My wife has always been highly strung.
(Twang her banjo with a fishbone plectrum Sings of de Cold Cold Ground...) My wife has never been particularly passionate.
(Massena's in de Cold Cold Mound of Venusian tentacles that secretly at dead of night, in the snooz of the bowl oot, conjugate inward merely to exacerbate an already titillant situation...) We did most of our courting on bicycles. We'd just pack our lunch and off we'd go.
(Porocious Johnny oy sinking his enamelled gravestones into a pink thickness of span - caused sublimation with only an occasion - al shard of bone or toenail. And round his ears the hedgerows of May (everything that Tommy Atkins fought for) clustered at his ears like curious and angry gnats, bunched into bouquets and spread along the thorn - mustard points of insect green: "Give me the countryside everyday!") Betty and I have always been fond of a joke.
(Not I tickled the amylles they dug on the lawn, planted pinana trees in the cornflakens. A large parrot found singing Schubert in the icebox I rode across the television beam into a variety of unexpected anatomical parts. "Angel, I": squawking again end you with those ghostly tailfeathers sticking out of your ear!)
John's not a very keen gardener I'm afraid, but he does keep up with the lawn. (So the yellow scent of the cut grass creeps up the summer wall and I am an itch of hayseed in Betty's nostril while John cuts off the lengths of clock tick with his snore-scissors. When I'm a tickle I can spread and her whole flesh oozes pores for the night damp loins churning in a childhood hayfield...)

D'you wish we'd waited?

Only sometimes.

We got the sun each morning in the bedroom. (Dancing in with my daft bells clanging, amfulls of meadow culled bayonets dropped with a clash on the apricot elder down - Brandishing sunrays like a beacon on a fat stick - Spilling a hibbl of yellow cherries down the front of her unstained apricot nylon Babydoll drawers. Wait till they've gone to the apricot bathroom - returning and wondering why the wardrobe mirror is shattered in yolk of egg and why a shrilling hobby horse is nailed high on the apricot wall on the window side...)

Feeling like a game of cards?

What a splendid idea!
37 Elmcrest Crescent, NW 32.
19.5.66

Dear John,

Mummy and I went to examine the property only to find that the late householder is still in residence. He is a very odd person. It was really as much as I could do to bring myself to look at him but alone hold a conversation.

I would like you to meet him before we go any further with our plans.

All my love,

Betty.

Dear Betty,

I shall be in London this weekend. Suggest Sunday to view the house.

Love

John.

P.S. Don’t worry!
doctor, or some social worker; but in this case, it is of the utmost importance that the parents should be satisfied as to the suitability of the individual upon whom they propose to rely. Suitability does not depend upon knowledge or upon position, but upon attitude to sex; and this is essentially a personal thing. Any one of the proposed substitutes may be utterly unsuitable.

There is a third course that may be adopted. Parents may prefer to put into the hands of their children some book written specially for this purpose. Here again, care is necessary to be careful that you do get the right type of book; for some books which are written especially to fill this need are written by people whose “knowledge” is inaccurate and whose attitude to sex is deplorable.

HOW BEST TO GIVE THE FACTS

In those cases where the parents have managed things reasonably well in the earlier years, so that the youngsters turn to them confidently and without embarrassment whenever they need information, I think that the parents are the best people to undertake the completion of sex knowledge up to this important stage. They should know fairly well the present state of the youngster’s information, and his particular way of looking at things—and this is valuable special knowledge which a stranger cannot have. Such parents may do everything by word of mouth; but probably they will prefer to have a little chat by way of introducing a book, which will be handed over for “private study”; subsequent discussion of the subject matter there may be, and, of course, this will be “in the family”. There should, I think, be an understanding that the book does not reach other hands without permission.

Parents who do not feel competent or quite at ease, in spite of their best efforts, may rely upon the book alone; and this course should prove perfectly satisfactory, provided always that the book itself is perfectly satisfactory.

I have left the third course—calling upon the human substitute—to the last; and, except in those cases where there is an undoubtedly suitable person available and willing, I think that it is third “in order of merit”.

BETWEEN INFANCY AND PUBERTY

Let us now return to the gap between infancy and puberty. During infancy John asked questions about his origin, about the differences between little boys and little girls, and about one or two other matters. He knows that he grew inside his mother; that when he was big enough to be born, an opening in his mother stretched sufficiently to allow him to pass out of her body and then contracted again. His curiosity has been satisfied, and his thoughts have turned into other directions. What happens during the next five or six years depends upon a number of different factors—whether John has an active inquiring mind; whether he keeps pets and is interested in living things; what he is learning at school; his environment; and his associates.

I have said that some children have a knowledge of and interest in sex matters which would astonish their parents and teachers; on the other hand, there are not very uncommon cases of people who reach adult years without gaining any clear idea of the details of sex. The great majority of children fall between these two extremes, so that John will probably not bother very much about the subject, while, on the other hand, he will probably hear some talk on it from some of his associates, and he will almost certainly see animals paired; the chances are that he will want to know precisely what part the male parent plays.
If he wants to know, he must be told. The question arises whether he should be told when some favourable opportunity arises for introducing the subject, whether he wants to know or not; and here opinion is divided; but he must certainly know before he reaches puberty. So much depends upon John himself; if his attitude to sex is as you have tried to make it, and if you know that he will come to you without the slightest hesitation or embarrassment when he wants information, I am inclined to think that you will be safe to keep to the early rule to the extent of waiting until he does ask; but when he does really want to know, I think that you should take the opportunity of answering him much more fully than you would have done when he was younger.

You have to decide beforehand how you are going to give the information when the time comes; and you must keep in mind that however you do give it, the boy’s interest will fly back to himself and to his own father; but bear in mind at the same time, that he will probably not feel a fraction of the embarrassment that you fear that he will feel—your fear is a result of your own early attitude, from which, we hope, John’s attitude differs profoundly.

If John wants to know while he is fairly young, you have to tell whatever you do tell him in your own words, or else by reading to him some suitable book; if he is already a good reader you may prefer to give him a book to read himself.

In any case, I think that John should go through a simple account of the different methods of reproduction so that emphasis falls upon the object to be achieved—the fusion of a contribution from the father and a contribution from the mother—and upon the ways in which this object is achieved by different types of living things. Human affairs fall more into the general scheme of life if there is this leading up to them. Nevertheless, the really intense interest will, naturally, be in humans.

I propose to try to assist you by giving a few little talks on the different points upon which John will want information; but before doing so, I have one or two bits of advice.

A FEW WORDS OF ADVICE

Parents should discuss with one another all matters that may have to be dealt with, so that they may have the same plan for dealing with them and may not be caught unawares; there comes a time, for instance, when mother will want to tell John that he’d better ask father about that.

Wherever opportunity arises for preparing the ground for “further instruction”, it should be seized. Anything that helps to put reproduction into its place in the ordinary scheme of things should be utilised; the care of the young, the co-operation between parent birds, are instances that will occur to your mind at once. Reproduction itself needs to be kept in its proper place as a part, and only a part, of the scheme for the continuance of each living race.

Many parents worry themselves about masturbation when their children reach puberty. There is almost complete agreement that masturbation, unless it is carried to real excess, does no permanent harm whatever; there is no doubt that masturbation to some extent is so common that it must be regarded as an almost universal practice—so much so that one could almost say that it is natural. Infinite harm does result, however, from the fears of impotence and insanity, and from ideas of sin and dirtiness. Well-meaning and other grown-ups who preach these entirely wrong ideas are thus responsible for any harm that may follow.

A FAVOURITE AND PROLIFIC PET

Most children are interested in rabbits, and those who keep them as pets soon learn where baby “bunnies” come from and how they are born.
Laurence Rise,
NE 11.
28.6.66.

Dearest Mummy,

The wedding photos were lovely, all except one. What do you make of this? I get funny swellings every time I look at it so that I can hardly get my stockings on. Do you think I should see a priest doctor? I am so worried.

Love, Bet x

P.S. See you for Sunday lunch.
We've nearly completed payments on the Hoover.
(Which I drive round the house noising the pile of the new carpets with a swell and a moan - showing lovely Betty when she shakes out the bag - don't want a baby yet - show her the round black hole, the metal O, the scorched out domestic cage with wisps of rug-fluff clinging to the rim...)
The neighbours are very nice.
We don't see much of them and that's how we like it.
(Hag sabbaths, rooms full of slow serpents curling in deep patches up the walls, fish-eyes in the ceiling fungus and one red child in the bath - A catatonic operatic soprano with her larynx blocked mouthing a baroque silence as she plays a dressmakers dummy with the bucklestraps of her stays in the boxroom and behind the wallpaper in the breakfast room one overcrowded cupboard - )

**NERVOUS DARLING?**
**NO - NOT REALLY**

We only had one row in the first six months and that was when John's mother came.
(Mummy darling, she's a white spider. Mummy sweet, she cooks much better than you and it's all poisoned. Cuddly mummy, yes she's female too, the same as you. Now come with me and contemplate the spiderhole of your own state...)

**HAPPY DARLING?**
**I SUPPOSE SO.**
We manage to keep our distance from the in-laws. A quiet respect would be the term.
(Looking hopelessly at one another on a bleak winter morning with the Sunday joint to cook and each other's unbellicals still only half digested - Betty keeps finding little pink fragments under the bed...)

We keep up our own interests. John has his rowing and I go to wine-making classes. (Tell-tale rivulet of red from the corner of his open mouth late on Christmas morning and the feeling of something here inside eroded by acid...)
We don't let that side of things worry us too much. I was fitted up before we married of course but John is usually so tired in the evening.
(So I zoom from the door of the bedroom gloom and light a set of firecrackers and banana plants all down the mattress - every portrait of Mao Tse Tung in fairy lights sprouts a diamond pattern shawl, helmet like pineapple grenade and dagger palms with saw teeth grouped at the root. The applause is overwhelming...)

WELL DEAR - HERE WE ARE

WELL?

WELL?
In the garden, a key is hidden. By that dark flower, the dancing mushroom. The little pink fairy mesh with the seed from frizzled pink delight. OPEN the container of the bell, and run with a ring into the key.