

Three – Living together

Our encounter had a dramatic effect on our lives. Without consulting each other, we broke with our relations. We did not want to miss this opportunity!

Paris – New York We agreed to see each other another weekend in Paris. "To check it out." We spent the weekend in the hotel, making love and telling each other the story of our life. She told me about her anorexia, her attempt at suicide, her use of drugs, her sexual experiences and her dependencies on doctors. "Doesn't it scare you?", she asked me. "A little", I said. "But I am glad you told me." She also told me that she was a demanding woman. I told her about my relations with women, the confusion my multiple relations had brought me in, and the solitude of my current life. We had smoked some joints and were tuning in to each other rapidly, physically and mentally. When the weekend came to its end, we had to decide whether to continue with each other. It took us about three hours over coffee to say "YES", committing. I left with the train, excited, with pain in my heart. Back home, I called #6 and told her 'things are going fast.' After a month, I saw #6 again, to exchange the little stuff we had of each other. I had made her suffer a lot, but I didn't want to feel guilty about it. My life had to go on. Yet, I told her that I still cared for her very much. Which was true, I still do, and I miss the intimacy that we had.

I was excited. She had everything. She had the spirituality and wittiness of #1. She had the sensuality of #2. The sexual experience of #3. She was as adventurous as #4. She had the liveliness and radiance of #5, and the sensitivity and need for intimacy as #6. What more could I wish for? There was only one problem. She enjoyed to be touched, but she could not touch. She would learn, in time.

Back in Amsterdam, I couldn't stand the thought of not seeing her for almost a month. Walking to my work, I suddenly got the idea of flying to New York to celebrate my birthday with her. She was delighted, and impressed I think. We had a lovely time. We walked in Central Park and made a wish. We had to keep silent about the wish, but for the both of us it was obvious what we wanted. We also visited the MOMA, where we felt very close looking at the paintings. In the evening, she dressed up and took me out for dinner. My birthday dinner. As a present, she gave me a pen and a photo of herself. I was impressed, and when I saw her undressing later in the hotel, the thought of having her as my wife occurred to me. Man and wife, in a classical style. Back in Amsterdam I called

her a number of times and we wrote each other letters. We were desperate to see each other.

I wrote: Reality How sweet it was to hear your voice again, after so many days. Telling me it is not a dream, but that our love is reality, waiting to be fulfilled. Being without you is hard. Hearing your voice is a sweet consolation. There are so many things I want to talk about with you. I tried to call you again, longing to hear your voice. It is so miraculous what we have that I sometimes can't believe it's true,..., I simply need you, I want you. One more week, we can manage.

Never, waiting seemed so hard. Time goes slowly, day by day. There is nothing I can write, nothing I can do to speed that up. My body is aching to be with you. It is only one more week.

She wrote: Joyful ..., I can't wait to see you – it seems rather lovely, like a twinkle, being just with you, discover more from you. Your "being" is beautiful. We are shy and I like it, but I can't wait to see what we will be when living together. I promise, I do not want to shock you by saying this.

I am so joyful and impatient for "US"! How can I tell you, such new feelings growing in my heart?

I have just been kissed by a little angel and that was you, pulling me along to go through the blue door into a new light, that neither you, neither me knows, what kind of light it is!

Let's be patient. (It's so hard!) Let's not hurry things. (It's so hard!) Just "LET IT BE"! And the rhythm of the truth will start getting in place. I am going to try to be very precautious, because in any case I could not stand shocking you or deceiving you.

She wrote: Moved ..., I'm feeling lonely without you. You called me this morning, it was wonderful to hear you. I cannot believe the state I am in now. Truly, it never happened to me in my life, this way. I'm astounded, I'm deeply moved. You turned me upside down. I suddenly feel a new maturity ... one I've never felt before, the one you probably have when you are in love. My body is quiet, at rest. And my mind is so turned up. I've got the "stage fright". My life is switching for good. I waited that time for so long, it seems unimaginable. I've got butterflies in my whole body, shivering like the leaves blown by the wind. You are the sunshine of my heart, the gentleness of love, the wildness of love, the precious one that I want to cherish. I am very impatient to get to know you now. I can't wait to be all over and done with my "social business" I'll have to face those coming weeks. I'll probably need your help. I can't wait to be in our "love nest". I guess that in the first months I'll have to do a couple of returns to Paris as far as that "social business" is concerned. It really is a drag, but I have to do it to feel comfortable and this has to be done the most efficient way.

..., you're the first man for which I have such feelings: this strong feeling that makes you desire a sharing of life in love. Love is for us. I can't wait to be with you, at ease, calm and happy. I can't wait to be close to your body, to your mind.

She wrote: Love ..., I love you. I'm so happy when I think of you. I can't wait for that wonderful life waiting for us. Life is going to cherish us and we were both hoping for that for many years in the depth of our hearts.

I cannot wait to see you, to be with you. I hope that life is going to be smooth enough to let us be together, just simply as our love is. Help me to be not too complicated. Help me to sort out all the practical things I have to face to be with you, darling. Just think of us and what we have to do to live together. Our love. I can only think of our love, how wonderful love is and how wonderful it is to be in love with a wonderful being – like you! My love, let me kiss you a lot, let me kiss you a lot, let me love you. Take care, you're so special, so wonderful. I love you.

Things went fast Things went fast, indeed. But we did it 'grand style', at least in the beginning.

When she returned from the States, I went to Paris to meet her. I remember she was too late at the station. I felt lost. Was it all nothing but a dream? But she only had some trouble with the car. Later in the evening, in a 'brasserie', I suddenly felt sick and I fainted. Again, the feeling of loosing everything overwhelmed me. But she was so sweet, wiping my face with cold water.

The next day we visited her family. Everybody was very nice. I was received as a new member of the family. I was considered 'cool' and 'clean'. They obviously thought I was the solution for her problems. And theirs, because for the last two years she had been living with her parents. Her sister assured me that she needed a quiet and simple life. Only her mother asked her if I was using drugs, because I was so calm.

The day after that, before I left for the south of France, where I had another conference, we spoke again of marriage. We agreed to do it. We were both excited. When I came back a week later, she had packed everything. Ready to move to Amsterdam. Her father had accompanied her to the station. He shook my hand and said: "I trust you will take good care of her." Nothing more needed to be said.

She wrote: Wife ..., yes, you are my dearest loveliest and loveliest darling. I feel so fulfilled at your side, I can't wait to have your name, to be your wife. I want to be yours. You're mine ... just you I love and nobody else but you! I want to be with one and another, in one another. I want to be with you, body and soul. My heart is magnificently loving you. Never have I been so happy to be loved by someone and to love. I love your whole being ..., I love your body ..., I love you ... Don't let me down. Never will I let you down. I am your wife.

Living in Amsterdam Arriving in Amsterdam, I was anxious about how she would like my house. Actually, she was a bit disappointed, she later confessed, that it was only a two-room apartment, and not a real house. Nevertheless, she liked the place, although she found it a little bare, without things showing my personal history. Later when she left, she said that the place had looked sinister.

Rightaway, she demanded a new bathroom, with a sink and a new shower. I agreed.

The next week we visited my family. My sister was at first opposed to this, because she had spent lots of time with #6. A little to my surprise, my sisters started telling her what a difficult person I was and how awful I could behave. But she just replied by stating: "I love him very much."

The week after that we rented a van and drove to Paris to get her stuff. Back in Amsterdam, we bought a number of closets and within a week all her stuff had found its place in the house. Sorry, apartment. I had written her already that I was difficult in allowing changes to the house, but to my surprise our ideas were quite compatible. Each day the place became more lovely. She renewed lots of things, in the kitchen for example, cleaned the woodwork and the walls, and we also bought a plant. My first plant in more than fifteen years. In the evenings we went out for a glass of wine, or drank a sambuca and smoked a joint. We were very much in love.

When we had done most of the work to install ourselves in the house, we started organizing the marriage. We selected rings. We went to the townhall to register. However, before we could register, she had to get a residence permit and explicit permission to marry from the police. This was a little more difficult than we thought. We had to spend hours of waiting at the police station and the townhall to get the paperwork done. We did it. Just in time to fix the date of the wedding before the summer holidays. This would be the most convenient time to invite the family.

In the second month, she did a ten-day course in Dutch. Learning Dutch was necessary, to be able to find work and to communicate more easily with the people around us. We spoke English with each other, which was fine at the time, but for my son it was very tiring and sometimes just too difficult. For shopping she did alright, but she was a bit lax and difficult to motivate to learn the language properly.

A few weeks before the wedding, when she got her residence permit, we went to the employment agency, to see if there was any work for her. Again, this was not so easy as we thought. She had to be able to speak Dutch, and take a course before she would have any chance. We got her subscribed, and she would probably have entered a course in the fall. We were well on our way.

We did not see many people. During the day I went to work. When I came home from work, she was usually waiting for me, excited to see me, kissing me everywhere.

She loved the neighbourhood, with all the little shops, terraces and people on the street. "Everybody seems to have vacation", she often said. "Except me", I used to say. The weather was lovely that period, and many times we went out to have a drink. Saturdays we went to the market to do the shopping. After that we drank a coffee or a beer. I loved that. We enjoyed life and each other. During the week she did all the shopping and all the domestic chores as well. I had a luxury life. Living together was beautiful.

There was one incident, that proved to be important later on. It was Friday evening. We were out of money, so we went to the cash machine, together. When

I had to type my PIN code, she was looking over my shoulders. I was reluctant to type the code. She felt I didn't trust her. She was upset. I apologized for my behavior. I did not expect her to abuse my card, but I felt uncomfortable with giving my code away. I know I made an error. It is one of the things she could not forget, that she criticized me for later. She may have been right about my attitude, but I was willing to change that, gradually.

Having lived a life as a solitaire for so long, it was quite a thing to learn how to share. The incident is an example of where I had a problem of allowing someone on what I considered as 'private space'. More in general, money, and how to deal with money was a problem.

When I met her, I had quite some money on my savings account. Going to Paris and New York, buying tickets for our holidays, buying the furniture, things for the house, a new shower, the preparations for the wedding, and in general our way of living, made my reserves disappear quickly. Since also her allowance from Paris stopped when she applied for her residence permit, our financial situation became a bit tight. I am used to having little money. In such a case, I just start living more economical. My worries about money, however, gave her a feeling of guilt whenever she bought something or, for example, even when she finished the last piece of cheese. But to be honest, it showed on my face. It wasn't my intention to restrict her, but just to be careful.

She wrote: Budget I've been thinking. You are right. I have never been careful with money – I have always lived like a "free little bird". I have never lived with anyone in the way to manage money. So let's learn together. I am asking you to be a little patient with me. Give me a budget and I'll stick to it. I'm totally aware and conscious of the fact of money. Let's be simple – please – do a budget for me. I want to solve this because I don't want this to ruin our life, because we love each other. And as soon as I'll work, if it happens, it will help ... And don't forget, I love you, I want to be yours and nobody else's!

Becoming Dutch We agreed to have a budget for shopping and her personal expenses. We opened a shared account for that purpose, so that she wouldn't have to ask me for money. In the meantime, I put the money weekly in a teacup. This worked fine. In addition, she had still some money on her own account. It was the first time I took financial responsibility for someone. We were not rich, evidently, but we should be able to manage. We were both willing to learn.

She was a beautiful girl and very lively. Everybody around me liked her. I was considered fortunate to have her. And indeed, I was proud. I was proud to have her as my wife. I was proud to give her my name, and I was looking forward to start a family with her, to live with her and have a child together. "I am here to stay", she said on my son's birthday. "I will become a Dutch girl."

A few weeks before the wedding we had a little crisis. I had a strange feeling when sending the cards to my family and friends, formally announcing our wedding. It was not really my style. She was nervous and called people in Paris, her aunt, her analyst and her ex-lover. They reassured her, I believe, by saying that a little stage-fright is a normal thing before a wedding. For some days

she thought about going to Paris for the weekend. I was reluctant to let her go, a little paranoid, afraid that the wedding would be postponed or cancelled. For a while her aunt called her daily, telling her how happy everybody was with the marriage.

Actually, she was nervous quite often. She had been taking neuroleptics, anti-depressiva, for several years. She also had been seeing an analyst for years. She stopped seeing the analyst when she came to Amsterdam, and she stopped taking the neuroleptics after a few weeks living with me. Instead, she took ordinary calming pills, in a light dose. When she became nervous, I usually tried to calm her. Making love often helped. Sometimes, I got nervous myself.

She wrote: Sorry How can I say "sorry"? I deeply love you, darling. You must know that I am very grateful for all you have done for me, for all you are giving to me, for having me in your life, for sharing your life with me. I'm proud you have chosen me. I know, I'm difficult. I complain a lot, but I have met the most wonderful man of my life: you. You are wonderful, all over, all inside. Stay close to me – that's all I want. I'll stay close to you because you are the one I love and with love ... forever. Please, don't judge me now – I'm particularly nervous at this enormous turn of my life. I want us to be happy and enjoy life together, and I am sure that is what is waiting for us – we deserve it! You, as much as me. I don't want to loose you because I love you. I want to give you my respect and don't worry ... I can be a wonderful girl, a women you have not yet expected, and this is the present I would like to offer you for life, my love.

The wedding The day before the wedding, the French and English family arrived. The English family, two uncles and two aunts, all of about my age, came for tea at our apartment. We talked and played music. The French family arrived by train. They were all very emotional and friendly. Again it was a beautiful day. Everybody loved Amsterdam. "She has never looked so well", her mother said to me. "The Dutch life does her good." In the evening we had dinner together. After that we went to a bar for a drink. We went home early. Running, to become calm. "How do you feel?", we asked eachother. We didn't have an answer. We didn't sleep very well that night.

The day of our wedding was also a lovely day. At nine she went to the hairdresser. At ten, I went to the hotel to meet her family. With her father, her aunt and her uncle, I walked to the town hall. The sun was shining. My family, my mother and my sister and her daughter were already waiting. About ten minutes later, #1, her partner and my son arrived. "You two look very much alike", said her uncle to my sister and #1. "That is the reason he went with her in the first place", my sister said, jokingly. Everyone was in a good mood. A little later the rest of the family arrived. Her mother and sister and her two brothers with their girlfriends. She had instructed me to tell her mother and sister how lovely they looked. So I did. "I must take care not to marry the wrong one", I said, hugging her sister. Also my younger sister with her husband and children arrived. Finally she came. She looked like a Parisien model, in a very tight dress, looking very anxious and nervous.

The ceremony was mostly in Dutch. Typical Amsterdam style, lax. #1's partner made an attempt at translating it in English. The marriage vow was in French, however. We were standing on a platform, that started rotating when we were to make our pledge. I felt a slight vertigo. After saying the "yes" (she said "oui") to each other, we were both almost in tears. (Were we?) I felt dizzy, we were married. From now on, we were living in another world.

She told me afterwards that her brothers took her in their arms and asked her whether she was happy. She said, she didn't know, so she didn't say anything.

I had arranged a boat to take us to the restaurant where the lunch would take place. Everyone enjoyed the view of the canals. And the cool air. I was complimented for having organized it.

At the restaurant, we unpacked the presents. We kissed and thanked everybody. We got beautiful things. The next day, our house looked lovelier than ever.

The restaurant was near a church. The carillon was playing all the time. We took care that everybody was happy. We did not pay much attention to each other. Why should we? We had a lifetime waiting.

Towards the end of the afternoon, everybody went home. The French family left first, then my family. Only the English branch remained to help us with our presents. Everybody had liked everybody, as they said. We agreed to have a reunion the next year.

At home, we opened another bottle of wine, unwilling to end the day. Then we took the English family to their hotel. Walking to the hotel, some old guy sitting in front of a cafe shouted: "You will never make it". I was annoyed, but didn't say anything. "He was right, that guy", she remarked later. Waiting for the family to pack, we took another drink and smoked a joint. The joint killed her right away. Also her uncle passed out. They drove us home and I carried her upstairs. I put her on the bed. Her uncle took a long time to say goodbye to her, and an even longer time to go to the toilet. I was wondering what the two of them were doing, but I decided not to interfere. It was a family affair. God knows what happened in the past.

The next day, we woke up with a hangover. She had a nausea. "Not exactly the erotic route", she joked on the telephone. That afternoon we made love, but there wasn't much difference with how it was before the wedding. We were slightly disappointed. What did you expect? To live in a completely different reality? Since the nausea continued, she did a pregnancy test. To my surprise it was positive. She got very nervous, and I phoned a doctor to have the test confirmed. The next morning, Sunday, the test was confirmed. She was pregnant. It was a love baby. She complained about the Dutch doctors and the primitive way everything was done here. That evening we informed our families. "That's fast", they said. Indeed, that was fast. Were we happy with it? Yes, I think so. But I don't know. We were still exhausted.