

Part One

CHAPTER ONE

Politics is often a millstone around democracy's neck, and it had become a noose around mine. But I had an escape plan. I was nearly free. Granted, I'd botched my first attempt. Or rather, I'd been undone by an eleventh-hour shocker completely beyond my control. But that was then. In a day or two, I'd be in the clear. Really.

I was seriously asleep when my BlackBerry chirped. When my eyes could finally recognize our alphabet, I read "B. Stanton" on the screen. Excellent. I'd hoped never to see that name on my BB ever again. Yet here it was. A call from the Liberal leader's slippery Chief of Staff seldom sent me to my happy place. Just a day or two more.

I spoke quietly, trying not to waken Lindsay beside me. I need not have worried. When she slept, she went straight to the bottom.

"Daniel Addison," I sighed.

"Is that you, Addison?"

"Uh, no Bradley, I just open with that name to confuse callers. I'm actually Tiger Woods," I replied, no longer caring about pissing him off on my way out.

"Up yours!" he roared. "You've got call display. Why can't you just pick up and say 'Hi Bradley'? You knew it was me calling."

"You mean 'You knew it was I calling,'" I lectured. Too often, I corrected grammar on instinct, without thinking. "And 'up yours' is just so . . . last century."

“Fuckin’ pedant. I’ll be gla—”

“And yes, I do have call display,” I interrupted. “But I was praying it might be a wrong number from, say, a Bratislav Stanton, or perhaps his brother Benito. But no such luck.”

I waited for him to speak but he didn’t. So I just kept going. This was kind of fun.

“So what’s up?” I continued. “Wait, don’t tell me, you’re recruiting for *Machiavelli: The Musical* and I made the shortlist. I’m touched, really I am.”

“Yeah, that’s just hilarious, ass-wipe.”

Where was he getting these archaic boys’ camp epithets?

“Listen,” he went on. “Have you seen the *Globe* this morning?”

“Bradley, it’s 6:45. I barely have vital signs at this hour. Why?”

“There’s another fuckin’ story about you and your crazy mountain man. Are you still working the gallery for these puff pieces? ’Cause if you are, I’ll have your nuts,” he threatened.

“Um, yours seem to be quite large enough already, Bradley. But before you have an aneurysm, I had nothing to do with the story, whatever it is. And I’ve not pitched a single journo since the government fell,” I said, and meant it.

“Yeah, well, the piece says your hairy friend might run again. I’m waiting for you to tell me that’s not true. I’m waiting for you to tell me you’re both heading back to your academic sandbox. I don’t want to see either of you on the Hill again. I’m just so tired of that ‘holier than thou’ shit you and McLintock were peddling,” Stanton barked.

“Of course you’re right, Bradley. Putting politics together with honesty, transparency, and the national interest, it’s an outrage bordering on treason,” I sneered. “Now you listen. Don’t get your boxers bunched up. I can tell you that neither Angus nor I has any plans to make any plans to return to politics. We didn’t expect to be there in the first place, and I certainly have no desire to go back. I was trying to get out when all this started, remember? So I’m done, and hearing your warm and caring voice again clinches the deal.”

I heard the click as he closed his cell. What a jerk.

Noose or not, the political junkie in me still needed my morning fix. So in a semi-comatose stupor, I tipped myself out of bed and padded to the front door, my fingers twitching for the newspapers. The first faint traces of morning light angled into the second-storey boathouse apartment and pooled on the hardwood floor.

Outside on the porch the papers lay rolled and waiting, just out of reach from the warmth, and shall we say traction, of the front hall. You've heard of black ice – that treacherous and nearly invisible glassy layer that forms on roads when certain meteorological conditions are met. Well, the McLintock boathouse has a similar phenomenon known locally as "porch ice." With no eaves-trough, the melting snow on the roof drips onto the porch, only to freeze when the sun drops. Angus had mentioned this danger to me in his typical engineer's dialect, noting something about the floorboards' coefficient of friction dropping asymptotically to nearly zero. Right, asymptotically. So when I slipped out the front door to fetch the paper, I literally "slipped" out the front door.

In life-threatening situations, the "fight or flight" instinct kicks in. Without consulting me, my body chose "flight," in the truest sense of the word, so I was compelled to go along for the ride. I managed to sustain a life-saving hold on the doorknob, my only tether to earth, as my foot left the icy porch floor in a hurry. Now I'm not what you would call coordinated . . . at all. Yet I somehow landed back on the porch without serious injury, my shimmying feet eventually coming to rest more or less under me. But naturally, my momentum slammed the door shut. Scratch that. Locked the door. Think bank vault, or Fort Knox. So there I was, marooned on my own front porch at 6:45 in the morning, the frigid day after Christmas. Did I mention that I was naked? No pants, so no pockets, so no keys.

Bare hands and faces are quite accustomed to braving the harsh temperatures of winter. Other parts of the male anatomy, not so much. I felt December's arctic grip clamp down on my . . .

situation. Like pushing an elevator button that's already lit, I tried the doorknob, oh, fourteen or fifteen times just to confirm with each attempt that the door was indeed still locked. It was. I then decided I had two choices. I could simply bang on the door and face the unbridled humiliation of waking Lindsay to rescue me, or I could pry open, and crawl through, the narrow side window next to the porch. Easy call.

I slid open the window without incident, even on my frictionless bare feet. I'd not thought it possible to be any colder than I already was, until my bare chest touched the window sill. It was aluminum. When I had shoehorned myself halfway through the deceptively small opening, the "humiliation in front of Lindsay" scenario was looking pretty good. But things were going so well with her, with us, I decided that breaking into my own apartment, naked, was worth it.

I kicked my legs gracefully, almost balletically, scraped through, and landed on the hallway floor, my forehead coming to rest on, er . . . Lindsay's bare feet. As I looked up, I saw that "bare" applied not just to her feet. She was holding her stomach and quivering. She was making a Herculean effort to keep her sides from splitting wide open. I was not blind to the humour in all of this, but I did think her hysterics took it a tad too far. In time, she gathered herself.

"I often find the door works quite well also," she deadpanned.

"Yes, well, I was a C-section baby so I'm drawn to windows," I quipped without missing a beat. I jumped to my feet to stand next to her, affecting casual indifference, as if nothing had happened. Tough to sell, with hypothermic convulsions, full-body abrasions, and a shrunken . . . ego. She shivered once, standing so close to my icy body, then headed back to bed. To complete my tribute to the Keystone Kops, the rolled-up newspapers still lay on the porch, mocking me through the window.

After a scalding twenty-minute shower, I returned to bed with the newspapers and all the nonchalance I could muster. Lindsay lay beside me, apparently back in the trough of deep sleep.

Boxing Day is one of my favourite days of the year. The chaos of Christmas is over, and the real relaxing begins. Because of the holiday, the papers were thinner than usual, but the story Bradley had called about actually appeared in both the *Cumberland Crier* and the *Globe and Mail*. I hadn't been completely honest with *Darth* Bradley. I knew that André Fontaine, staff writer for our local paper, the *Crier*, was working on a feature and had hoped to get broader placement of it. He couldn't have done much better than our national newspaper.

I propped myself up on my pillows, taking care not to shake the bed unduly, and opened the *Globe*. Four photos accompanied the story. There was a shot of Professor Angus McLintock receiving a teaching award from the U of O Engineering Society. Another showed him sitting in *Baddeck 1*, the hovercraft he'd designed and built in the boathouse workshop below me. Yet another photo, taken just outside the House of Commons, featured Angus flanked by yours truly and Muriel Parkinson, whose smile actually made her look younger than her eighty-one years. Finally, there was a stock photo of disgraced former Finance Minister and Cumberland-Prescott MP, the Honourable Eric Cameron, likely taken after presenting his last federal budget and well before the cataclysm of a couple of months ago.

Lindsay stirred beside me, then was still again.

It was surreal to see my own name in a *Globe and Mail* headline.

MCCLINTOCK AND ADDISON – CUTTING A NEW PATH IN POLITICS

It was a bit over the top in my view. Then there was the subhead to fill in the holes in the headline.

BEHIND THE PARTNERSHIP THAT BROUGHT DOWN A GOVERNMENT

Please. It made us sound so much more purposeful and calculating than we had actually been. Really, I'd had very little to

do with it all. The Tories had gambled that the snowstorm of the decade would maroon most MPs in their ridings. It was Angus who had rocketed up the frozen Ottawa River in *Baddeck 1* all the way to Parliament Hill. I was just a spectator in the gallery when he burst onto the floor of the House, his wild grey hair and swirling beard in full fright, just in time to cast the deciding vote. But like the intoxicating aroma that often leads me three blocks out of my way to the nearest Cinnabon outlet, the headline and subhead are intended to seize your attention.

I settled in to read the piece. Lindsay still looked as if she were asleep beside me but her roving hands beneath the comforter told a different story. Focus, Daniel, focus. André's story covered the whirlwind of the last two and a half months, including my abrupt resignation from my speech-writing gig in the Liberal Leader's office and my guilt-driven promise on my way out to find a Liberal candidate to run in my new home riding of Cumberland-Prescott. Never mind that it was the safest Conservative seat in the land.

As I feared, André revealed the bargain I had struck with my new landlord, Angus McLintock. I'd admitted nothing in my interview, but honest Angus had freely confessed he agreed to let his name stand as the no-hope Liberal sacrificial lamb only after I promised to teach his English for Engineers class, a quadrennial duty he absolutely loathed. I was surprised to see that André had included a nice quotation from my PhD thesis supervisor noting how pleased he was that I'd agreed to join the English faculty at Ottawa U.

Lindsay's sub-sheet ministrations moved quickly from distracting to arousing, but I had almost finished the story. The hint of a smile on her tranquil face confirmed that she was not in the throes of some strange, yet wholly satisfying, sleep disorder.

"Just a couple more paragraphs, Linds, and I'm all yours. I'm just getting to the good part."

"Me too," she whispered, still smiling.

She redoubled her efforts as if I'd said nothing at all, which,

frankly, worked out pretty well for me.

André had some fun with the leather-studded late-campaign stunner, describing how the wildly popular incumbent MP and Finance Minister Eric Cameron inadvertently went public with his S&M secret. You don't often see words like "alligator clip" and "crotchless rubber suit" living in the same sentence alongside "Finance Minister." So I savoured the moment. Even Muriel made it into the article. André described her as the spirited eighty-something Liberal warhorse who had stood for the Liberals against the Tory tide in C-P for five elections in a row. Nicely put. I wondered how Lindsay's grandmother would take the "warhorse" reference, before deciding she'd probably wear it with pride.

By this time, Lindsay had shed any pretence of sleep and thrown herself into her work. She was quite good at it, too. My concentration flagged as I tried to make it to the end of the article while also thinking hard about baseball. And hockey, and football. Did I mention baseball? Almost there. Just a few more paragraphs. Bear down, Daniel. Down.

The article couldn't quite capture the full impact of Angus McLintock's stunning upset and his honest, forthright, and refreshing approach to public service. Yet it was all true. Against all odds, against more than a century of local political tradition, and definitely against the wishes of Angus McLintock, it was all true. Despite outward appearances of a carefully orchestrated grand plan, we'd simply been lurching from one issue to the next, trying to do the right thing. Who could have foreseen Angus McLintock's Midas touch? I certainly hadn't.

The last line of the feature really said it all.

"With the government defeated and another election looming, the burning questions are: Will Angus McLintock seek re-election for a job he never wanted in the first place? And will Daniel Addison still be at his side?"

“No and no,” I intoned out of nowhere, in a louder voice than I’d intended.

Lindsay clearly wasn’t taking no for an answer, and launched into new techniques well beyond my thin playbook. I do have my limits. I jettisoned the paper as if it were on fire.

An hour later, when we’d both finished, the *Globe* story I mean, Lindsay set down the paper.

“Well? Did André nail it?” she asked.

“He got the history right, but he’s got the future all wrong,” I replied. “As far as I’m concerned, Angus and I are heading back to the peace and quiet of the university. He didn’t want to win. I didn’t want him to win. The collapse of the government just means we can now go back to our regularly scheduled lives.”

Lindsay smiled and looked down. I thought I might even have detected a faint shake of her head.

“I’m with Grandma. I think Angus was surprised to discover that he actually liked being an MP. And I think you actually quite liked being his EA.”

“Despite what Muriel and you believe, I think I know Angus pretty well. He will not run again,” I concluded. “You can flip us both over and grab the barbecue sauce, we’re done.”

We lay in peace for a time.

“What a wonderful few weeks it’s been,” Lindsay sighed and rested her head on my chest. No one before her had ever rested her head on my chest. I liked it.

December had certainly packed a punch, and I don’t just mean weather-wise. When the government collapsed, we found ourselves with some time on our hands as the Governor General tried to figure out what to do. The government fell, but it didn’t automatically mean another election would immediately be called. The GG had another option to consider, particularly since Canadians had endured an election just over two months ago. She could ask the Liberals to try to form a government with the support of the New Democratic Party. But that would be like

asking the Hatfields and the McCoys to make nice and move in together. Not bloody likely, but worth a try. Neither party had the seats to survive without the support of the other. So our fearless leader sat down with the NDP Leader and for the last two weeks, they'd been trading horses, trading insults, and nearly trading blows.

Twice the discussions broke down. The first time, the NDP Leader stomped away from the table when our guy refused even to consider a thirty-year-old NDP plank, nationalizing the banking system. It was a non-starter. To get him back to the table, we apparently offered a compromise, agreeing that a Liberal government would strengthen the regulatory powers of the long-neutered Foreign Investment Review Agency. Then three days ago, our enraged leader was said to have thrown an eraser at his NDP counterpart. I've seen the Liberal leader in the heat of a temper tantrum. I'm glad only an eraser had been in reach and not a stapler, let alone a fax machine. It all fell apart over the demand that at least a couple of NDP MPs sit in the proposed Liberal Cabinet. I could understand why the NDP would expect a seat or two at the Cabinet table if they were going to prop up a Liberal government. Unfortunately, I was not invited to the negotiations. Bradley Stanton was running the show. Bradley wouldn't recognize a principle if one landed squarely on his crotch. As for the NDP's Cabinet demand, our leader exhausted all the appropriate clichés (*over my dead body, when hell freezes over, etc., etc.*) and reached for the eraser. After bouncing it off the NDP Leader's forehead, he found there really wasn't much left to talk about. The two negotiating teams gathered up their toys and headed home. It was Christmas Eve by then, yet neither leader was in the gift-giving mood. The Governor General was expected to announce her decision on how to proceed on December 27, giving the political parties, and the nation for that matter, a brief Christmas reprieve from the political manoeuvring.

While much of that was playing out, Lindsay and I had escaped to Quebec City for a four-day break. If you're with the right

person, at the right moment in a romance, nothing deepens a relationship like four days strolling through the snow-filled streets of old Quebec. I swear I did not think for even one moment of the political maelstrom we had helped to create and that was now presumably raging in the nation's capital. I couldn't. Lindsay and I connected on a whole new level while in that beautiful city. Without romanticizing it too much, it seemed more a meeting of minds and hearts than anything else, although deep and long discussions were punctuated by the breathless meeting of more tangible parts. When we returned to Cumberland, Lindsay promptly moved into the boathouse with me. It was the most wonderful Christmas gift I'd ever received.

Angus had spent his holiday break in the workshop putting the finishing touches on *Baddeck 1*, the now famous homemade hovercraft that had brought down a government. I'd seen very little of him since Lindsay and I had returned, but as I climbed the outside stairs to the apartment above, I spied through the workshop window that the hovercraft was finally varnished so the blue paint gleamed.

Yesterday had been wonderful. Christmas morning always has a special feel to it. The streets had been deserted as Lindsay and I drove to pick up Muriel, before returning to open gifts and wade through the turkey fumes at the McLintock house. Peter and Pete2, two pierced and tattooed punk rocker engineering students, and our only campaign volunteers, made a brief appearance, on leave from their own family celebrations in Cumberland. In true Christmas spirit, Peter had attached a jingle bell to one of his cheek piercings while Pete2 had reinforced his red and green frosted mohawk with enough mega-hold gel to support a small sprig of mistletoe that hung perfectly above and in front of his forehead. Nice.

Angus did not once raise politics but outdid himself as merry host. Well, as merry as a crusty Scot can be. He fussed over Muriel as never before and made sure she was settled in a comfortable

chair before he passed out the gifts arranged under the tree in the window. It helped that he bears a striking resemblance to Santa Claus in street clothes, although I doubt Santa carried sawdust and sandwich crumbs in his beard, let alone spoke through such a thick Scottish accent.

Angus clearly took delight in giving gifts, despite his curmudgeonly demeanour. He'd obviously given heartfelt thought to each of the gifts he presented. To Muriel, he gave the final type-written manuscript of his late wife's last book. Muriel had been a great admirer of Marin Lee's writing, long before she knew Angus had been her husband. She was moved to glistening eyes by the gesture. On almost every page, there were notes in Marin's own hand in the margins. Angus had built and varnished an ornate maple box, with a lid and latch that housed the manuscript perfectly.

For the two Petes, Angus had somehow secured two official lapel pins of the mace of Canada's Parliament that must be worn by MPs to allow them access to the House of Commons. I have no idea how he'd gotten his hands on two extras. Using his soldering skills, Angus had fashioned each mace pin into what looked like a big safety pin so they could be worn as body piercings for special occasions. Angus warned them not to show up on Parliament Hill wearing them or the Commissionaires might seize their pins and "escort" them off the premises.

When Lindsay opened the very old Walter Duff sketch of the Canadian Senate Angus had found for her, she just shook her head in surprise and locked him in a bear hug. Lindsay was doing her Master's in political science and her thesis was on the future of the Senate. She was bucking the prevailing wisdom and felt strongly that the Senate could actually become the chamber of second sober thought that it was originally envisaged to be. The sketch was a beautiful piece of art in a simple and classy black frame. She was touched.

As for me, I unwrapped a mint-condition, signed first edition of Robertson Davies's novel *Leaven of Malice*, the only one of his

great works to have won the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour. I have no idea how Angus had known, but this was the only Davies novel I didn't own in a first edition.

I don't know who was more pleased, all of us who had just opened absolutely perfectly chosen gifts or Angus himself, as our unalloyed pleasure washed over him.

Having passed all the gifts under the tree to us, Angus eventually got around to opening my gift to him. He looked at it for such a long time I began to worry. Then he raised his eyes to mine and mouthed, "I thank you." No sound came with his words.

It was a framed photograph taken at Baddeck in Cape Breton in 1918. In the foreground, a dock juts into Baddeck Bay. Dominating the right-hand side of the photograph, Alexander Graham Bell stands with his back to the camera. He cuts a fine figure in tweed knickers and a poor-boy cap. He gazes out towards the bay watching as his hydrofoil, the *HD-4*, races above the waves on its ladder blades towards the world water speed record it would own for more than a decade. Later that night as I sat at my – rather our – kitchen table in the dark counting my blessings, I saw Angus trudging through the snow towards the boathouse, the Bell photo under his arm. Fifteen minutes after he'd entered the workshop below, I heard five faint hammer blows as a finishing nail was driven into the wooden wall so Bell could watch not only his beloved *HD-4*, but also stand guard over *Baddeck 1*.

Enough reminiscing. We'd both finished the *Globe* and the *Crier* and really had no excuse left for still being in bed at that hour. Lindsay leapt up first, newspapers flying everywhere, and threw on a T-shirt and sweat pants. A minute later she was standing in the centre of the living room holding her new Duff sketch and eyeing each wall in turn.

"How about over the bookcase?" she proposed, holding it up against the wall.

"Done!" I replied. "Much better than the poker-playing dogs I had in mind."

Long a believer in using the right tool for the job, I jumped up to swing a heavy saucepan to embed the picture hanger in the drywall. It took me nine swings to make contact once with the nail. I had a much higher batting average hitting my thumb. As for location, I'd have let her suspend it from the refrigerator door if she'd wanted to. Hanging her Christmas present from Angus on the wall, on our wall, seemed to codify that we were actually living together. I liked that too . . . a lot.

We spent the rest of the day squished together on the couch reading, except for about forty-five minutes late in the afternoon when we were squished together on the couch not reading. I was immersed in my signed first edition of *Leaven of Malice*, marveling at how Davies strung together so many luminous sentences. Lindsay was engrossed in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*.

At 6:00-ish, I kissed her on the forehead, descended the boat-house stairs, and ambled up the snowy trail to Angus's front door. I figured he'd spent enough time alone over his first Christmas break without Marin. I knocked.

"You ready?" I asked as he opened the door.

"Aye, but are you?" He let me pass and closed the door on the winter wind.

He was wearing denim overalls above a bright orange Buchanan tartan flannel shirt. It took my eyes a moment to adjust. I'm not kidding. In concert with the chaos of his hair and beard, it put him in the running for the eighth wonder of the world. He took his place at the table next to the window with the frozen Ottawa River only just visible in the fading light. I sat opposite and palmed a black pawn in one hand and a white in the other beneath the table. He chose and I handed him his black pawn. I much prefer playing white anyway.

Angus seemed distracted but was a skilled enough player to brood on some other subject while still dismantling me on the chess board, whereas I needed to devote all my cerebral energy to the game to avoid spectacular blunders that often spelled defeat in fewer than ten moves. We settled into a standard

opening and the familiar rhythm of the game. Time to focus.

“I know I warned you about the ice on the porch, laddie, but I may not have mentioned that there is in fact a spare key to the apartment hanging beneath the railing opposite the door,” Angus said, his face expressionless, his eyes trained on the board, but with a twinkle germinating.

I sighed.

“Fantastic. That’s just great. How much did you see?” I asked, mortified.

“Oh, I didnae come upon the scene until your hindquarters were lodged in the hall window with your legs windmillin’ out of control like a . . . well, like a windmill out of control. An uncommon, even startlin’ sight at dawn’s first light, it was. It fair put me off my oatmeal.”

“You might at least have tried to help me. I might have been hurt,” I whined.

“Aye. Well, you also might have worn pyjamas. They’re all the rage these days. Even I wear them. Och, calm yourself, professor. I was halfway out the door to render assistance when you managed to wriggle through.” Angus was smiling now, but still staring at the board. “I might have come to your aid sooner but it took me a moment or two to find my camera. But damned if I could lay my hands on the tripod. I almost had you in the lens when your flappin’ feet disappeared through the window and I heard you thump to the floor, even from this distance. So of course I retreated discreetly, as you would have done for me.”

He was enjoying this a little too much so I said nothing, not wanting to encourage him.

“Mate in three,” Angus announced.

Great. I confirmed his claim in an instant and toppled my king in surrender.

We played four games. Three decisive McLintock victories, but I managed a draw in the fourth game. Angus refilled his single malt and handed me another Coke before draping himself on the chintz couch. I reclined as much as I could in my

extraordinarily uncomfortable arrowback chair at the chess board. It's no wonder I lost, the seat was so hard I'd had no feeling in my legs since halfway through our second game.

"So you know what happens tomorrow, I suppose." I inched towards the issue.

"I still read the papers. I see our feckless leader has sent the NDP packin'. I held out little hope for a coalition but it would have been interestin'. I'm just not sure it would have been good for the country."

"Well, I figure it's a moot point now. The GG will probably drop the writ tomorrow and it's back to the polls we go, whether the voters like it or not," I said. "What I still don't know for sure is who will be the Liberal candidate in Cumberland-Prescott." I took in a breath and held it.

"Well, laddie, if you've no big plans tomorrow, let's have Muriel over for lunch and we'll put an end to it all." He swept his hand over the *Globe and Mail* on the floor, opened to André's article. "We can meet with the university later in the week, but I think they'll be fine if we both return. I foresee no problems."

I exhaled, relieved. It seemed I really was slipping out of the noose. His demeanour suggested I should drop the subject. I've learned the hard way to go with his demeanour. My mind flashed to the university life about to welcome us back.

When I returned to the boathouse, Lindsay was already asleep. I find confirmation in my feelings for her when I watch her sleep. It's hard to explain. A face at peace – free of stress, joy, angst, or happiness. A face at rest. Perhaps it's knowing what the face can reveal and convey when awake that holds my eye and my heart. I was still watching her sleep when I heard Angus slip into the workshop below.

DIARY

Thursday, December 26

My Love,

I've made it through by the skin of my teeth. I cursed the

Christmas traditions we created together as they fell silent for the first time without you. I don't mean that how it sounds. But it fair tore me up these last few days. My saving grace, beyond incessant thoughts of you, was having Muriel, Daniel, Lindsay, et al. over for Christmas dinner. I fear I'd still be deep in the abyss were they not there with me.

I also had some time to tidy up *Baddeck 1* after what the damn papers are calling "its historic run up the river" a couple of weeks ago. Pap and hyperbole. The paint is now done and dried and the varnish kicks off a mighty sheen. I'm now only waiting for an electric starter motor to arrive from Cordova, Illinois, so I can start her from the comfort of the cockpit rather than yanking that cursed pull-cord astern. And then she's done.

As to my current dilemma, I've gathered the clan and will tell them tomorrow. But I think you already know . . .
AM