

The young couple huddled silently at opposite ends of their still new floral cotton sofa. Alice, her auburn mop in Sunday disarray, her robe, not the bridal pink silk, hanging disconsolately in the closet, but the brown nubby one, carelessly tied around her slimmish waist, gazed absently at the pile of seductive travel brochures on the teak coffee table, her mouth frozen in a pout. David, showered and shaved, prematurely thinning ash locks neatly combed, crisp in his seersucker Brooks Brothers-on-sale-robe, peered miserably at the business section of the Times.

This round, all on a account of a stupid spatula Alice fumed.

David, a passionate cook, had designed a corkboard for their tiny, Manhattan apartment kitchen. Each pot, pan and cooking utensil was united with its own special hook for hanging. Alice, whose lifetime habit of casually misplacing things suited her just fine, thank you, was thrilled if she could relocate a kitchen object somewhere in the kitchen and not in the bathroom. Needless to say, that Sunday morning, when David's favorite spatula for his delicious, made-from-scratch blueberry pancakes had disappeared, he was furious. And Alice, angry, defensive, groaned to herself, he's driving me cra-zy!

After a few beats, Alice shifted to the center of the couch, testing out the "let s move on" waters, piping up in a cheery voice, "Honey", listen to this: The owners of Knoll Farm announce the opening of their inn, in the magnificent Green Mountains of Vermont. A place of renewal, contentment,

great beauty, all home cooked meals included'.....and... it`s affordable."

“What do you think?”

“Whatever you want to do, baby,” David answered gruffly, not looking up from Lucent Technology. When he called her baby, that was a good sign, though. This particular tiff was history!

So, In mid-July, leaving behind the stifling, suffocating air of their asphalt city, the couple headed to Vermont, where, Alice hoped, the grass would always greener -- at least for one week. What a royal greeting; a brilliant, New England sky, the color of Alice`s turquoise ring, endless, rolling hills, splashed with lovely, mid-summer wildflowers, clay-red barns, and miles and miles of majestic, verdant backdrops, the gloriously Green Mountains.

The owners of Knoll farm, Anne Day, gracious, sturdy, gold plait down her back, milk-splattered jeans, open, curious face (forties, Alice guessed) and Frank Day, (fiftyish?), solemn, in faded overalls, looking down at his tall, mud caked boots, hints of former handsomeness in his deeply lined, deeply burnt sea captain kind of face, invited Alice and David to roam the farm. A cheerful menagerie of hens, chickens, pigs, geese, sleepy cows, graceful horses and enthusiastic sheep dogs entertained the pair until supper, a most delicious, home cooked and, of course, home grown feast.

That night, cozy in their plumped up country bed, the two city mice

reflected on their first day on the lovely farm.

“Baby, the strangest thing happened. What do you make of this? After dinner, while you were talking with the other guests, Frank Day showed me his wood shed; lots of furniture, all designed and built from scratch -- beautiful stuff. This guy is a real craftsman. And then, he stepped outside, looked up at the stars and said, ‘When will it all be over, when will it all be over?’ What do you think he meant? I felt it would have been rude to ask him. After all, we just met today.”

Alice, lulled by the crickets, whispering promises and the hoot owl, chanting, Renoooo-al, Renooooal murmured, “That is strange – it just doesn’t make any sense” and fell promptly asleep.

Day two, after a sumptuous breakfast, served by a pale and oddly distracted Ann Day, no Frank in sight, an exhilarating hike up and down the nearby, locally renowned Mount Horrid, complete with rushing waterfalls, ~~gorgeous vistas and funny name.~~ *frag.* As the blood orange sun was setting, the hikers returned, rosy and relaxed, hungry for robust farm food, astonished to find a swarm of state troopers, like creatures from outer space, descending on their bucolic scene, combing the ponds, joined by blood hounds, growling, sniffing, pawing at the earth. Had there been a murder? A prized animal drowned? What was going on? All the guests were crowding onto the porch of the white, clapboard inn, surrounding a distraught Anne Day, clutching her berry-splotched apron, her serene, grey eyes now wild with fear.

“Frank is missing”, she said quietly, “Since late last night,” *and she* disappeared into the white house.

By dinner time, the news was out – he had been found, not far from his favorite trail by his teenaged son, throat slashed, self-inflicted!

Alice, David, stunned like everyone else, haunted by Frank’s prophetic “When will it all be over?”, tried to piece together the puzzle of his suicide with scraps of information from the other guests: Former Bostonian, furniture maker, much in demand, met Anne, farm born and bred, in college. Opened the farm five years ago. Sank into deep, crushing depression after the move, greatly missing his former life. *He felt* Isolated, increasingly in his own unreachable shell. Anne, desperate, begged him to build the wood shed. He had tried to kill himself several years ago but everyone thought he was just fine now and that the medication had worked.

That night, their last night at Knoll Farm, closed until further notice, Alice and David huddled close, unable to sleep. A fine life – we all get deeply depressed, Alice thought, realizing that neither one of them would ever understand the depths of Frank’s pain....and wondering, had David said something that might have triggered this horror? She would never ask him, she was sure of that

Sounds of bull frogs, raucus, wildly leaping from lily pad to lily pad, like crazed witches, a coven conspiracy, resounded in the chilly night air, a mocking good bye to those seeking paradise

Back in New York, Alice and David wandered the wilting, humid streets of the city, haunted by the surreal dream turned nightmare of their vacation.

Hand in hand, pensive, grateful, they criss-crossed Central Park, walking east to the river, pausing for air conditioning relief <sup>by going into</sup> ~~from -- where else?~~  
Bloomingdales.

Alice spotted it first, in Housewares, the perfect spatula: Graceful, sloping sides, firm grip of a handle, a center that could curve, flip over, like a somersaulting acrobat, and.. made of no-scratching, stainless-steel, a dishwasher safe, all crud removing wonder.

“My gift to you, David. No -- our gift to each other.”

“Shall we put it in the top drawer of the cabinet?”, David asked softly, back home, without his usual reference to the `refuge for the homeless`.

With a sure grasp, Alice reached over to the pegboard, arm extended in front, leg extended in back, reaching, reaching, like a ballet dancer, about to leap. With great tenderness, she placed the new, shiny occupant firmly on the second hook from the left.

Years later, thinking about her life with David, its `zigs and zags, ups and downs, highs and lows, Alice realized that the brief, post Knoll Farm moment in that small, New York kitchen, was for her, a defining moment -- the real beginning of her marriage.