

Chapter 7

Honeymoon in Cornwall

August 1939



1939

As summer 1939 arrived we realised that war was inevitable. We had planned to wait one more year before we got married to allow Peter time to pay off some of his debts, but now this seemed a bad idea. If we were not married they would separate us. So I gave in my notice at Denes and we booked a Registry Office wedding, for August 5th. As we gave people very little notice and invited no guests we had few wedding presents and wore ordinary clothes. It was raining. My brother Roger and Peter's brother Bill came as witnesses, and we were shown into a long, narrow room. The roof leaked. We all lit up cigarettes.

"Please come with us," an official said – so we stubbed out our fags and were led to another long narrow room, also with a leaking roof. Finally, we got to a little square room and settled down in four chairs, two behind two, facing the Registrars' desk.

The ceremony was soon over. All through, Bill, who sat behind me, was whispering in my ear "Taxi's ticking up, taxi's ticking up!" We signed things and emerged into the rain and our waiting taxi. After a tea with a home-made sponge cake made by my mother we took a bus over to Bexley – determined to embarrass Arthur by "doing it under his roof!" and sat up until he was forced to suggest that we went to bed – together.

The next day we went to Cornwall for our honeymoon, catching the same train and bus as we had the year before, having sent off the camping things in advance, for our honeymoon.

We had already made friends with Trip, Mr Tripconey, an ex-fisherman and member of the lifeboat crew who lived in Cadgwith and earned his living as a "Sunday painter", selling views of the harbour and the village to tourists. Times were very hard. The whole village went on the dole all the winter. Now we got to know some of the other visitors.

Before the war there was a mildly pornographic magazine called *Razzle*. We now met its originator who called himself Lord Razzle. He had bought up a failing magazine aimed at men, and gradually made it more and more mildly pornographic – nothing to what is published legally nowadays – and it became more popular and sold more copies the ruder he allowed it to be. With very good judgment he sold it to another publisher for a very high price *just* before the police pounced and banned it unless it was cleaned up. When this was done the sales began to drop off – and when they had fallen enough to make it totally unprofitable he bought it back – very cheaply – and began to edge it up again by nudes and suggestive articles bit by bit – increasing the circulation again. Again he sold it very profitably before the police clamped down. This process he repeated several times and became very rich.

His wife, Maisie Gregg, was pregnant with her first child at the age of 45 that summer – unheard of then. She was a writer of

Mills and Boon-type novels which were stocked in twopenny libraries in the corners of stationers' shops, and was making £1000 a year (now £40,000) so *knew* she was a great writer.

A younger childless couple lived an ideal life. Both wrote for weeklies – she for *Women's Weekly*, he for *Red Letter*, a very down-market cheap periodical. They had no settled home but travelled the world with their portable typewriters. Each weekday they typed for a couple of hours in the morning and posted off their contributions – then they were free to enjoy themselves. He wrote for *Red Letter* under the name of Delia Eames, but under his real name, Delano Ames, wrote novels which were stocked in *proper* libraries. Each one had some kind of bed in the title – *Double bed on Olympus* and so on.

Finally there was a little man who was living in a bicycle shed in the middle of Cadgwith which he rented for five shillings a week. Like Baron Corvo he had hung the shed with religious tapestries and set up an altar. He drew and tried to sell wavery faint pencil sketches of religious subjects.

We decided to give a party in our tent on Tuesday evening so I cooked a three course meal on our primus by dint of juggling saucepans and a frying pan and Peter read M.R. James' *Ghost stories* by the light of the hurricane lantern. Finally, about 2 am our guests left. We were too tired to clear up and slept amid the dirty dishes.

Next morning we woke up late so had to leave at once as we had a date with two of our fishermen friends to go out with them on their crab and lobster trip. We left everything as it lay and walked along the cliff path in time to catch the tide. It was a long business. Innumerable lobster pots had to be hauled in, emptied of contents if any, and stacked in the small boat leaving only a toe hold for passengers like ourselves behind the mast. They were then rebaited and flung back. By this time the tide had risen too high for more work, so we ate, smoked and chatted for five hours until it had fallen again to allow us to repeat the process. Peter and I fished with a spinner, a metal bait, whenever the boat was under way – it had to be moving so that the bait spun as it was pulled through the water to look like a small fish. It was a good day – we caught about 20 mackerel which we strung on two lengths of string to make them easier for carrying.

By the time we had unloaded the lobsters and crabs into the keeping baskets near the shore and cleaned up the boat the pub was open and we were able to get a substantial ploughman's meal and settle down to rum and beer, cigarettes, singing and good talk. Eventually we took up our string of fish and wandered up the little footpath through the village with Trip. We had never met his family. This time we were honoured to be invited in. His wife

made us welcome and put the kettle on. As we chatted the 11 o'clock news came on the wireless, very faintly as the batteries were running down.

Suddenly we stopped talking and went closer to listen carefully as we heard, "Will all teachers from the following boroughs in London report back to their schools on Friday morning next". It was now late Wednesday night. The only way we could do it was to catch the *Cornish Riviera* at Helston early next morning. But Helston was twelve miles away, and the bus left Kennack Sands at 7 am!

We walked back by road and woke up the farmer's daughter, gave her our mackerel and begged her to call us as soon as it got light. We knew she would be up. Back at our tent we realised we had no water, no paraffin, no matches – and the remains of our last night's party were all around us. Somehow we slept amid the chaos, soon to be woken at dawn. There was no way we could wash. I couldn't even find my comb. We were still in last night's clothes covered in mackerel scales. Hurriedly we packed up everything, wrapped it all in the ground-sheet to be forwarded to Blackheath, and what we could carry we packed into and hung round our rucksacks. We just caught the bus, driven by the man we called the "mad driver". It was his habit to tease the Emmets by driving very fast up to the hotel in Mullian – to stop dead about six inches from the edge of the unprotected cliff.

This morning we asked him if there was any way we could get a drink of water.

"Never you mind, my dears," he said, and stopped his bus in Mullian village. "Come on you two," he encouraged us and took us into a cottage. "Make these dear people some tea," he said to his sister, "I'll be back for mine" – and he drove the bus off with its load of anxious passengers to collect more at Mullion Hotel, leaving us to our welcome cup of tea. By the time we were starting on our second cup he was back, leaving an even fuller bus load of frantic holiday makers to sit outside while he drank his. But we caught the train at Helston. The *Cornish Riviera* was pretty full of very clean and proper Headmasters and Headmistresses with their families – spick and span from their expensive hotels in Penzance. We found a couple of seats, dumped our rucksacks and went to have a very welcome wash, but there was little we could do about our fish scales or our hair.

When the train reached London we bought two newspapers, the *Times* and the *Daily Worker*, to find out what was happening. We were too dirty and smelly to go to Lyons, so we marched into the Ivy which was full of famous theatrical people, on the assumption that the richer people were, the less they would mind. It seemed to work well and we had a meal and read our papers. We had married just in time. War was imminent.