

CHAPTER TEN

1970 TO 1973

Living in Peace

*For everything there is a season, and a
time for every matter under heaven:*

... a time to weep, and a time to laugh

... a time to be born, and a time to die

☞ ECCLESIASTES 3

HOUSEWARMING

In 1970, Nanny has a big surprise in store for the family. Like a young student who leaves home to live in her own apartment, Nanny at age 79 moves out of Lorne's home and rents an apartment in a seniors' residence on Rochester Street in front of the High School of Commerce.

The family helps her to settle. She doesn't have very much to move. The successive moves over the course of her lifetime have reduced her possessions to her bedroom furniture. Gertrude provides her with household articles and Nanny soon gives her apartment a very personal character. When I ask her granddaughter to describe the apartment to me, she tells me:

A nice little apartment, neat and tidy with paintings, usually something up on the easel and a few plants. A neat, little apartment.¹

Marie-Louise finally has her own place and everybody observes the tremendous joy that she feels.

*I think it's the first time that I saw her truly happy.*²

I still recognize just the joy that she felt in finally being on her own, just as if she finally reached the goal that she always wanted to do, not to be dependent on somebody else at some point. She wasn't there for very long ... but she LOVED that time.³

But on 28 December of that same year, a cloud comes to shade her happiness. Her sister Claire-Hilda passes away in Hanmer. Marie-Louise goes to Hanmer with Gertrude and her husband to attend the funeral. She says goodbye to her "twin gossip," her confidant, the little sister that she had seen born with so much joy and that she couldn't have imagined dying before her.

A TIME TO ENJOY LIFE

Upon her return from Hanmer, Marie-Louise's social life becomes organized around a new circle of friends and she spends even more time on her creative activities.

She started going to the movies with her girlfriends in the building, and taking painting lessons, then pottery classes and really, you know, it was a blossoming, it was the youth she never had.⁴

Her relationship with her family takes another turn. It is she, now, who receives them.

I remember that she welcomed me in her apartment. She was so proud to show me all her things.⁵

Her grandchildren visit her regularly and if, per chance, other building residents take the elevator at the same time, Marie-Louise does not deprive herself of the pleasure to proudly introduce them.

She would be so happy if somebody came in the elevator 'cause it would be somebody else she could introduce me to. And she had quite a few grandchildren and I am sure they all got the same treatment if they would go and visit. Oh yeah, she was very happy to show off her grandchildren.⁶

Members of the family surround her with great care as she always did for them. On Sunday nights, Lorne comes to pick her up, takes her to his home for dinner and brings her back at the end of the evening. Her granddaughters help with her household chores and Marie-Louise, as always, expresses her gratitude with little treats much appreciated.

I remember her apartment because I had gone to wash her floors and she had given me a box of chocolates. My God, that impressed me! A whole box of chocolates just for me! Oh wow!⁷



Wedding of Michael Ray, grandson of Marie-Louise, 21 July 1973.
Nanny is to the left of the groom.

ARTIST

Marie-Louise continues to partake in activities organized by the Good Companions' Club that she had joined a few years earlier. But the activity she always prefers and that she comes back to time and again is, without doubt, painting in oils. She has installed her easel in her living room and paints, alone and inspired, in the peace of her apartment.

She had taken up painting and gave my parents a painting she made, that, at the time, I felt was spectacular. She was very proud of it, and was happy that we were impressed with her work.⁸

Some of her paintings still adorn the houses of her children and grandchildren. They are signed “L. Ray.”



Painting, flower pot

A TIME TO DIE

In the summer of 1973, Marie-Louise learns that one of her granddaughters, Louise Mantha, is moving to Japan for a few years with her husband. In mid August, at the moment of departure, Nanny’s reaction takes her breath away.

*The whole family came to the airport to say goodbye. And when I arrived at my grandmother, I kissed her and she said, "I will never see you again." And I said, "For heaven's sake, Nanny, why do you say that?"*⁹

They say that when death is near, we get premonitory signals: a dream, thoughts linked to death, the desire to express feelings kept silent until then or an urgent need to settle legal affairs. Perhaps this separation from a granddaughter that she loves tenderly and the great distance that will prevent them from visiting from time to time awakens in Marie-Louise a portent of her imminent death. Installed in Japan, Louise starts corresponding with her grandmother. Nanny attempts to answer her in spite of her limited abilities in written communication. Louise notes with tender astonishment that her Nanny is simply illiterate.

*She was illiterate! The letters she wrote to me were all phonetic. She didn't know how to spell.*¹⁰

In the month of October following Louise's departure, Marie-Louise learns that she must go to hospital for an operation. At the moment of leaving for the hospital, she feels anxious.

Mum and I went to pick her up at her apartment to bring her to the hospital. When we got there she said, "Christina, if I don't come home, you can have my TV" ... And mum kept saying, "No, no. You will be back on Monday. Don't worry about it." She said, "Just in case, this plant needs this and don't forget my poinsettia," and this and that and she kept insisting — and THAT I will never forget because she would never get compulsive. Somehow she knew.¹¹

During the operation, she has a heart attack. When notified of the situation, the family rushes to her bedside.

D: Dad [Joe] and Gertrude for sure stayed with Nanny in hospital. ... Her heart was failing. So they went and spent the night with her. And she died and then Dad came over to my house to tell me that she had died.

C: And I am sure he was terribly affected.

D: He was! He was! I did not expect that. I didn't expect her to die. She was going in for a D & C.¹² ... She had congestive heart failure. ... So her heart couldn't take the anaesthetic.¹³

Now that Nanny is deceased, Diane is pleased that she had a last chance to spoil her a little before her departure for the hospital.

I remember that I was very happy that I had brought her that beautiful plant because she was going in to be operated on and I thought, "Why wait till she is in the hospital? I will give it to her now." And I am so glad I did because she died! ... I was so happy because she was so thrilled with that and I was remembering that present you know [she is referring to the incident with the perfume bottle]. I was trying to make up for so many years. But that did it because it was for no reason. And I just drop by, out of the blue, brought her this beautiful Chrysanthemum. She was very, very touched, excited. I felt really good.¹⁴

On 23 October 1973 at the age of 82, Marie-Louise Labelle née Bouchard passes away. In Notre Dame Cemetery on Montreal Road, her tombstone reads:

RAY
Marie L. Bouchard
Wife of Joseph Ray
1891–1973

Engraved in the stone, in capital letters, is the name Ray, the alias that she and Joseph adopted to hide their love. And in spite of the fact that Joseph never officially married her, the inscription attests to her full right to the title of wife: “Wife of Joseph Ray.” No mention is made of her adoptive name, Labelle. She returns to the earth with her maiden name of Bouchard. She has come full circle.

One day when Gertrude and her daughter Suzanne visit Marie-Louise’s grave, Gertrude whispers, “*She lied all the way to her grave!*”¹⁵



Grave of Marie-Louise Bouchard Labelle