks, Anna." And he was chasing the wheel chair.

Anna turned to the boys "Anyone like some ice cream?" Two faces broke into beams and heads were nodding. She took one hand on her right and one on the left and headed for the cafeteria.

Anna said, "I don't remember your names. I'm Anna."

My name is Jeffrey and I'm older than Teddy. I like chocolate and he likes vanilla."

Halfway through their ice cream Anna asked, "Are you guys any good at arcade games?"

Teddy grinned. "I beat my brother most of the time."

"Are you sure of that? Older brothers usually win games."

"That's true most of the time, but I'm faster with the paddles."

She could see from Jeffrey's expression that Teddy was speaking the truth. "Jeffrey, do you like to play the games?"

"Oh sure. I can give him a bad time, even if he is better than I am."

"All right. We installed an arcade several months ago. I'll be the referee while you compete."

For an hour she was totally caught up in the spirit of their competition. Teddy, having won three of four games, challenged Anna, who was about to demur. The intercom announced, "Dr. Peters, you have a visitor."

The three of them hustled to the reception area to see Mrs. Banes looking as though she was out of breath and worried. Within three minutes all was calm and Anna was saying good-bye to the trio, who were on their way to the arcade.

As she entered her office, the admin said, "You have a message from a Martha Volka." She read from her notes. "Ms. Volka apologized for the delay and said she would get back to you in a few days. That the plans were still in the works, but the timing has not been established."

Her cell phone buzzed while she and Fred were finishing dinner that evening. She had just finished telling Fred about the change of activity and its calming effect, taking her mind off the planned Gates

meeting. It was Bill Phillips. “Robert was born twenty minutes ago, seven pounds, with great lungs. Thanks, Anna. I’ll talk with you in a day or so. I have to run back to Liz.”

To her surprise, she was paged while changing from scrubs to street clothes after surgery the next morning. “Boss, there is a call coming to you from Seattle at 11:10.”

“Good morning, Dr. Peters. This is Martha from the Foundation. Bill and I are leaving for Washington within an hour. Would it be possible for you to join us at the Watergate at eight?”

“Certainly.”

“Good. Bill, Melinda and I would like to explore a possible relationship as you move to work in the Middle East.” Anna felt her pulse racing and her heart hammering in her chest.

“Just bring yourself and your husband. No papers are necessary. This will be a discussion of philosophy and intended goals.”

“I understand. We’ll be there.”

“Great.”

Anna hung up the phone, leaned back in her chair and whispered a “Thank you.” She let the news sink in. Her mind began a lot of chatter, ending up with a picture in her mind of that day when she was saying good bye in Jordan to Abbass, concerned about his “lazy eyes.”

She called Fred to share the good news.

Melinda Gates opened the door to their suite at the Watergate. An “Oh” escaped Anna’s lip, having expected some secretary or Martha to respond to her knock her surprise brought a smile to beam across Melinda’s face. “I initiated making the trip because I wanted to meet you and get the feel of what motivates a young woman to take on this formidable task. Please come in.”

Bill Gates and Martha came forward and introduced themselves to Fred and Anna. Martha announced, “We decided to delay lunch an hour in order to move directly into the subject of the meeting. Melinda will need to leave within an hour, although Bill and I have plenty of time.”

Coffee and tea were available as the five got down to work. Bill asked, “How much has your original plan changed, if at all, as your planning progresses?”

Anna was surprised, although she should not have been. Gates had a keen mind and lots of experience.

“As you would expect, the problems add up and then are solved. We were moving along well within our own, but the research into the work of all the organizations made us reevaluate the three pronged project. We are seriously considering dropping our surgical mobile team. While there is always need, we think that the unit might serve another purpose where services are less available.”

Bill said, “That was Martha’s thinking, too. Have you finalized your thinking?”

“Not yet.”

“If you were to discard that part of your project, what service have you been considering for that unit?”

“We are in the midst of a debate. I personally would like to have two units focusing on maternal and early childhood care. It seems to dovetail with the objective for our Ophthalmology, which is to provide relief from a disease or limitation so that opportunities are not limited in the future.”

Melinda interjected, “I like that thinking, Dr. Peters. The extension of life and opportunity for newborns is a big concern of mine. Oops. Sorry I interrupted.”

Anna laughed. “That statement would strengthen my argument with the governing committee.”

Fred cut in with a comment. “I am chairing the sub group that is dealing with the surgical teams. I can say that the subgroup is about to recommend the use of the third mobile to address other needs. We do have a special problem. We have a number of volunteer specialists ready to go. They will be disappointed.”

Bill said, “Since they are medically trained personnel, although specialized, I would guess most would still be willing to use their general training and knowledge to help some children.”

Anna said, “Do I hear a willingness to provide us some assistance for the two units that would be specializing in maternal and childhood concerns?”

It was Martha’s turn. “We had already decided to invite you to partner with us and to provide funding. It is that this emphasis is a direct fit, because we believe that in addition to addressing this concern we also believe that your teams may discover and refer other threats to authorities who can rush resources to the locality.”

Anna grasped the idea. “Do I hear you saying that you would like the teams to be alert to the presence of other medical threats such as TB, HIV, Malnutrition, etc.?”

Bill grinned. “You are quick, Dr. Peters. That is to the point.”

Martha said. “We are prepared to fund all expenses including drugs, vaccines, and administrative costs. In fact all expenses related to two such units in each camp where you are invited. I am saying up to ten units simultaneously for a period of five years. The extension beyond that period will be open to agreement that certain objectives have been met and that both organizations agree to continue or discontinue.”

A phone interrupted. Martha answered, while looking to Bill. He nodded. She said, "Ten minutes will be fine." Twelve minutes later they were seated and were served the opening course.

Chapter 12. Refugee Camp March 2017

Nurse Slavich handed her a fresh Turkish towel.

“Congratulations, Doctor. That was absolutely brilliant. We all thought that there was little possibility that you could save her right eye.”

She knew that the entire team was fatigued from the grueling five hour stretch in the operating room. And she knew they shared her joy in the success in spite of the extreme efforts.

Anna wearily dragged herself to her feet, dropped her clothes and grabbed the towel Marie had given her.

Her spirits brightened as the water washed away her fatigue and the aroma of the body oil replaced the smell of the operating room.

She was looking forward to a quiet evening with her husband, Fred.

As she drove the converted golf cart to their compound, she was moved while driving through the area where she had been a foster child as a four-year old. She felt emotion welling up as she remembered how frightened she had been and the immense relief to be saved by Diane and Ben, who had adopted her and taken her to America.

After dinner, she retired to the tent to await Fred’s arrival. She let her mind travel over some of the highlights of her formative years after moving to the States. She thought of the books in Arabic that she took from the library, all in order not to lose touch with her native language. She took classes at Stanford in Palestinian Arabic and Modern Hebrew.

She remembered the day she actually made the commitment to Ophthalmology.

She found herself smiling as she recalled her field works in the Bahamas as part of her residency at Yale. She found herself giving thanks to God for Fred, Nanan, Dr. Jessup, Moishe and Pastor Bill Phillips and his wife, Liz, who put Anna back on track when she was faltering from fatigue and anxiety.

Her folks, Ben and Diane, came stage front as the scene in her mind switched. She sensed that warm glow that often had overtaken her when their arms encircled her in times of pain or disappointment.

That triggered memories of some failures as well as her success. She really regretted her failure to gain access to some of the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. Even after the fifth rejection, she had persisted in asking the Vice Premier to take up the matter with Premier Ismail Haniveh. He sent a special envoy to see her in Amman who made it clear that no help was needed from any American institutions because of that country’s close ties to Israel.

Her pleas that she was a Palestinian and a citizen of Jordan were met with, “and you are a citizen of the United States as well.”

Her day dreaming was interrupted by the sound of Fred’s arrival. The following hour was filled with stories of Fred’s work with the mobile concentrating on the welfare of young mothers-to-be and newborns. He was so enthusiastic that she teased him about switching from surgery to Obstetrics.

Anna waxed enthusiastically about her week, using the robotic equipment that had arrived last week. She said, “I am so glad I took the time to fly back to Washington for the week’s training. That was especially true today. There was no way my hand could have been steady enough to perform the operation on the young boy, who came to us with a splintered stick stuck in his left eye.”

She said, “The big news was a phone call from Martha. She will be in Amman next Saturday and Sunday and wants us to spend the weekend reviewing the quarterly figures and to discuss some other ideas. Just imagine sleeping in a hotel bed instead of one of these cots.”

Fred laughed. “I have the sense that your good mood means good news for this evening.”

Anna just giggled.

They left early the next Friday, taking the Land Rover for the six hour trip to Amman. To say that they luxuriated in the spacious room would be an understatement.

Martha had brunch served in her suite. After the bus boy came to clear away the rolling table, they concentrated on the reports from the Maternal and Child Health Mobiles. After an exhaustive study of all the details, Martha said, “You do realize that you have delivered more than anyone, included you, ever expected. Melinda will be so pleased, since that unit is her special baby, no pun intended.”

Anna and Fred were thrilled to hear the good news, and Anna felt a special glow of pleasure that her longtime dream was producing even more than she had ever imagined.

They decided to have lunch in the hotel dining room. Martha suggested that the couple take a couple of hours to do some sightseeing or shopping while she handled some other business. “Let’s meet at the suite at 3:00.”

When they regrouped, Martha said, “I talked with Bill who is in Egypt. He and I are thrilled with the numbers and some of the special surgeries performed by all the vision units. Bill and I want to point out that your unit and especially you, Anna, are, as Bill put it, overachieving. We are worried that you may work yourself and your team into exhaustion. Bill wants to remind you that we have years to accomplish our goals and good health on our part is required to keep us moving forward.”

Anna could feel Fred’s finger gently rubbing her knuckles, his signal of calming her. She wanted to protest to Martha, but his signal reminded her that the subject had been a recurring theme in their tent. She felt herself starting to blush.

Martha dropped her eyes to look at some papers and then continued. “Have you had a chance to use the robotic equipment that was sent recently?”

Anna’s face burst into a smile. “I sure did and can tell you that in an extremely difficult surgery a week ago I could not have saved a young boy’s eye without the robot. I have performed two other operations and started training my associate. I hope we can afford the equipment for the other mobiles.”

Martha chuckled. “That is the next item on the agenda. We are prepared to spend funds on expanding the use of robotics for ocular surgery. We are proposing several steps for your consideration, Anna. First, we shall provide units for each of the other mobiles. What we think would be practical and offer some

relaxation for all the Ophthalmologists would be a week in Amman for training with you as the trainer. We can begin this as soon as you can fill your spot from the list of volunteers that are awaiting a call from your headquarters.”

Anna was taken back with this announcement. She found herself of two minds, excited about the ability to better serve patients but that meant taking herself off the line as a surgeon.

Martha and Fred were waiting for her response. Finally she beamed, “That would be great, not only serving our patients but giving new skills to our staff.”

Martha was obviously pleased. “Melinda came up with another plan. She and Bill want to provide robotic units to a number of key hospitals throughout the Middle East where the Foundation now has partners. She hopes that you would avail yourself to be the trainer for the many Ophthalmologists who will want to make use of the equipment. If you should agree, we would like to send Fred for a three week advanced training session on the use of robotics in general surgery so that the two of you can be lead trainers in your respective fields.”

Anna was quick to grasp the idea that the Foundation wanted her enough to sweeten the pot. Martha, wanting to be sure she landed the big fish, suggested that the two of them talk about the proposal through the dinner hour and join her for an evening at the opera when they would give her an answer.

It took four weeks to install the robotics and train the staff of the other four vision mobiles.

Six weeks later the first training sessions were set up in Cairo, with Ophthalmologists from Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Emirates in attendance as well as surgeons from those countries. The following week the training was held in Teheran, with physicians from Iran, Lebanon and Syria attending. Ankara was the sight of the training during the following week with Turkish, Iraqi and Jordanian doctors in attendance.

Chapter 13. Looking Ahead

Anna and Fred had come to the end of their six-month leaves of absences. It was time to return home. Both were ready for the break.

On the flight home, Fred said, “Honey, your dream has been fulfilled. The organization is now in good hands and well-funded for the next five years. Success will bring the funding for the future. It’s time to focus on some personal concerns.”

Anna giggled. “That sounds like fun. Okay, I’m ready to go off the pill. I think I’ll start with a bit of practice holding babies by visiting Liz and baby Robert.”

Anna had also worked out an agreement with the hospital board to spend a week each quarter of the year working with one of the mobiles in Jordan.

Anna said to Fred, “There is an important visit I need to make before we fly out of Amman. I need to visit Badran and Abbass, the twins I met at my Mama’s in 2003. They are now nineteen and will be starting university studies this coming year. I wrote them last week to tell them we would be visiting about this time of the month.”

Badran was not present when they arrived but Abbass shyly approached Anna and smiled when she opened her arms for a hug. Badran arrived a few minutes later and the scene was repeated. Of course tears of joy had to be dabbed before any conversation could take place.

The first words uttered were from Abbass. “Look, Anna. No lazy eyes!”

“I noticed, Abbass. Both of you are so handsome and look healthy.”

At that moment the boys’ adoptive parents entered the room and shyly introduced themselves. The shyness eased in a few minutes and soon they were sitting down to tea and sweet cakes. The boys opened up with stories that had never appeared in their letters.

It seemed like they had hardly arrived when the cab they had ordered beeped to let them know it was time to leave. The dad, Dr. Kardash, took Anna aside. “Thank you, Dr. Peters for the funds to enable Abbas’s operation. The change was miraculous. I do believe that he was the most popular boy in the senior class last year.”

Rona met them at the airport, taking care of their luggage. She was excited about being accepted as a resident at Yale, hoping to follow in Anna’s footsteps.

Anna and Fred spent the first Sunday afternoon visiting with the Phillips in order to see how much young Robert had grown and so that Anna could cuddle baby Robert. She also got to referee the video competition between the older boys.

Later they went to have dinner with Nanan. They found her in great spirits and in good health. She did say that she and her colleagues, along with Gramma Sellech were working on a special project that involved the health of Palestinian children in two sections of Israel, particularly in the north.

Anna said “Nanan that may have to wait for a year or so. The board has invited me in for a discussion that involves building a large wing in order to expand the Ophthalmology department, particularly the Pediatric Division. One of the older hospitals in the poorer section of the district finds it hasn’t the funds to update their pediatric facility. The current thinking is to build a pediatric unit on their premises.

Together the two hospitals will join with one of the larger clinics in the Highlands by adding a smaller vision unit to the clinic. It looks like I will have plenty on my plate.”

Fred added his news. “As of the first of next month I will be the number two in GW’s surgery unit, but the big news is that Anna and I are ready to start a family.”

Anna saw the sparkle in Nanan’s eyes. The voice was soft but the words were clear. “A great grandson will come to warm my heart just as his father did.”

Anna saw the voice mail alert, the red light blinking as she entered the apartment. The wonderful surprise was a message at home from Ben. “Honey, we thought you had already arrived. Mom and I are arriving Monday evening to welcome you home. Mom has an appointment with the Navy, which needs some of her Middle East expertise. I also have a matter to discuss that you may find of interest.”

She picked up the phone and placed the call. “Hi Dad. Your message is great news. Cancel any hotel arrangements and stay with us. The extra bedroom is ready for you. The housekeepers were here two days ago getting ready for our home coming.”

She listened as he called to Diane.

. “All right, Anna. We’re arriving at Dulles and will take the limo. We should see you about seven.”

By eleven thirty Monday morning, she was ready to tackle the mail that had piled up in spite of the filtering job by her staff.

A letter showing the return address of the New York Medical Center caught her attention. Ignoring what was probably more urgent mail, she zipped open the envelope. She could hardly believe her eyes, noting that the letter was from the Chef Administrator. She was invited to go to New York for a discussion regarding the matter of heading their Ophthalmology department.

In part the letter read, “We are aware that your contract with Children’s is due for renewal. We have discussed our intent with Dr. Jessup, who has reluctantly agreed that we should approach you. Our board has been given your history and is open to whatever recommendation our committee makes regarding your working with us. You are the committee’s sole choice. Thus, we are not discussing this opening with any others.

"If you should consider us favorably, we will be calling your husband regarding a special position with our surgery department."

"We are sending our ambassador to Washington so that you may pose any and all questions in person, regarding this matter."

When she put down the letter, she took a deep breath and let out a very slow sigh. "This came out of nowhere."

She decided to wait until this evening to bring up the subject with Fred. The afternoon work was punctuated with thoughts of the letter. By four o'clock she decided that her work was suffering and it could wait. She headed for home to prepare the apartment for her folks' arrival.

Fred called, saying he would not be home before seven and, in fact arrived just as a cab delivered her folks. The reunion was loud and joyous all through dinner.

Anna introduced the letter to all three as they adjourned to the living room with after dinner drinks. The room was silent for a minute after she read it. Fred broke the silence with, "I am kind of surprised. I would have expected that the message would be delivered in person."

Ben spoke up. "That is the usual approach, but in this case I asked Jim to mail the letter and that I would be the envoy bring the invitation in person. Ana, that is the primary reason we are here, although Mom does have an appointment as I mentioned."

Anna look astonished. "Daddy, what do you have to do with New York Medical Center?"

"The head of their Family Medicine department is my closest friend, dating back to med school. In fact it is he who is responsible for my meeting and marrying Mom and bringing you into life. I have spent a number of occasions consulting with his staff over the years."

"You don't suppose they thought you would try to pressure me to take a position with them, do you?"

"No and I guarantee that. My friend is the chair of the committee and is in town. We are in communicating on a regular basis. During a recent conversation he mentioned his work on the committee to seek a new head for their Ophthalmology department. At that moment it seemed like the right thing to do, so I mentioned your name."

"Jim has been well acquainted with your career since your Dad likes to boast about his daughter. A few weeks later he called to tell me that the committee and the board were extremely interested in having you come to New York. He hoped that I might have enough influence to encourage you to meet with him and furthermore to vouch for him as a person of integrity, which I am happy to do."

"You say that he is in town hoping I say "yes" to a discussion?"

"Yes. He hopes it can be a conversation with the two of you."

Anna looks at Fred, but she received a neutral look, which said silently, "It's up to you, Dear."

Anna let out a whoosh. “What a day. Life has a way of interrupting the best laid plans of humans.” She turned to Ben. “Daddy, I need a lot of time with Freddie. Suppose we change subjects for this evening so that Freddie and I can think about this. Perhaps we can come to some clarity by morning.”

When her folks had retired for the night, Fred made more coffee. They took their cups to the sitting room for a serious discussion. Anna began, “I’m inclined to say 'No, Thanks,' with no conversation.”

Fred said, “Yes, but that is not how you operate. I think we need to open up the subject.”

She said, “The first thing that came to mind was not about you and me, but about Nanan. I don’t see how we can leave her, and I am sure she would not consider giving up her home for an apartment in New York.”

Fred responded with, “I would never try to guess what another person would do, especially Nanan. I think the discussion should focus on our life, personal and professional.”

That gave Anna a chance to ponder her future. “I guess I haven’t done a thorough job of that. I just assumed I would continue working, even after having one or two children.”

“Maybe that is how it would work out, but you may find that you want more full time with our baby than just a few months maternal leave. You may discover a deep satisfaction in being a full time mom.”

“You’re right. I am sure I can work out some flexibility with my bosses here. That might be more difficult in a new situation.”

That brought up another concern to Fred. “If we decide to take on new positions, it precludes starting a family now. The question is for how long.”

Anna mused for a bit. “I guess that would depend on the challenge of the job and the kind of staff that I have. How do you feel about delaying?”

“Honey, this is about you. I just don’t want to wait until it is too late. If the problems in the new job are major and need more time than planned, the delay may stretch into years. That, I would hope to avoid.”

“The more we talk about it; the change sounds like a major disruption in our lives.”

“Anna, that may be true but I think you need to meet the head of the committee so that you can properly evaluate the proposal. We would both live unhappily if there were regrets about a quick decision.”

Anna took time to pour more coffee before saying, “Okay. Let’s set a conversation for tomorrow evening Remember, this also is about your future.”

“I know but I will be offered excellent options simply because it is a price they are willing to pay to get you.”

With a smile in her voice she said “Freddie, your bias is showing.” He laughed and said, “Just wait until tomorrow.”

“Honey, since this involves our future, I want you in the room. I realize most of the conversation will be about me but you need to make a point if I seem to be missing anything.” He nodded.

During breakfast Diane told of how Jim cleverly arranged for Ben to come into her life. “He was my attending physician in the emergency room at Columbia Presbyterian. I was on my way back to school at Harvard. He strongly suggested that I see a Dr. Ben Peters for follow up when I got to Boston.

Anna had never heard that story and pressed her Mom for complete details. She eventually turned the subject to their decision to meet with Jim that evening. Ben took out his cell phone and dialed Jim. After he had informed Jim of their decision, he listened a moment, then turned to Anna. “Dinner for the five of us in his suite, after which, Mom and I leave so that the three of you can conduct your conversation?” Anna and Fred nodded their agreement.

The gathering for drinks and dinner was warm and informal. Anna could see the depth of the longtime relationship among the three. She felt that she could have an honest discussion about the future.

When the questioning and probing had given them the foundation for discussing an offer, Jim laid out a straight forward proposition. “We are prepared to offer Fred the position of Assistant Chief of surgery and you Anna, the head of Ophthalmology. Your salaries will be approximately double your current figures. In addition you will have the penthouse apartment on East Sixty Ninth, just a few blocks from the hospital.

“Anna, we need to overhaul the department while we rebuild the current physical unit with a planned addition. Key people are ready to retire, which makes this the perfect time to bring in a new leadership team. You will have complete independent authority to choose new staff, with whatever help you want and need from the retiring staff as well as our HR staff. Dr. Morrison, the current Chief, is willing to delay actual retirement for six months if you choose to have him help you through the transition”

Anna posed a few questions about the staff members who would be continuing. Then Jim continued. “It is our hope that you can help us perform some of the same services in Harlem, less than sixty blocks north of the hospital, as you did in Washington Highlands.”

That comment shot directly to Anna’s heart. She was about to ask another question, when Jim said, “And we hope you will still want to make your visits to the refugee areas in the Middle East.”

Fred admitted later that even he was overwhelmed with the free reign that was being offered. Anna raised questions regarding the Harlem project, knowing that she would need plenty of help and, furthermore, a delay until she had her main job fully in hand. She caught herself reflecting “*I’m beginning to sound like I am ready to say yes, but I need to slow down.*”

The room had been silent while she had been thinking about the enormity of the task and warming to the challenge. She heard Jim asking “Is there more I can say to convince you that we, one of the finest medical centers in the world, need you.”

She paused for a minute before asking, “How long would you estimate the time before I could take time for maternity leave?”

The question surprised both Jim and Fred. She continued. “Fred and I were just about to implement plans to start a family just as your letter arrived. I don’t mind telling you that we almost decided not to even conduct this conversation.”

Jim said, “I would guess about a year, but that does complicate matters. Neither the board nor our committee had considered this possibility, although clear thinking planners should have. I need to confer with our people and I know that you and Fred will want to talk things over. Are you available to meet with other members of the committee and me at brunch about eleven in the morning?”

Anna raised her eye brows. “Other members are here?”

Jim laughed. “No, I did not have that kind of confidence. But if you are agreeing to another meeting, I will place a call and the others will catch the early Metroliner in the morning.”

With an affirmative nod, the session came to an end.

Sleep was a long time arriving for a very stimulated couple. Fred said, “The offer was even greater than I expected, even though I told you that they were willing to pay a high price for your services, Honey.”

“I know. I was overwhelmed, but, even more; it is their willingness to grant me the freedom to pursue my dream for the kids in the camps my heart jumped when he mentioned Harlem. That will be a special bonus for me.”

“You certainly threw us for a loop when you introduced the matter of starting a family.”

“I know, but I figured that we may as well get that into the open even if it is a deal breaker. I spent a lot of time thinking about that in bed last night, and having a family is important to me as I know it I for you.”

“Yes. I sensed that in the tenor of your voice when you startled me.”

“Freddie, what do you think?”

“I believe you want to say "yes," but something is gnawing at you.”

“Several thoughts keep me questioning the wisdom of taking up the challenge. We seemed to have a plan that will be uprooted. Someone once said, “God has a way of calling you just when you thought your plans were air tight.

“I also am feeling disloyal to Dr. Jessup and in spite of your comments regarding Nanani; I need to talk with her.”

“I understand. I will call Jim early and put off our meeting. How about dinner tomorrow?”

“That should give me time.”

Dr. Jessup was smiling as she entered. “I’ve been expecting your visit, Anna.”

“I knew that, once I found out that someone had already asked you for permission to talk with me. Even discussing the possibility seems so disloyal.”

“You know, of course, that I had hoped you would be with us for years, even dreaming that you might eventually succeed me, but that was folly. I am a long way from retirement and there is a big world out there that needs your talent.”

“But...”

“No buts. If the offer meets your personal and professional hopes, then decide for it. I would personally consider it an honor to be interviewed for that position.”

Tears were flowing from two sets of eyes, expressing the deep feelings and respect that each had for the other. As she turned to go, he said. “We will have more time to see each other before you leave.”

Matthew opened the door as they approached the house. Nanan was seated in the sitting room, grinning like a well pleased Cheshire cat. “Welcome, dear children. Come. Let me hug each of you while Matthew prepares a light repast.”

Fifteen minutes later Nanan was saying, “Matthew and I have been discussing a serious matter. His doctor has just informed him that he has that illness they call “Lou Gehrig’s disease.” Within a short period of time he needs to be in a home where he can get help and medical attention.”

The children listened in awe and waited when Nanan’s voice broke. Anna was aware that Mathew walked with less confidence and was especially careful with the tray.

When he left the room, “What is the prognosis?” asked Fred.

“The doctors say that Matthew will need to be in an assisted living facility, probably within the next two months. They expect he will be hospitalized shortly thereafter.”

Anna knelt in front of Nanan, taking Nanan’s hands in hers. “This must be terrible shock.”

A nod of agreement and Anna thought she saw Nanan stiffen her back. “We both knew the day would come when one of us would leave the other, but we always figured it would be I, not Matthew. First, I need to make arrangements for him. You and Fred can be of real help. Second, I have to sell my home and find a place where I can have adequate assistance. It will be so hard without Matthew.”

Fred asked, “Doesn’t Matthew have a sister?”

“Yes, but she lives on Long Island with her son. I am the one who must see to his welfare.”

Anna asked, “Are you committed to living in Washington?”

“Not necessarily, but being near you, Fred is now very important.” She took a close look at Anna. “Was there some special reason for asking? Are you considering a move?”

Anna and Fred laughed. He said, “Sharp as a tack is my Nanan.”

Quickly Nanan asked, “What and where?”

Anna asked, “How would like to live in Manhattan on the Upper East Side?”

She was surprised when Nanan asked, “New York Medical Center is offering you a position?”

“Nanan, you haven’t missed a step. How did you come to that conclusion?”

She laughed. “Upper East Side. The only institution important enough to attract you is the NYMC.”

Fred said, “Spot on, as usual. We are in the midst of some conversation with the head of their recruitment committee, in fact, dinner later.”

Anna interjected, “While I had been having doubts even though attracted by the offer, we weren’t sure that we could leave you here while we were that far away.”

“Bless you, my dear children. If going to New York is the right decision for your futures, I will accept your offer of living nearby. Now, the first business is getting Matthew into the right situation. I will call his sister to begin the search for a place where she and I can visit during these last months.”

“Can one or both of you come to dinner the day after tomorrow? After dinner, the four of us can attack the problem.”

That evening Jim proudly introduced the two of them to five other committee members. They spent a little time on light subjects. Every member of the group had several questions for Anna or Fred and each took time to add a reason why both were needed.

At the right moment Jim moved the discussion with, “We have full authority to say that you may take a maternal leave as soon as you feel the need to do so. We are convinced that you will organize staff so that not a step will falter. You have demonstrated that ability at Children’s and in your Middle East projects.”

Fred said, “Jim, we are inclined to accept the offer but there are a couple of wrinkles involving family. My grandmother, who raised me, has a close friend who has taken care of her for most of her years here in the States. He has ALS, meaning an assisted care facility and hospitalization starting very soon. His location must be handy for visiting by my grandmother. In addition we need an apartment for Nanan very near us, preferably in the same building if possible.”

Jim broke into a broad grin. “I am sure that one phone call to Manhattan will produce the solution to the first problem, Matthew. The second is easily solvable but may take a bit of time.”

Anna stood and reached to shake hands with Jim. “Unless you feel it necessary for us to come to Manhattan, we do not have the need to do so. I am taking your word that the staff and board will be warmly welcoming.” She jokingly said “You weren’t just snowing us, I hope.”

The entire committee chuckled. Jim said “Rest assured, Anna. That would be a betrayal of the child of my dearest friend for forty years. With your permission, I will start the paper work. The beginning date is your option, especially considering everything that is on your plate.”

Dinner with Nanan and Mathew was sober as expected. At the close of dinner that Nanan had arranged with a catering company, Mathew could no longer stem the tears of joy and sadness. Fred had pictures of the assisted living home in Morningside, near Columbia University, a short cab ride from the Medial Center. His sister and her son could visit with just one subway change.

Matthew had a present for Freddie, to whom he had been Uncle Matthew, for most of Freddie’s life. “I have kept these, guessing that they might be of some value and of interest to your sons.” He handed Fred a shoe box full of baseball cards in mint condition, including a "Honus Wagner" and a "Ty Cob," both priceless.”

Without another word, he stood, shook Anna’s hand, bear-hugged Freddie and left the room.

Nanan said, “Any other plans can wait. My mind is so filled with thoughts of Matthew that I will be of no use tonight. Besides, it is now in your trustworthy hands.”

Anna took both of Nanan’s hand in her own, brought them to her lips and then planted a gentle kiss on her forehead.

The end.