



Best Kind

A Novella by Peter Garland

This is a story about how the widower Milligan Jenkins' life was changed by serendipity and an old Reverend, who loved to watch reunions, because he carried the terrible weight of a reunion missed.

It was a small miracle in which God chose to remain anonymous. Or as Emma Bull once said, it was a coincidence - which is the word we use when we can't see the levers and pulleys.

Opening his eyes, Milligan Jenkins was blinded by the morning sun that shone through the broken window blind in the trailer. The ceiling fan creaked as it moved the hot, dank, stale-beer smelling air around the small bedroom. A dog was barking.

"Shut the hell up Charlie," he mumbled as he swung his arthritic knees to the floor, groaning.

He reached for his glasses on the nightstand, knocking an empty Bud Lite can and a birthday card to the floor.

“Happy seventy-third me arse,” he said, standing up and shuffling to the bathroom in the shorts and t-shirt he’d slept in.

“I’se Da By in Newfoundland!” the shirt said, with a cartoon moose grinning.

He still felt a bit woozy from the beer and rum shots served up at the Okeechobee Happy Hour Bar by Hetty when she announced to the crowd that “Milligan, our Newfie is a birthday boy y'all”!

“The Happy Hour - 1 Dollar Draft Beer!” the broken sign near the road proclaimed. It was adjacent to the tattered Sunnydale RV Park, wherein a collection of impoverished locals and a few ancient snowbirds spent their days in the shade of the palm trees and the awnings that hung from every trailer chatting and playing cards. Depending on the time of the month when welfare and pension cheques came in, some afternoons were spent in the Happy Hour for the early bird \$7.99 special and a beer.

Most times Milligan skipped the special and sat at the bar for the \$1 drafts and chats with Hetty.

He guessed she was 60-something. She had blondish hair, was plump and was a strong no-nonsense woman. He liked her.

He brushed his teeth, gagged, filled a glass with the sulphur-tasting Florida tap water and drank it with his blood pressure pill, his prostate pill and two aspirins.

He stared at the cracked mirror. An old man he did not know scowled back.

He splashed some cool water on his face, and patted what was left of his wispy white hair down.

He put some clean sheets on the bed, and stuffed the dirty ones in the tiny washing machine.

In the galley, he poured some day-old coffee into a mug and zapped it in the microwave. He trashed some empty beer cans, wiped down the counter, and put the dirty dishes in the sink. Looking around, he thought - not bad for company.

He found his keys and wallet, relieved to see he still had \$35 cash for gas. He wasn’t sure how much was left on the Visa.

On the doorstep he found a reminder for the monthly trailer rental for \$800 and threw it inside. Ten days ‘til me government pension and old age security gets in, he thought. They’ll wait. Not like people are lined up to spend a winter at lovely Sunnydale. But what the hell, it ain’t fancy, and I’m not shovellin’ snow or feedin’ wood to the stove. It beats Moreton’s Harbour in the winter.

Yes b’y.

After a few tries, the old truck roared to life and he headed out on Route 70 to West Palm Beach Airport, 90 minutes away. His daughter had called the day before to wish him happy birthday and to make sure he’d be at the airport to pick her up.

She told him the flight number and the arrival time and he'd written it down but forgot it back in the trailer. But he recalled Air Canada from Toronto arriving at one something, he was pretty sure. Or was it 11?

"It'll be good to see you Dad," Cindy had said. "Are you O.K.?"

He looked at the dash clock - 9:30. He wished he'd brought a bottle of water. He found his sunglasses on the truck floor, put them on.

The a/c was broken so he rolled the windows down but it didn't help much. He drove for half an hour and pulled off and got around to the passenger door and pissed in the ditch. Can't hold it long anymore, he thought. The pills was supposed to help.

Leaving the flat cattle farms and orange groves coming into Indiantown he passed a sign that flashed the time and temp - 10:27- April 6 - 83F.

April 6th? Gone by some fast since I got here in December!

My son that was an awful Christmas. Thank God the neighbours had me in for Christmas supper or I'd a lost it. I shoulda waited. Mother, dear old soul at 94, told me but I wouldn't listen.

"You'll be some lonely down dere, Mill my son", she'd said.

She was right, but I had to get away from that house. She was everywhere, God rest her soul. Everywhere I looked there she was and it wrenched me heart out. I bawled me eyes out for two months after she passed and I couldn't do it no more, no sir, he thought.

So he'd packed his gear and headed for the ferry and caught I-95 south at a border crossing in New Brunswick. Two days later he saw his first palm tree and travelled with the windows down.

He'd slept in the truck at a campground near Fort Pierce on Hutchison Island, the sound of the ocean comforting him. A guy in a motorhome told him about the Lake Okeechobee area, inland, and cheap rentals there.

"The views ain't great, but you still ain't shovelling snow", he'd said.

The wind caught a tear and tore it from his cheek. He merged the truck onto I-95 south.

Maisie wouldn't want me to suffer that way, now would she? Thirty-seven years together we was.

They was good to her in the Twillingate Hospital, God knows, but there was nothin' they could do they said but keep the pain away.

She woulda liked it down here. Maybe too hot for her. I dunno.

Oh Maisie. He wiped his eyes with his T-shirt, realizing he'd forgotten to change it.

He pulled off I-95 into the airport and parked the truck in short term. Desperate to find a men's room, he walked as fast as he could into arrivals.

The night before, Hetty had made him a birthday cake and brought it out from the Happy Hour kitchen with one candle on it and led the regulars in singing happy birthday to him. On the cake was written "Happy Birthday Mill!" over a cartoon anchor.

When she cut it up to serve, he got the piece that said Mill, with the candle. She was thoughtful that way.

"Not that far behind you, Mill." she said, smiling at him.

She'd liked Milligan from the moment he'd walked in, making her uneasy at first when he called her m'dear and m'love and telling stories and jokes he'd brought from Newfoundland, a place she'd barely heard of.

She pronounced it wrong. He'd gently chided her. "M'dear it's NEW-fin-land. Like UN-der-stand."

"Or just The Rock will do."

And she came to understand he called most women m'dear and the men buddy, even watching him get sideways looks from men he called m'dear. That usually happened late, just before she'd tell him he'd had enough, to get home.

She would have had enough of the Happy Hour by then too. Her feet would ache and she longed to shower the smoky bar smell away.

But the horses would have to be fed and watered when she got back to the small farm that her family had owned for four generations down the Old Conners Road, five miles away.

Sometimes her husband Sonny would do chores, most times not, asleep on the couch when she got home, beer cans around him, some sports thing on, blaring away.

When the construction work stopped in '08, Sonny did too.

He gave up looking after a while, and she'd gone up to the Happy Hour, asking if they needed anyone.

Sonny would fish sometimes and bring home some crappies or bass, or in the winter go up to his brother Fred's bar in Spring Lake to drive the tourists around in the swamp airboat and get a few bucks in tip money.

If it wasn't for the board they got for the horses and her bar job, they'd be on welfare, she was sure of that.

There were no children. The doctor forty years ago had called it a lazy ovary.

She prayed they would not get sick.

When all the regulars had left, an hour before closing time, she'd asked Milligan about his family. This was after he'd said how much he liked a small table lamp that was in a back corner behind the bar that someone had thrown a red silk scarf over to diffuse the bright light.

"Me Aunt Wavey had lamps like that all over her house. Fancy decorator she was. Worked in Boston for a while, she did, back in the thirties."

"I love her name, Mill. Wavey. You said she was in Boston?"

"Ya well, growin' up in Moreton's Harbour, Newfoundland she was a, whasisname – a interior decorator. Or wanted to be, I guess. She'd order them fancy magazines in the mail, and catalogues and stuff I guess, and learned by herself how do up people's homes nice like. Made up her own stuff too, I allows. She was some artist, too.

"Oh m'love, the Bartlett home was like a fancy palace inside, eh? Nothing like it around there I'll tell you. Maybe some townies in St. John's would have rooms done up like that but not in Moreton's Harbour, no m'dear. Not that her mother Nellie would care or even thank her for it.

"Cranky woman that Nellie and some devious too. But Wavey learned that decorating stuff all by herself, and then late one summer some tourists come up. Goin' all around the circle they was, like in that song - I'se Da by. Fogo, Twillingate, Moreton's Harbour, all around the circle! Sometime I'll sing that for ya, if you could stand it."

"That would be good, Milligan."

"It would cost you some beer, m'love. One of which I'd like right now. Down payment."

She poured him a draft, set it down in front of him.

"You need that like a hole in the head," she said.

"It's dry work, all this yarnin', Hetty m'dear. I should be smart, seeing as I have to drive to West Palm tomorrow, pick up me daughter. Too soon old, too late smart."

"Ain't that the truth Mill."

He sipped at his beer.

"Anyways, didn't the tourists get a flat tire right in front of the Bartlett's place. Wavey's father goes out to help fix the flat, gets talkin' to them, and then invites the whole crowd in for a cuppa tea. I allows Nellie wasn't too pleased about that.

"The story goes that them tourists was shocked to see the way Wavey'd got that house up, just praisin' it up and down. Some pretty it was, with her paintings and quilts on the walls and pretty hooked rugs here and there.

“Sea glass. She made into them stained glass windows, like.

“Seashells and local stones for knickknacks and bookends, scarves on the lamps, like that one,” he said, pointing.

“A little model wooden dory held her magazines. Yellow, it was. I loved it. Otto over in Little Harbour made it for her. A big ship's wheel over the fireplace. God knows where she got that. A big piece of twisty driftwood varnished all up was a coat rack in the hall.

“Right modern, it was, for then. And, like, what's the word - nautical, and so the Boston folks were right taken with it. Yes m'dear.

“One of the men, a rich lookin' feller, says to Wavey he's putting up a new place in Boston and if she had any ideas as to how it should look she should send them to him, see if they fit, like. She thought he was just sayin' dat, y'know, to be nice?”

“So after tea they goes on their merry way, but not before Wavey gets his address.

“I got all this from me mother, so it's all true, the woman wouldn't lie to save her life.”

“Did she send him some ideas?” asked Hetty, stifling a yawn.

“Don't you want to go home, m'dear? It's getting on a bit.”

“I do but I don't. This is getting good. Keep on...uh...yarnin'.”

“So yes m'dear, she mailed down some drawins and designs and such, can you imagine, not knowin' what his new place looked like at all.

"And a month later a telegram gets delivered from the wireless office over in Twillingate. It was from the rich feller offerin' her the job to decorate his mansion in Boston! Mailed her money too, to cover the travel.

"Well, her mother Nellie went right crooked over that, sayin' they needed her there, and she'd be killed by some madman, or how did they know this guy was on the up and up and that the Boston States, what they called it then, was no place for a Moreton's Harbour girl.

"Her father Albert stuck up for her though, and by and by, before Christmas it was, she was headed to Lewisporte to catch the train to Port Aux Basque and the ferry to the mainland.

"Mother told me her mother Nellie never even said goodbye.”

Another sip.

"She was some beautiful then, I must say. Seen her picture.”

“So how did she do in Boston, Mill?”

"She became the talk of the town, as they says, at least in the decorating world with rich Boston people bookin' her and articles in the paper on her and such.

"She was rollin' in the big time, yes m'dear. Right proud they was of Wavey at home.

"The Telegram - that's the paper in St. John's, a big Newfoundland city - did a report on her. I got it at home somewhere. In March month, 1938 it was. Oh yes, m'dear, she was big.

"Now in 1939, Britain's in the war and she meets a pilot in Boston who was with the R.C.A.F. That stands for Royal Canadian Air Force.

"A lot of Yanks who wanted to get into the war in '39 come up to Canada and joined up.

"He was home on leave, I guess. They got engaged. They was together for just a short time. They was crazy in love.

"He gets shipped overseas. He was a fighter pilot. Flew them fighter planes - Spitfires, 'e did.

"So she worked on at her career, and one day shortly after he left she gets a telegram from her mother saying her father was very ill. Come home, it says.

"Of course, she took that to mean he was dyin', and so, lovin' her dad and havin' a bit o' money now, she somehow gets on a plane to Gander and then takes a taxi to Moreton's Harbour. A taxi! Musta cost her a fortune. That's like seventy-five miles, sure.

"Not too cheap to fly to Gander in those days either, eh?

"Turns out her Dad Albert had some lung trouble - emphysema is it? And was in bed a good bit o' the time.

"Her mother Nellie knew it wasn't gonna kill him, sure. Not yet. She just wanted her home, see? She was the postmistress too, so she was at that, but Nellie'd put the guilt trip on her and she'd stay. Oh, don't leave me to take care of your father alone and me workin' sorta thing, eh?

"But then ol' cruel fate took his turn, or I should say, more than one turn, on poor Wavey."

Mill took a sip of his beer, excused himself, headed for the men's, comes back and starts in again.

"One day, she got a telegram sayin' her Air Force man was severely injured and not expected to survive. Shot down in the Battle of Britain he was. Never heard another word. She wrote his folks, heard nothin'.

"But the fates wasn't done whackin' her yet, m'dear. One morning, a few months later, they found mean ol' Nellie dead in her bed. Heart attack in her sleep, 'twas.

"In the meantime, Wavey's clients in Boston are gettin' impatient and she's seeing a promising career go down the tubes while she was way the hell up in Moreton's Harbour, lookin' after her dad for real now, cause his lung trouble got worse.

"She was trapped, she was. She loved him and could not leave. And the community would have scorned her terrible if she did, I guess.

"Yes, trapped like a beautiful bird in a fancy cage she was, as I understand it.

"Mother told me she had to look after Albert then because, well, Wavey just sorta lost it. Who could blame her?

"Just went over the edge and didn't come back for a long time. Cried and wailed night and day, Mother said. They practically had to force-feed her to keep her alive and for a long time she never said a word. She'd have a spell and wander at night outdoors in her nightgown, winter and summer and they'd find her down by the shore just starin' out.

"One time they had to call the doctor in the winter because she was half froze to death, she was.

"Albert, her dad, passed away after she went out in the winter once and left the door open. The house was freezin' by the time anybody knew. His lungs give out, eh? At least that's what I was told.

"When I was growing up, I'd say around when I was seven err eight, she'd come out of it a bit, no wandering' or wailing' no more. Her memory was going' though.

"I would go to visit Aunt Wavey. She'd make tea and buns and say how grand it was that I'd come back and fuss over me like I'd been gone for years when I dropped in every second day.

"She never stopped redecorating' that house. Every month it looked like a different little house. Just a little saltbox we called them, but inside, oh m'dear, some beautiful.

"But here's the thing. On the settle in the kitchen..."

"What's a settle?"

"It's like a couch, next to the wood stove. Your dad would lie down there after supper."

"Anyways, on her settle would be an open suitcase, full of clothes. She was packed to go to Boston the next day.

"She'd say when I come over, every second day or so, 'Now Milligan, be a sweet boy and don't linger because I must finish my packing. I'm leaving for Boston in the morning!'

"But of course she never went. Never could go. One time I said so.

"She just stopped and looked at me for a long time and then just started in again."

"Is she still alive, Mill?"

"Yes, m'dear. Still alive. Ninety-two she is."

Mill stepped off the escalator that led up to the arrivals area, and walked toward the screens that hung above the traveler information kiosk.

There were two Air Canada flights scheduled to arrive from Toronto - 10:55 and 13:30. Both were displayed in red and the status read Two Hour Delay. So were flights from Chicago, Minneapolis, and Detroit, with many of those cancelled.

"Any idea why them flights from up north are delayed, buddy?" he asked the senior wearing a pink pastel blazer with a Can I Help? badge who manned the info booth.

"There's a big snowstorm up north, sir. I expect there will be further delays", he said. "There's a TV tuned to the news over in the waiting area. Not a good day up north, I'm afraid."

He pointed to a row of benches and chairs facing the arrival gate with a flat screen on the wall tuned to CNN.

"Jesus", said Milligan, wishing he'd turned on the radio in the truck.

I'da come anyways, he thought.

She probably called. He'd forgotten his cellphone back in the trailer.

A reporter on the TV was standing in a blizzard beside a snow-covered street, cars creeping along behind him. A small weather map in the corner of the screen showed a blue cloud that stretched from west of Chicago east to Boston.

"1500 flights delayed or cancelled, roads dangerous", said the graphic below the reporter.

He sat down on one of the pew-like benches that faced the walkway for the arriving passengers, joining a few people waiting.

"No Public Entrance", a sign said above the walkway. A bored security guard sat at her podium.

He joined a mother and child, two older couples, a limo driver with a sign on his lap, a very old white-haired man with a scarred face and a cane, and three guys wearing baseball caps backward, heads bobbing to whatever was in their ear buds.

He could smell food, and his stomach rumbled. A Sam Snead Restaurant was just down the concourse, peddling overpriced steaks to the wealthy Palm Beach crowd.

Expensive-looking art hung on the walls of the airport, a metallic mobile of geese in flight hung from the ceiling.

This ain't the arrivals room in Gander, he thought.

Clusters of people stood, expectantly looking towards the entrance ramp.

A group appeared at the end of the arrivals ramp, walking along, struggling with huge carry-ons, carrying coats and pushing kids in strollers, businessmen with briefcases walked purposefully, looking at their Blackberrys.

Two people in wheelchairs were pushed by airport staff, couples holding hands walked, smiling.

A kid about twelve with a big Unaccompanied Minor badge self-consciously trundled along beside a United Airlines staff member.

As they walked closer, some started to wave and a few people in the pews rose to greet them, waving and shouting and merging into the standing crowd.

The limo driver moved out of the pews and stood with his sign. "ROBINSON", it said.

Now people were hugging and bending to kiss kids and wheelchair people, and excited voices rose above the PA announcements.

The baseball hat dudes high-fived a guy wearing a Philadelphia Flyers T-shirt, shorts and flip-flops, whooping and hollering.

Grandparents hoisted kids in the air, a woman gave a businessman a long kiss. The twelve year old hugged an elderly couple who showed ID to the airline lady.

A very well-dressed couple, he resplendent in a blue blazer and tan slacks, she in a long fur coat that matched her blonde hair, approached the limo guy, who grabbed their carry-ons and herded them toward the escalator down to the main level.

He heard someone say they'd just made it out before the storm hit, dodged a bullet. Didn't catch where they were from.

In the pews now it was just him and the white-haired guy, who was watching the greeters and the arrivals, smiling. He got up to check out the arrivals screen.

The old man nodded at him, smiling.

"How ya gettin' on, skipper?" said Milligan as he passed him.

Both Air Canada flights were still on a two-hour delay. There was a lot more red cancellations bars on the screen now.

He walked down the concourse to find something cheap to eat. Good luck with that he thought, reading the signboard menu outside the Sam Snead joint that featured a steak special for twenty-two dollars.

Back in the waiting area with a bottle of water and a blueberry muffin, Milligan sat down near the old man.

“Shockin’ what they charges for a muffin and a water here, b’y,” he said. “Seven bucks. At least it’s a big muffin, look.”

He held it up and noticed two things about the elderly man. He wore a clerical collar and deep burn scars ran down one side of his face, partially closing one eye, pulling the mouth down, disfiguring his nose.

The white hair had grown on one side, and was combed over.

“It is awfully expensive to eat here, you’re right. I bring my lunch,” said the old man in a raspy voice, holding up a sandwich in a baggie.

“Good plan.”

He bit into the muffin. It tasted good, with lots of blueberries.

“I’ll be waiting awhile, sure. What with the weather and all up north,” said Milligan, sipping on the water bottle.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Your friend is delayed?”

“Me daughter in Toronto, yes sir. Delayed at least. Not cancelled yet.”

“Well, there’s hope then. Do you live close by? You could wait at home.”

“No...uh...Reverend is it? I’m up in Okeechobee. With my luck I’d get home and have to turn around.”

"I see by your shirt you've also spent some time in Newfoundland."

"Yes sir, that's me 'ome."

They heard a cry of joy and the old Reverend turned slowly to see a woman give a welcoming embrace to a young man in a blue uniform.

May, 1939.

As he came up the steps, his mother rushed out to hug him, father close behind, shaking his hand, patting his back.

164055 RCAF Pilot Officer John M. Morris arrived home in Boston exhausted after a two day drive through the early signs of spring along the Ontario and Quebec flatlands and heading south from Montreal and then east through the twisty mountain roads of Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

He'd left RCAF Station Uplands in Ottawa, Ontario after weeks of pilot school, with a transfer to RAF Llandow in Wales for Spitfire training and now two weeks leave before his flight from Halifax to Gander and then overseas.

It was good to see the large old family home again on Center Street in the Dorchester area of Boston and his mother Grace and father Alex were overjoyed to have him home, in spite of his late arrival shortly after midnight.

His father, dismayed at him wanting to join a war that the U.S. had no part in, put on a brave face to welcome his son home. His misgivings could wait and the sight of his boy in the blue uniform of the Royal Canadian Air Force secretly pleased him.

His mother made him a sandwich, poured him a glass of milk and didn't forget his favourite gingersnap cookies on the plate.

He told them as much as he could about his flying adventures, his fellow airmen buddies and the Canada he'd come to love, before his eyes would stay open no longer. He fell immediately asleep in his old room, surrounded by the keepsakes and memories of his youth, a model plane slowly swinging from its tethers above his head.

Over eggs, toast and coffee in the morning, his father, slowly getting worked up, insisted that Hitler was not the threat some people thought he was, and that John was just putting them through a lot of unnecessary worry, but it was his life and he could do what he wanted with it.

He said he hoped when it was over he'd be interested in "getting involved" in his insurance business.

His mother said nothing, but at one point, cried a bit.

John said he believed that the Germans were a threat to England and they needed help and he just felt the need to go. He said he wasn't the only American, there were seven on his course alone.

"They call us Yanks".

He did not say anything about loving the thrill – the circus of combat flying, Hitler or no Hitler.

"After all, Dad, that's where we came from right? Great grandfather came from Dorset?"

"Maybe so, but I think the goddam Boston Globe should not have run those ads from Canada looking for our American boys!" he said at one point, hitting the table, making the cutlery rattle and his mother jump.

"It's not our bloody fight and right now I'm kind of wishing you'd never taken those flying lessons."

During the summer before his last year in high school, his father, for a birthday gift, had bought him flying lessons out at Boston Metropolitan. He'd learned to fly a Piper Cub.

He was a natural, his instructor had said, and he'd gotten his licence.

He'd mowed lawns for two bucks a go for gas money for the plane all summer, getting up about five times, hooked on the adrenaline, the freedom.

The ad said "Join the Fight For Britain!" with a snappy looking guy in a RCAF pilot's headgear looking skyward, and below was an address in Montreal.

He wrote, they accepted, and so it all began.

Once he'd learned to fly the "Yellow Peril"- the Harvard - he'd yearned for more after hearing about the amazing Spitfire. And as luck would have it, he now had that chance.

"Look Dad, for all I know I might be on transports, just a bus driver, lugging troops around."

He knew that was a lie, but he had to try to calm their fears somehow.

"I hope so Johnny," his mother had said, putting her hand on his.

Father, looking resigned, had said "I guess we'll just hope for the best, son."

They went that night to a dinner party out at the Ferguson's, his father's business partner in Morris and Ferguson Insurance, whose large house sat back among towering maples on Dudley Street. It was to be appetizers and drinks on the sun porch and then, when the evening got cool, inside for dinner.

He would feel conspicuous in his uniform, but his mother had insisted.

"You look so handsome, Johnny. Please?"

There was a woman sitting in one of the wicker chairs on the porch, wearing a blue dress. He thought at first she was related to the Ferguson's.

"Johnny, Grace, Alex meet Wavey Bartlett. Wavey, this is Grace and Alex Morris and their son - a Canadian flyboy named John. We call him Johnny."

"Wavey is doing some work for us here for a while."

A beautiful dark-haired woman with arresting blue eyes raised a glass of wine.

"Hello all" she said, smiling.

"Good evening", he said, transfixed.

Smitten.

"I suppose if you're old enough to join a war, you're old enough to drink," said Wally Ferguson, glancing at John's father, who nodded, and then heading to the bar.

"Want a beer?"

"Yes, please".

He sat across from her.

"Nice uniform," she said, smiling. "I seen some of those walkin' around Gander once."

Wally brought him his beer then saying "Wavey's from Newfoundland, John."

He looked at her and said, "What a great name."

"Newfoundland or Wavey?" she said, smiling.

"Wavey," he laughed. "Your parents must live near the ocean there."

"M'dear, yes. Moreton's Harbour, up north of Gander. You ever fly there? Gander?"

"Soon." he said. "I guess that's where we refuel when I go over to my new base."

He sat across from her at dinner and listened as the hosts raved about her decorating skills and how maybe she'd think about modernizing their "old dump", as they called their mansion.

"You are the talk of the town, Wavey", said Wally. "You come highly recommended."

"I got some ideas, Mr. Ferguson," she said, smiling.

Then the conversation turned to John, and he recounted the past few weeks for them.

Later as the others chatted, he asked how a lady from Newfoundland came to be a home decorator in Boston.

"Like a movie star I was discovered, I was," she said, a chuckle in her voice.

"If Mr. Cabot had never got a flat in front of our 'ouse, I mind I'd still be in Moreton's Harbour."

Astonished, he listened as she told him of meeting one of Boston's wealthiest men in rural Newfoundland, he admiring her interior design talents, and serving him tea.

Then sending designs, and the eventual invitation and travel fare to go to Boston.

He asked her if she'd heard the little poem about the Cabots.

"And this is good old Boston,
The home of the bean and the cod,
Where the Lowells talk only to Cabots
And the Cabots talk only to God."

"My son, I believes that," she said in a quiet voice. "You have no h' idea of the money! Shockin' 'tis!"

He loved her musical accent, her dropped and added H's.

The hosts and Wally's parents were talking - the weather, the war, FDR, Churchill.

He caught her eye and said quietly, "I love your accent. Is it uh...sort of...Irish?"

She leaned across to him.

"All mixed up, see? Irish and British I guess. Words you never 'eard of 'ere. I got to lose it, I does. Folks 'ere can barely get what I'm sayin, eh? Although Mr. Cabot says he likes it, too".

"I understand you," he said looking into her eyes, she into his.

"Back 'ome we says you people speaks proper," she said.

"Talk some more", said John. "That's what's proper."

Later, when dessert, coffee and tea were done and dishes were being cleared, they remained alone at the table, talking.

She'd had tea, and Mrs. Ferguson remarked that it was made with her favourite condensed milk, Carnation.

"A touch of home for you Wavey," she'd said.

He felt toes touch his ankle, under his blue uniform trousers.

August 18, 1940.

She'd given him a piece of sea glass from the shore in Moreton's Harbour for good luck, smooth and blue, the size of a quarter, that he always carried with him tucked into a flight suit pocket.

He didn't understand it until she explained it was from some glassware lost at sea and its broken shards made smooth by the waves and rocky beaches.

She'd said blue sea glass was very rare and beautiful. Like him.

After 12 sorties, he'd begun to believe in the luck of it.

His squadron had lost seven pilots since he joined them.

When the klaxon sounded, they had jumped up from the table in the ready room, upsetting teacups, tossing playing cards and ran to their aircraft.

They'd scrambled into clear blue skies, to repel the first of three huge Luftwaffe raids that day against British airfields and radar stations.

The 12 Spitfires of No 602 Squadron caught up with the Stukas, not too far from the coast near Middleton-on-Sea.

Flying Officer John Morris in the lead, fired bursts at five dive-bombers in turn, sending one down before he ran out of ammunition and headed home.

He was nearing his base at RAF Westhampnett when he noticed another fighter closing on him, coming out of the morning sun. He thought it looked like a Spitfire but he was mistaken.

The next thing he heard was a series of loud bangs as cannon shells detonated on his rear fuselage. Splinters from the exploding rounds gouged into his legs and lower body. Smoke began to fill the cockpit.

He struggled with the controls and through greying vision and smoke miraculously found a field just short of the runway and had to belly-land, his landing gear disabled.

A wing tip caught, he ground looped, the aircraft spinning up on one wing before falling and grinding to a stop.

He remembered the flames as he desperately tried to free the canopy. He could not stand, and saw blood pooling at his feet.

He remembered strong arms pulling at him.

He recalled the pain from the burns and his shattered legs and groin and the horror he felt looking in the mirror when they finally removed the bandages three months later. He saw an impotent, crippled monster, and wept.

He had to write a letter to Wavey. He dreaded that.

He was 19.

"Ah yes. I have a fondness for Newfoundland. I've heard so much about it," said the old Reverend.

"Well, I must say, I been here since December month, and I'm gettin' bit homesick, Reverend. Is you waitin' on someone too?"

"No son, not really. I am a volunteer chaplain here, I retired from the active ministry. I just like to be in this part of the airport when I'm not needed in the chapel. It's a happy place, mostly, arrivals. There's a lot of love here."

Milligan left his seat to check the TV monitor again.

"Not too happy now, Reverend," said Milligan, when he came back. "My daughter's flight is cancelled."

"Do you want to call her, and see what her plans are?" said the Reverend.

"Wish I could. The truth is I left me cell phone back in Okeechobee. It's got her cell number in it."

"Anyone in Okeechobee who can get that number for you? I can help. You are welcome to use the phone in the chapel office. Lots of folks do."

They walked slowly down the concourse, Milligan beside the Chaplain with his cane.

The chapel was non-denominational, a quiet sanctuary away from the busy concourse with peaceful art on the walls, some faux stained glass windows and a few comfortable chairs and cushioned pews like those in arrivals.

The Reverend's office was a tiny space off the main room. A small desk, two chairs, and a plug-in kettle sat on a folding tv table.

"Feel free to call whoever can help you, uh...?"

"Oh, it's Milligan. Milligan Jenkins, sir," he said, shaking hands. "This is very kind of you."

"All part of the job, Milligan. My name is Morris. John Morris".

"Nice to meet you, Reverend Morris."

"You can call me John."

He called 411 to find the number of the Happy Hour, and Hetty.

"Happy Hour" said Hetty loudly, over the din at the bar.

"Hetty m'dear! How ya gettin' on?"

"Mill, where the hell are you? Is your daughter here"?

"No, m'love, she's storm-stayed in Toronto. I'm at the airport. I'm tryin' to call her but I left me cell phone in the trailer with her number in it. Can you fetch it for me please?"

"Lemme see if I can get someone to watch the bar for five minutes. I'll call you back. What's the number there?"

Milligan got it from the Reverend, and gave it to Hetty who said she'd be back with it in ten minutes.

"You'll have to put up with me a bit longer, Reverend, while my buddy finds Cindy's number."

"That's fine, Milligan. Why don't we sit in the chapel while we're waiting. Would you like some tea? I can put the kettle on."

"Reverend, I would love a cuppa tea. Hasn't had a decent one since I left Moreton's Harbour."

The Reverend brought a hand up to his heart and stared at Milligan, looking shocked.

"You okay Reverend?"

"Oh yes", he said, finally. "I just, um, thought of something. Moreton's Harbour. I...I..." He turned away quickly then, toward the kettle, after a moment saying "Do you...do you take milk and sugar?"

Milligan watched as the teabags went into the cups, and the boiling water was added. The teabags removed after a minute, sugar added and to his surprise, a can of Carnation milk was produced from a tiny fridge.

"Sorry about the condensed milk. It's something I've loved for many years."

"Yer makin' me homesick, Reverend. I grew up with that."

The smoke in the Happy Hour hung like a fog as six noisy draft drinkers played the computer bowling game, screeching when someone got a strike. The jukebox blared a Patsy Cline tune.

"Fred, watch the place for five will ya?" said Hetty to one of the regulars, as she finished filling a draft pitcher.

"Bring this over to them noisy crackers. And get the ten bucks for it. I gotta fetch Mill's cell phone from his trailer to get his daughters number."

The screen door slammed when she left. At the same moment the phone rang again.

"Like goddam Grand Central Station in here," said Fred, back at the bar, picking it up.

"Happy Hour."

He listened, said "Ok Sonny. Now take'er easy. I'll send her home right now, she just stepped out for a minute. You go lay down, ok? "

They sat in the chapel on opposite ends of a pew, teas in hand.

"She should call me back soon, Reverend John."

"I have nothing on my schedule Milligan," said the Reverend, smiling, "except enjoying this tea with a new friend."

"Thanks Reverend."

"You must be disappointed your daughter is not coming."

"Yes, I am that. I wonders if they'll put her on a later flight, but we'll see how long that storm goes on, eh? Tings with the airlines gets backed up, they do."

Sips on the tea. "That's some good."

"So what brings you to Florida, Milligan?"

"Well, Reverend I guess I'm one of them snowbirds I hears talk of. Thing is, me wife Maisy passed not too long ago and I felt like I had to get out of the house. So I did. Just got in the truck, pointed her south and here I is."

"I'm sorry to hear about your wife. How long were you together?"

"Thirty-seven years. Went by too fast. I never stops thinking about her, Reverend. She was, like the sayin' goes, me other half".

Stares into his tea. "Half of me is gone, yes sir."

"Just remember how lucky you were to have all those years together Milligan. Not everyone is so blessed. Try to remember that. It might help a little."

So they sat in silence for a few minutes, then Milligan said, "I hope she could find the cell phone. It's taking awhile. Sorry."

The Reverend finished his tea, looked up and said, "Well, we could always chat about Newfoundland while we're waiting."

He folded his hands in his lap and leaned forward, expectantly.

"During the war, I spent a few hours in Gander on my way overseas. Tell me a bit about Moreton's Harbour."

The traffic was thin on 441 and she finally got to Old Conners Rd, taking the corner a bit fast, scaring herself.

When she got out of the truck, she could hear the TV, some sports thing blaring away and she thought well he can't be that bad.

The dog barked.

She found Sonny on the couch with the phone on his chest, still and grey, eyes at the TV but unseeing.

"Ah yes, I seem to recall that song, Milligan. 'Fogo, Twillingate, Moreton's Harbour, all around the circle!'

"One and the same Reverend. Me home town. Beautiful, 'tis."

"And you have lived there all your life?"

"Yes, and my family goes back hundreds of years or more, I'm sure."

"I'se the b'y!" said Milligan, pointing to his shirt and they both laughed.

Milligan excused himself for a minute and went to a washroom out in the concourse.

Thirty minutes had passed.

"Reverend, can I call my friend back? I think she might have got your number wrong or something. Shoulda heard back by now."

Fred answered and gave Mill the sad news about Sonny.

"Hetty went out to get your phone and when she was gone Sonny called an' told me he had some bad chest pain. She flew outta here when I told her and then called here hysterical. Found him dead on the couch, a heart attack I figure. The cops and the ambulance is out there now. Not that he needs one."

Hetty had left Mills cell phone on the bar before racing out and Fred gave Mill his daughter's number.

Mill thanked Fred, and turned to the Reverend, his face sad.

"Bad day all around, Reverend. The friend I called just found her husband dead. Poor Hetty."

"Oh my, what a tragedy. May God rest his soul," said the Reverend.

Milligan called his daughter, said he was at the airport.

She was told she may get a flight out in two days. But, no guarantee, due to huge back-ups. "I'm sorry, Daddy. I'd get there and just have to turn around and come home again."

"Maybe I'll head up Toronto way on my way back home, Cindy m'love."

He hadn't felt quite this sad since Maisie. It felt like a heavy black spot in his chest.

"I'm so sorry my friend. It has been a challenging day for you," said Reverend Morris.

"You know, I have a spare room you can use if you want to wait until the morning to drive back."

"No thanks, Reverend. I'll just take my time. I'll be there the once."

Before he left the Reverend asked for his cell number.

"Sometimes I take little holidays and I haven't been over to Okeechobee in a long time. Maybe you'd make an old minister a cup of tea if I showed up?"

"Yes b'y, love to do that, Reverend. I allows Sunnydale RV Park could use a chaplain, even for just a visit. Don't wait too long, though. I'll have to go back to Moreton's Harbour sometime, or the FBI will hunt me down."

The Reverend shook his hand, a smile on his scarred face.

"I might see you again, God willing, Milligan. Safe home. Comfort and peace to your friend."

Milligan thought he saw a tear in his eye. Probably just the injury causing that, he thought.

He drove out of short term parking and got charged forty dollars at the kiosk.

"Jesus Christ" he said. Good thing the Reverend didn't hear that, he thought.

But the lady in the booth did.

"Y'all were in short term for a long time, sir. The Lawd ain't got nothin' to do wid dat." said the attendant, scowling at him.

He did not want to drive back on the blinding thruway and then into the dark farmland but he did, stopping for a hamburger and fries he knew he'd regret at a McDonalds and twice for roadside pees.

He wanted to get back. He wished his daughter was with him.

He thought about Hetty and how they had something in common. They were both just a half now.

"Miss Bartlett, you have some company," said the nurse, a bit too loudly.

The tiny woman in the Lazyboy chair took her gaze away from Lawrence Welk on the small TV and looked up, smiling at the elderly couple coming in.

"Spillin' rain out, Wavey. And the fog? You can't see your hand in your pocket!" said the foremost of the two, Louise Jenkins.

"I'm glad it warn't me drivin'," her husband Bill said. "Got a lift with Max Cooper, bless him."

Room 106 at Sunset Manor in Twillingate was the most beautifully decorated room in the assisted living complex, if not the neighbourhood.

Wavey had been allowed to bring a few cherished pieces of furniture, and that was a trial for those involved. She wouldn't decide, or couldn't, and it came down to a compromise wherein pieces would be rotated from the house occasionally. So for now it was an antique rocker, a mahogany corner cabinet filled with soapstone carvings and knick-knacks, a leather Lazyboy, two dining room chairs, a settle by the door, her bedside table and a wrought-iron headboard.

Around the room was a quilt-hanging depicting a seaside outport saltbox home with colourful items on a clothesline, a framed sea glass display hanging in the window, a driftwood coat-rack by the door, and a tiny wooden schooner on a shelf.

A lamp draped with a blue silk scarf sat on a table and a small yellow dory rested in a corner. A hurricane lantern sat on the windowsill. A Ted Stuckless painting of an outport house being towed across a bay for resettlement hung over the bed. It was titled "To Greener Pastures?"

On a bedside table, a framed black and white photograph of a handsome man in uniform, smiling beside beautiful young Wavey as they stood by a harbour, and one of Louise, Bill, and teenage Milligan taken when Milligan graduated from Coaker Academy, his high school, in 1959.

"How ya gettin' on m'dear?"

"Best kind, Bill. Best kind," said Wavey.

"They brought me some lovely rice pudding for my dessert this evening," she said as both visitors leaned down to hug her and kiss her soft, papery cheek.

"And I got my hair done this morning, just for you," she said giggling a bit.

Her hair was a beautiful halo of white that accented her blue eyes and dress perfectly.

"Is Milligan coming?"

"No m'love, Milligan has gone on a holiday, remember? He drove down to Florida."

"When will he come home? I miss Milligan. And Maisie must miss him too," said Wavey, anxiety on her face.

"Now Wavey, you knows dear Maisie passed last year. Remember? She was awful sick with the cancer?"

She turned and looked at the window, at the sea glass hanging there.

Finally she said "Oh yes...poor Maisie."

"Mill called us a couple of weeks ago, Wavey. He sends his love. Cindy is going to visit him in Florida from Toronto. Won't that be nice?"

"Cindy?"

"Yes, Wavey", said Louise gently. "Cindy is our granddaughter who lives in Toronto - Maisie and Mill's daughter."

Bill fumbled in his jacket and eventually produced, from a full envelope of photos, a picture of Cindy, Wavey, Maisie, Bill and Louise all on a couch, grinning, the women in garish Christmas sweaters. He found that the photos helped.

"There we are at Christmas a few years ago Wavey. That's Cindy next to you."

Wavey, brightening, said. "Isn't she beautiful! Cindy! We were at your house! You cooked a Jigg's dinner for us!"

Bill and Louise, taken aback by this accurate recollection, smiled and nodded to each other.

Louise said "That's right, Wavey. Jigg's dinner!"

"Milligan wasn't there?"

"Yes, he was there, Wavey," said Bill. "He took the picture."

She stared at the photo and then at the window again.

"Was he wearing a Santa hat?"

"Yes, he was, m'dear. You remembers that well, Wavey!"

"Haha!" Wavey clapped her hands with joy. "He was our Santa!"

It probably wouldn't be long, Bill and Louise often said, that they would be down the hall from Wavey.

Hopefully they wouldn't need the envelope of photos.

After a while the three, Louise with a cane, Wavey with a walker, Bill valiantly assisting both, slowly made their way out of her room.

They passed the packed suitcase on the settle and went down a hallway to the small cafeteria for a cup of tea before Max came to drive the Jenkins' back to Moreton's Harbour.

When Milligan arrived back at Sunnydale RV Park after what seemed like an endless drive from the airport, he parked the truck at his trailer and walked to the Happy Hour. Fred was still on bartender duty, having been unable to reach the owners so far.

The news of Sonny's passing had spread, so there was a somber crowd of locals gathered around the bar.

Two of the women had gone out to the farm to comfort Hetty.

Milligan got his cellphone from Fred, and asked him for directions to Hetty's farm.

"She's been some nice to me, Fred, and I'd like to say I'm sorry and help if I can, b'y."

He asked Fred for a double rum and Coke and sat at the bar.

"I'll dart down in the mornin'."

He drove down Old Conners Road about three miles to the mailbox shaped like a grouper that Fred had told him to look for, and pulled up the long driveway that was shaded with live oaks.

The sand-coloured stucco ranch-style house sat behind a neat front yard. Tall poinsettia bushes bloomed at the corners. There was a small barn at the back of the property that looked out on a few acres of scrubby field. A few chickens wandered around. Four horses were ambling across the field.

Hetty was almost back to the house after putting the horses out to pasture when the red truck with the Newfoundland plates came up the driveway.

There were two cars and a pickup beside the house.

Probably family, thought Mill as he got out of the truck.

"Hi Hetty," he said, embarrassed, as she waited by the porch steps. "I'm some sorry to hear the awful news, m'dear."

"Oh Milligan. How good of you to come," she said walking to him and burst into tears and hugged him.

That feels good, he thought, guiltily.

"I'm not too good at this, Hetty, but I just wanted to come and say I'm sorry."

"Thank you, my friend. That's very nice of you."

She stepped back to look at him.

"You should be home visiting with your daughter."

"She never made it, Hetty. The plane got cancelled. Big blow up north."

"Oh, I'm sorry Mill. You were looking forward to her coming. Oh damn, I never gave you her phone number. I..."

A woman came out on the porch at that moment and said "Hetty, I'm sorry, but the minister says she's got to go soon."

"Ok, I'll be right in, Marge. Marge this is Mill Jenkins, a friend from the Happy Hour. Mill, this my sister Marge."

"G'mornin' Marge."

Marge nodded hello.

"Sorry Mill, I'd have you in for coffee but we have to make arrangements for Sonny's ...um....," Hetty said, putting her hand to her quivering mouth.

"I'm glad you came out, Mill. Thank you."

"If you needs any help, Hetty, let me know. I'll see you soon," he said turning towards his truck.

"The funeral's on Wednesday, Mill. Pass the word around would you?"

The Comfort Room in the Lake Winds Funeral Home in Okeechobee was full. Family members, Happy Hour customers, and friends from all over central Florida all stood as Hetty and her family walked up the aisle to their seats.

She looked exhausted, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue. Her sister had her arm around her shoulders.

Sonny had been cremated, and an urn stood next to a large flower bouquet and his picture on the altar. Sonny had been a handsome man when the picture was taken. He looked to be about thirty-five in the photo.

Milligan heard from both eulogists - a friend and his brother - that Sonny had served in the army in Vietnam, was a faithful friend, was once a hard worker and could spin a few tall tales to tourists on the airboat up in Spring Lake.

He seemed like he had been a pretty good guy. Just the last few years he'd kind of gone downhill, thought Milligan.

Hetty never got into details, but sometimes at the bar she'd make comments laced with a sort of comic bitterness about Sonny's lack of ambition.

She'd say, while slinging beers, "I don't have a honey-do list at my place. I have a freakin' do-it-myself list. So shit gets done."

A hang-ashore, Mill thought at the time.

The minister, Milligan suspected, had not known Sonny, as her comments were so general they could have applied to most people who were not career criminals.

The organist led all in "How Great Thou Art" and closed with "Amazing Grace", singing in a fashion that reminded him of a lady in the Moreton's Harbour Anglican Church choir, once described by the local doctor as having an "extreme reluctance to leave the note." A sort of constant high-pitched droning, punctuated by desperate gasps.

Milligan realized when he looked at the funeral program that he had never known Hetty's real first name or her last name for that matter, or had even bothered to ask her.

Edward "Sonny" Clay, mourned by his loving wife, Heather "Hetty" Clay.

Heather. That's nice, he thought.

There followed sandwiches and coffee at the funeral home, and a wake at the Happy Hour that lasted long into the night.

They had passed the hat for Hetty and someone said they'd collected about a thousand bucks towards funeral costs.

One late night at the Happy Hour about three weeks after the funeral, Hetty said, "Mill, tell me more about Newfoundland. First of all, I don't know where the hell it is. Is it close to Maine?"

"It's up that way. Hang on for a bit."

Mill went out to his truck then to fetch the well-worn atlas he'd bought at the Irving gas station in Summerford, a town close to Moreton's Harbour, the day he left.

He showed her the full map that included the U.S. and Canada, pointing to Florida, "This is where we're to," he said and pointing then to Newfoundland, "and that's where Moreton's Harbour's at."

"Oh my!" she said. "Now that is up north! And way out in the ocean! I had no idea."

He found the Newfoundland page and a close-up of home.

Hetty told him the farthest north she'd ever been was when she was teenager and her family drove up to visit relatives in Ohio one cool summer.

"I reckon it never got above 70 all five days we was there," she said. "We all like to freeze to death."

"Back 'ome," said Mill laughing, "we can get all four seasons on one day!"

"Lordy! I got my A/C set at 90 at the house", said Hetty. " I guess it's what you're used to."

Milligan told her about the rugged beauty, the huge headland cliffs that dropped into the sea, waves crashing against them. The icebergs, monstrous and magnificent, that came through Iceberg Alley, the colourful houses in the outport villages that clung to the rocky shores with pastures and hillsides full of windflowers, the small boats anchored offshore and the big longliners waiting to go out for their catch. He told her about the capelin rolling in, and he and his friends catching them by the bucketful.

"Lard Jaysus, I sounds like one of them come-to-Newfoundland TV commercials," he said.

"Are the TV commercials online?" she asked.

"Prob'ly."

She got her iPad out then and found the beautiful Newfoundland tourism ads on YouTube.

Her favourites were of the little red-headed girl running down the path by the sea ("They filmed that one over by the lighthouse in Twillingate," said Mill) and the lady hanging quilts on the clothesline with an iceberg in the distance.

"My God. Why would anyone want to leave?" she said.

"You notice there are no commercials of the winter," said Milligan.

One late afternoon, after enjoying the early bird special - a blackened grouper sandwich washed down with a few draft beers - Milligan volunteered to help with the horses, if and when Hetty had to work an extra shift.

"You sure, Mill? Not just the beer talkin'?"

"Could be, but you can hold me to it, m'dear. We had a Newfoundland pony when I was a kid. Good ol' Jacko. Hauled a lot of wood, he did. Good horse. I knows a bit about horses."

She said she had never heard of Newfoundland ponies, but would Google them when she got home.

"There's only a few left. Don't Google too hard," said Mill and she laughed. He hadn't heard her laugh for a long time.

So she showed him the routine in the barn when he drove out one morning, and then later poured him some coffee in her bright and cheery kitchen.

She'd given him a tour of the comfortable home, Mill noticing Sonny's funeral photo on a side table next to a well-used recliner.

A framed photo of a young Hetty on horseback hung on one wall, a painting of a moonlit mangrove swamp on another wall over the couch.

A cabinet with knick-knacks, a lot of them tiny horses.
Not much like a saltbox he thought, with ceiling fans in every room, and no wood stove.

An electric heater stood in a corner. He had a heater in the trailer but had never used it on the cool Florida days in January and February, wearing a sweater in the morning and by noon it was usually as warm as a lovely summer day in Moreton's Harbour.

She noticed him staring at it.

"You snowbirds always laugh at us when it gets cold down here. You should hear the abuse I put up with at the bar when they delay the school buses if it's below fifty in the morning!" she said laughing.

Apparently y'all walked through snow banks uphill in your bare feet to get to school."

"That's right, we did. And 50 is t-shirt time in Newfoundland," said Mill, chuckling. "Like you said, it's what you're used to, uh...Heather."

He grinned at her.

"I've never been Heather. I couldn't pronounce when I was little, I called myself Hetty, and it stuck."

"Hetty suits ya," he said.

"I think so too, and by the way, thanks for doing this, Mill," she said from the kitchen.

"Just be careful not to give them too much oats - just a cup. You heard the expression 'feelin' yer oats'? Well, that's horses. They get hot and go a bit nuts. Fill their buckets and one flake of hay each. That'll hold 'em 'til I get back."

"Never had the oats back home," he said. "Not for horses, anyways."

She poured the coffee, put down a plate of cookies and sat down opposite him at the fifties-era Formica kitchen table.

"Mother has a table just like this," said Mill, smiling. "I grew up sitting at a table like this."

"This is my mother's table," said Hetty, "and I grew up sitting here."

They smiled, and after a moment Mill said, "Well, that's another thing we got in common now."

Hetty looked up from her coffee, "Sad but true, Mill."

"Sorry. I kinda put a downer out there."

"That's okay," said Hetty.

"You told me once, Mill, how hard for you it was when your wife passed. Now I know. Sonny was down the last few years and God knows he drove me nuts. But he was a good man and I miss seeing his lazy butt in that chair."

Mill thought she was going to cry, but she didn't. She had a pained look, though. He'd seen that in the mirror.

"It's kinda like there's this empty space not just inside the house...but also inside me."

"That's it, Hetty. It got so bad for me around our house I just left and come down here. She was everywhere...but nowhere, y'know?"

"Did it help, Mill, getting away?"

"I'd have to say yes and no, Hetty. Comin' down here it felt like Maisie was in the truck and then the trailer with me. But after I was here for a while, I think she hangs out with me a bit less now. But it's only been, what, going on six months? They say time heals, but I'm not sure what the timetable is on losing the other half, m'dear."

"I don't think it ever heals, Mill," she said.

Mill asked how long she'd lived there, trying to gently find her history without seeming to pry.

She had grown up on that farm, her great grandparents having moved to central Florida at the turn of the twentieth century from Louisiana seeking cheap land to farm. They had an orange grove and raised beef cattle. As the years went by, the property was severed into sections for family members. Some farmed, others found work elsewhere.

"My brother lives in Momma and Daddy's house down the road a piece," she said.

Her maiden name was Lacombe.

"There is a Lacombe, Louisiana. I reckon we've got some French in us from way back. Ooh la la! Let's have a cookie. I baked them myself. It'll make us feel better."

It did, a bit, but not as much as the goodbye hug, he thought after he left.

One afternoon, Milligan was sitting outside on his neighbour's patio across the road playing eu-chre when a black Mercedes pulled up in front of his place. Charlie the dog barked.

"You expectin' company, Mill?" said Wally, from Michigan.

The driver got out and went around and opened the passenger door, and helped an elderly man with a cane get out and they both walked towards Mills' trailer door.

"Excuse me, b'ys," said Mill to the card players and got up and headed over there.

"Can I help you fellers?" said Mill, behind them.

The driver, a black man, and the elderly man with a scarred face both turned.

"Well, Milligan. It's good to see you again, my friend," said the old man in the black shirt beaming under a Panama hat, his hand extended.

"Oh my. If it isn't the minister from the airport, Reverend...uh...Morris is it? How ya gettin' on Reverend"?

Mill shook his hand.

"Just fine, Milligan. I'm sorry to just drop in like this. I tried to reach you a few times on your cell-phone but no luck."

"Sorry, Reverend. I always forget the thing back in the trailer and the battery is most likely dead. Always forgetting to plug 'er in."

"I recalled you mentioned Sunnydale RV Park, though. So I took a chance. We looked up the address and David and I headed over. The manager pointed out your home. David drives this old chaplain around, Milligan. David, meet my friend Milligan Jenkins."

Mill shook David's hand. "Nice to meet you," said David.

"Well, if you fellers can stand a mess, you're welcome to come in," said Mill opening the trailer door. "It ain't a palace, but it's home for now."

Milligan silently gave thanks he'd gotten rid of the beer empties yesterday.

"I'm just going to go for a drive around, maybe find a place to sit by the lake, so you and Reverend Morris can visit." said David.

Then to the Reverend: "John, you give me a call when you're ready."

Milligan, confused, said "You don't want some lemonade, or water, David?"

"No thanks." Then seeing Mill's look said, "I'm Reverend John's chauffeur, so you guys enjoy your visit and I'll see you later."

With that, David walked back to the car and drove away.

Nice airport that gives its chaplain a car and a driver, thought Milligan.

Mill opened the trailer door and they went in and sat in the tiny living room.

"Make yourself at home, Reverend. This is a nice surprise."

"Thank you," said the Reverend, looking around. "This looks like a nice cozy place for a winter getaway."

"It's not fancy, but it's cheap and it beats shovellin' snow, Reverend." said Mill.

Mill turned the air conditioner on and it groaned and squealed and finally emitted some cool air.

"Some 'ot in the 'ouse, b'y."

"Pardon, Mill?"

"Warm in here," said Mill.

He filled glasses with ice and poured lemonade for them, and sat across from the minister.

"I hope your daughter wasn't too disappointed about not being able to visit you, Milligan."

"Well, I think we both had a letdown over that, Reverend, but there's nothing you can do about the weather. We needed a visit. It will happen. I might go up that way when I goes back."

"That would be nice," said the Reverend, then took a sip of his drink.

"Well Milligan, since we met that day in the airport I have not been able to think of anything else. God truly works in strange and mysterious ways. So I needed to talk to you and perhaps learn a bit about Moreton's Harbour and someone who was very special to me."

"Someone in Moreton's Harbour? Who is that, Reverend?"

"Well, if I may, let me first tell you a bit about me."

He paused, then, "You know, I just thought - did we interrupt you across the road? I'm very sorry, very rude of me to not ask earlier."

Milligan laughed, "Nothing but the world's longest euchre tournament, Rev. You have my full attention."

The Reverend took a deep breath and began.

He told Milligan about his RCAF years and the Spitfire crash that left him with what he called "the souvenirs you can see," pointing to his face, "and a lot you can't."

He recalled his successful post-war career after he inherited his father's insurance business and its huge success over the years that left him a wealthy man.

He talked about his devotion to the church and, after he retired, his subsequent training to become an Episcopalian priest, or minister.

"I retired at age 65 from the insurance business, sold my interest, and began a new career working for God," he said.

"I served a small parish outside of Boston, in Wareham for fifteen years, and then when I reached eighty winters, I came down here. Enough snow, as you said. Luckily, the chaplaincy at the airport came available, and I was accepted, in spite of my age."

Something clicked in Mill's mind when he mentioned Boston. Moreton's Harbour...Boston.

"Did you ever get married, Reverend?"

"No I did not, Milligan, and that brings me to the rest of this story and why I had to come here today."

He took another sip of lemonade.

"When you mentioned to me at the airport you were from Moreton's Harbour, well, it hit me like a bolt. It is beyond belief that I would meet you. I was engaged, in Boston, before I went overseas, to a young woman from Moreton's Harbour.

We were very much in love, and when I left, she was living in Boston. Then she had to go back to Newfoundland. My father wrote and told me it was family illness that drew her back."

"Nellie drew her back...," Mill said, under his breath, incredulous.

The Reverend paused, leaning forward, his hands clasped in front of him.

"When...I recovered from my rather severe war injuries, I looked in the mirror. I wasn't the man she knew, in...well...a lot of ways. So I decided to just let her go."

A shiver ran through Milligan's body and his neck-hair stood.

"I wrote her after I'd learned she'd returned home, but received no replies. I have never forgotten her and it has haunted me all these years, wondering what might have been, and what happened to her. When I met you, I just knew in my heart that you were a God-sent connection."

Milligan, eyes fixed on the Reverend, was astounded.

"Are you alright?"

"Oh my God, Reverend," he could barely speak.

"What are the odds of this happening, Reverend? You are talkin' about my Aunt in the old folk's home up there. It's Wavey Bartlett."

The Reverend put his old scarred face in his hands and wept.

April 22

Hetty picked Milligan up in her truck at 10am to take him to Okeechobee airport, a small airport but with a runway long enough to accommodate private jets.

They sat in the Landing Strip Cafe and she had coffee. Milligan sipped on a glass of water.

"How are you feeling, Mill? Are you excited?"

"Excited and terrified at the same time. Don't know what to expect, m'dear."

Mill and Hetty talked about the Reverend's incredible visit.

Hetty said, "I wonder what happened to the letters he said he wrote?"

The Reverend and Mill had talked well into the night, first in Mill's trailer, then at a corner table at the Happy Hour over a late supper. Thankfully there were no rowdy customers at the bar or the bowling machine. It was a quiet night. Milligan told him of his life with his parents, Bill and Louise, his work as a fisherman and woodsman, with a stint at a factory in Toronto after the cod moratorium in '92, just to keep bread on the table. His life with his Maisie and raising Cindy in the small outport town.

The Reverend wanted to know everything Mill could share about his Aunt Wavey.

Mill talked about her mental decline and partial recovery years ago, and how the years had treated her since, her extreme eccentricities tolerated by understanding friends and neighbours. The exquisitely decorated house, and now, her lovely room in the retirement home.

The constant reminder of those years was the packed suitcase always ready to go with her back to Boston.

Mill explained that at ninety-two, her memory was fading, but that she would often recall details that surprised everyone. He wished he'd had a picture of her, he'd said to the Reverend.

"She's still very beautiful."

Reverend John Morris was a wealthy man, Milligan learned.

Under his watch, Morris-Ferguson Insurance became one of New England's largest insurance firms. When he retired, he gave many of his millions away to charities and to his church, but he kept some perks, and one of them was access to the company plane, a Gulfstream private jet. In twenty-five years of retirement, this would be the second time he'd used it, he said. The first was to accompany a shipment of water and medical supplies to a mission in Haiti after the earthquake.

"It's a beautiful aircraft, but I think if I was still a pilot, I'd still prefer to fly the Spitfire. I missed flying very much after the war. I still do after all these years. It gets into your blood," he said wistfully.

He had never married.

"There's not much chance of that when you look like this," he'd said.

He lived in a small condo in West Palm Beach.

David the driver was not a retirement bonus, he explained. Just his sole employee.

"At 92, I'm too old to drive properly, even in Florida," he said, smiling, "although I wouldn't stand out around West Palm Beach behind the wheel. I'm grateful to the Good Lord I can still manage to walk a bit."

Later, Hetty had joined them at their table and was introduced. She was immediately charmed by the old minister in his black short-sleeve shirt and his smile and bright blue eyes. She was a bit taken aback by the extent of his facial scarring, and she hoped she didn't show it.

"How nice to meet you, Hetty. I'm so sorry for your loss," he said, placing his hand over hers on the table. "It's very hard. I hope you've found some peace and comfort."

"Thank you, Reverend."

Mill said, "Hetty, I met Reverend Morris in the West Palm airport when I went over to get Cindy a few weeks ago."

"Yes, April 6th. I won't forget that awful day."

"Yes, it was, Hetty. Awful..." he paused.

"Over at the airport in West Palm, the Reverend here helped me out - leant me his phone to call Cindy up in Toronto."

Mill shook his head.

"Anyways...geez...I don't know where to start. I.."

The Reverend spoke up.

"I'm the airport chaplain, Hetty. We met just by chance in arrivals while he was waiting. He was wearing a Newfoundland shirt and I...well...it seems that Milligan and I, amazingly, have discovered that we have a very strong connection," he said.

Milligan, very excited, said, "In Moreton's Harbour, Hetty. Back 'ome. Of all things, I runs into this feller...I mean minister, in an airport in Florida and well....I'm...we...is in shock, m' dear. It's shockin' is what it is!" Mill stuttered. "You never heard such a thing. I..."

The Reverend sat silently holding the cross he wore around his neck in his hands, staring at Hetty.

"Spit it out, Mill," she said.

"Okay, here it is. I got to slow down."

Milligan took a breath.

"Hetty, you mind me telling you about me Aunt Wavey back home, the wonderful interior decorator, who was found by the Boston rich guy and hired to fancy up his house?"

Hetty nodded.

"Sure Mill. You told me about her the night before you went to the airport."

"Now that's weird too, see? The night before...anyway, does you remember me tellin' you that she had to go home from Boston? That her mudder kinda lied to get 'er back and then died and she was stuck back up in Moreton's Harbour, after being a big success in Boston."

"Yes, I remember that. It's so sad."

"And," said Milligan, his throat tightening, he paused to collect himself and then spoke almost in a whisper, "Hetty m'love, remember the part about the RCAF pilot she'd met in Boston, and they was in love and he went overseas and she got word that he was shot down and not, like, s'pose to recover?"

Milligan looked from Hetty to the Reverend, his eyes wet.

Her mouth dropped open.

"What are you saying?" said Hetty. "It's you, Reverend?"

The reverend nodded.

"I pray she still knows me," he said. "We must meet again in this life."

Later that night Milligan, forgetting the ninety minute time difference between time zones, woke Louise and Bill Jenkins with the incredible news at twelve-thirty in the morning in Moreton's Harbour. They, on extension phones, were shocked at the news, and sounded somewhat cautious to Milligan.

He put the lack of jubilation off to the sudden, incredible story of a chance meeting seventy years later, and of course, a mostly forgotten and unwitnessed part of Wavey's life, back from the dead.

"I never 'eard the like of it. No my dear," Louise said. "Oh my."

Mill thought she might be crying.

Mill told them the Reverend was rich, was flying him up in a private jet.

"A rich minister, son?" said Louise.

"Yes, mother. He got a bit o' money before he was a minister. He owned an insurance company."

"Nar one o' dem here," she said. "No rich ministers."

"He's a wonderful man. It's just unbelievable we should cross paths," said Mill.

"It is that, for sure," said his father.

"What about the truck, Mill?"

"We're not stayin' long. Flyin' back down here after awhile and I'll drive 'er back. Dad, can you ask Max Cooper to turn the water on in me house, maybe get Annie his wife to make up the spare room bed for me?"

"Yes b'y, I'll do that."

"I been thinkin', mother, I thinks it's best if you don't tell Wavey," said Milligan. "See, the reason he broke it off back then is because he was some awful burned in the war, he was. Burned all over. He thought he was not good enough for her."

"So it's bit of a shock at first to see. I thinks it would be best for him to, well, let her get to know him again, gentle-like. She might be expecting her handsome Johnny otherwise, eh?"

Silence on the line, then, "He might have told her, back then. Not a word to 'er. No letters, nuttin' at all, at all," said Louise.

"He told me he wrote her," said Mill. "and 'e never be heard from her, either."

"All right. I don't know how she'll take this, my son. It'll be an awful shock for an old lady."

The line was quiet again.

"We can't deny them this, Mother."

Then Bill said, "Does you want us to pick you up in Gander? When are you comin' up, b'y?"

"I think we'll probably rent a car. We're coming day after tomorrow Dad. "

They watched as the silver Gulfstream jet taxied onto the apron adjacent to the cafe.

Milligan and Hetty walked out the door, through a gate and waited, Milligan holding a suitcase, his winter jacket over one arm.

The jet idled, a staircase unfolded, and a man in black pants, a white shirt and tie with gold bars on his shoulders, came down the stairs and strode towards the couple.

"Mr. Jenkins?" he asked.

"That's me, sir."

"Follow me, please."

Mill turned to Hetty. She hugged him.

"I feels a bit like a rock star," he said. "Give yer head a shake, eh?"

"To the Reverend and Wavey, you are a rock star, Mill. Good luck. Have a safe flight. We'll see you soon."

"Bye m'dear. Take care."

He followed the crew member, went up the stairs and the door swung shut.

Hetty watched it taxi out and waved as it screamed by on the runway and climbed steeply, heading north. She watched it disappear into the haze, and stood there for a while, lost in thought.

The man who'd come out to get Milligan took his suitcase and coat and stowed them.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

Milligan saw the Reverend waving him to one of ten large, comfortable-looking leather seats.

"Buckle up Mr. Jenkins, please", said the man. "We are preparing for take-off."

Mill shook the Reverend's hand and sat in the seat facing him, fastening his seatbelt.

"Welcome aboard, Milligan," said the Reverend.

"Thanks, Reverend. This is a beautiful plane! I love to fly, and my son, this is the way to go!"

The Reverend gave him a thumbs-up. Two chimes sounded.

"Gentlemen, Captain Jim Grant here. We are cleared for takeoff. The weather on the way to Gander looks good today, and we are seeing sunny skies and ten Celsius or fifty Fahrenheit in Gander. We arrive in about four and a half hours. Enjoy the flight. Thanks."

Milligan glanced around at the luxurious interior. Not at all like the Air Canada flight to Toronto, no sir.

The jet taxied, turned and paused, the engines raced and they began to speed down the runway.

Mill looked out the window. He saw a small figure near the gate waving to them, then the powerful little jet left the runway and climbed out, pressing him into his seat, turning northward.

"Have you flown much before, Milligan?" said the Reverend

"Not much. Just Air Canada to Toronto and back a few times outta Gander, but I dunno, I always loved it."

"Well, I'm looking forward to seeing more of Newfoundland," said the Reverend. "Gander was a pretty bleak looking place when I stopped there on the way overseas. It was rainy and foggy. I never got outside the airfield area. No time for that."

Mill told him how the town of Gander had grown over the years. They talked of the incredible story of the Newfoundlander's generosity towards the nine thousand stranded airline passengers that had descended upon them in Gander on that dark day known as 9/11.

"It was the proper 'ting, Reverend."

"It would be nice if the rest of the world were that generous, Milligan."

The Reverend read, and Milligan watched the landscape unfold beneath him out the window. He wished he had a map so he could identify where they were.

Mountains gave way at times to coastline on the port side. Was that long line stretching north near the coast I-95, the interstate he'd taken to Florida? He moved over and could see mostly ocean on the starboard side, sparkling in the sun, sometimes the wake of a ship visible.

Mill noticed that the Reverend was very quiet, sometimes putting his book down to nap.

Or pray, Mill thought. God, I hope she remembers him. That's my prayer, he thought.

The crew member who'd fetched Mill at the airport was actually the co-pilot, Mill learned, and after an hour or so came back to check on them. He also pointed out that the galley in the rear had an assortment of sandwiches, salads, cookies, cold drinks and a hot coffee and tea machine and to please help themselves.

The Reverend asked if Mill would be kind enough to get him a cup of tea and some cookies, and Mill, hungry by now, chose a sandwich, a soft drink and cookies.

He laid it all on the beautiful gleaming coffee table between him and the Reverend.

"I'm spoiled forever now for flying, Reverend." said Mill.

"It is very posh," said the Reverend.

"By the way, Milligan. I've rented a car for us at the airport. I hope you don't mind driving."

"Don't mind one bit, Reverend. And I know the way to Moreton's Harbour like the back of my hand."

The Reverend just nodded.

He's worried and afraid, thought Mill. I would be too.

After they'd finished, the Reverend slowly got up, leaning on his cane.

"I think I'll go up and visit the cockpit. See if I can give the pilot a break," he said with a wink.

"I think I'll visit the head," said Mill, laughing. "Give me bladder a break."

The chimes sounded and Milligan woke with a start.

"We're just approaching the south coast of Newfoundland now, gentlemen. Won't be long before we start our descent into Gander."

Mill looked across at the Reverend who was sound asleep, oblivious to the announcement.

Probably hasn't had much shut-eye lately, thought Mill. He looked out the window at the approaching rocky coastline.

They flew over the thousands of ponds and small lakes, Mill thinking it looked like someone had splattered dark blue paint on green linoleum.

Soon the engine noise changed pitch, and they descended. Mill looked down at the logging roads, and finally, glimpses of the Trans Canada Highway with its tiny traffic.

The thunk of the landing gear locking down woke the Reverend.

When they touched down, he smiled and said, "Home sweet home, Milligan."

Milligan thought, I hope so.

The pilot came back and chatted with the Reverend about the return flight.

"Nothing for certain yet, Captain", said the Reverend. "I'll give you lots of notice. Thanks for the nice flight."

They cleared customs and did the paper work at Enterprise. Milligan got the car in the lot, drove the Altima around and parked in the kiss'n' fly, then went in to the lounge area to help the Reverend out to the car.

As they headed up the highway out of Gander the Reverend said, "I'd like to go to see Wavey first, Milligan. How long will this trip be?"

"About an hour and a half, Reverend."

And so they drove past the green forests, stands of white birch and ponds, with the open sea sparkling in the late afternoon sun on Gander Bay as they crossed the causeway toward Twillingate. The narrow, canoe-like Gander Bay boats sat in the bay, bobbing in the tide.

"It's very beautiful."

"It gets better, Reverend."

"I pray that it does, Mill. I pray that it does."

Louise and Bill had been at Sunset Manor since noon.

Bill had objected, saying Mill and the Reverend would arrive in Moreton's Harbour first but she knew better.

"There's no way he's going to wait one second longer than he has to," she said.

So they had visited with Wavey and had two cups of tea and dozed and nervously fidgeted as they waited in the lobby as she napped.

Then Louise could wait no longer and woke her, and brushed her hair.

She was taken aback when, once again, Wavey asked, "Is Milligan coming"?

"Yes, my darling he is and bringing a friend. So we want to look nice."

It was 4:30 when the rental car pulled up outside. The Reverend and Mill came into the lobby and they hugged Milligan, Louise crying, Bill looking exhausted.

Mill introduced them, "Reverend, this is my mother and father, Louise and Bill Jenkins. Mom and Dad this is Reverend John Morris."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr and Mrs Jenkins. Your son Milligan has meant the world to me."

"Oh Reverend Morris", said Louise tearfully, shaking his hand. "After all this time."

They walked down to room 106. The Reverend had to pause once, to wipe his tears. He took a deep breath.

Louise pushed the door open and said, "Wavey, my dear. You have some company."

She was sitting on the edge of her bed, facing the door, her hair a beautiful white halo, and her blue eyes sparkling, a lovely smile on her sweet face.

Milligan, with the Reverend behind him, went to her, kissed her cheek and took her hands in his.

"Wavey, I've found an old friend of yours."

She looked past him, over his shoulder, into the Reverend's eyes.

"Oh Milligan," she finally said. "Am I in heaven? Have I died?"

"No Wavey, you're here with us my love," he said, standing aside for the Reverend.

She cried with delight and held her hands out and the Reverend grasped them, weeping.

"Can it be? Aren't you my Johnny Morris?"

The Reverend reached into a pocket and placed a beautiful piece of blue sea glass, the size of a quarter, that he'd always carried with him for luck, in her hand.

"It's beautiful, John. Like you," she said,

"My sweet lovely Wavey. How I've loved you and missed you," he whispered.

And he sat beside her and held her and she caressed his lovely scarred face.

When they left Wavey (the Reverend very reluctant to do so), Mill drove to Moreton's Harbour, dropping off their bags at Mill's house and heading over to the Jenkins house for supper.

"I'm moving her back home Milligan," said the Reverend in the car. "We're going to be together now. We'll take care of each other. We'll live in the moment, as they say."

When they arrived at the Jenkins' house, Mill sensed that something was wrong. Both Bill and Louise were troubled and said very little, nervously glancing at each other, barely replying to conversation.

"Mother, what's wrong?" he said to her quietly in the kitchen. "Aren't you happy for them?"

She looked frightened, he thought. A minister in the house was sacrosanct in rural Newfoundland, and Mill thought she was nervous about that.

"I'm not sure if this is too soon after your getting here," she said. "We needs to talk to you after supper, Mill. I has to get it over and done. Now go get the minister sat down at the table."

The Reverend led most of the supper conversation over the salt fish cakes and potatoes the Jenkins had lovingly prepared, in spite of their age.

He asked about their lives and talked to Bill about cod fishing and to Louise about the Women's Institute. He'd seen their beautiful building in Twillingate.

Milligan was dreading what was next and ate little. Was one of them sick? Cancer? What's going on?

Louise poured some tea and got out a plate of ginger snaps and they went into the living room.

The Jenkins sat on the couch looking tiny and aged and afraid.

Louise, trembling, started to speak and broke down.

"Oh dear," said the Reverend. "Are you all right?"

"We have something shocking to tell you," said Bill, his weathered face reddening.

"We can't wait no longer!" He almost shouted.

Louise patted his hand and he took a breath and calmed down.

"What is it, Dad? Go ahead," said Mill.

"Now Milligan, we hopes to dear God that you'll understand why we never told you this. It's because we loved you as our son, and didn't want you to have no pain.

"Wavey was a very sick woman back in the day when she come back. She wasn't able to even take care of herself, never mind a...a..." He put his head down.

"A what Bill?" said Milligan.

Louise, hanky in hand, took a deep breath.

"A baby, Milligan. Her baby. What we wants to tell you is, you are Wavey's son."

Milligan sat, aghast, staring at Louise.

"I ...Mother, I don't know....Aunt Wavey is my mother?" Mill stammered. "How come you never told me this, Mother?"

"We raised you as our own, my love," said Louise. "She couldn't raise you so we did and then, we thought you wouldn't want to know you was born...to an unmarried woman.

"It was awful then to have that. Everybody was scorning her. Nellie never let up on 'er, you know? The poor woman. Here she was, carryin' you, she got the news of you lost, Reverend," said Louise, looking at him.

The Reverend hung his head.

"She cried for a month at that news. Then no letters come, not a word."

"I wrote her many times, I ..." said the Reverend.

"Well, I knows she never got one letter. Nellie passed then and what a shock again for her. She was in a terrible state back then, her mind gone for the longest time. And then she got a bit better and we thought we'd tell you Milligan when you was old enough, but somehow we never. Maybe because we always thought you was our son.

"We wondered why the neighbours never said a word to you, Milligan, 'bout who your mother was. They thought you knew, I guess.

"Wavey has never mentioned it to us, nor we to her. I think she's lost that part of her life.

"We brought you up as your mother and father. Wavey was your Auntie, far as you knew.

"Until you called. Bill and me knew we should have told you years and years ago, m'dear.

"We is so sorry, my son. So sorry."

She cried into Bill's shoulder. Bill took his glasses off and pulled a handkerchief out his pocket, wiping his eyes.

Mill saw two dear old people who did their best, weighed down by time and circumstance.

A long silence then. There was just the sound of the wind gusting against the house, the old grandfather clock ticking.

Milligan sat staring at the rug, shaking his head. His mind went back to the days of his visits to Aunt Wavey, part of his and Maisie's life, his daughter's life, her laughter, her beautiful home. Always leaving. Would she have left him?

What does it matter now, he thought.

His wonderful years growing up with his...yes...mom and dad...in their nineties now.

There they are, crying on the couch. They don't deserve this.

"Oh Milligan," said Louise finally, "We wants always to be your mother and father, or step mother and father, but you loves Bill and me like we loves you. Don't get bitter at us, my darling."

"I'll never be bitter at you Mom and Dad. Never."

But he felt like he'd been run over, nonetheless.

Suck it up, he told himself. For them.

The Reverend, looking very pale, got up and went to Louise and hugged her and then he hugged Bill.

"This must have been a terrible burden for you two to carry all these years and since, well, since Milligan met me and called you. May God bless you both."

Then, turning to Milligan, he said, "You must forgive these dear people, Mill. They raised a wonderful son."

Milligan, 73 years old, looked at Louise and Bill.

"You was always good to me, Mom and Dad," he said. "I'll go up and visit my other mother tomorrow. She's been in me life forever, like you. I'm too old to get crooked about this. So are we all."

He paused to gather himself.

He looked at the Reverend, pale and sad, staring out the window. My God, he thought.

Mill went to the couch and hugged them.

Then to the Reverend, holding him close, both in tears.

"You are a good son, Milligan", said the Reverend, finally.

"Yes you is," said Louise, kissing his cheek.

"Best kind," said Bill.

The Reverend and Milligan went back to visit Wavey early the next day. They'd agreed not to mention what the Jenkins had revealed until she opened the door, or perhaps never.

Wavey was full of joy and nothing should stop that. She held the Reverend's hand all day, and they shared the stories of their lives, tears and laughter all the while.

Milligan loved to listen to them. He took them for tours in the rental car around Twillingate Island, up the long hill to Long Point Lighthouse to look out over the sea at the icebergs drifting by.

They drove down Pride's Drong in Little Wild Cove to watch the capelin rolling in, scores of people with buckets and nets after them.

The Reverend couldn't get over the beauty of the place.

Mill called Hetty at the bar with the astonishing news. She had said loudly, "You have got to be kidding!" so he asked her to keep it under her hat to the regulars, who would have heard that exclamation, until he got back.

He missed Hetty and told her. She said "Backatcha cowboy!"

That was for the regulars.

He told her he'd be back as soon as things settled down.

After a week had passed, the Reverend brought Wavey back to her home, Milligan first finding a local woman to clean it and make it a home again.

He also found a homecare woman in Summerford, a single lady named Mary who would come daily to care and cook for the Reverend and Wavey. She would soon become their friend and look after their every need.

The minister from St. Peter's Anglican Church in Twillingate had come to visit them. Milligan suspected a wedding was in the works.

Milligan had gone to Wavey's house to help them settle in, and to have a look at a section of the roof that was leaking rain into an upstairs bedroom. One rainy day he took Bill with him.

"There's no way an ol' fart like me is going up on that roof, sure," said Mill. "I'll go to work and get up in the attic, see if I can spot where the water's comin' in."

They brought Bill's lightweight aluminum ladder over and Mill got a flashlight and went up through a trap door in the ceiling of an upstairs bedroom. It didn't take long to discover that the leak was around the vent pipe where it went up through the roof.

"Prob'ly just needs some patchin' around the bottom of the pipe, outside, Bill. I'll call young bud-dy over in Upper Jenkins Cove - Calvin. He can do that, not a problem. Half our h'age 'e is."

Mill looked around the attic. Old metal bed frames leaned against the rafters, an oil lantern, a suitcase, a mouldering old winter coat hung from a nail, a hatbox. An ancient breadbox, and a rusting Moir's candy tin, just like the one he'd sneak hard candy from at Christmas when mother wasn't looking.

Empress Mixture, 5lbs it said on the little bucket with the tin handle.

He picked it up and couldn't resist prying off the lid one more time.

Inside was a bundle of letters, tied with string. Perhaps twenty, all opened. The letter on top said:

Miss Wavey Bartlett

A line had been drawn through an address in Boston.

Please forward to:

Moreton's Harbor

NFLD

Written in the upper left corner was:

164055 F/O John Morris, RCAF

RAF Westhampnett

England

"Lord almighty," he said under his breath.

He shouted to Bill, "You can go home, b'y, if you wants to. I'm just at some ol' stuff up here. I'll carry the ladder back. Thanks Bill."

Bill said "Okay b'y." and seconds later Mill heard the door close.

He opened the envelope.

July 20, 1940

My Dearest Wavey,

Well, here I am ready to win the war and get us all back home. The gang I'm stationed with are good fellows, and the weather if you were here would make you homesick for Newfoundland. Flying some days is not pleasant but then we're not here for pleasantries!

I'm not the best at writing letters so I'll just say I miss you and love you more each day. I hope you can read my terrible handwriting. Mother told me I should have been a doctor. Haha! Much love and kisses,

John

He thumbed through at least ten more addressed to Wavey in Moreton's Harbour and read the last one.

August 15, 1940

Dear Wavey,

I'm beside myself wondering why you haven't written. If it was something I said or did I beg your forgiveness. Please write and tell me you still love me. Father said you had to go back to NFLD.

We are flying daily. Your sea glass is always with me. Lucky so far!

I love you and miss you.

Love,
John

P.S. I wonder if you have the wrong address?

Why didn't she write to him he wondered?

Then an envelope that answered his question. None were ever sent. None received. Nellie was the postmistress. Nellie was her jailer. Goddamn her, he thought.

F/O John Morris, RCAF
RAF Westhampnett
England

From:
Miss Wavey Bartlett
Moreton's Harbour
Newfoundland.

July 3, 1940

Dear Johnny,

Oh how I does miss my flyboy!

I wish you would write. Perhaps you have and the mail is held up in this crazy world. Mother sent a telegram a few days after you left saying come back father is not well. So here I is, and he don't seem that bad so I'll get back to Boston as soon as I can I hope.

I hopes I get a letter from you soon, my love.

Lately it has been some rainy and cold. I hope it's nice over there.

All my love,
Wavey xox

Two from Wavey were addressed to the Reverend's father, Mill guessed, a Mr. Alex Morris in Boston. He read the fifth one.

Aug 5, 1940

Dear John,

Still not a word from you and here I am stuck in awful Moreton's Harbour. Now two month gone by and I am worried to death about you and something else.

I am in the family way and you is the father. I'm crying as I write. Soon it will show and I'll be the shameless hussy here, but I'll love my baby. Our baby. If I was in Boston I could hide some- wheres.

Why can't you write me? I'm going to write your mother and father to see what's wrong.

My Boston clients must be angry.

Please Johnny help me. I love you.

Wavey
Xox

He re-read the letter over and over.

He did not read the other letters.

After what seemed like a long time up in his mother's dusty attic with his thoughts, he climbed down the ladder with that candy tin so full of love and pain, into a sunny room, the rain having passed.

He'd give the letters to the Reverend - to his father, with respect and love, his worst scar healed.

He deserves that, thought Milligan.

And so this little love story about invisible levers and pulleys and a God who chose to remain anonymous will end soon.

Milligan flew back to Florida, and to Hetty - via Toronto by Air Canada this time, thanks to his real father's generosity and the encouragement of his adoptive parents.

He had a wonderful visit with his daughter Cindy during a two-day stopover in Toronto. She was amazed and delighted with the news of another set of grandparents.

He drove the truck back to Newfoundland from Florida with Hetty riding shotgun. He did think that maybe people would think it was too soon, but then decided they could go to hell. They love each other. They've talked about getting married, and might, when and if the notion strikes them.

They lived in Moreton's Harbour for six months, except for the week in St John's for Mill's successful prostatectomy, and then drove back to Okeechobee in February.

Hetty said she'd never been so cold in her life, but is sad every time she leaves that beautiful place. She and Milligan are now occasional customers at the Happy Hour, and she can fill in as bartender at a moment's notice, telling tales about icebergs and whales.

Mill loves taking care of the horses at their farm.

Every summer for as long as they can, they will come home to Moreton's Harbour, Newfoundland.

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The Reverend John Morris and his wife Wavey were married in a quiet ceremony in their home in Moreton's Harbour with their son Milligan as Best Man and Louise as Maid of Honour. Bill escorted Wavey up the aisle (actually from the kitchen into the parlour) slowly.

Wavey wore a blue dress to match her eyes, and, for luck, a beautiful blue sea glass necklace the Reverend had made for her by a talented jeweller, the daughter of a man who lives over in Wild Cove, Twillingate.

The Reverend wore an air force-blue suit with his shining hard-won medals on his chest. Wavey referred to him as "her handsome Johnny", and still does.

For as long as God allows, they spend summers in Moreton's Harbour and winters in West Palm Beach, at a lovely condo that Wavey has decorated with sea glass, a little yellow dory and silk scarves over the lamps.

There is no packed suitcase near the door.

They take their devoted companion Mary, who likes flying in the jet, with them.

The Reverend resigned as the airport Chaplain to spend all of his remaining time with his beloved Wavey.

Milligan and Hetty drive over to West Palm Beach for visits once in a while in the winter, and in the summer walk over through the wild flowers to visit the sweet old people who live in the pretty little house by the sea.

-----The End---