

The View across the Bay

Novel by

Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe

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Chapter 1

‘You look different!’ she said, with an intriguing mixture of so many facets of expression of eyes, face and voice: each minute, almost imperceptible, but so rich on their own and together that any actor would be envious. There was surprise at seeing him in the first place, although she could not remember, consciously, ever having seen him before. There was also surprise at seeing him in this place, where she would not have expected him to be. She was surprised that he was so different from what she remembered him to have been, although she knew she had not seen him before. This lack of logic surprised her, too, as soon as she noticed it. He was different from the other men she had encountered in the course of her entire life; although he looked young, he was a survivor. In the instant she saw him she knew, beyond doubt, deep within, that he had lived through difficult times and had made a conscious decision, early on in that phase of what was nothing but a severe test on the path of spiritual self-development, to endure rather than to give up, to observe rather than to get involved and entangled, and thus to live rather than to die. Seeing him proved to her that he had been successful, and the maturity he had gained in the process was at the core of what made him different from other men, other people she knew.

This insight added a further dimension, in addition to surprise, to the range of her expression that accompanied the words, ‘You look different.’ It was an almost objective, neutral, calm recognition of the depth and value of his achievement, combined with emotional admiration, strong feelings of being moved but without being overwhelmed by them at the same time. There were also happiness and joy that he had now achieved what she knew he had failed to achieve before, even though the circumstances eluded her—this did not give rise to concern as it was not relevant at this

moment. In this moment, there was also an element of sheer excitement about meeting him so unexpectedly, about the mystery, the unanswered questions, the questions that did not need answers at this point, and the range of possibilities of where this meeting might lead.

Her words, 'You look different!' had come almost immediately when they had set eyes on each other, and their spontaneity, her spontaneity, had been obvious to him. Within the same set of what can have been only fractions of seconds came his immediate reaction.

Different. I am different, always, and eternally, different. That is what defines me, 'different,' nothing else. Nothing specific, particular, special: only 'different.' Everyone's immediate response to me: he is 'different.' I have accepted that I am being perceived as different, I know the reasons why others see me, immediately, as different. But it surprises me every time, again and again, when this happens, because I do not feel different, I feel as myself. I have a strong feeling of self-identity, and that is why I do not feel threatened, or attacked, or sad when others confront me with my difference, only surprised.

On this occasion, he noticed as well, the difference she talked about did not come in the statement of fact, as in 'You *are* different,' but was mediated, for the first time in his memory, through the sense of sight, vision: 'you *look* different. She had been *looking* at him, for quite a while, lost in herself, before she spoke, probably not aware of it. She had seen him and taken him in as fully as possible in that quiet, absorbing manner, and then reacted to what she had seen and kept seeing, with reference to the sense of sight, but suffused with all the other nuances of layers of surprise, knowledge, insight, being moved, admiration, joy, happiness and excitement.

In addition to these thoughts, insights, flashes in his mind, he knew that he knew her, had known her for a long time, for an eternity, but not here, not in this shape and form, neither his nor hers. He took note of her physical appearance, quickly found it pleasing, intriguing and attractive, but did not dwell on it beyond.

All the events since he first saw her and since she first saw him, only a few seconds ago, had been within their respective minds, where they felt secure. He knew that he needed to respond because she had talked to him. She expected a response, because she had talked to him. Her utterance had been spontaneous in reaction to the sudden, and unexpected, encounter. She had opened herself up, almost involuntarily, and realised that she had left the security of her inside. She experienced the concomitant vulnerability. Her invitation to him to open up as well, through the response that had to follow, now, made him feel vulnerable in return. Anything he was going to do now was going to be a response, and she would experience it as such, even if he turned around and ran away. The time he would allow himself to pass between hearing her 'You look different' and his visible, audible or nonverbal response was already part of that response as well. He was aware of this, but it did not constitute an element of pressure or strain for him; he was used to maintaining his sense of self while exposing himself to vulnerability.

It had been a unique moment that they would never forget. They happened to have parked their cars next to each other to shop at the supermarket, and had both returned to their cars with their trolleys full of shopping. They had casually looked at each other, and time stood still.

'I probably do, yes.'

She blushed. ‘I am sorry, I don’t know what I am saying, I don’t even know you...’

‘I think you do. I know you, I am sure. I recognised you as soon as I saw you.’ He paused, hesitated briefly, then, seeing her not shutting off: ‘Although I am equally sure that I have not seen you before. I still know you. I am Caleb, by the way. Caleb White.’

Kaya thought for a moment, without hesitating. ‘Caleb,’ she said, as if tasting the name’s flavour, exploring its resonance within her. It sent shivers down his spine to hear her say his name aloud. His face showed curiosity. ‘Oh, my name is Kaya, Kaya Jarvis.’

They were both still holding shopping bags in their hands, ready to put them into the boots of their cars.

Caleb smiled: ‘Lovely name. Should we finish with the shopping and then go somewhere,’ he paused, and looked at his watch, ‘12.30—for lunch? To talk some more?’

Kaya’s response came quickly: ‘Love that! You know the nice Italian around the corner? We can leave the cars here.’

‘I only moved here recently, so I don’t know that place yet, but Italian sounds good,’ Caleb responded.

They put away their shopping, locked their cars, and walked across to the restaurant together, quietly, each deep in their own thoughts. As they walked, it happened quite naturally that they held hands. They looked at each other at the moment their hands met, surprised, curious and then acknowledging the fact by briefly firming up the grip on the other’s hand.

They sat down in the restaurant, having chosen a table by the window that allowed a beautiful view over the promenade. They studied the menu and ordered.

They looked at each other, then spoke both at the same time: ‘So, tell me all about...’

They stopped, laughed, and continued together ‘you?!’

Kaya added quickly: ‘You first, please, Caleb.’

‘Yes,’ he agreed. ‘I just joined the university here. I teach drama.’

He paused, and Kaya took this as an invitation to respond. ‘So, you are a lecturer?’

‘Professor, actually,’ he said modestly.

Kaya smiled: ‘And you are so modest about it because...?’

‘People in the UK are sometimes a bit sceptical about academics, the more so the higher up in the hierarchy.’

‘I see.’ Kaya sounded thoughtful. ‘What is that hierarchy then, actually?’

Caleb was in his element: ‘It starts at the level of lecturer, both in the old universities and former polytechnics that became universities in 1992, the new universities. In the old ones, you apply for promotion to senior lecturer, in the new ones you progress to that level automatically. Then comes the level of reader (again in both old and new universities), while in the new universities there is the role of principal lecturer. That is for people more into teaching and admin, while the reader-role is more for the research-oriented colleagues. From senior lecturer or principal lecturer or reader you can be promoted to a professorship, or chair. It’s a personal chair if you get there through internal promotion, or an established chair if you have applied for, and are

appointed to a professorship that was publicly advertised. Higher up the ladder are more managerial posts, such as Head of Department, Dean of Faculty, Pro Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice Chancellor. The higher up in the hierarchy, the higher the salary. The teaching load also gets less the higher you get in the hierarchy.'

'Very comprehensive information,' Kaya commented, satisfied. 'Do you enjoy teaching?'

Caleb's response took a while. 'I do, yes, but over the years there have been ups and downs. You want me to elaborate?'

'Yes, please!'

'I have always enjoyed teaching. I think I came back from my first day of primary school telling my mother I wanted to be a teacher, and for that I needed a big car with a big boot to fit in all the students' notebooks I had to take home for marking!'

Both laughed, and Caleb rejoiced in the sound of Kaya's laughter, which cascaded and flowed like beads from a pearl necklace.

'I trained as a teacher at school level, especially for A-level English, where I was able to choose an emphasis on drama. But after that I taught only at university level. My approach to teaching is student-centred: I seek to enable student experience of the contents of the seminar or workshop first, followed by contextualisation within relevant history and theory. For a module on American Drama for UK students, I started with the insight that most students have never been to America, or if, then to Disneyland. I integrated student presentations and staff presentations on a wide range of topics, including food, political parties, family, healthcare, the military, sports, climate, American landscapes, religion in the USA, American cityscapes, economy and sales, US journalism, population, education, the relationship between the USA and Canada,

crime and law enforcement, transport, actor training in the USA, culture beyond theatre, and American film and TV. This gave them at least an idea of what America is really all about, and provided a context for the plays that take all this for granted. For courses at MA level, I have explored the approach of asking students to read a relevant chapter from a book, or a journal article, either set by myself or of their choice in relation to the session topic, and develop at least ten precisely worded questions in relation to the chapter or article contents. This approach has led to student ownership of the contents, and the questions have sparked lively debate, adding to student engagement and achievement of learning outcomes.’

Another cascade of laughter from Kaya interrupted Caleb’s fast flow of words. He was a bit startled: ‘What?’

‘Sorry,’ Kaya comforted him, ‘Only, you sounded almost like a letter of application just then, you know, for an American post where you need a teaching philosophy statement.’

Caleb laughed as well: ‘You are right, I did sound very formal there!’

‘Do go on, please,’ Kaya pleaded.

‘But then in the last two years I suddenly noticed a difference, students did not like my teaching any more, and I began to find teaching boring. It was quite a crisis, because I could not have continued working in such an environment.’

‘I wonder whether your teaching had become merely functional?’ Kaya ventured.

‘How do you mean?’ Caleb’s question was genuine, and revealed that he did have some inkling of what Kaya had in mind.

‘Well,’ she explained, gaining momentum, ‘I guess with time, some kind of routine can creep in: you do the same thing year in, year out, it works, you don’t have to prepare any more, and it gets boring. Less and less of your heart is involved, enthusiasm, energy; teaching becomes reduced to the contents you must get across and that is tested in exams. That’s when teaching becomes functional, and that restricts the way the student can receive the functionality of what you teach them. They feel judged, and they close off.’

Caleb continued this train of thought: ‘Yes, exactly. Thinking about it, there was also an increasing level of restrictions from the education system which added to the frustration. Student feedback is becoming increasingly important in staff appraisals, and therefore you are tempted to teach in a way that students praise your work, which they do first and foremost when you give them good marks.’

‘But you cannot do that if the achievement just does not merit a good mark.’ Kaya interjected.

‘Quite,’ Caleb confirmed. ‘I also noticed that I was teaching at the same level I had been teaching for the past 20 years or so, and I then realised that that level was far too high for today’s students. In their first year, they are at a level now that corresponds to year ten or so at secondary school twenty years ago. I discussed this with some colleagues in the education department, and they agreed. I took this on board and gradually the students came back to me, as it were, and I enjoy teaching again.’

Kaya considered this for a moment. ‘You probably have to learn not to judge the students for being at a different level now than they were twenty years ago?’

‘Yes,’ Caleb agreed, ‘it’s not their fault that they know less, or different things, and that their entire ways of functioning, thinking, operating are different.’

‘And being,’ Kaya added.

‘Yes, indeed, it goes as far as that, great.’ Caleb nodded.

Their food had arrived, and they started eating, enjoying the pizzas they had ordered, his Margherita with additional sliced tomato, and hers Calzone without the usual red meat component.

‘And how did you get into this kind of job in the first place--or should I say: how did you get to fulfil your calling?’

‘Calling, definitely,’ Caleb beamed. ‘It was all quite straightforward: from school I went to university, did an undergraduate degree in drama at Royal Holloway, then an MA at Exeter, then my PhD at Warwick, and then straight into a lectureship at Middlesex, on to a senior lectureship at Brunel, and then the professorship here, which I started a few weeks ago. I seem to have been in the right place at the right time on several occasions.’

‘And you *are* modest, this is quite an impressive career, even if some luck is involved,’ Kaya admired. Caleb was pleased, smiling with shy pride at Kaya’s words.

Kaya saw this and added: ‘I think we should never hide our light under a bushel. Doing that is of course an English characteristic, but I think it’s an old, wrong belief pattern.’

Caleb looked puzzled: ‘I am not familiar with that concept, “old, wrong belief pattern”. Can you explain, please?’

‘Of course!’ Kaya sounded happy and keen to be asked. ‘Belief patterns and dogmata and doctrines have become so engrained in our lives that we take them for granted without even a thought of checking their validity. They are, in fact, patterns of belief, not of truth, even in the way we refer to them. We all tend to create our own

world in the realm of our thoughts. If that world corresponds to laws of nature that rule the universe independent of what we are thinking, then we are lucky. If the world we create in our thoughts does not correspond to that set of natural laws, we have created, and are engaging in, wrong belief patterns.'

Caleb had been listening intently. 'But these wrong belief patterns,' he spoke those words slowly, still getting used to them, 'cannot be good for us.'

'No, not at all,' Kaya confirmed. 'The longer we believe in those wrong patterns, the more they harden, and we come to believe that they are in fact laws of nature, which they are not.'

'Can you give me some simple examples, perhaps, just to make sure I get this right?'

'Of course. Here we go: Others always want to pull a fast one on me; others want to harm me; I must not attract attention; money makes you arrogant; men cannot be faithful; women cannot remain matter-of-fact; I mustn't contradict my partner; I am not likeable; I am only average; what would others say; that's how we have been doing this always. You see?'

Caleb showed relief. 'Yes, very clear. It's interesting that many of these wrong belief patterns seem to be generalisations. But they need not be accurate in this way for everyone?'

'No, not at all.'

Caleb looked so curious that Kaya felt encouraged to expand further: 'Belief patterns form our innermost convictions, and these influence our thinking and action in a major way. We begin getting used to belief patterns in early childhood: our upbringing unconsciously makes girls believe that they must be well-behaved and must not stand

out. As adults, such women will be extremely adaptable, but also prone to put their own interests last.'

Caleb tried to think this further, interrupting with: 'And boys have to be brave and must not have, or at least show, fear, otherwise they will be seen as milksops and expelled from their circle of friends.'

Kaya nodded: 'Great, yes! Other belief patterns accumulate through life experiences—if the colleague gets the dream-job more than once, this leads to the belief pattern "I am just not good enough". In some cases, wrong belief patterns may well have helped us. Patterns such as "I must not make any mistakes", or "I must be perfect in everything I do" may have brought us to the track of success we are on now, but suddenly such belief patterns turn from 'right' to 'wrong,' or their nature reveals itself as having been wrong all along, and they turn from guarantor of success to dead weight.'

Kaya stopped for a moment. She knew that this information could easily become too much to take in, and she did not want that to happen, especially today at their first meeting. It was extraordinary how their conversation had developed. But it had felt so right to share what she had said so far.

Caleb noticed her pause, and sensed her reason for it. 'You have more on this, don't you? Out with it!' he coaxed.

'OK,' she grinned, 'you asked for it! Belief patterns give us a feeling of security, especially if they are well engrained in mass consciousness. We become part of an enormous energy field and feel supported by that field. However, in fact an energy field whose energy is no longer in line with natural law does no longer sustain its own energy, it needs energy from outside, from those engaging with the energy field, and

thus we are drained of our own energy to support the energy field of the wrong belief pattern. We make our own lives miserable by adhering to such wrong belief patterns, because we close ourselves up to engaging in different, more rewarding experiences. Especially if we believe very strongly in a wrong belief pattern, we feed that pattern with a lot of our own energy, and if many people on earth have the same pattern, it gets very big and very strong, and forms a massive energy field. It takes a lot of effort and courage not only to find out that belief patterns are wrong, but even more so to free oneself from such energy fields.’

Kaya stopped again, almost out of breath. Caleb found her arguments very convincing, and sought to apply them to his own life—maybe later, or drama.

He offered: ‘I have been thinking about something like this, only in different terms, in my work. There are so many assumptions about drama and theatre, and opera, that are taken for granted. Nobody in their right mind would doubt them. Would those be belief patterns, and could they be wrong?’

‘For example?’

‘Well, that drama can only “function” on the basis of conflict.’

Kaya thought for a moment, then her eyes twinkled: ‘Do you realise that you have now combined two of the areas we talked about this afternoon?’ Without waiting for his response, she went on: ‘Functionality and belief patterns. When drama, and I assume that also relates to theatre, only function, they are devoid of their essence, of the heart, anyway. And I then believe full well that drama and theatre can only function on the basis of conflict; and yes, it must be a wrong belief pattern, and I agree that it is probably the hardest of them all to crack!’

Caleb continued Kaya's line of thinking: 'So, the development of any kind of new knowledge implies, or goes along with, the cracking open of old, wrong belief patterns. That takes a lot of courage and effort and time, and can be exhausting.'

Kaya concluded: 'But when you have done it, the result is so simple and straightforward, you wonder why nobody has thought of this long before.'

Caleb raised his right hand up in the air: 'High five!'

Kaya raised hers, and their hands met on her own cheerful 'High five.'

They paused their conversation for a moment, each caught in their own thoughts, and allowing the other their space for this. Kaya was surprised how what they talked about, reflecting their thinking and their lives, added up, and how much Caleb understood of her philosophical approach that was too deep for some. Caleb, in turn, wondered at the way in which Kaya was able to put his hunches into explicit, meaningful contexts.

'Family?' Kaya ended the silence.

Caleb had dreaded this question. Now that Kaya had asked it, now that it was in the air, he felt even more insecure and vulnerable than he had expected.

Kaya sensed this immediately: 'Oh, you went quite pale there—sorry, raw nerve, is it? Please leave it if you like?'

'No, I might as well.' Caleb sounded determined, but added: 'Please be patient and gentle with me.' He cleared his throat—always a sign for him of nerves. 'I am divorced. I loved my wife, very much, and found out, one day, by chance, that she was having an affair. I caught them in bed together, coming home unexpectedly, meant as a surprise. I knew him as a distant acquaintance, whom I had never paid much attention to, and I wondered what she might have seen in him, might still see in him. And what

she saw in me, saw me as, had seen me as ever, that she could now prefer him to me. I doubted myself, for the first time in my life. My ex-wife asked me whether I could forgive her, she had made a mistake, she wanted us to come, and be, together again. Sounded great, as in the movies, but I was just not able to forgive her, and I have not been able to forgive myself for not being able to forgive her.’ His voice choked over the last few words, and he had to strain not to allow tears into his eyes.

Kaya took all this in, also Caleb’s obvious and visible reaction. Very gently and slowly she extended her hands and took his into hers, ready to withdraw at any moment if she sensed any discomfort on his part at her touch, but there was none—in fact, he seemed to welcome it.

‘You were deeply hurt, Caleb, and forgiving is the hardest test for anyone. It was like the Falling Tower in the Tarot pack of cards. Are you familiar with that?’

‘No, not at all,’ Caleb admitted.

Kaya explained: ‘In the *Tarot*, there is the card of the *Falling Tower*. According to one interpretation of the spiritual dimension of the card, it represents a major insight, or cross-roads, in human spiritual development in which the majority of, or at least the major, pillars of the beliefs and belief patterns that we have established for ourselves across our lives, are subjected to a major challenge. The carpet of those beliefs is almost literally pulled from underneath one’s feet, leaving the personality, hitherto soundly founded on those very belief patterns, in near-complete limbo. Absolute certainties, lived, supported, confirmed, expressed, and believed in for decades, crumble, like images of large buildings being blown up intentionally in the course of demolition. Such explosions, or implosions, leave a heap of ruins, where close examination of more superficial false truths gradually leads to the collapse of deeper and deeper, well-hidden

foundations of what we had assumed to have been the certainties of our lives. Or we realise that we in fact did see the symptoms of the ruins that are only too obvious, but we were unable to accept them, unable to face them, to acknowledge them, and so we pushed them aside, buried them in our unconscious, aware, on some level, that we would not be ready, strong enough, capable, of facing the facts and taking action to address whatever was amiss.

There are different phases of the reaction to this, of different duration and intensity, sometimes several at a time—shock, disbelief, doubt, despair, insecurity, laughter, tears, bitterness. Many mistakes were made, involuntarily and unknowingly, much hurt suffered at the hands of, and inflicted on people who are invariably the most loved ones, in our lives. Increasingly, as time after the initial revelation moves on, we realise the need to forgive (never forget!), ourselves and those who hurt us, and seek forgiveness from those whom we hurt.

We come together with partners to resolve karma, or to deal with tasks. Working together is easier than doing things on one's own. With a partner we can develop such a high level of trust and understanding that we can then mirror, unconsciously, to each other the points that we need to work on most. Did you notice that with your ex-wife, that you were pushing each other's buttons, saying something to each other that hit a sore spot, again and again, until you had been able to realise it and sort it out?'

Caleb was amazed: 'Yes, that certainly happened. I could not give examples if pressed right now, but that certainly describes our relationship!'

Kaya was pleased, but serious. 'You see. And in the past centuries it was probably the case that most couples needed a lifetime together to work out all the things they had planned to sort out...'

‘Between incarnations, you mean,’ Caleb interposed.

‘Yes. But time is working so much faster now, in many cases a whole lifetime is not needed, so you get together, fully, with one partner to work out whatever karma or tasks are on the cards for that partnership. Then those partners leave each other, to allow for some period of being alone—not lonely—in between, and then perhaps the next partnership to deal with a different set of issues. When partners leave, of course there is a period where it hurts, and then it is so important to let go, to forgive, and not to feel guilty.’

Caleb had been listening closely. ‘Because feeling guilty is again related to old belief patterns, that you should be together for a lifetime and that it must be your fault, somehow, if it ends before that?’

‘Exactly,’ Kaya reinforced. ‘Getting over such a belief pattern, and forgiving, are necessary before you can start afresh.’

‘And how do you forgive? Can you learn it?’ Caleb wondered aloud.

‘You can practice it, at least,’ Kaya assured him. ‘You can create time, sit in front of a lit candle, if you like, achieve some inner calm, and then, from and with all your heart, ask whoever for forgiveness, and forgive whoever has hurt you. It helps, probably, to be aware that you are forgiving the person who hurt you...’

‘You mean I am not forgiving the actual injury, as inflicted by the person who hurt you, because that is there, that will never go away, and pretending it did not happen would just push it under the carpet?’ Caleb interrupted.

‘Precisely,’ Kaya continued, ‘you forgive the person, also from the awareness that yes, they said or did what was genuinely hurtful, but they did so also to help you.’

Caleb frowned, but did not interrupt, allowing Kaya to carry on: ‘The other person was the carrier of the injury, the means. But if it had not been that specific person to hurt you, it would have been someone else. You see, you carried within you the resonator for the injury, the energy field that attracted the injury. From this life, or past lives, it is not necessary to find out in detail. You had some issue within yourself, unknown to you, not consciously, probably well-hidden so as not to obstruct your life, but festering under the surface and screaming to be noticed and taken care of and reintegrated into your Self. A little child that has been lost and wants to return into the hugging arms of its mother. This hidden part of the soul sends out signals from its place of hiding, and in this way, you attract actions from others that respond to that signal. If you did not have a resonator in some area, you would not attract attention in that area either.’ Kaya paused because she realised that Caleb needed another moment to allow this to sink in.

Caleb caught on: ‘So I had some relationship issues buried inside myself, and the best person to bring these to my attention was my ex-wife, because of how close I felt to her, and how much I loved her and how much I was open to her?’ he asked, hesitantly.

‘It is amazing how quickly and fully you understand what I am trying to say.’ Kaya’s voice showed her surprise and admiration.

‘It’s because you explain it so well—grounded in your own experience, I dare say?’

‘Thank you.’ Kaya said simply, ‘and, yes, much of what I am talking about is not my own thinking, originally, but I have experienced a lot of it in my own life.’

‘Let me see if I got this right then, about forgiving,’ Caleb picked up where they had left, ‘My ex-wife, then, mirrored to me—am I using something you said earlier correctly now?’

Kaya nodded quickly.

‘My ex-wife mirrored to me, in her betrayal, some partnership issues of mine that have been suppressed for ages but that want to be resolved. When I sit with the candle, I can forgive her, as the carrier of that stimulus to start thinking about these issues, without pretending not to have been, perhaps still be, hurt by what happened?’ Caleb continued his thoughts in silence for a moment, then chuckled: ‘I might in due course even come to thank her for it?’

Kaya joined the chuckle: ‘It’s great you can smile about it already—and yes, probably. Has happened to me!’

In the long silence that followed, Caleb came to rest in gazing at Kaya’s face. *Some faces are random, they come and go, they are perceived and forgotten. This statement is devoid of judgment, an observation of fact, others will see more in those faces, for whatever reason, but I do not, and I do not feel guilty about it. Some faces are interesting, would be good for such and such a character in drama, would give their owners, or wearers, a valuable bonus to their chances as actors. Some faces, more than others, tell me: ‘this person has lived her life to the full,’ and I am not sure I want to know more... Some faces change very quickly to reflect the owner’s or wearer’s current mood or general state of being, which I can read in the face at a glance; familiarity with the face may help, but some faces have that quality even without having looked at them closely and often. There can be distant beauty in faces, impersonal, beauty that is not meant for me but for the general public—a paradox, because after all, am I not also*

a member of the general public? The beauty of the face is meant for me, but remains impersonal to me. Others fall in love with such beauty, it enhances their well-being. For me it serves as a reminder of live beauty. The faces of actors who are rather plain in daily life can become radiantly beautiful on stage when they play 'being in love,' either happily or even unhappily. Love will make any face beautiful. Most faces on paintings lack the life of life. Leonardo is the exception: the faces on his paintings live, more so than many real faces. How he achieved this will remain an eternal mystery. Some living human faces are genuinely exceptional. Kaya's face. Solely to me, the living, loving beholder, because I project my love onto the face? Or do I detect, sense, draw in, reflect, become the beauty that is there in the face, God-made, God-given, for her to express, to relish, to honour, for me, at this moment, in this present, to realise, to marvel at, to respond to with a series of deep breaths, gut reactions to the power of the perception of yet a further nuance of the face, revealed in a new angle of the head, a new arrangement of hair around it, a new interplay of the light in the room or the outdoors environment and the features of her face? God as sculptor, because no human sculptor, or painter, not even Leonardo or Michelangelo, could have created such an infinitely finely chiselled countenance, with so many, infinitely delicate yet robust, infinitely nuanced features and shapes, gentle, flowing, sweet, but not too, all in just the perfect proportions on their own and to each other, and each individual feature with its own infinity of further layers just as perfectly proportioned and relating to each other. I could spend an hour looking at a minute section of the face in depth, and that would not suffice to grasp the dimensions of structure and form that represent and create the beauty of that section. All those aspects of beauty come together in the overall beauty of her face. By looking at it I gradually become the face. I feel her face on, or in, or

through, or with my own face. I see through and with her eyes, I breathe through and with her nose, I sense her cheeks with or in or through mine, feel her hair as my own hair around her, which becomes my, face. I sense the joy of those parts of the air, down to subatomic particles, that she inhales, joy at being chosen to make their way towards her face, and in through her nostrils, and the joy of that same air when it leaves the body on the outbreath, joy at having contributed to the life of such beauty, an act of worship in gratitude to God to have become part of it.

Kaya allowed Caleb all the time he needed. They had finished their lunch, and paid, splitting the bill half and half. When Caleb indicated to Kaya, by returning his gaze to her directly, that he was back in this world, they agreed to take a walk together on the promenade by the sea shore. They walked, holding hands again.

‘There is much more I could say about myself,’ he said, and added, with a wink: ‘but maybe you give me a break and tell me something about yourself.’

‘Of course,’ Kaya smiled. ‘I studied dentistry at King’s College, did my Dental Foundation Training in Kent, and have been employed as a dentist in a practice here for the past six years.’

‘Dentist,’ Caleb repeated, pensively.

‘Many people are so surprised when they hear that I am a dentist, I really wonder why,’ Kaya said, mock-reproachfully.

Caleb laughed: ‘You don’t look like a dentist, you don’t have the macho face for it that comes from so many dentists’ websites.’

‘Is that mainly the male dentists, though?’

‘Perhaps,’ Caleb admitted, ‘but many female dentists have that as well. After all, you have to have some guts to pull teeth, don’t you? Are you a good dentist?’

Kaya did enjoy her job, it was a calling for her as well, even if that may be difficult for patients to understand, and she told him so, full of obvious conviction.

‘Yes, I think I am a “good dentist”, as you put it. I have developed my physical skills very well, and always from the patient’s perspective, as much as possible. I make sure for the regular check-ups that I do not cause pain by unnecessarily poking the gums with my instruments. I make sure the lips are not caught in between my fingers and instruments. I establish whether a patient can open their mouth wide, as needed for check-up or treatment, without feeling discomfort or pain, even for very short periods of time, and give them comfort breaks in line with their needs, or I use bite blocks. I am aware of the areas of the mouth where pressure could cause vomiting reflexes, and I have trained my dental nurse to use the suction devices in such a way that they do not cause discomfort and that she is aware when saliva accumulates in the areas close to where they cause the need to swallow. I never prepare cavities (I think you might call that “drilling”) without local anaesthetic, and for that I have tested many products to come up with one that I find has the least side effects such as nausea. I have refined my syringe technique so that the sites of my injections are not painful after the numbness has worn off. I am very good with patients who are afraid of dentists—usually from poor experience in the past. I know that visits to the dentist are not at the top of anyone’s list for having a good time, but at least I think I have found ways of making it not too much of a dreadful experience either, especially where it is possible, through some additional practice and effort and attention to detail, to definitely avoid unnecessary discomfort and pain.’

Kaya paused, then added: ‘And yes, it takes determination to do all this, especially extractions, but for those again it is a question of knowing what to do in the

context that presents itself to you in the moment of the treatment. A tooth that needs extracting may be more decayed underneath the surface than obvious to the eye or the x-ray, so it might break off under the pressure of the extracting forceps. This is, first of all, not really the dentist's fault: even the best use of the most sophisticated technology does not allow you to predict everything. I just have to think quickly and proceed to excavate all the parts of the tooth that are still in the mouth, using different tools and related skills.'

Caleb was clearly interested and impressed. 'I have been thinking that I seem to feel, to perceive, my teeth in my mouth, with the tongue, as much larger than they are in real life: I am always quite surprised when I see how tiny an extracted tooth is, when I see it on the dental tray, in comparison to what it feels like in my mouth. I wonder whether that is only my experience, or whether it is a common human experience. And, taking it further, do dentists develop the ability of seeing the teeth in their patients' mouths somehow larger than non-dentists, even when they are not working with the special glasses?'

'I have never thought about that, to be honest. I will think about it when I am back in the surgery on Monday, and check the literature,' Kaya promised.

'Are you planning on opening your own practice at some point?'

'I don't think so. I see my boss putting in so many more hours on the admin and management of the practice. OK, she earns a good deal more than I do, I guess, but she has not much free time at all over the week and the weekends. I work on a less than full time contract, the equivalent of four days a week: I am at work 8-5 Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, and 8-12 Wednesday and Friday. While I work, I am fully committed to it, and I love it, but I don't have to think about work outside of those hours, and I don't

do it, either, and I like it that way, and I cannot imagine wanting to have the extra money for all those extra hours where the job becomes your life without space for anything else.’

Caleb changed the subject: ‘Family?’

‘No, not yet,’ Kaya responded.

‘Oh.’ Caleb’s voice was a hilarious mixture of joy for himself and sadness for her, and Kaya had to laugh out loud, and Caleb joined that laughter, adding: ‘How come?’

‘I just didn’t meet you earlier,’ she started, for the sake of the witty expression, but, with a very quick glance at Caleb, only half-jokingly, ‘and I was very much overshadowed by my mother.’

‘Which allows us to segue elegantly from husbands and wives, past, present and future, to parents and wider family. So, what is (was?) your mother like? I hope you don’t mind my asking?’

‘Not at all,’ Kaya said, adding with a cheeky twinkle: ‘it will be your turn on that soon anyway, and you started off talking about your ex-wife, so I might as well make a start here, talking about my mother, Grace. She *is* a journalist, and she has been a formidable presence all her life, brushing everyone aside with her sheer energy, and for decades not even aware of her impact. Very well-meaning, good-natured, with very strong ethical principles, but oblivious that other people just did not have the same *joie de vivre* as her and actually could come to feel quite oppressed and stifled in their own lives and expression by her verve, vitality, dynamism, dash and spirit.’

‘She sounds like a very dramatic character, in a colloquial sense of the word,’ Caleb mused.

‘Melodramatic, rather, yes,’ Kaya agreed.

‘Was your career choice influenced by your mother’s personality?’

Kaya did not have to think for long: ‘It definitely was. I needed something very practical, physical, embodied, and scientific to balance what came across as her somewhat aimless exuberance. At some point in my years of study I realised that I had lived all my life just as my mother wanted me to, and that had both given me a lot of advantages that others do not have, but had also deprived me of being myself. I arranged a long weekend to talk this through with her, very tough, but also very helpful. We have been able to build up a new relationship since then, more distant in a way, but also closer, but not mutually obstructive.’

Caleb’s attention had been caught particularly by one word. He repeated it:

‘Mutually?’

‘Yes: it turned out in our two-day talk that she had felt under pressure as well with regard to me. She was a single mum, you see...’

‘I had been wondering why you had not mentioned your father so far...’ Caleb observed.

‘He had the choice of leaving when he felt overpowered by my mother,’ Kaya explained, ‘and he left soon after I had turned ten. I have seen him on a regular basis, we are on good terms, but never really developed a “proper” daughter-father relationship, and at home it was always mum, never a full family, and no siblings either. My mother never said so, to this day, but I think she was very lonely without a partner, and threw all her abundant energy into her job and me, to equal parts. That meant that I had to comply with all her expectations, which were OK for someone of her drive, but I just don’t have her vivacity. I mean I’m not lethargic, far from it, but hardly anyone can

get close to mum. At all levels of her life, she was always the best, right from primary school onwards, and I had to be at least as good. I still remember when I came home with good to average marks, she would despair and tell me that I would end up as a bank clerk—always the epitome of the most undesirable profession on the planet.’

They both laughed at this, and Caleb added: ‘You were under a lot of pressure all your life, and your mother put herself under that pressure as well. Did your two-day talk resolve this?’

‘Yes, it did. Our relationship came to breaking point several times across those two days, but we had promised each other at the outset never to give up and not to leave mid-way. We stuck to that, just about. And then we built up our relationship from scratch, over a few months, and it’s been brilliant since without the need to dwell too much on what we discussed over those two days.’ Kaya’s voice sounded convincing.

‘What about your parents,’ she asked Caleb.

‘My mother died in a car crash a few years ago, she had been on a day excursion to a posh country house with friends, and on the way back a tyre burst on the truck in front of them, the trailer jack-knifed, spinning the truck around at full speed and straight into the car she was in. They were all killed on the spot, immediately, the medical people told us later. The truck driver remained uninjured; the investigation found that the tyre had ruptured through debris on the road, not the driver’s fault.

‘Oh no, how terrible,’ was all Kaya could think of.

‘It was just such a shock, gone from one moment to the next. My parents had been together for 35 years at the time, they taught at the same grammar school, she Science, he English. They were both much loved by their students, and by their colleagues alike. They taught from the heart. After the accident, my father took the first

ever leave, for bereavement, and he never went back to teaching, he just couldn't face going back to the school, with all the memories of my mum there. He took early retirement, sold the family house, most of his possessions, and has been travelling the world since, I keep getting emails and we skype occasionally, he's been all over Europe, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and is now doing the Americas. It distracts him, but it still does not make him happy.'

Caleb paused, and Kaya wondered aloud: 'What a story. At least he is doing something, rather than just sitting at home watching television and crying, though?' she offered.

Caleb considered this position. 'I see what you mean,' he mused, 'and I think you are right, in a way. He is certainly going through experiences on his travels that not many other people in the world can have, but the cost is so high, not to have a home any more, really.'

Kaya was still thoughtful: 'He is making his home truly within himself, so that he is genuinely at home wherever he is, independent of the ever-changing outside environment, and also independent of the conventional notion of home.'

Caleb picked up some of the ideas they had been talking about earlier: 'Could it be that the conventional idea of home had become an old, wrong belief pattern for him? In other words, what constitutes a right or wrong belief pattern depends on the person—for one person the same belief could be right, but wrong for a different person?'

'Yes, I think so,' Kaya agreed, 'although I had not thought about it in this way. I should double-check that with my mother, but it would make sense. How long has he been travelling by now?'

'Four years.'

‘What’s his name,’ Kaya wondered.

‘Quite conservative, Henry.’

Kaya had a sudden idea, and frowned. Of course, Caleb noticed immediately, and asked: ‘What is it?’

Kaya hesitated a little: ‘I hope you won’t find this in any way offensive, Caleb, but knowing my mother, she would be so keen to interview him for her series in the *Guardian*. And she’d be happy to travel to the US to meet with him there—do you think he might be open to that?’

Caleb liked the idea: ‘Not offensive at all, Kaya, I assure you. I think he would be thrilled to be interviewed, and from what you told me about your mum, I think she would allow his voice to come through. He has been thinking so much about loss, about grieving, and I am sure he would now want to share his thoughts with others. And to tell his overall story, and share the extraordinary situations he found himself in during his travels. I guess I will meet your mum at some point, and then we can discuss further?’

Kaya nodded, smiling at Caleb’s expectation to meet her mum.

For the next few minutes, they just walked, hand in hand, silently, occasionally looking at each other, smiling. They returned to their cars.

Caleb broke the silence: ‘Would you like to come over to my place, for some more conversation, and later I could make us some simple dinner? I mean, do you have time and...’—he hesitated.

‘I’d love to,’ said Kaya.

‘I have not quite finished unpacking and arranging the new place yet, though. So be warned,’ Caleb laughed.

‘OK, I’ll try to be generous and will overlook any mess,’ Kaya promised.

‘You better take your car over there as well, it’s not too far, and there’s plenty of parking available, and you might not want to walk back to your car later on.’

Caleb gave her the address and the postcode for the Satnav, just in case they got separated on the way, and his mobile number. They had no problems reaching his block of flats, parked their cars and Kaya helped Caleb carry some of his shopping up to his top floor flat. It was generously sized, with cloak room, living room, dining kitchen, en suite double bedroom, study, and en suite guest double bedroom. It was neutrally decorated, with new beige pure wool carpet flooring in the rooms and light blue linoleum flooring in the cloakroom, bathrooms and kitchen. The boxes still in need of unpacking were all in the guest bedroom, leaving the rest of the flat free of any sign that the owner had moved in only recently. Caleb showed Kaya around, and she caught herself out, with a surprised and happy smile, thinking about where to place some of her own furniture. After packing away the shopping, Caleb offered Kaya a choice of drinks. She looked around curiously at what was on offer, and her eyes came to rest on a bag labelled “Monsooned Malabar”.

‘What on earth is “Monsooned Malabar”?’ Kaya asked.

‘It’s coffee,’ Caleb explained, ‘from India. The coffee beans are soaked in monsoon rain for a day or two, and then aired in monsoon-humid fresh air for up to a few weeks, depending on the producer. In this way the beans are quite different from beans not undergoing that special process. Then they are roasted in the same way that other beans are. Want to try some?’

‘Sounds fascinating, I had never heard of it before, yes, please, I’d like some, with lots of sugar and milk, even cream, please.’ Kaya sounded really excited, and watched closely as Caleb prepared the coffee. His movements showed calm and

experience. For their coffee, they sat down in the armchairs of the living room around a chrome side table that Caleb had quickly placed there. Kaya relished the coffee's unusual flavour.

During her quick tour of the flat, Kaya had seen the fairly sizable vinyl record collection in the living-room, and in his study an impressive treasure of books. Caleb alertly followed her eyes as they now wandered over to the records again.

'Surprised to see all the old vinyl records?' he asked.

'I have quite a number as well,' she explained. 'May I have a closer look?'

'Yes, of course.'

Kaya went over to the shelf, and browsed. 'Mainly classical, lots of violin and opera,' she remarked after she sat down again, sipping her coffee.

'Well observed.' Caleb was pleased. 'I played the violin for seven or eight years, when I was very young. I think, with hindsight, I was never a good pupil, I wasn't even taught vibrato, but the teachers were never able to explain to me how to hold the instrument properly with the left hand, the mechanics of weight and counter-weight, and even in current instructions on websites I have not found the answer. You have to put pressure on the fingers where they touch the string, you see, but how can you apply that pressure without the violin losing its horizontal position, where does the counter-pressure come from? From the point where you hold the violin with your cheek and collar bone, or from the wrist that is placed underneath the neck, and if the latter, how do you achieve a rounded wrist without resting the wrist against the violin neck? I still loved the instrument, and my own playing allowed me to appreciate it being played by the masters. I quickly developed my A-list of favourites, just from listening to records, or the radio, with Heifetz quickly taking first position. I would listen to my favourite

pieces from the violin concerto repertory and compare the same movements played by different violinists. I saw some performers live where I grew up, but not in London, so we got only the 2nd league among the great ones who toured the provinces. But in the years of my undergraduate studies, I was in London almost every day, in the theatre, the Barbican, the Royal Festival Hall, English National Opera, Royal Opera Covent Garden, sometimes, on matinee days, two or three shows a day. Do you like classical music and opera?’

Kaya had been listening closely. ‘Those years in London must have been extraordinary. Yes, I like them both. My mother has conducted interviews with many leading conductors, soloists and singers, and on some very memorable occasions I was allowed to be present, quietly in the background. It was interesting to see these stars of the classical music and opera scene off-stage, as more ordinary people. Mum always managed to get close to their cores, and was then able to make them much more appealing to her readers than they might well have been before. Real people, you see, with their own problems and issues that we can all feel with.’

‘Jarvis,’ Caleb pondered. ‘Does she write under that name?’

‘Yes, Grace Jarvis,’ Kaya confirmed. ‘Why?’

‘I’m sure I must have read some of her pieces,’ Caleb explained. I have to google that some time. Did she meet all these celebrities in London?’

‘Some of them, when their schedules brought them there. But on some occasions my mum had to travel to them to fit into their tight schedules. She got a few business trips to some quite exotic locations that way.’

‘Did you join her on those trips?’ Caleb enquired.

Kaya came alive with her memories. ‘She took me to one trip to Verona, where she had been able to get an interview with Domingo while he had a guest appearance at the Arena. We stayed for a week, and went to see opera every evening. Some productions more than once. You must have been?!’

Caleb had indeed: ‘It was very impressive, to be one of an audience of 10,000 people. I didn’t know what to expect, and I found that the sheer size of the auditorium and the number of spectators made me feel isolated, rather than part of something. Can you relate to that?’ he wondered.

‘Let me see,’ Kaya considered this, ‘in a space like the arena, the stage is so far away from the spectators even in the front row. Distance is part of the experience, somehow?’

Caleb agreed, taking this further: ‘When I was at the Verona Arena, I thought of ancient Greek theatre, where the special relations were similar, with a lot of space between the stage and the spectators. The texts of the plays also come across as distant, or distancing. They train the spectators to see the events of the play as observers, involved but not attached, and that in turn might help them in their daily lives to observe their lives as if they are observing a play. In our times, the analogy of film might work better: watching our lives as if we were watching a film, allowing us to take an observer position. Or in terms of ancient Indian, Vedic texts: developing consciousness to a point where pure consciousness, without any content when on its own, co-exists with the waking state of consciousness and observes what is happening in the waking state of consciousness.’

Kaya picked this up: ‘And I guess that in that observer position you can see clearly which of the ideas that influence your life are old, wrong belief patterns, which we talked about earlier.’

Caleb immediately saw her point. ‘You’re right. And, in relation to forgiving that we talked about earlier as well, if you can manage to achieve the observer position in relation to past trauma, then it is easier to forgive.’ And he added after a moment: ‘I had not made that link yet.’

‘Maybe the observer position is also helpful in us realising and then overcoming functionality?’ Kaya wondered.

‘It’s fascinating how all these areas and concepts relate to each other, isn’t it?’ Caleb added.

‘Because they are precisely not intellectual “concepts”, they are part of human experience, which may include, but goes so far beyond concepts,’ Kaya concluded.

Caleb paused. ‘How did we get here?’

‘Verona, distance,’ Kaya reminded him.

Caleb remembered. ‘Excuse me for a moment, I just want to get something from the study.’ Kaya heard him rummaging, and he was back quickly with a slim folder.

‘When I travelled to Verona, I kept a kind of diary on that trip, I’d like to read you something from that. Here we go. *In past centuries, rich and sophisticated people sought to enhance their education through a journey to the major cultural centres of Italy. A group of Americans were emulating such a journey towards the end of August, where I encountered them on the train from Verona (had they been to see a performance at the Arena?) to Milano. Their accents, and the enormous quantity of their luggage, and the enormous size of the duffle bags and suitcases, identified them as*

Americans. Their conversation identified them as college or university professors. There were probably two or three couples of late middle age, grey-haired, taking both their specialist and their general knowledge for granted and manoeuvring comfortably within its admittedly wide intellectual boundaries. Closest to me, and therefore even more audible than those other two or three couples, were a slightly younger couple with a teenage boy who turned out not to be their son, but possibly a nephew, less likely a son of friends or acquaintances—from my cultural background, the familiarity with which they talked to the boy was such that it seemed too direct, intimate, and close for less than some kind of family tie. The boy seemed to be on the brink of his voice breaking, and struggling to cope with a recent growth spurt, sometimes not quite sure what to do with all those long arms and legs. His uncle at some point examined his braces, robustly taking hold of the boy's cheeks with thumb and middle finger of his right hand, squeezing to create indents on the cheeks, and in the process squishing the lips into a weird shape: 'Yes, you can see good improvement already,' and, pointing out the areas thus identified to his wife with the indicator finger of his left hand 'See, here, and here, and here, and there, yes, good,' so close to the teeth that he had to wipe his hand on his shirt after he had completed the examination and demonstration. The boy was admonished, by the uncle, not to scratch (I assume this related to a rash on his legs). At another point, the uncle demanded reproachfully for the boy to tell him what that meant, and the boy dutifully incanted: 'When you tell me to be ready with cases packed at 10am then I will be ready, next time, at 10 am with cases packed.' The tone of voice, not only the contents, was very close to the words of Thumper in the film of Bambi, 'If I have nothing nice to say then I should not say anything at all.' The uncle did most of the audible talking, his wife's voice was heard only occasionally, and much

more softly. The uncle held forth, sharing his opinions about all kinds of subjects, mainly moaning and complaining. An interesting pattern emerged in the conversation between husband and wife: he would offer some thought, apparently every-day and harmless; the wife would respond. The husband's answer to that response, however, would reveal the initial thoughts as a subtle (unconscious?) trap—the wife's answer would trigger a sharp put-down from the husband, shutting his wife up once and for all on that opinion of hers regarding that subject—and on to the next topic: awkward segue, setting the trap, and relishing in the put-down.'

Caleb finished his reading. Kaya found it very well observed and entertaining.

'How would you feel about some dinner, now,' Caleb asked.

Kaya was enthusiastic: 'I'd love some, I'm hungry again after the lunch and coffee—all our talking.' She added: 'Should we cook something together? Your kitchen looks very inviting and large enough for two.'

'It's such a long time that someone has cooked with me,' Caleb mused. Seeing disappointment on Kaya's face before it had quite manifested, he added quickly: 'I mean that I would be very happy for us to cook together, it can be very special.'

'Oh, lovely. You know, you sensed within less than seconds that I was about to misunderstand you as saying that it had been a long time since someone cooked with you as implying some reluctance on your part. You are very quick to read people.'

Caleb agreed, pleased: 'It's a nice combination of nature and nurture. It is probably one of my strengths, but I have refined it through my work in drama, sensing a character's subtle feelings, imitating, in acting, real-life people in their nuances, and, in directing, guiding actors to pick up and project those nuances, and then teaching actors and directors in just these skills.'

‘So, what are we having to eat?’ Kaya reminded him.

‘Completely forgot,’ Caleb laughed. ‘Thanks for reminding me. Let’s go and see what’s in the fridge and the cupboards.’ They walked across to the kitchen and rummaged for a while, at leisure, deciding in the end to make a grated carrot salad (with a dressing of sunflower oil, lemon and sugar), and a cream of asparagus soup. It was the season for thick, white asparagus in Germany, and Caleb had some left that he had purchased in an online shop specialising in German products. Kaya found the kitchen utensil drawer, took out a peeler, and went to work on the asparagus. Caleb glanced over at her quickly, and liked what he saw.

Kaya noticed this, and commented: ‘Am I passing the test?’

Caleb laughed: ‘You are so attentive, you notice everything, too, don’t you? And yes, you are very good at peeling the asparagus. But I was not really looking to judge you, to assess you. I remember from cooking with others, even though it was a long time ago, how surprised I had been to see how different some people do the same things in the kitchen from the way I am used to doing them, so I was curious to see how you work.’ He was meanwhile peeling asparagus as well.

Kaya thought for a moment, without pausing her peeling: ‘Come to think of it, you are right. Now I see you peeling the asparagus, I do it in a similar way, but my mother has always done it differently.’

Caleb added salt and butter to the water for boiling the asparagus, Kaya gently put the peeled asparagus into the boiling water, and proceeded to peel the carrots for the salad. Caleb created the salad dressing and then went on to grate the carrots. They worked quietly.

‘Don’t you use an electric chopper for this?’ Kaya asked, ‘it must be straining to do all this by hand.’

Caleb carried on grating. ‘The texture is different, it’s rougher with the chopper, as if you end up with ever so many little beads. When you grate them, they get much softer, you’ll see,’ he promised, and gave Kaya a small spoon full to taste, without dressing.

‘Wow,’ she agreed, ‘it’s just melting on the tongue. I could start laying the table, where are the plates and cutlery?’

Caleb showed her, and Kaya laid the table. In a while he pureed the asparagus and added spices and cream, asking Kaya to confirm when the soup had reached the texture she liked. He had left some of the asparagus tips to add to the soup for additional nuance. They started with the fresh carrot salad, and then relished the rich soup. Kaya made a mental note to get some white asparagus as well, and to recommend it to friends and family. She also found herself imagining a large family gathering in her home with a rich meal cooked by Caleb and herself. Meanwhile, Caleb admired how “at home”, relaxed and poised Kaya had been while cooking, and how naturally elegant she ate—something he had already noticed earlier, in the restaurant.

After dinner, they placed their cutlery and crockery and pots and pans into the dishwasher, added the detergent and Caleb started it.

‘Now, Dr Jarvis,’ Caleb said cheekily, ‘that is, assuming you did your doctorate in dentistry. Do we need to go to the bathroom now to brush our teeth?’

Kaya laughed. ‘Yes to both, factually and ideally. I am Dr Jarvis, thank you, and I would be a hypocrite if I tell my patients to brush their teeth after meals, and not do this myself.’

‘Congratulations on the doctorate, you can tell me what it was about later. I have at least one spare toothbrush in the bathroom, still fully packaged. I take them for travelling and leave them behind, so that I can tell myself that my luggage on the way home will be a little lighter as a result. You can then also comment on my toothpaste. You go first.’

After their exercise in dental hygiene, they went back to the living room. Kaya cheerfully approved of both the toothpaste and the toothbrush, and was amused by Caleb’s reaction of infinite mock-relief. They put on a record of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto, played by Heifetz, to be heard gently and unobtrusively in the background.

They talked more for a long time, until Kaya hesitated, before she said what she felt might not be easy to say or easy for Caleb to take. ‘This afternoon and evening have been so special, like nothing ever before in my life. It’s been so much to take in, I think, for both of us. I’m getting tired, and I’d like to be on my own for a while, so, I...’

Caleb sensed her hesitation and continued: ‘I feel this same, this whole time was out of this world, catching up on at least one lifetime with a totally familiar stranger. I would so much love you to stay, but I also feel I need some space to digest it all, to think it through.’

Kaya was relieved: ‘So you are not disappointed or angry if I leave now?’

‘No, Kaya, not angry at all; disappointed perhaps, because once you’re gone I’ll miss you terribly, but I know you need space, and I need it as well.’

Kaya responded quickly: ‘That’s good. I’ll miss you, too. Will you come to my place tomorrow morning for breakfast, maybe at 10?’

‘Wonderful idea,’ Caleb beamed. She gave him her address, Satnav details, and mobile number. She put on her coat, they hugged tightly without kissing, looked deeply into each other’s eyes, and she left.

Chapter 2

Back at home, Kaya wondered whether all of the past few hours had really happened, or whether she had fallen asleep and dreamt it all, but it was real. She packed away her shopping, then considered watching television before going to bed, but decided against it so as not to spoil the thoughtfully elated mood she was in. She put on a record and sat in her comfortable armchair, closed her eyes, allowing herself to become absorbed in the music. Then she pulled her phone over, and pressed one of the speed dial buttons. After a few rings she heard the beloved and familiar ‘Hello’ at the other end of the line.

‘Hi, mum, it’s me. How are you?’

‘Well,’ said her mother, surprised and just a little worried, ‘and you? Calling so late on a Friday evening?’

Now Kaya was concerned: ‘Is it late?’

‘It’s 10.30, dear!’ said her mother.

‘Oh, dear indeed, so late, I had no idea, did I wake you up?’

‘No, don’t worry,’ her mother reassured her with a slight chuckle, ‘I was still up. I just couldn’t go to sleep yet: my head is still buzzing from the interview I did this afternoon. And I was probably expecting your call, I had been thinking about you a lot today, actually—happy thoughts. So, what’s up?’

‘Kaya grinned: ‘You first. You and your interviews. Whom did you dig up now!?’

She could feel her mother's enthusiasm from her voice: 'A life that is so tragic, on a small scale, that you can hardly put it into fiction, let alone into a biographical piece, it's so difficult to keep a straight face and to capture the realism...'

Kaya interrupted: 'And those, of course, are your very strengths!'

'Thank you,' her mother sighed, adding cheerfully: 'but I think you may be right! Anyway. A woman, early forties, very pretty, tall, slim, looks after herself well, good home. Fairy tale romance and marriage when she was in her early twenties. Her boyfriend, then husband, was a fellow student, undergraduate, postgraduate MA and PhD. Then he went abroad for a year on a scholarship and she had to stay behind. They missed each other terribly, and towards the end of the year she started a relationship with someone else. He found out, and was so hurt, she cried when she told me, now, more than a decade later. She wanted to get back with him, but he was unable to forgive her. They were divorced at his request very quickly, he threw himself into his career, she into hers, she moved away from where they were together. She changed her name, reinvented her looks, they did not talk in person for more than fifteen years, ever since he left the house. She made her career in fine art, painting, and that's what my portrait of her will be about, pun intended, mainly, and she is joining the university where you are in a few days on a part-time basis as a practitioner in residence. Just imagine, not talking for fifteen years, carrying all that guilt, whether it is justified or not, for all that time without any chance of closure.'

Grace paused. 'Hello? ... Are you still there?'

Kaya's voice sounded hoarse: 'Wow. I think I may have to add something to the unlikely nature of all this. This is really weird, spooky, out of this world.'

'Nice build-up, Kaya,' her mother urged her on.

‘The ex-husband’s name would not happen to be Caleb White?’

Now it was Grace’s turn to be silent, stunned. Then she gave a big sigh. ‘Of course, it is. He’s a senior lecturer in drama at Brunel.’

‘Ahem,’ Kaya set up the humdinger: ‘Not any more, he isn’t. He is starting a professorship at the university where I am, as you just put it. Next week. That would be the same department where his ex-wife will be working.’

‘And you know this because...?’ Grace’s curiosity was audibly at bursting point.

‘Because, mum, and here we segue ever so elegantly into why *I* called *you* in the first place: because I met Caleb at lunchtime today in the supermarket car park, it was love at first sight for both of us, and we spent the rest of the day together, restaurant, walk at the promenade, hand in hand, then coffee and dinner at his place, talked non-stop, shared probably most memories of our lives, and yes, his ex featured prominently, and I just got back home.’ Kaya was out of breath.

Grace added: ‘And you’ll have breakfast at yours tomorrow morning?’

‘Mmmm,’ Kaya confirmed, ‘and in due course you can have an exclusive on the reunion of Caleb and his ex!’

‘Her name is Sophia Hockley.’

‘*The* Sophia Hockley? She’s the most talked about British artist in years—which would be, of course, why you interviewed her, mum.’

‘Right again, sweetie!’ Grace’s voice sounded cheerful. ‘So, tell him, your Caleb, all about this tomorrow morning. If you like, I’ll come over on Sunday and break the news to Sophia, and I can also facilitate a meeting between her and your Caleb.’

‘And you’d love to bring all of that into your article as well, ever so delicately?’

Kaya enquired with a broad smile on her face, audible in her voice.

‘If ever possible, yes. But I’d do it all without that, just for her and you...’

‘And *my* Caleb?’

‘Yes, sweetie.’

‘Great, mum, I’ll talk to *my* Caleb tomorrow, and will call you then. Good night, sleep well!’

‘Good night, sweetie,’ Grace replied, and hung up.

When Caleb had closed the door, he let out a deep sigh. So many years ago, his love had been shattered, as he had thought about it to this day, or, with the new wisdom gained today, Kaya’s wisdom, that chapter of his life and love had come to an end. He had buried himself in his work, and his fast rise had been bought at the cost of his denying himself any further relationship. And now, within a few hours, there was Kaya and with her the hope of something new.

He needed something to do, to start with, and quickly tidied the flat and emptied the dishwasher, all the while re-playing in his mind bits of their conversation. What partners came together for, that relationships need not be for a lifetime, the ideas of “wrong belief patterns” and “functionality”, the big issue of “guilt” which were all, in its own way, unnecessary, and blocked so many beautiful feelings and expressions of life. He got ready for bed, brought a candle to his bed-side table, lit the candle, sat on his bed, and began the forgiveness procedure Kaya has talked about. It was not difficult for him to recall the moment he had returned from abroad early, as a surprise for his ex-wife. He forced himself to think of her with her name, Olivia. He had opened the front door to their house, and called out Olivia’s name, giddy with the expectation of seeing her delight and surprise of him being back early, and for good. Not having found her in

the living room, dining room or kitchen, as he would have expected given the time of day of his arrival, he had worried she might be ill in bed—he was certain she was at home on the basis of some other clues. So, he had walked quietly up to their bedroom, opened the door gently, and had seen Olivia naked in bed with Timothy Bates, a distant acquaintance. They had woken up from him opening the door and stared at him, Tim with his usual dull expression, Olivia with total horror, embarrassment and the deepest sadness Caleb had ever seen, obviously realising the extent of the damage done. Caleb had snapped into a mode of extreme calm, as always in extreme situations. He had said, in a very calm, firm voice, addressed to Olivia and completely ignoring Tim: ‘Oh, I am sorry to have interrupted you. You will hear from my solicitors about the divorce. I will ask some of *my* friends to collect my things in due course. Please do not contact me directly, I do not wish to have any communication directly with you any more from this day until I die. I hope Timothy is worth it. Good bye.’

With those words he had left, spent some days in a hotel, then arranged for somewhere permanent to live, and instructed a solicitor friend with the divorce proceedings. He had not given in to so many friends and family to reconcile with Olivia, to at least talk to her to hear from her what had happened. He had asked to be left alone on this front, and ended some former friendships where their insistence on communication between him and Olivia had become too strong and tedious to have to deal with.

Sitting on his bed in front of the lit candle this evening, Caleb realised that he had never once, even for a moment, snapped out of that icy calm in relation to that moment of seeing Olivia in bed with Tim. In terms of what he had talked about with Kaya, this must have become a part of his soul that had separated itself from the soul’s

core, an aspect of his life that he had completely suppressed, but not from laziness, but for sheer survival: he just would not have been able to cope any other way. Therefore, he was sure that he should not feel guilty about the way he had behaved: he had had no alternative. But he had felt guilty, so the first thing he did now was to forgive himself for his hardness, for not having been able to communicate at all with Olivia after the incident, let alone consider the possibility of reconciliation, despite her pleas through friends and even through her solicitor. Then he proceeded to think about forgiving Olivia for what she had done to him, for all the feelings of inferiority and disgust and hatred and anger and so many, many other thoroughly unpleasant feelings she had caused him. But as he went through all these memories of the range of feelings of the hurt she had inflicted, he realised that he had never allowed those feelings the space they had demanded, keeping them rather well-managed under the coldness and calm that had characterised his first response after he had snapped. He had been aware of something under the surface, boiling and bubbling away, but he had never allowed it out. And now it did come out. Tears formed in his eyes, and he realised he had never once cried over the past fifteen years, since “the incident”. His breathing got faster and irregular, choking sensations gripped his throat. He was afraid of the intensity of what was about to erupt, not sure he would be able to cope, wishing Kaya could be with him now, and glad at the same time that she wasn’t, suppressing the tears, the crying, the ancient sadness, the mountain of guilt, the tons of weight he felt on his chest, the massive lump in his throat, all like a volcano about to erupt after decades, possibly centuries of inactivity. He was not able to suppress all this anymore, even if he would have tried to, and he decided not to try, to let it out, come what may. And then he had just the split second of time to throw himself on the pillow face down before the tears

came in full floods. He roared and howled into the pillow as if possessed, screaming and sobbing all the pain, oh, so much pain that seemed to have filled him up entirely, leaving no space in his feelings, only in his thinking, for anything pleasant. He kicked his legs, and beat his fists hard on the mattress from arms raised as high in the air as possible, all the while continuing his shrieking, shouting, wailing and roaring across the whole range of his voice in pitch and volume. He did not reflect any more on what he did, he just did, allowing all feelings that wanted to come out to express themselves fully, without inhibition, only hoping occasionally, in a rare pause, that his neighbours would not hear him and send an ambulance or the police, or both, in concern. He calmed down only after what seemed to him have been a very long time. His pillow was wet from tears, and he was sweating profusely, but he was too exhausted to do anything about that. He blew out the candle and fell asleep quickly.

Chapter 3

While usually he slept soundly for some eight hours every night, meeting Kaya, their intensive conversation, and his major release later on, had left Caleb so alert, and so much had gone through his mind, that he did not sleep too much, but those few hours of sleep had been particularly sound and refreshing. He made sure he woke up well in time for their 10am breakfast at her place. He changed the sheet, duvet cover and pillowcase of his bed, had a long shower, washed and dried his hair, and selected a casually elegant outfit to wear. He left early, drove into town to do some last-minute shopping—he had had an idea for it in the middle of the night—and reached Kaya's block of flats in time to be able to ring her doorbell at exactly 10am. The buzzer sounded literally a second later, Caleb noted with a broad smile—she must have been standing right next to the

door in expectation. Caleb took the lift to the top floor (Kaya also had a top floor flat, just like him), clearing his throat a little nervously as the lift doors opened. Kaya stood in her flat, door wide open, and gave him a little wave with her right hand when he saw her. He walked briskly, holding the large bouquet of pink roses in front of him and handing it over to Kaya once they were inside the flat and she had closed the door behind them.

‘Good morning, Kaya,’ he said softly, ‘I hope you like pink. And roses.’

Kaya nodded happily in response, whispering ‘Thank you so much, Caleb,’ and led him to the kitchen where she put the flowers into a simple glass vase, and brought them through to the living room, placing them in front of a picturesque fireplace.

‘How are you...’ they started both at the same time, laughed and carried on together, ‘this morning?’

Instead of responding, they slowly walked towards each other, taking each other in with their wide-open eyes, not hesitating, sensing each other’s determination, meeting in warm hug that developed into a passionate kiss, more blissful and intense that they had ever experienced, and had been able to hope for.

After a long time, Caleb asked: ‘Is this crazy?’ There was no hesitation in his voice.

‘No.’ Kaya said resolutely. ‘Perhaps unusual, but wonderful, and right. Do you need breakfast now?’

Caleb responded with another kiss. Kaya gently guided him into her bedroom, from which they emerged only a few hours later, fulfilled, but definitely quite hungry by then. They had showered and dressed again. Kaya cooked some pancakes, which they ate with cream and maple syrup, served with orange juice and fresh coffee (which

was not as good as the Monsooned Malabar, they both agreed). For a long time, they did not talk at all, just being still in each other's presence, full of the memories of the past few hours, their bodies tingling.

After a while, however, Caleb began: 'Dearest Kaya, that was wonderful almost beyond description.'

'Same for me, Caleb,' Kaya agreed. 'I'm always trying to be in the moment rather than in the past or future, but I think I've never achieved it more than just now, and without trying, there was not space for trying anymore.'

Caleb picked up on this: 'I think trying is intellectual, and it can lead to some success, but full achievement of being in the moment, fully in the here and now, is different. We can appreciate it intellectually afterwards, but when and while it happens, it is holistic, with the intellect having its appropriate role, but not taking over as it usually does in our world that is dominated by the rational, left brain hemisphere, and an orientation towards science.'

Kaya simply nodded, allowing them both to feel the silence.

Caleb started speaking again after a while. 'I tried the forgiveness ritual you suggested to me yesterday. I don't know whether that is how it is meant to work, but I certainly released a lot. I was literally bawling for an hour or even more, really howling, roaring into the pillows, I just hope now my neighbours didn't hear me. After that I was totally exhausted, but also very clear in my head. It may sound strange, but I want to find my ex-wife. I want to find Olivia. I just realised that I have not said her name since I left her so many years ago, after I had found out. I want us to reconcile. Only where to start looking for her?'

Kaya braced herself for the news she had to share with Caleb: ‘Actually, Caleb, our meeting was not the only weird and wonderful thing yesterday. It does not stop there. I told you that my mother is a journalist who writes people’s profiles for the *Guardian*? I called her last night, I wanted to tell her about us, but she was so full of an interview she had done yesterday, and she told me all about it and...’

Caleb interrupted, laughing, but tensely: ‘Now you are going to tell me that her interview was with Olivia?!’

‘Yes.’

Caleb jumped to his feet and paced around the flat for a few minutes. When he sat back in his armchair, he was still quite out of breath. ‘Sorry, Kaya, I needed to get that out of, or into the system! Where is she, how is she, what does she do?’

‘According to mum, she’s changed her name, which you might actually know, so get ready to get up and run around again...’

Caleb realised that Kay was only half-joking.

‘She’s now called Sophia Hockley and she will start as artist in residence here in the uni here on Monday. There you are.’

Caleb did not jump up again. He remained seated, motionless. His face went completely blank, for a good while. Then he said simply: ‘Oh, I see.’ And after another few minutes, he asked to be allowed to inspect the balcony to get some fresh air. Kaya opened the door and joined him outside a moment later. Caleb was inhaling the air deeply. ‘Olivia, or Sophia, would be terribly shocked to see me, if she is not prepared, as I am now, kind of. Will be difficult enough knowing what to expect. Is there any chance your mum could talk to Sophia before Monday?’

Kaya was glad he had asked: ‘My mum offered this already, I only need to phone her to confirm. She even offered to come over tomorrow to facilitate, as it were, your meeting on Monday —of course hoping you would both allow her to include it in her article, very delicately, but she would do the facilitating even if you decide not to allow her to write about the reunion.’

Caleb did not have to think about this for long: ‘I think I would be very grateful to your mum to talk to Sophia in advance, and to facilitate our meeting, and I would be happy for her to write about it.’

They were interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. Kaya smiled. ‘That would be my mum, too impatient and curious to allow me to phone, as we had agreed.’

She went over to the phone and lifted the receiver: ‘Hello?’ She immediately heard her mother’s voice.

‘Well, it’s already afternoon, and you still have not called me. Are you all right? I mean, breakfast cannot take that long?!’

‘Mum, hello, yes, I am fine, and may I remind you that we agreed that I would phone you?’ Kaya said, intending it to sound mock-reproachful, but she noticed a certain edge to her voice that she had not intended. She glanced at Caleb, who had turned to look at her with slightly questioning raised eyebrows, and now came over and hugged her. She was moved deeply, close to tears, to find him again so sensitive to her feelings, which she herself was only just about aware of. His reaction, the expression of his eyes, the raised eyebrows and the hug, had been so spontaneous, and not at all patronising, or placing her, let alone pushing her, into a victim role, and she nestled into his embrace.

Grace did not let on whether she had noticed the tense undertone in Kaya's response, and continued with a conciliatory, not quite apologetic 'Yes, or course, dear, but I was just too curious, you know me. So?'

Kaya, still in Caleb's embrace, which he had loosened a little, was similarly conciliatory, without giving in an inch: 'Yes, I do know, mum. Caleb would be grateful if you could initiate the mediation and meeting between him and his ex-wife. Her original name is Olivia, by the way. So, you will call her at some point, and we take it from there? And, oh, I forgot, Caleb is happy for you to include this in your article.'

'Good, Kaya, good.' Grace sounded very pleased. 'Can I stay at your place tomorrow if it works out in the way that I come over there for a meeting on Monday?'

Kaya hesitated briefly. 'Yes, that's fine, but you might find yourself alone overnight,' she said firmly.

Grace knew her daughter well enough and did not tease her on that account, no matter how tempting it was for her, and she simply confirmed warmly: 'That's fine, sweetie. I'll try to phone Olivia or Sophia now, and will get back to you later to tell you about any developments.' She could not resist, however, to add a cheeky 'And if you don't answer the phone, I'll leave a Facebook message.'

Grace hung up. She was in her study at home, elegantly furnished, spacious and rather empty, with a functional bookshelf, a large desk with computer and phone, and a comfortable arrangement of two armchairs around a side table with sophisticated microphones on tripods. The colour scheme of the furniture was focused on a generous beige. Grace searched for the phone number of Sophia Hockley, whom she had met in her London studio only yesterday. Grace had liked adventure and excitement all her life,

fearing boredom more than anything else. Meeting with, and writing about other people, all extra-ordinary and many famous, also gave her the opportunity to compensate for the root of that fear of boredom, her own loneliness. It was loneliness, rather than being alone. She was not good at being alone, feeling lonely, forsaken. She had a strong circle of acquaintances, some of whom she referred to as friends, but who were probably not really friends, and she had her daughter, Kaya. Grace wanted to have friends, she wanted to have Kaya, and she would have liked to have been able to have a husband. Friends and family featured as possessions in her way of thinking, something she felt a right to have. But her husband had left her very early in their relationship, Kaya kept her distance, and so did her friends. Grace felt that not having these people as she wanted to have them was a major injustice to her, for which she could not figure out the reason. Grace had been particularly hurt when Kaya had decided not to pursue her own arts and writing interests professionally, to follow her mother's inspiration and footsteps and benefit from her mother's vast range of important business contacts. When Kaya had declared her decision to become a dentist, and had not succumbed to her varied attempts at dissuading her daughter from this decision, a world had collapsed for Grace, two decades of building Kaya's future for her. She had contemplated these circumstances occasionally, less and less over the years, and thrown herself into her work.

The challenge now in hand, arranging the meeting and reconciliation of Sophia and Caleb, was just what Grace rejoiced in and excelled at. She dialled Sophia's number, and was pleased to hear her answer the phone after only a few rings.

'Good morning, Sophia,' Grace said. 'It's Grace, Grace Jarvis calling. I hope my call does not come at an inconvenient moment?'

‘Hello, Grace.’ Sophia’s voice sounded genuinely pleased. ‘Not inconvenient at all, as a matter of fact. What can I do for you? Don’t tell me the recording of our conversation didn’t work and we have to do the interview again?’

Sophia’s voice reminded Grace of the overall tendency in Sophia’s life for her to expect the worst possible scenario and then feel relief if things turned out less awful than expected. Grace had wondered about the reason for this pattern, and only now realised that it must have been the shock of Caleb leaving.

Now Grace reassured Sophia quickly: ‘Don’t worry, all fine with the interview. The reason I am calling does relate to something we talked about yesterday, though. You remember that you said that you would really welcome an opportunity of reconciliation with your former husband, Caleb? In one of those weird situations that you cannot call coincidence any more, I think I may be able to facilitate that reconciliation. Would you like me to explain?’

‘Yes, of course, please,’ Sophia immediately urged her.

‘Well, very briefly, then, Caleb has just joined the same department in the university that you will be joining on Monday, and it seems that he has also met my daughter, Kaya, I told you about her. They met for the first time only yesterday, and they have apparently spent a lot of time together talking, and Caleb is keen to see you to talk through the past, what happened all those years ago.’

‘Crikey,’ Sophia gasped. ‘Does that mean that your daughter and Caleb are an item, kind of?’

‘Knowing my daughter, the way she talked on the phone to me just now, definitely yes, Sophia,’ Grace admitted.

‘That’s a relief, in a way, actually,’ Sophia explained, ‘I am happy to meet with Caleb, to get closure for the past, but I don’t want to be in a position that I urge myself, or others urge me, to go back to the past and undo the last ever so many years since he left. I want that closure to finally be able to start afresh, but that new start does not have Caleb in it as a potential partner. Colleague will be quite enough, thank you very much.’ Her words had come fast, and sounded to Grace almost over-determined, almost as if she was afraid of admitting she was still in love with Caleb.

Sophia paused, and as there was no immediate response from Grace, she continued: ‘How would this take place practically?’

Grace responded swiftly this time: ‘It’s Saturday today, I will travel over from London tomorrow, visit Kaya, meet Caleb, if she allows me, and I could then meet with Caleb and yourself on Monday, in Kaya’s flat, she works over the day, or in Caleb’s office, or in some public place, a restaurant perhaps. I will be driving, and I could give you a lift over, at least tomorrow.’

After a while, Sophia responded. Her voice sounded tired. ‘I think I’d like to travel on my own, if you don’t mind, both ways, but many thanks for offering the lift,’ she started. ‘I will be staying in London for the months of my residence, but and commute when I am needed there.’

‘No problem at all, I understand,’ Grace reassured her quickly, making a special effort for her voice not to come across as motherly or patronising, but matter-of-fact.

‘Thank you, Grace. I’ll find somewhere to stay tomorrow night. I think a public place, as you put it, would be best for the first meeting. I appreciate you offering your daughter’s place, but the idea of seeing Caleb again for the first time after so many

years in his new girlfriend's place is a bit much after the last time we saw each other was with me in another man's arms.'

'Of course, Sophia, it was rather thoughtless of me to even suggest it, I'm very sorry,' Grace apologised, genuinely embarrassed. 'Kaya always tells me that in my drive to be practical I can be terribly insensitive,' she added.

Sophia was generous enough to be able to smile when she said: 'It's OK, Grace, apology accepted. Caleb and you can decide when and where to meet on Monday. I just checked my diary, I believe we have a staff meeting at 2pm, so some time in the morning would be best.' After a brief pause she added: 'And thank you very much for phoning me about this and making the effort of coming over and arranging the meeting.'

'You're most welcome, Sophia,' Grace responded.

'One further thought,' Sophia added, 'would you want to include this in your article about me?'

'I would love to have your and Caleb's permission to do this, yes. And I might even have to ask my own daughter's permission if I decide to include her in the article. I would of course show you the full text for your approval beforehand. And please, you should know that I am doing all this not only to improve my article.' Grace's voice conveyed her both her professional eagerness and her genuine concern.

'Thank you for being so open about it. We'll see how it all develops.'

Grace and Sophia exchanged their mobile phone numbers, having talked only on their landlines so far, and agreed for Sophia to get in touch once she had arrived from London.

Chapter 4

Just like Caleb, Sophia had worked hard at suppressing the events of fifteen years ago. At first, she had replayed the moments leading up to Caleb leaving, and the second she had seen Caleb for the last time, thousands of times every day. The situation he had caught her in had been unambiguous, and he had had every right to be offended and hurt. Sophia had not meant her affair with Tim to be serious, and neither had he. It was to have been over before Caleb returned from abroad, a nice time for her and Tim, no more, at a time when they both needed it. Close analysis had also allowed her to realise and admit that, at least unconsciously at the time, she had started the affair to punish Caleb for his absence. They had not dealt with their long separation well, had not talked about their feelings of loss and loneliness, of the pain every new separation had caused when he had visited and left, or when she had visited him and left. In due course, each had come to assume that the other one did not really mind their separation all that much, half admiring their toughness and half wondering whether she still loved him and whether he still loved her, or what kind of love it was that did not feel the separation as painful and undesirable. Sophia had also realised that she had blamed Caleb for having to be separated in the first place, given that he chose to take the post abroad for the year, over and above them being together, as it were—it had not occurred to her at the time and for many years that the decision was not as one-sided as she saw it, because she might have joined him if she had chosen to do so. More recently, Sophia had come to wonder whether Caleb had been disappointed that she chose not to join him.

These thoughts had developed over the years, every now and then, caused by unforeseen triggers that had caught her unawares. But for the majority of time she had managed to keep these thoughts at bay by redefining herself, with a new name. Most

importantly, she had made a conscious decision about her focus and emphasis in terms of her profession, making a living through her painting. She had used money from the inheritance after her father's relatively early and unexpected death to buy an affordable flat in London that came with a large, airy room she could use as a studio, and had, over the years, developed her style, created her brand, and become a well-liked, much-talked-about contemporary artist. She made a comfortable living from her art. All this, however, had come at the expense of any private or social life worth talking about. She had a range of acquaintances from her professional circle, she would be invited to parties and events, and have the occasional "do" at her place. She had tried to form some deeper relationships with men she thought herself in love with, but had always backed away, or found an excuse to withdraw, when things had started to get too serious.

Yesterday's conversation with Grace had brought all those memories and thoughts back to the forefront of Sophia's mind; she had been genuine when she expressed her wish to see Caleb again—that wish had never left her since the day Caleb had slammed the door behind him. The prospect of meeting with him in a little more than a day, and to be seeing him possibly on a daily basis after that, the fact that he had a new girlfriend, now made her head spin. Would she even recognise him, would he recognise her, would she be able to contain her feelings, what were those feelings going to be, what was reconciliation, would she still love him—all these thoughts were milling around in her head wildly just after Grace's phone-call. She needed more clarity, though, and knew how to achieve it.

She went into her studio, arranged the blinds and curtains to allow in natural daylight, adding from the array of artificial light sources until she had created the

ambience she wanted. She put a fresh canvas on the easel, helped herself to a large ceramic tumbler full of water from the dispenser, and embarked on drawing Caleb's face as she remembered it, quite spontaneously, and found herself ending up with the expression of shock on his face when he had seen her and Tim in bed together. She used the drawing as the source for a full-scale water colour painting, feeling calmer when she had completed that in a few hours' time. She decided to take the drawing and the painting with her tomorrow, to show Caleb if it made sense on the day. She walked over to her desk in the studio and checked her diary. She had planned to travel to work on Monday in time for the staff meeting, returning to London that same evening. She now booked a journey for Sunday, and reserved a room in her favourite hotel. She packed her travel bag, selecting her outfits for the journey on Sunday, Sunday evening, and the day on Monday. She stuck with her plan to return to London on Monday evening. She was clearer about the position she wanted to start out with in her conversation with Caleb, and issues she wanted to raise, and she was confident she could allow some spontaneity to govern the meeting on that basis, which she considered to be firm on her part. Sophia then prepared some food, ate it quickly, and went for a long walk in the nearby park, an activity she had come to love and appreciate over the years.

Grace, meanwhile, felt satisfied with her conversation with Sophia. The artist's obvious polite distance, she realised, was characteristic of so many of her interview partners—there was always distance, for them she was always only a side-show, they never allowed her fully into their lives, no matter how much she might imagine herself to be getting genuine access. This left her with some sadness on occasion, which she usually brushed aside. However, today Grace wondered why she was feeling slightly upset by

the reluctance of her interviewees to relate to her as if they were close acquaintances or friends, and not the relative strangers they actually were. On the one hand, she concluded, it must be because she herself did of course not open up fully to those strangers either—she did not even open up fully to Kaya, her own daughter, who was closer to her than any other person in the world. Her expectations were misguided, and her own unknowingly distancing behaviour attracted the distancing response of her interviewees. But she still got more out of them than many other interviewers, which had been her road to success, and she felt justified to be proud of this achievement.

At the same time, she reconsidered her intention to include the reunion of Caleb and Olivia/Sophia in her article about Sophia, and decided against it in the interest of the standard of her writing—her niche and strength was subtle reflection, not the crass revelation of investigative journalism, nor the sensationalism of the popular media. She phoned Kaya, told her briefly about the conversation with Sophia, efficiently discussed and agreed the best venue for the meeting on Monday, and arranged to meet with Kaya and Caleb for dinner in a restaurant on Sunday evening. Not having had much of a lunch, she now cooked herself a delicious early dinner, wondering briefly whether she would cook for someone else, someone special, ever again.

When the phone conversation with Grace had ended, Kaya was still in Caleb's embrace.

'Thank you so much for comforting me, I needed that,' Kaya smiled.

'I just followed my instinct, there was something in your voice,' Caleb explained.

'It is so amazing how well you pick things up about me and how you know how to respond to what you pick up,' Kaya admired.

Caleb was modest: ‘Thank you. We seem to have known each other for a long time already, perhaps in previous lives.’

‘Reincarnation?’ Kaya mused, ‘We have to talk about that as well, but not now.’

At that moment, the phone rang. ‘Perfect timing, as ever, from my dear mother,’ Kaya sighed with a grin, and picked up with her usual ‘Hello?’

It was indeed Grace, as Kaya had predicted. Kaya listened to her carefully for a while, making a few notes on the notepad next to the phone, and interjecting a few instances of ‘OK,’ and ‘I see.’ Then she turned to Caleb and summarised: ‘Sophia is fine to meet with you. Mum suggested you meet at the café inside the Odeon, it’s spacious, and open and not too crowded in the mornings. 10.30 am might be a good time, not too early, and in time for the staff meeting to get some lunch in between, wherever. Alright with you?’ she asked Caleb.

‘Yes, sound great to me. Can’t imagine it will be really happening. But the logistics are fine.’

‘You heard that, mum?’ Kaya asked into the phone.

‘I sure did, honey,’ Grace answered. ‘Very lovely voice, your Caleb’s got, and very loving,’ she added, very warmly.

‘I agree,’ Kaya said happily. ‘When are you coming over tomorrow?’

‘I am planning on leaving here around 2pm, so I should reach your place around 5pm at the latest, what with Sunday afternoon traffic. Maybe we can all have coffee, and then go out for dinner together,’ Grace suggested.

‘Yes, that’s fine, mum, good idea,’ Kaya confirmed.

Grace just could not resist adding cheekily: ‘And then I can go back to yours, and you to Caleb’s for the night—wasn’t that the plan?’

‘Honestly, mum!’ Kaya protested. ‘But yes, that’s the plan,’ she insisted, ‘see you tomorrow, have a good time until then, and a good trip.’ After a few moments, Kaya hung up.

‘You really have to be very alert around your mum, it seems, or she succeeds in her attempts at dominating you,’ Caleb observed, also noticing that on this occasion Kaya had been better prepared than earlier and did now not need his hug to reinforce her own position.

Kaya nodded, noticing herself that Caleb had not come over for a hug this time, and quietly appreciating the alertness they afforded each other. ‘You’ll meet her tomorrow, she’s coming here around 5 for some coffee—could we please have some Monsooned Malabar for her? And later we can go for dinner,’ she summarised the plans, and added softly: ‘And then she can stay in my place and I would love to spend the night at yours?!’

‘All fine with me,’ Caleb stated. ‘Meeting your mum might be a bit daunting, but the night at mine will be plenty of compensation, or a victory celebration, depending,’ he added with a broad smile.

Kaya punched his ribs happily with her elbow: ‘Cheeky! Oh, I forgot, mum decided that she does not want the whole thing between you and Sophia and the meeting as part of her article about Sophia. It’s the last thing you need to have the whole world, and especially your new colleagues, gossip about you, and it won’t help our relationship either, she figured.’

‘I’m relieved, to be honest, I had almost regretted my earlier consent, but I would not have withdrawn it. Very self-effacing and mature from your mum.’ Caleb’s voice reflected both his relief and his appreciation of Grace’s decision.

They spent the rest of the afternoon in further conversation, freely and comfortably alternating between casual, cheerful and deep moods. In the early evening, they had a light dinner of tomato and cheese on toast. When they both felt they were getting tired, they agreed to spend the night together in Caleb's flat, because Caleb had suggested that they should rise very early the next day because he wanted to take Kaya to a very special place for the sunrise.

Their night was even more blissful, apart from affording some rest as well, than their few hours in Kaya's bed earlier that day. They rose early, and Caleb led Kaya to a secluded bench off the main promenade walk.

The view across the bay, from this elevated position, was impressive at any time of day or night, but the current sunrise rendered it astonishingly breath-taking. The blood-red sun made its first appearance on the horizon almost shyly, as if in awe of the night, of the dew that had formed in the air and on the plants, roads, houses, and cars, and tentative to break the magic spell of that nightly peace and calm. The sun also knew that its rise was part of nature, part of creation, and that therefore those moments of hesitance would not last long. Nevertheless, or precisely because those moments were so brief, the sun relished the gentle, loving feelings they triggered on a daily basis. Unconditional, infinite, unbounded, universal love thus re-established, and re-confirmed itself anew, each morning, as the sun's innermost core and essence, informing and permeating, and thus decisively shaping, all life on Planet Earth.

While the first glimmers of the blood-red sun were therefore hesitant, the remainder of the sunrise was a spectacle of determined splendour. The colour of the sun itself, through the increase in light behind it, mutated through a rich palette of deep red, and this radiated through shades of dark, deep red via lighter red and orange all the way

towards golden and yellow, at times mixed with a hint of blue. Those colours spread out from the sun into its vast surroundings of the morning sky in ripples and intricate patterns of undulations. Some of the hues resembled that of an animated salt lamp, or, among precious stones: agate, blood jasper, garnet, red coral and red ruby. The air was crisp and fresh, the kind of cool that foreshadows higher temperatures during the day. Caleb sensed a minute hint of the acerbic fragrance of cedar oil—or was it the slightly sweeter clove?

‘Did I promise too much?’ he asked. His voice revealed his quietly excited anticipation.

‘No. It is really truly beautiful!’ The answer came from the heart, deeply felt, and resonated with Caleb’s heart. ‘I wonder whether you could have asked that question differently, though?’ Kaya added.

Caleb thought for a moment. ‘You mean—not with a negative implication that you implicitly ask me to deny.’

Kaya smiled: ‘Yes, exactly—although that is not so easy, actually: many questions, also rhetorical ones, seem to have a negative phrase in it, such as the “isn’t it” in “beautiful, isn’t it?”’

Caleb continued this train of thought: ‘Will a simple question, “Beautiful?” do the trick?’

Kaya nodded: ‘Yes, perfect, it is much more open, do you (not don’t you!!) see?’

Having agreed on this, they were silent for a while, until the sunrise was complete, the sun had risen, and the new day had begun.

Later that day, in Kaya's flat, the doorbell rang. This was the moment of truth, both Caleb and Kaya thought, at the same time. Kaya pressed the buzzer and Grace was upstairs in a few minutes. Caleb had decided to wait in the living room. He heard Kaya welcoming her mother, and they made their way to the guest bedroom where Grace would stay on all of her visits. Kaya came back to the living room, while Grace settled in as quickly as she could. She had googled Caleb, of course, so she knew what he looked like, and remembered the stages of his academic profile, but she burned to see and meet him in person, possibly the first real serious boyfriend her daughter had ever had, in all those years. Grace took a final look into the mirror, was pleased with what she saw, and made her way into the living room. Kaya and Caleb were sitting on the sofa together, with both armchairs free for her to choose from. When she entered, they got up.

Blushing, Kaya introduced Caleb and her mother to each other: 'Mum, this is Caleb. Caleb, this is my mother, Grace.'

'I am very pleased to meet you, Caleb,' Grace started, extending her hand.

'The pleasure is mine, Grace,' Caleb responded, gentleman through and through, with an open smile, and taking Grace's hand for a warm handshake.

'Shall we sit down,' Kaya suggested, motioning Grace to her choice of armchairs and Caleb to the sofa, taking the seat next to Caleb she had been in when Grace had joined them.

They sat down, Caleb and Grace smiling at each other comfortably.

'Did you have a good journey, Grace?' Caleb asked, adding quickly: 'I bet you told Kaya already, though.'

Grace smiled at his consideration: ‘Yes, the journey was uneventful, which is good, and no, I hadn’t told Kaya already.’ She thought for a moment: ‘I like the way you say her name, by the way.’

‘Oh, thank you,’ Caleb said, surprised. ‘It is a beautiful name. What made you choose it, if I may ask?’

Kaya had to pull herself together not let out a squeak of joy at that question. They had not rehearsed the conversation with Grace, but Caleb’s question was the best trigger for the launch of a conversation she could imagine. Her parents had apparently spent a very, very long time indeed on the choice of Kaya’s name, were very proud of that choice, and always annoyed when people casually mispronounced the name.

Grace beamed: ‘The name has different meanings in different languages, but our choice was influenced by its meaning in the Native American Hopi language, where it means “my wise elder sister”. We liked the spelling, the pronunciation and the meaning.’

‘I like them, too, and I love Kaya,’ Caleb smiled.

They continued their conversation with ease, now that the ice had been broken so quickly and warmly. Caleb talked about his work, his love for drama and theatre, and some of his teaching and research, making sure to catch the signals from both Grace and Kaya when they had heard enough, and it was time for someone else to take over the conversation. Kaya talked about her daily routine as a dentist, and Grace shared some of the insights from her interviews.

This was an appropriate moment for Kaya to launch a new idea. ‘We were wondering whether you might be interested in doing an interview with Caleb’s father, mum,’ she announced.

‘Really?’ Grace sounded interested. ‘Tell me about him, Caleb.’

‘Right, here’s the pitch,’ he smiled, and Grace smiled back encouragingly. ‘Four years ago, when he was sixty years old, my mother died in a car crash. She had been a teacher of Science at the same school where he taught English. He retired from his job, sold the family house, gave me my part of the inheritance, and has been travelling the world since. He had seen him in person about once year since then, and we skype occasionally when he feels like it.’

‘That sounds fascinating, Caleb,’ Grace agreed. ‘I’d love to interview him. You said you are not in touch regularly, so we play it by ear. Call me when he’s been in touch and if he’s interested, and then we can arrange something at short notice.’

‘I told you that mum is always very practical,’ Kaya beamed.

‘I like practical, and your suggestion works well,’ Caleb confirmed. Now it was just seizing the moment when Henry would get in touch again.

For the rest of the day, Caleb, Kaya and Grace had coffee, and Grace loved the Monsooned Malabar. Later they decided against dinner in a restaurant. Instead, Grace cooked a self-made cream of mushroom soup with toasted croutons, and not too long after that, they double-checked the arrangements for Caleb’s meeting with Sophia, Kaya packed a few things for the night and the next day, and then left with Caleb to spend the night at his place while Grace had Kaya’s flat all to herself. They all agreed that it had been a very happy first encounter between Caleb and Grace.

Chapter 5

The next morning, Kaya and Caleb had to be woken up by their alarm clocks, not being able to sleep in due to the demands of daily life, working life. They still managed to

have a relaxed, long and lovely shower and then breakfast together. They agreed to meet back at Kaya's place after their work, so that Caleb could share how his meeting with Sophia, and his first staff meeting, had been. Grace would also be there, briefly, before heading back to London.

Grace and Caleb met at the Café as planned, ready for their encounter with Sophia. Finally, she arrived. Caleb recognised her immediately, and she him, although they had not seen each other face to face for the last fifteen years. Sophia walked over, and said hello to Grace. That seemed easier, and was straightforward. Grace gave her an encouraging hug, making sure at the same time that it was a distant hug. Then Sophia turned to Caleb.

‘Hello, Caleb.’ Her voice sounded dull, distant, forced.

‘Hello,’ Caleb hesitated, and decided: ‘Sophia.’

They shook hands, and for both touching the other's hand brought back the memory of physicality in their marriage. Although fifteen years had passed, that touch was still familiar.

Grace motioned them to sit down, and motioned the waitress over to take their order. Caleb had a hot chocolate, Sophia as well, and Grace a café latte. They spent the minutes until their drinks were served engaging in small-talk, about the weather and the coincidence of Caleb and Sophia working in the same department at the same university. Once the drinks had been served, Grace took hers to a separate table further off. Caleb and Sophia were on their own.

‘This is not easy for either of us, I guess,’ Caleb broke the silence. ‘I wanted to start off by thanking you for agreeing for us to have this meeting.’

‘Nothing since “that day” has been easy for me,’ Sophia said bitterly, ‘and I am relieved we can meet today.’

They were silent again for a while. Caleb started again. ‘I wanted to apologise that I was so hard on you at the time, and that I was unable to forgive. I was not happy with that inability, but there was at the time nothing I could do to get over it. You know that I met Kaya, Grace’s daughter, and she talked to me about forgiving, and what to do to achieve it, and I think that I have been able to forgive you, and I hope you can find a way of forgiving me.’ And Caleb told Sophia in detail about the purification and release process he had gone through in the night after the first meeting with Kaya.

Sophia listened quietly, without interrupting Caleb a single time. ‘You have not lost your ability of being so very clear and precise, I always admired that,’ she said, with a hint of smile, with a hint of warmth, in her eyes, if not her face. ‘I would have told you in person, if you had allowed me, and I told you through the solicitors that my affair with Tim was meant to have ended before you were back, and that I still loved you despite the affair. I had not realised that my affair, if you did find out, would hit you so badly, that it would make you shut down and off so completely.’

‘I guess you can never predict the impact it may have on the partner who is the victim of the betrayal. The victim role is of course quite easy to sustain, it certainly was in my case. I felt sorry for myself, more than angry with you. The moment of insight was like being punched in the stomach with a wrecking ball, I think I doubled over first. Then total coldness and shutting off all emotions, for sheer survival. Probably you were unable to cope with our separation in any different way, and I not with seeing you in bed with Tim.’

‘I have felt guilty about this all my life since then,’ Sophia informed him. ‘I never had a proper partnership since, always ran away when it got serious. I think I will try the approach to forgiving that Kaya taught you, and then I hope I might be as lucky as you and find my own new partner. I certainly wish you luck with Kaya, and, to be clear, I am under no illusion that I might get you back. We cannot undo what happened.’

‘I am very happy with Kaya, although we have known each other only for three days. I will always cherish the good memories of our life together, and I hope that our meeting today can make it possible for us to dwell more on those good memories than on the separation and its circumstances and aftermath. I hope you can forgive me, and forgive yourself, and that you find another partner.’ With those words, Caleb briefly placed his hands on Sophia’s. She turned her hands and took hold of Caleb’s, squeezing them, equally briefly but firmly, and then let them go.

They had reconciled, it had not been too difficult, they both realised, and it felt better. Sophia knew she still had to start the inner forgiveness process, and Caleb realised that there were still remnants of unforgiven material left over that he had to address. They could now, however, move on to more practical matters.

Sophia started. ‘I think we should leave the past to itself, Caleb, and not reveal to anyone at work that we were married to each other once. I took on a different name to distance myself from the past. Do you agree?’

Caleb was relieved. ‘Yes, absolutely, just imagine having to tell everybody what happened. It would make us very unhappy, and for what? For a few party conversations? We are too precious for that!’

‘Good, we are agreed on this.’ Sophia was relieved as well. She added: ‘I’d like to meet Kaya, but not yet, in due course, when your relationship has firmed up.’

‘And I’d like you to meet her, and I hope I will be able to meet, very soon indeed, someone who is then as dear to you as Kaya is for me,’ Caleb said with genuine warmth in his voice.

Sophia swallowed. ‘Part of this meeting today, for me, is to realise even more how much I lost, seeing what I could have been part of, you and your life, and I will need time to work through that, with the forgiveness thing and all.’

‘I understand that, Sophia. In a way, it is the same for me, despite me having found Kaya. It’s the “if only” scenario, in so many ways. If only you hadn’t had the affair, if only we had handled our separation during my year abroad better, talked more openly about how we felt, if only I hadn’t come back early unannounced, if only I had been able to forgive you, all of these, at random, not in any specific order.’

‘But we are both agreed that we cannot go back in time, and do not want to, either. We have both suffered a lot, and are still in the process of coming to terms with what happened, getting over it properly,’ Sophia concluded.

‘Yes, very well put,’ Caleb agreed, ‘we are now in the process of transforming it, of healing. And this meeting and our conversation helped a great deal in this process, and we will be able to co-exist peacefully in the same department.’

Sophia and Caleb had both looked forward to the meeting as something very necessary, but had also been apprehensive about the meeting. They were relieved that the meeting had been so amicable and productive. Neither of them felt inclined to engage in small-talk, and without hesitation they thanked each other again for the conversation, and Sophia left. Caleb saw her walking over to Grace, who got up. They

talked briefly, gave each other a friendly but distant hug, and Sophia left the café, waving at Caleb casually through the window as she passed his table outside. Caleb waved casually back, and finished his drink.

Grace came over and joined Caleb at his table. She looked incredibly curious, so much so that Caleb could not help but bursting out laughing. Grace looked confused.

Caleb explained: ‘Sorry for laughing Grace, but your face is one big question mark of curiosity, and at the same time polite hesitation not to ask immediately what has happened between Sophia and me.’

Knowing how her face tended to be a very accurate mirror of her soul, Grace joined Caleb’s laughter. Then Caleb told her what had happened, briefly, to the extent that he felt she should know, in some cases, Grace felt, a little short on the personal, emotional side of things which of course was most interesting to her, but she respected this as part of his private sphere. She had noticed already in her conversation with him earlier and the day before, and from his exchanges with Kaya she had overheard, that he was firm in demarcating and retaining his private sphere, without being uncomfortable about it, pushy, or impolite—merely gently firm, if that existed. Caleb expressed his genuine gratitude to Grace for having arranged the meeting, and Grace was pleased it had worked out so well. Grace then went back to Kaya’s flat, while Caleb walked across to his office. They would meet again later in the day after work at Kaya’s.

Kaya, meanwhile, had gone to her surgery, prepared for the day and started seeing patients. She had a number of routine check-ups scheduled, as well as some routine fillings, and an extraction of two teeth in a young teenager at the request of the orthodontist, prior to starting orthodontic treatment. The 12-year-old girl came with her

mother, who had taken half a day off work so that she could be with her daughter. Kaya could see that the girl was quite frightened. Kaya motioned the girl to sit in the dental patient chair, and moved a visitor chair to a position where her mother could be as close as possible, also holding her daughter's hand, without obstructing her own work. Then she asked the girl whether she would like her to explain to her what she was going to do. The girl nodded to her mum, who confirmed to Kaya that knowing what was going to happen, and then what was happening, would help her daughter a lot. Kaya got out some models to help her explain what the purpose of the injection was, and how she would work to extract the teeth. The girl understood, and seemed to relax a little. Kaya then adjusted the chair backrest and prepared the syringe for the injection, showing it to the girl before she started, and talking her through her movements just as the girl had seen them with the model a little before. Kaya was very pleased and the girl rather surprised when the injection had been set without her feeling much pain. Kaya then took an elevator to loosen the tooth, followed by the extraction forceps to remove the tooth. The procedure was straightforward and successful, for both teeth that had to be removed. The dental nurse then gave the girl instructions on how long to keep biting the gauze to stop the bleeding, and further information to her and her mother about what to expect and what to do, including the possible need for pain killers, and reminded them to phone the surgery during office hours, and to call the NHS on 111 after hours if needed. Kaya led the girl and her mother out to the reception, where the girl hugged her, thanking her for the treatment, for having made it so bearable. Moments like this were always wonderful for Kaya, confirming how right she had been with her career choice.

After that patient, the dentists and nurses had a scheduled break which they used to have their packed in between snacks. Caleb had brewed some Monsooned Malabar

for Kaya to take with her, and her colleagues noticed the striking aroma and asked her about the coffee. Kaya explained, they all had a little to try, and loved it very much indeed.

Emily Smithson, who owned the surgery, had known Kaya for the past six years, ever since she started working in her surgery. She looked at her curiously now: ‘I say, Kaya, you seem to be in exceptionally great spirits today, and that cannot just be the new coffee?’

Kaya grinned. ‘Well observed, Em. The coffee is not the only thing that’s new in my life, although what’s also new is not really a think either,’ she giggled jauntily.

‘OK,’ Emily investigated further, taking up Kaya’s mood: could it be a fish?’

‘What?’ Kaya gasped.

‘Not a fish, I conclude,’ Emily stated.

‘I know, a doggie,’ ventured Emily’s nurse.

Kaya just raised her eyebrows.

‘A man, it must be a man. The man in her life, the man of her dreams, Mr Right,’ squealed Kaya’s nurse.

Kaya nodded shyly. ‘I didn’t expect it to be so obvious already on the first day back to work,’ she remarked.

‘Transparency is a motto of this surgery, you just can’t escape that, it moulds you for life,’ Emily joked.

Kaya told them about Caleb, and Emily hoped he would become a patient at their surgery, so that they could get to know him quickly. Emily also thought about arranging an in-between social to which partners would be invited—she was just too curious to meet Kaya’s new man.

When Kay's office hours had ended, she phoned Caleb in his office so that he knew he could come over to her flat in line with his own commitments. Then she walked to her car and drove home.

After the conversation with Sophia, Caleb walked across to the university and had a light lunch in the refectory. Then he proceeded to his office and worked through some emails, before making his way to the staff meeting in one of the studios of the performing arts building. He greeted those colleagues he knew already, and was introduced to some additional ones, including Sophia, and neither let on that they had known each other before. When the meeting started, the Head of Department welcomed his staff, formally introduced Caleb and Sophia as new staff members and invited all others to briefly introduce themselves. For Caleb, it was interesting to match photos on the staff web-pages, which he had read closely, to real faces. The Head of Department then moved refreshingly swiftly and efficiently through a lengthy agenda, and in much less time than anticipated, Caleb found himself sharing a coffee with some colleagues in the Performing Arts Centre's posh and expensive Café. When he returned to his office, he had time for some more emails, then Kaya phoned him to tell him she was on her way back home.

Although he was, he did not want to come across as desperate, and waited for another ten minutes or so before he shut down his computer, left the office, and walked swiftly, faster and faster, he noticed, to Kaya's flat. Grace was with Kaya, of course, and they reminisced briefly about the successful meeting of Caleb and Sophia, earlier that day, although it now already seems like in the distant past. Grace said her good-byes soon, wanting to be able to return to London in at least near-daylight. Caleb then

told Kaya in more detail about his day, the meeting with Sophia, the staff meeting, and coffee with new colleagues, and Kaya shared some of her day's impressions, her work and her colleagues' curiosity about him.

Over the next two or three weeks, Kaya and Caleb got to know each other even more, shared many stories from their lives with each other, the first times they had been in love, their parents, memories from school, classmates, teachers, and their professional lives. They alternated where they would spend the night, they cooked together and had the occasional meal in a restaurant. One Friday night, at Caleb's place, the phone rang, and Caleb answered it with his version of 'Hello?' He gave a little gasp when he had heard who was calling. 'Dad! Such a surprise! Where are you calling from?' He paused for a moment. 'Of course, we can skype! I just need to turn on the computer. You call me?' Another pause. 'Great, so looking forward. Bye.'

'Your father?', Kaya enquired. 'You sounded very happy to hear him.'

'I certainly am,' Caleb confirmed, 'sometimes it takes weeks for him to get in touch. He sounded as if he had exciting news to share. And I can tell him about us and about your mum being interested in interviewing him.' He walked over to the study, Kaya joining him, put on his computer and launched skype. His father's call came as soon as the programme was open. The connection worked well.

'Such a lovely surprise to see you, dad,' Caleb said happily. 'It's been a particularly long time.' He looked at the background of the space where his father was sitting—clearly a hotel room, but no clue as to where. 'Where are you skyping from?'

'You can't find a clue in the picture, can you,' Henry joked, having noticed Caleb's searching glance. 'I'm in Germany. I got back here from New York only yesterday, and I am planning on travelling over to the UK tomorrow morning, and I'd

love to come over for tea tomorrow afternoon. I should reach the station at 3.30pm and will take a taxi to your place. What do you say now?’

‘Wonderful!’ Caleb said. ‘In that case, I will leave all my surprises for when you get here,’ he teased.

‘You never have surprises, Caleb,’ Henry White said to his son, only half-joking.

‘You’re right, I am very predictable, but this time I’m making up for the last decade at least’ Caleb smiled. Then he added more formally: ‘You haven’t seen my new place yet—do you want to stay here with me, or would you like to keep your independence by staying in a hotel?’

Henry hesitated, but not for long. ‘Always independence, if I have a choice. I’m very curious about all your news. Connection’s getting a bit wonky, see you tomorrow!’ And with that he hung up.

Henry was still a little jet-lagged from his travel. He had been in New York for a couple of days, to fit in a few Broadway shows and a night at the Metropolitan Opera. Now he was in Munich, for another night at the opera, and an early morning flight to London the next day. He had now been travelling for the past four years, and while he was busy, relentlessly so, he had realised a few weeks ago that he was not getting the distraction from his suppressed grief any more—even the travelling, the constant barrage of new impressions, had become routine. On the flight over from New York he had made the decision to finally come to terms with his wife’s death, by whatever means, even if that meant counselling—a thought he had found abhorrent so far. He would settle down again somewhere in the UK, because that was his home after all, and he realised that he did need a physical space to call home again, after four years of all

but formal homelessness—for legal reasons, he had had his place of residence with Caleb.

‘He’s very brief and to the point,’ Kaya observed after Caleb had closed down the skype software and his computer. They went back to the living room.

Kaya had been thinking while Caleb skyped: ‘From what you told me about him, he might not be here all that long. Should we check with my mum whether she is free the day after tomorrow to come over and meet and interview him?’

That’s what they did. Grace was free on the specified day, and sounded very keen to come over and meet and interview Harry. For her it was a completely new way of trying to cope with bereavement, and she was certain it would make for a fascinating article for her to compose.

Chapter 6

For Henry’s visit, Kaya and Caleb had agreed for Caleb to be on his own when Henry arrived, and for Kaya to join them an hour or so later. Henry’s train had been on time, and he reached Caleb’s flat around 3.45 in the afternoon. Caleb found Henry looking tired and weary, showing his age of by now sixty-four for the first time, as far as Caleb could recall. It was more, Caleb also realised, than mere jet-lag or travel-fatigue. Henry seemed to have arrived at a crossroads, Caleb felt.

Henry, in turn, was not too absorbed with his own thoughts to realise the change in Caleb since he had last seen him. There was so much life in him, warmth, and love, as he had not remembered from him ever since his divorce. He also saw Caleb’s concern when he had seen him.

‘I look old and tired, don’t I,’ Henry asked, briskly interrupting Caleb’s attempt at a response ‘No need to comment, Caleb, right now. I saw your concern when you saw me. Your face is still so familiar to me, even if I don’t see you on a daily basis any more. But you do look great, so please, do tell me your surprises, right away!’ he urged.

After Caleb had shown his father around the flat, and Henry had made use of the guest bathroom, they sat down together in the living room. Henry had had some coffee on the journey and now really wanted to hear the news before having tea.

‘There’s a lovely fragrance of perfume in the flat here, Caleb, and it isn’t yours, and it is not so stale that it could have been left from the people who lived here before you moved in,’ Henry observed. ‘Would one of your surprises be that you have a girlfriend?’

‘Good guess, dad, and spot on,’ Caleb beamed. And he proceeded to tell Henry all about Kaya, how they had met, that she was a dentist, and many other details. Henry had many questions to ask, and Caleb was happy to answer them. He told his father also about his meeting with Sophia and their reconciliation. Then he came to mention Grace, and that she was keen to interview him. ‘Grace would be able to come over here tomorrow and talk to you then. I mean I don’t know your plans, but you might be far away again soon?’

‘So that’s your surprises done, Caleb, is it?’ Henry asked, and when Caleb nodded, he continued: ‘They were wonderful surprises, all of them. I am very happy for you that you have found Kaya, and that you are reconciling with Olivia. Sorry, I know that she is called Sophia now, but for me she is still Olivia. I admire you for admitting that you had problems forgiving her. I always fully understood why you were unable to set eyes on her again. You know how upset I was at the time, and how furious with her:

I could easily have killed her myself, and I need some help in dealing with that whole chapter of your life, and also mine and that of your mother. All in due course. And I am grateful to Kaya and you to think of me a suitable subject for Grace's interview series. I am very touched and honoured by that, believe me. And I would be very happy to be interviewed.'

Henry paused and got up, as he now came to his surprise, which had firmed up further overnight. Caleb made a move to get up as well, but Henry motioned him gently to remain seated. 'Here's my surprise,' he started, clearing his throat. 'I have now been running away from the grief about your mother's death for the past four years. I have given up my home and travelled the world. Financially, I could go on like this until I die, literally. But even travelling has become a routine that does not stop me from thinking of Imogen...' he hesitated because he had not said that name aloud for a long time, 'of Imogen. So, I want to settle back in the UK, I don't yet know where exactly, I'll make up my mind over the next week, and then I want to get grief counselling to help me cope better with my loss.'

Caleb was very happy for his father, and told him so immediately. He proceeded to make coffee, and had even baked, at very short notice, his father's favourite cake. Just when they were ready, the doorbell rang, and Kaya joined them. She had heard much about Henry, and he about her, from Caleb, and so they met for the first time as if they had known each other already well. Kaya was keen to see Caleb and his father together. They were very relaxed and cheerful with each other, which made her happy for Caleb and Henry, but she noticed feeling a little sad herself because she did not have that kind of relationship with her mother, let alone her father. Henry, in turn, was pleased to see how relaxed and cheerful Caleb and Kaya were together. He liked Kaya

from the moment he first saw her. She was so different from Olivia, Henry thought, even if he tried to be objective and dismiss his antipathy towards Olivia, which he had held even before Caleb had left her. Kaya was right for Caleb, Henry felt, and Caleb for her, they were right for each other. He had high hopes for their future. Which would include him, and perhaps even see him become a grandfather, in due course.

They continued their pleasant conversation, with Henry relishing the opportunity of sharing memories of his years of travel, Caleb and Kaya made dinner for them all, and some time after dinner they took Henry to his hotel. He would come back some time in the later morning for breakfast together, they would go out for lunch and then leave Henry to meet with, and be interviewed by Grace.

Time passed quickly and congenially, and Grace arrived at Caleb's place as arranged. Kaya introduced her to Henry, and Henry and Grace looked at each other attentively as they shook hands. They had coffee together, then Caleb and Kaya went for a walk, leaving Henry and Grace to their interview—Grace would call Kaya when it was time for them to return. Grace took out her recording equipment and arranged it in relation to where Henry and Grace had decided to sit for their conversation. Then she put on the recorder and launched her questions. As usual, she had prepared as much as possible, based on information from Caleb and Kaya, but there was no public material available on google about Henry. As a result, she had to start with some questions that filled in the facts, his life up to his travels, and some detail of the travels themselves. Henry's responses allowed Grace to form some feeling for him, and guided the direction of her later questions. She found, as Caleb and Kaya had already over the last day or so, that Henry felt a strong urge to share his life experiences, and that, as a teacher of English,

he was very erudite and expressed himself very eloquently and poetically. He was able to draw her into his world, which, during his years of travel, had been a world of adventure. In terms of its route, it may well have been similar to a young person's travels in the gap year between school and university. But it came across as so much richer than that because Henry's experiences were those of four years of travelling, not one, it was not a time in between one very specific set of circumstances and another one, school and university, or university and life in employment, and, even more importantly, he was able to bring some forty years of a rich adult life to the travels, which afford many more nuances and points of comparison than twenty years of infancy, childhood, adolescence and very young adulthood.

Grace was impressed by his life and his narration. All she had to do was provide an occasional nudge to steer him into a direction she had become particularly interested in, and she was certain she would gain so much material in transcript of the recording that there would be plenty to go with for an article in two parts over two weeks. Henry was aware that in Grace he had a very interested listener, and he was glad to be able to tell his stories to someone who would not consider him off because of their contents.

They spent quite a long time on their conversation. Kaya and Caleb had meanwhile returned to Kaya's place, and waited there for Grace to phone them. In the end they had even made their own dinner there, and Grace and Henry had made their own dinner at Caleb's place, interrupting the recording for that hour. After dinner, Henry and Grace tidied the kitchen and placed used cutlery and crockery into the dishwasher, and carried on with their recorded conversation. When this had drawn to a close, they continued their conversation without recording, even though the recording had not felt too formal for either of them. Henry suddenly remembered that only two

days ago he had wondered if he would ever cook for, or with someone again. Now he had, and he felt that it had been with someone special. They talked about the formalities of Grace having the recording transcribed and then composing the article, and then she would send it to Henry for approval, and then it would be published.

Henry sat up a little straighter in his comfortable armchair. 'I have enjoyed talking very much, and enjoyed talking to *you*. Look, we are both a little advanced in years. You must have realised that I don't like wasting time. What I am trying to say is that I would not want our next meeting to be left to chance, and not be occupied by a formal interview either, although I hasten to add that you made me feel very comfortable throughout. Oh, I'm not good at this, at all, am I? It's been a long time,' he faltered.

'I know what you mean. And you have said it very beautifully, Henry! I also enjoyed our meeting and conversation, and the cooking and eating together, more than many other formal interviews that I have been doing over the years,' Grace reassured him. 'I would like to invite you to come to my place in London, whenever it suits you with your plans, sooner rather than later please, and we can talk, can cook and do whatever else we like,' and with the last words she placed her left hand on his right one and squeezed it firmly.

Henry then phoned Caleb and because it was late in the evening by then, they arranged for Henry to go to his hotel, while Grace would stay in Kaya's flat and Kaya and Caleb in Caleb's. They laughed a lot working out these logistics, but in due course everyone ended up where they were meant to, and had a restful night. They met for breakfast at Caleb's, then Grace returned to London in time for an early afternoon interview with Simon Callow.

Henry had vacated his hotel room and asked to stay at Caleb's for a few days. He had been thinking hard over night, and raised some of his thoughts with Kaya and Caleb. 'I hope you don't mind if I confide in you,' he started, 'but I am quite smitten with your mum, Kaya, even though I only met her for a few hours yesterday. I told her, quite clumsily, I think, that I would not like to leave seeing her again to chance. She assured me that she would like to see me again as well, and invited me to have tea with her, even at her place. I just don't know whether she was just being polite to an old fool and secretly hoping he'd not take her up on the invitation.'

Kaya smiled warmly when Henry had finished, aware that all eyes were on her. 'It seems we don't waste time courting in this family,' she commented. 'My mum would never play with someone's feelings—her own have been hurt more than enough for that. She would have found a very clear and kind way of turning you down on the spot, Henry, if that had been the way she felt. If she invites you, then you are in there with a big, fat chance. And don't feel you need to be polite about timing. If you feel like travelling over to her today or tomorrow, do it.'

Chapter 7

Henry felt good to have asked, and pleased with the information and assurance he had received. He phoned Grace the next day, and they arranged to meet, initially for lunch at a new Indian restaurant Grace had found, tucked away in Soho, two days later. Before that, Grace had to finish writing up the interview with Callow, and arrange another one. They were both very excited about the prospect of meeting relatively soon, though, and their excitement was amply reflected in their voices on the phone. Henry immediately told Caleb and Kaya, who shared his joy, and Grace phoned Kaya as well to tell her the

news, although she then realised that Kaya must have heard, and had indeed heard, from Henry herself. But she simply had to tell someone how happy and excited she felt, almost like a giddy teenager awaiting her first prom.

On the day, they met at the restaurant. Henry was curious, because Grace had praised the cooking so highly. The fragrance of the spices was already prominent when they studied the menu. The combination of ingredients struck Henry as imaginative, and mouth-watering, to an extent he had not expected and known from any other restaurant he had been over his many years of travel. They ordered, and Grace shared some of the insights from her recent interviews, which went beyond the material she would then publish officially. It took a long while for the food to be served, confirming the chef's claim to prepare the majority of items on the menu fresh to order, rather than having many dishes pre-cooked and only re-heated, or, worst of all, microwaved, on order. When their food arrived, its arrangement in the metal bowls was a feast for the eye, almost too precious to disturb by tucking into it. The meal proved a feast for the taste buds as well. The combination of flavours of the meat and the vegetables and the combination of spices was so intricate and varied, so adventurous and simply right, so multi-layered without the layers dissolving in the mouth to an anonymous mass. And the flavours in their infinitely subtle and still rich textures and blends remained in their mouths and their memories for a long time after they had finished their three courses—another experience Grace had only encountered at her previous meals at this restaurant, and Henry never before in his life. They ate mainly in silence, focusing fully on their experience of relishing the food. Unlike many restaurant experiences, their stomachs felt pleasantly filled rather than stuffed to the brim (independent of the quantity of food

they had actually eaten). After lunch, they took a taxi and went for a leisurely walk in Hyde Park.

After a while, Henry realised he did not know where in London Grace lived, and he asked her.

‘Around the corner, in Mayfair,’ Grace answered. Seeing that Henry fell silent and went pale, she added quickly: ‘Don’t worry, I am not earning enough to be able to afford this. It was left to me a few years ago by my favourite teacher in school, with whom I had kept in touch after leaving school. She had inherited it herself from an uncle, had lived there for her long retirement, but she did not have family, and I was very surprised when I had the summons from a London solicitor one day. I went there, and he read her will to me. I was the only one of her many pupils over the years who had kept faithfully and genuinely in touch. It’s of course a great privilege. The will stipulated I had to live here myself, and leave it in my will to family or friends to live in—it must never be sold to a stranger on the open market.’

They reached the flat after a short walk, ready for a coffee, and Grace had in the meantime bought the family’s new favourite, Monsooned Malabar. They exchanged further memories, of Henry’s travels, of his life with Imogen, of Henry’s childhood, and Kaya’s childhood, of Julian, of Grace’s interviews. Time passed very quickly for both, and Grace prepared some light dinner. Henry had arranged to spend the night in a Travelodge near King’s Cross station, and returned there quite late at night, returning to Grace’s flat for breakfast the next morning.

‘Good morning, Henry,’ Grace welcome him in. ‘Did you sleep well?’

‘Yes, fortunately I can sleep well in most places,’ Henry told her, ‘otherwise travelling as much as I have done would not be possible.’ He sniffed the air. ‘Smells delicious—pancakes?’

‘Yes,’ Grace confirmed, ‘with maple syrup.’

‘Wonderful! Let’s go,’ Henry urged.

They had a rich breakfast, then moved on to the living room to sit comfortably in the armchairs. Henry cleared his throat, but before he could start to say what he wanted to say, Grace laughed: ‘You have this particular way of clearing your throat which always means you want to say something important. You did that after the interview when you said you didn’t want to leave our next meeting to chance.’

Henry giggled. ‘Guilty as charged, your honour,’ he said, and cleared his throat again. ‘Look, I may be rushing things, or may be jumping the gun, or whatever other appropriate phrase you can think of. Meeting you, for me, was love at first sight, and yesterday and today have only confirmed this for me. I never thought it would be possible, after having lost Imogen, but I love you, with all my heart, and...’

Grace interrupted him, gently ‘I love you too, Henry, for me it was love at first sight as well, I think, the way I feel, it is the first time I really love someone, and it’s you I love.’

They got up from their armchairs for a warm and tight embrace. Then they sat down on the sofa next to each other, holding hands. Grace picked up the important conversation they were having. ‘We said before that we are not ones to waste time. You love me, and I love you, we are certain about it, and we have told each other, and I will tell you at least a thousand times every day. You are making a fresh start anyway after all your years of travelling. Please move in with me, right away if you like. I think

given our years of independence, I would like us to be in separate bedrooms, to have our personal space if we need it, also if we find that we snore. I would of course like to sleep with you, but I have not had that pleasure, of sleeping with anyone, I mean, for a very long time, possibly even longer than the four years you have been without Imogen, so I am out of practice and a little anxious and shy about that. So that's my position, in a nutshell.'

Henry closed his eyes. He thought of Imogen, and that he was not betraying her in being here with Grace, whom he loved so dearly, even if very differently from the way he had loved Imogen. Feeling Grace squeeze his hands, he opened his eyes again and looked into Grace's. 'I would love to move in with you, I will just need to get my things from Caleb's flat. I like the separate bedrooms arrangement, and both beds are double beds, so we can always visit one way or another. We will take making love to each other as it happens, and it will be wonderful.'

Kaya and Caleb were both surprised, and at the same time not surprised, when Grace and Henry told them about the development. Henry picked up his things, the contents of one very large suitcase, from Caleb's flat and moved in with Grace less than a week from the day he had first set eyes on her. They now gave each other all the space and freedom they wanted or needed, and found their life together was thoroughly enjoyable, and it included making love.

Chapter 8

A few weeks had passed since then, and altogether three months since Caleb and Kaya had first met. They had decided, at quite short notice, to travel to Edinburgh for the weekend, where they had found a deal for a last-minute two nights in a flat close to

Waverley station. After an uneventful train journey, Kaya and Caleb arrived into Edinburgh station. They took their sparse luggage and left the train, walked through the station to the exit, and walked across to the flat they had rented for the weekend, self-catering. They needed to collect the keys from the owner, so they rang the doorbell as instructed in the email they received when they had paid the 2nd rate of the rent due. The owner, a feisty woman probably in her late sixties, welcomed them, showed them around efficiently, was open to their questions, and then wished them a wonderful weekend and left to go back to her own home somewhere else in the city. The flat was as lovely as they had hoped, the photos on the website were not too photoshopped, and they made themselves at home quickly. They had seen a food store on their way from the station, and walked back there to do some basic shopping. They left that in the flat and went out for another, longer walk before it was getting dark. Back in the flat, they prepared dinner in the small kitchen and ate at the dining table in the living/dining room, then lit some of the candles that were spread around the room, dimmed the electric light, and relaxed in the comfortable arm-chairs. At some point in their conversation, Caleb paused.

‘Kaya,’ he said.

Kaya laughed. ‘Whenever you have said my name in this way, it always means you have something special to say.’

Caleb laughed as well. ‘And you always notice in advance. Yes, you are right. I have been thinking: we have been together now for the past three months, and we have spent only few nights not together, when one of us was ill, or when I was away at a conference or you at an advanced training residential. I wanted to suggest that we move

in together, and if you agree in principle, then we can discuss whether to move into my flat or yours, or whether we find a new place to live in together.’

Kaya had come over to sit on Caleb’s lap already while he was talking. ‘This is a wonderful idea, Caleb. Yes, I agree in principle, and I have actually already been thinking about whether your flat or mine or somewhere else.’

They hugged and kissed happily, and then Kaya continued: ‘I own my flat, yours is rented. Yours is bigger overall. I have talked to someone in the university, without commitment: they would be interested to rent my flat, for as long as I like, with the option for me to move back in at a six-month notice period. They want to use the flat as a facility to house guest academics. They would offer a regular rental payment, would add furniture as needed once I have left, and take care of thorough cleaning after each visitor has left, and I would be invited to inspect the flat after each changeover of visitors. They would be prepared to start the contract at any time, with a week’s notice. I would like to bring some furniture with me, but by far not all. We could have your current bedroom as our bedroom, and have the current guest bedroom as guest bedroom for visitors, or if one of us needs to have more space, when we start snoring too much as we get older, perhaps, or if one of us is ill? What do you think?’

‘I like the idea very much indeed,’ Caleb beamed. When we get back we can walk through my or rather our, flat to see which furniture to add, or to swap, or which of the current ones can go to the British Heart foundation to be replaced by yours. And what we want to add that isn’t there yet in my or your flat. That will be fun.’

‘And we can work out the finances, sharing the rent and the insurances and utility bills and council tax and all that,’ Kaya continued.

‘Yes,’ Caleb agreed.

They enjoyed their weekend in Edinburgh, doing a lot of sightseeing together, Holyrood Palace and Park, the Castle, the Royal Mile, among others, and before they knew it, it was time to return home. They agreed which furniture to move, which to leave in Kaya's flat, and which to pass on to the British Heart Foundation to collect. Within a few days, Kaya had moved in and they began to create their lives really together, without having to arrange short notice over-night arrangements any more.

Grace and Henry were very happy to hear about the development, especially since they had moved in together even earlier and had not regretted that remarkable shift in their lives for a moment. Caleb and Kaya visited them in London a few weeks later, and each couple found the other exuberant with their new-found happiness. They reminisced about their first few moments with each other, not too long ago, and Grace wondered aloud whether it was possible for so much happiness to last.

'You mean that it is scary to be so happy, and something bad must happen when there is so much happiness?' Caleb asked.

'Yes, there is often a feeling of guilt attached to being happy, as if one has not deserved so much of it,' Henry agreed.

Kaya was adamant: 'I think this is an old, belief pattern, one that is very well established, but also very, very wrong. There is so much potential in life for gratitude, adventure, positive thinking, candour, cooperation, imagination, purpose, patience, flexibility, generosity, clarity, charity, wealth, laughter, joy, beauty, and goodness. We are so focused on negative emotions and negative experiences that we feel guilty when we have any of those wonderful things in our lives. But the purpose of all life is just those positive things, otherwise there would be no point, no point at all. So, let's be happy, let's be beautiful, and all of those other things, as much as possible, and rejoice

in those positive experience, modestly, from the heart, I mean without excess, but without feeling guilty.’

Henry was amazed. ‘Hear, hear. Quite a speech, Kaya, thank you. I think you are right. We must not feel guilty about our happiness, we should rejoice in each other’s happiness, and make the most of it.’

‘And not from an “while it lasts” perspective either, which allows the old fear that happiness cannot last back in through a side door,’ Caleb added.

Chapter 9

The weeks passed. Grace involved Henry in her interviews, discussing the subjects with him beforehand, and establishing which questions he would find of interest. He would, however, not be present at the interviews themselves, and not meet the VIP interviewees in person either. In turn, Henry took Grace to his favourite places across the world every few weeks, and thus they travelled to Italy, Greece, the USA and Japan together.

To the great satisfaction of Emily Smithson, and of course, Kaya herself, Caleb enrolled in the Smithson surgery and soon had his first check-up as Kaya’s patient. As a special treat for him, and as a surprise for Kaya, all practice staff were assembled in the treatment room for the occasion, bursting into a round of spontaneous applause when Kaya had completed the examination without finding any signs for concern.

Caleb’s Head of Department asked him to represent the Department, on his behalf, at a major conference for the subject, taking place in London, at relatively short notice because he was unable to attend himself. Caleb discussed the logistic with Kaya.

‘You remember your mum offered me to stay at her place when I needed to be in London?’ Caleb asked.

‘Yes, of course.’

‘Well, now that my dad is with her, that won’t work anymore, but I would still like to visit her.’

Kaya supported this, and Caleb phoned her. Grace was indeed very happy, and so was Henry. On the day, he reached Grace’s apartment in the late afternoon. After the welcome, with a cup of Monsooned Malabar, what else, in the kitchen-diner, Caleb sensed some tension in Grace, which he hoped was not to do with his presence in principle. Henry must have noticed it as well, because he raised his eyebrows at some stage and glanced over at Caleb. They engaged in some small-talk for a while, then moved to the living room and made themselves comfortable in the elegant armchairs.

Grace cleared her throat, bringing Caleb’s level of alertness to a new high point. ‘Caleb, I have not known you for a long time yet, but I believe you and Kaya are serious. This is why I have been thinking long and hard whether to share with you some very delicate information. I have not told Henry about this yet either. I have decided that I must share it with you, as it is fact that will have an impact whether you know it or not, and if you do know it, you have a better chance of dealing with it.’ Grace paused. ‘This is not really coming out making much sense, is it?’

‘Perhaps more than you think,’ Caleb reassured her. ‘I am tempted to take up some of the ideas Kaya and I have talked about, and that I expect you are also familiar with—I think some of them come originally from, or through, you. Are you talking about something in Kaya’s life that she has suppressed, that she may not even remember, or want to remember herself, but that is always there under the surface? And perhaps something that also explains a certain tendency of yours to be very protective regarding your daughter?’

Grace had to take a deep breath and blink away some tears that her eyes had spontaneously filled with. Henry took one of her hands in his, and she gave him a grateful smile. ‘Kaya said to me more than once that she was stunned by your exceptionally high level of sensitivity and of reading other people,’ she said. ‘Spot-on, again, Caleb. Brace yourself.’

‘Ready,’ Caleb said.

‘I don’t know how much background info I need to provide,’ Grace started. ‘How familiar are you with the debate around child sexual abuse—I mean, over and above what is in the media all the time?’

Caleb shook his head in disbelief and then put his head in his hands: ‘So that’s why I had to...’ he almost stammered. ‘Sorry, I am being incoherent. I know a lot, in fact, because I am about to finish co-writing a short book on the ways that contemporary drama, in America, England and Germany, has dealt with child sexual abuse, often conflated with the concept of paedophilia. I worked with a psychologist on the book. We are now looking for a publisher willing to take this up. It was a total coincidence, as this is usually not the area I publish in, and I was always wondering why I was drawn to this topic. It may well be for me to be prepared, as much as that is possible, now, for what you have to tell me.’

Grace took this in. ‘Good. Kaya must have told you about my husband, Julian.’

Caleb nodded.

‘Also, that he left me after some ten years of marriage.’

Caleb nodded again.

‘We stayed in touch, of course, and he had full access to Kaya and saw her a lot. After he had left, and I guess she did not tell you about that, we saw much more of his

brother, Nathan, than of him. I was glad to have the company, and Kaya adored him. With hindsight, I now know that he systematically groomed Kaya, for three long years, and then...' Grace's voice choked, and she started crying.

'No need to go into too much detail, Grace. I can imagine the rest,' Caleb said, shocked but still managing for his voice to sound warm and encouraging. 'How did you find out?'

'It was almost a similar situation to Sophia and you: one day I got home earlier than planned, which never happened with me. I found them together in her own bed.' A shiver ran down Grace's spine from this memory, almost visible for Caleb. 'It is an image I will never forget, I remember it so well as if it had happened only a few moments ago now. I don't know whether anything can be described as fortunate in such a context, but fortunately this had been his first violation, he had not taken it to the intended point yet, and up to that moment it had not met with any apparent emotional or physical opposition from her, she was quite excited about it all, and even, if only for a second, disappointed that I had interrupted them.' Grace paused, overcome by her memories.

Caleb was thoughtful. 'I bet that apparent pleasure only led for her own feelings of guilt to be even stronger later on?'

Grace hesitated. She told Caleb that she had beaten Nathan up so badly he had needed lengthy hospital treatment and she escaped only narrowly from being taken to court for grievous bodily harm. Nathan had been imprisoned for a number of years and responded well to therapy, from what she had heard—she had insisted he did not seek to get back in touch with them ever, during his prison term or afterwards. Grace had always blamed herself for not having protected Kaya, and had become and remained

overly protective since. She had been in therapy for what it was worth, to be able to support Kaya, who had suffered a total nervous breakdown after Grace had found her. That breakdown had left her with a case of what some psychologists might call repressed memory. 'I read a lot of the literature about this over the years. I am aware how controversial the concept has been, but anyway, nothing since has given any indication that Kaya remembers anything of what happens today. She does not show any special reaction when Nathan's name is mentioned, and the repression mechanism, if you want to call it that, seems to have worked well, I have not noticed any obvious signs of all the kinds of mental illness which can arise from abuse and repressed memory. The only thing is that you are her first boyfriend after a brief relationship ten years ago by now, when she was twenty, in uni. So, to answer your question, she did not have feelings of guilt directly related to this incident because she has never remembered it.'

'Thank you for sharing this with me, Grace,' Caleb said. 'Anything could trigger a flashback at any moment, though, couldn't it, and any adverse effect of the experience could materialise in a different area of her life, or has already, without her or you knowing.'

'Yes, you are right,' Grace agreed, 'and that is indeed why I have been so protective of her, because I didn't pay enough attention at the time.'

'I guess your therapists have told you that many times already, but I think you are not to blame, and should not blame yourself. These perpetrators are so clever and cunning, they wind their victims, both Kaya and yourself, and possibly also your ex-husband, around their little fingers. And you don't expect something like this from someone close to you.'

Henry had listened quietly throughout, looking compassionately at both Grace and his son. ‘This has been quite some revelation, Grace, dearest,’ he finally said. ‘All these repressed emotions in Kaya will come out, no doubt about it, and your work and knowing about what happened, Caleb, will allow you to be there for Kaya when she needs you.’ Then he added, after a pause: ‘I think I should make us all dinner now, we could do with sum sustenance after this conversation.’

Grace and Caleb agreed wholeheartedly, and soon they sat down together for dinner, allowing more inconsequential conversation to take over, which ended up focusing on the differences of comedy, and what people laughed about, in different countries. Caleb remembered that as a student he had spent some time on a rural university campus and seen a Woody Allen film. ‘The American students were laughing hard, quite a lot, and I sat there thinking “Ok, I know why this is supposed to be funny, but it really isn’t funny at all”. A week later, there was a British film comedy, *The Wrong Box*, in which Queen Victoria accidentally beheads a man she wants to bestow a knighthood on. She is seen with sword in hand, creating knights by touching the sword on the knights’ shoulders. The camera then moves to a close-up of her face when she is about to knight another man; you hear a loud thudding noise, the Queen rolls her eyes sharp left, then sharp right, and then enunciates in a perfectly calm voice: “Oh, I am so sorry, *Sir William*”. I laughed at lot at that, but nobody else in the audience did.’

Grace commented that comedy also depended on the current mood of an audience. She added some instances of comedy around dentists, where often intentional cruelty was part of the comic formula. Henry had come across the late German comedian Loriot, whose kind of comedy was still considered hilarious in Germany, while it could cause controversy as being insensitive towards minority groups in other

countries. The conversation then shifted to the impact of film on audiences. Caleb shared the example of common release of emotions in the large audience that watched the launch of the film *Steel Magnolias* in London, with around a thousand people in the vast auditorium.

‘There is a sequence of scenes that build up to a very intense release of pent-up emotions,’ Caleb explained. I will use the actors’ names, not the characters.’ The film is set in one of the southern states of the USA. Dolly Parton owns a beauty parlour, her husband is Sam Shepherd. Her assistant is slightly simple, very religious Darryl Hannah. Her circle of friends consists of the widow of the former mayor of the town, Olympia Dukakis. Sally field is the mother of Julia Roberts, and then there is the town oddball, Shirley MacLaine. Roberts is suffering from diabetes. She is getting married. She gets pregnant against her doctors’ advice. She had kidney failure, a transplant of a kidney donated by Field is not successful. Roberts collapses when her child is a toddler. Her husband finds her, she is rushed to hospital, never regains consciousness despite her mother trying all they can to revive her. They decide to have life support machines turned off. The funeral takes place, and in the cemetery after the funeral, Dukakis, Hannah, Parton and MacLaine are together with Field, who has a big emotional outburst: she should have been the first to go, it’s all so unfair, she is so angry, she wants to hit someone. All the while from Roberts’s collapse onwards, spectators have desperately repressed the expression of their emotions. Now Dukakis grabs MacLaine, pushes her towards Field and says: “Here, hit this”. This punch-line comes so unexpectedly, to the characters and to the audience, that it can serve as a conductor for the audience to release all their pent-up emotions in waves and waves of laughter.’

They realised that it was time to call it a day. Grace and Henry thanked Caleb for his visit, and he thanked Grace again for sharing the information about Kaya.

Chapter 10

Soon after this, Caleb was in his office on his own, working through a smallish backlog of emails. There was an urgent knock on his door, and even before he could call ‘Come in,’ the door burst open and, to Caleb’s considerable surprise, Sophia burst in.

‘That’s a surprise, I didn’t know it was your office day today. Come in, take a seat—or should we go and have coffee somewhere?’

‘Sorry, Caleb, to be barging in. I had some additional commitment here today, and then I checked my mail, and then I just had to see you immediately.’ Sophia was out of breath and sounded very agitated. ‘Better here, where we have some privacy.’

‘OK,’ Caleb said, more curious now than concerned any more. ‘What’s the news in your mail?’

Sophia hesitated, then pulled an opened letter out of her elegant briefcase. ‘Here, see for yourself,’ she said, shaking her head as if in disbelief.

Caleb reached for the envelope and took out an A5-sized colour photograph showing—Kaya in a loving embrace with a stranger. ‘What the...’ Caleb muttered under his breath.

‘I am so sorry, Caleb, but I thought I had to show you this at once.’

‘Yes, of course, thank you,’ Caleb stuttered. Then he quickly pushed his emotions to the side. ‘So, you found this in the mail today?’

‘Yes,’ Sophia confirmed.

‘Let’s see,’ Caleb mumbled, looking at the envelope, ‘posted in London, the day before yesterday, and addressed accurately to you. I’ll talk to Kaya about this, Sophia, and thank you so much for coming over with it straight away.’

Sophia was still upset: ‘I am so sorry this had to come from me, Caleb, especially after what we went through all those years ago, and I have no idea why someone would have sent this to me, but I thought I had to tell you.’

Caleb reassured her again that she did the right thing, although he had to agree that coming from her made this particularly painful for him, at this moment, no matter what explanation might emerge in the future. With that he left the office and returned home, thinking hard about what had happened and what “home” could still mean.

Kaya was already at home when he reached. She sensed that something was wrong as soon as Caleb entered the flat. He quickly disappeared into his study, and came out to the kitchen after a while.

‘Kaya,’ he said, trying to sound casual, ‘can we talk for a moment?’

‘Yes, of course, Caleb, what’s wrong? You look completely shaken,’ she said with genuine concern in her voice.

Without a word, Caleb passed the photo to Kaya. She looked at it, shook her head in disbelief, looked at Caleb, and then looked again very closely at the photo. Then she let out a laugh of relief, and, overcome with emotions to the point that tears filled her eyes, she sighed: ‘Oh Caleb, how awful for you. How did you get this?’ she asked, pointing to the photo?

‘It was sent anonymously to Sophia, posted in London, and she gave it to me. Why did you laugh?’

‘It is clearly a fake, poorly photoshopped, and I laughed with relief when I found the evidence. To get that from Sophia, after all you had been through together, must have been awful.’

‘Well, not exactly fun,’ Caleb agreed bitterly. ‘I never doubted you, but it was still alarming. What’s the evidence?’ He was genuinely curious, and beginning to get angry at whoever might have played at best a very poor practical joke on them.

Kaya took Caleb’s hands in hers and squeezed them tightly. Then she pointed to a detail of the image. ‘Here,’ she said, ‘See this? The shape of the wall in the background bends around that man. That shows it’s been photoshopped.’ She jumped up, ran to the chest of drawers in the living room and came back with a magnifying glass. ‘And here’s another clue, actually,’ she gasped. ‘The picture has been taken in sunlight. But if you look closely, for me the sun comes from the right, and for that man, the sun comes from the left.’

‘You cannot have been together. This is a fake. And now I recognise you in the photo, we have it on Facebook, of course, with me where that other man has been photoshopped in.’ The relief in Caleb’s voice was very obvious.

‘So, it’s clear and settled, it’s a fake,’ Kaya stated. ‘Now I really would like to know whether this was just a very poor practical joke, or a clumsy but serious attempt at getting us apart.’

‘It came via Sophia. Nobody outside of our family knows that she was my wife,’ Caleb considered. ‘And I think they would not have talked about it as a party-piece, I mean your mum or my dad, or your dad, if someone told him. Sophia was genuinely worried when she gave me the envelope, I don’t think it came from her. That only leaves...’

‘Sophia’s mother, Myrtle’ Kaya interjected. ‘You told me that she hated you after you did not take Sophia back.’

‘But so much hatred, after so many years, that she makes this effort, that she in effect commits a crime, and that she also involved her own daughter. It’s pathetic, sad.’ Caleb concluded. ‘And, in the end, she brought us even closer together than before, if that is possible.’ With those words, he took Kaya’s hands and they kissed and embraced for a long time.

‘Do we do anything about it?’ Kaya wondered.

‘I think we should not tell family, unless this photo spreads. I will tell Sophia that the photo is a fake. Perhaps she sorts it out with her mother, and gets her to admit it and apologise. If not, we or I could pass by Myrtle’s place when we are next over in London?’ Caleb suggested.

‘Good ideas, on all accounts,’ Kaya agreed. ‘Let’s keep this as low profile as possible, it does not deserve more of anyone’s energies.’

Caleb told Sophia in passing when they happened to meet again at the office, pointing out the evidence that the photo had been fake, and wondering aloud, but with not too much concern, who had done this. Sophia was visibly pleased that there was no problem in Caleb’s marriage, but she was also aware, quietly but very acutely, of the implications of the photo having reached Caleb through her. She made some comments to that effect, but Caleb quickly reassured her that she had done the right thing in telling him and giving him the photo.

That evening, Sophia had returned to her London studio and was due to meet with her mother anyway as they had arranged a while ago. She told Myrtle about the letter and the fake photo. ‘I just hope Kaya and Caleb decide to take this to the police,

because creating such a photo and sending it to a third party, me, is a criminal act, I am certain,' she finished.

Myrtle had been fidgeting in her seat all the while. Now she burst out crying. 'I didn't know it was a criminal offence, pet,' she sobbed. 'I just wanted to punish him for not forgiving you all those years, for making your life a misery, and now he's all happy again with that Kaya woman and you are not.' She was no longer able to suppress all the anger and frustration that had built up over the years, and her voice croaked, and she fought back the tears.

'My God,' Sophia exclaimed, shocked. 'It was you? Did you create that photo yourself, with Kaya's Facebook image?'

'Yes, it was me, and I do not regret I did it, and I told you why,' Myrtle almost shouted. Then she added, a little more subdued: 'I just didn't know it would be a considered crime under the law.'

'Well, is, mum,' Sophia admonished her. 'It was a very selfish and foolish thing to do, and Caleb and Kaya will be very generous indeed if they do not take this further and if they can forgive you.' She got up and phoned Caleb and told him what she had found out. Caleb listened patiently, and said that he was grateful that the culprit and her motive had been identified, and that he would not pursue it further. There was nothing else left to say and they ended their phone conversation very quickly.

'Sounded like Sophia,' Kaya commented when Caleb had hung up.

'Quite,' he said. 'Myrtle confessed, and Sophia apologised on her behalf, although I don't think Myrtle is apologising. She's just afraid we are taking legal action, but I told Sophia we are not.'

‘An unpleasant episode, finding oneself under attack like that,’ Kaya stated. ‘But we come out of it only stronger. I love you, Caleb.’

‘I love you too, Kaya.’

Chapter 11

Henry and Grace had now been living together for a few months. They had spent a good amount of time travelling in between Grace’s VIP interviews, and were now visiting Caleb and Kaya. One very early morning on that visit, they found themselves approaching the bench overlooking the bay that Caleb and Kaya had told them so much about, and they relished the sunrise.

‘This must be the bench they were talking about,’ Grace said.

‘Yes, indeed,’ Henry agreed.

They sat down and marvelled at the view across the bay, the sight of the sunrise.

‘True magic,’ Grace sighed.

‘Grace,’ Henry said, ‘I didn’t prepare this, and I didn’t rehearse or anything, but nature is so spectacular, and living with you has been so wonderful that I am doing something completely spontaneous now.’ With those words, he moved off the bench and knelt in front of Grace. ‘Will you marry me, Grace, darling?’

‘Such a wonderful surprise, Henry. Yes, I will, with all my heart,’ Grace responded almost immediately.

Henry scrambled up to sit next to Grace again. ‘Wonderful, thank you so much,’ he said happily. ‘I will go and buy you an engagement ring later today. Should we get married in about three months from now? In London?’

‘That would be lovely, Henry. It will be such a surprise also for Kaya and Caleb when we tell them later.’

It certainly was a surprise for them.

‘Engaged?!’ Kaya squealed, and everybody hugged everybody else.

Henry bought a beautiful rose quartz engagement ring for Grace, and three months later, as they had planned, they got married in one of the leading landmarks in London, the London eye, in their special wedding capsule, and later had a reception at their flat, with catering provided by the owner of the Indian restaurant in Soho that they had come to love so much.

Caleb and Kaya had been inspired by the wedding and the party, and had embarked on taking turns in cooking a special meal each weekend. Kaya heard Caleb from the living room: ‘Don’t forget to turn off the oven, lollipop.’

“Lollipop”. Kaya felt as if a bomb had exploded right in her head. She tried to observe, like watching a film, all the layers of what followed that explosion, to achieve some distance, necessary for her to survive, in terms of mental well-being, and literally. The word itself echoed around her head, distorted in volume and pitch, like the bizarre shapes distorting mirrors could create, with their convex or concave surfaces, or combinations of those for more sophisticated types. They were also called funhouse mirrors, but the distortions of “lollipop” in her head were not funny at all, not funny at all, they were expressions of a nightmare, a living nightmare, right here, and one she was unable to get out of, only able to distance herself from by observing it like a film. The word was also being said in her head by different voices that she was able to recognise as those of her mother, Caleb, her dad, her dad, some acquaintances and

friends, actor's voices she was familiar with, John Gielgud, Paul Scofield, Benedict Cumberbatch, her dad. She heard the sound of cutlery smashing on a floor, and realised that she had dropped a plate she was handling at the time Caleb had called her "lollipop". She also noticed that she had started sweating profusely. She was in meltdown, she realised, and giggled. Only that the giggle did not come out like a giggle—"lollipop" in different voices, and different intonations went on and on during all this—but the giggle came out as a distorted grunt, groan, deep from her belly, very low pitch, grumbling, guttural, croaking. The voice repeating "lollipop" now had a cooing tone, endearing, ingratiating, superficially loving but totally cold, calculated, put on, not even acted. Kaya realised that she must have heard that word before, spoken by someone in this cold, calculated way, but she had not seen through the pretence, the coldness, she had admired the speaker, had liked him, had loved him, like a child. She had been a child, innocent, trusting, and "lollipop" had been the signature word. But who. The voice was still modulating in her head, until it settled on one she could not yet place, identify, put a name to. She was sweating, she felt so hot, she felt weak. She had to find the name for the voice, otherwise all this was in vain. Her dad kept coming into her mind, her dad, but it was not his voice. Someone close to dad? A friend? A relative? He did not have any relati... UNCLE NATHAN. She gasped and had to hold herself up on one of the chairs, grabbed its backrest, miscalculated its position in relation to her own weight, it scraped on the floor. Uncle Nathan. Her dad's brother. It was his voice. He had called her lollipop. He had said it in this particular way. He had been her best friend after her father had left her mother. She had loved him, trusted him, told him her innermost secrets. And he had done all he could for her to do this, he had wanted her to love him, to trust him, to confide in him. And he had called her lollipop. And then...

UNCLE NATHAN. The chair did not hold her up any more, it had given way too much, she was hot, her head felt hot, her knees felt weak. She needed help. She needed Caleb.

‘Help, Caleb, I need help!’ She wanted to shout, but she heard herself that she was able to manage only a croak, a groan, hardly able to articulate the words, but she also heard Caleb reacting immediately. Lollipop, uncle Nathan, whose coldness and calculation she had not noticed. The excitement that such a lovely man was nice to her, liked her, told her that he loved her, told her that he loved her not only as his niece, as a little girl, but as a woman, a young woman, and—Caleb was on his way. She felt herself getting weaker and weaker, if that was possible. The lights seemed to flicker.

And then a flash, and she remembered clearly the moment when her mother had come in when she was in bed with uncle Nathan. Uncle Nathan had jumped out of bed, startled, shocked. Her mother had commanded uncle Nathan out of the room and into her own bedroom in a voice that she had not heard from her mother ever before or after, total authority that would not tolerate any resistance, cold, righteous anger, but also an enormous effort to control herself, for Kaya’s sake. Her mother had come over to Kaya, had embraced her so warmly and so lovingly, and had told her: “It’s good, it’s all good, relax. Let go! I’ll be back with you in a moment”. Relax. Relax. Kaya now felt tears just streaming out of her eyes. The possibility of relaxing, of letting go. Heaven.

She had heard strange, unfamiliar noises from the elsewhere in the house, had gotten up, out of bed, naked, had put her bathrobe over and followed the noises, had opened the door to her mother’s bedroom, and had seen her mother very quietly, without shouting, screaming or saying a word, hitting out at uncle Nathan, again and again, with her fists, very hard, and kicking him with her feet when he had collapsed to the floor.

Her mother had stopped only when she had become aware of her daughter standing in the doorway. Kaya remembered that she had been curious about this sex thing, excited that a man she loved so much—but she was still a child, she was thirteen years old, she had had a crush on him, as children at that age can have. But he had exploited that crush, that girlish, childish feeling, triggered it, nurtured it, kindled it, and betrayed her. That a man she loved so much was interested in her in that way, but she also thought that he was not really her boyfriend, as other girls in her school had boyfriends. That should be someone at least roughly your own age, not someone who was twenty or more years older. And she also knew that sex was not allowed until a certain age. She was a child, he had insulted her love, her innocent crush, her trust, he had betrayed her, hurt her, abused her.

She had realised that when she had seen him curled up on the floor in her mother's bedroom, she had felt responsible for what had happened, she felt ashamed at what she had done, at how her mother had seen her, at what her mother now had to do to uncle Nathan. She felt anger at her mother to have allowed uncle Nathan to be with her for so much of the time, not to have realised what was happening, not to have stopped the hurt, the betrayal, the abuse, and had been grateful to her then that she was punishing uncle Nathan. He deserved to be punished. She had wanted him dead, and that had brought a new wave of guilt for wanting someone dead whom you had loved so much until a few moments ago when you had realised the cunning, conniving and cold abuse you had suffered at his hands.

The chaotic swirl in her mind, then in the door-frame to her mother's bedroom, and now, combining memory and observing reflection, were too much for Kaya's brain, and she fainted, into her mother's arms then, into Caleb's arms now. The last thing she

had seen, and saw, before she lost consciousness, had been her mother's face, was Caleb's face.

Caleb called over to Kaya: 'Don't forget to turn off the oven, lollipop.' Then he wondered to himself that he had never given any pet name to Kaya before, and that "lollipop" was not really part of his vocabulary. He heard some strange noises from the kitchen, a piece of crockery smashing to the floor, some muffled, guttural sounds from Kaya, the scraping of the legs of a chair on the kitchen floor, and then a faint 'Help, Caleb, I need help' from Kaya. Caleb had never been aware how fast his body could move, and in no time at all he was in the kitchen, taking in the scene in a fraction of a second, and catching Kaya, who was in the process of collapsing, safely in his arms. She looked at him with wide open eyes, gave a flicker of a smile, and fainted.

Caleb managed to carry her swiftly to his bed and placed flat on her back with her legs raised with a pillow, closely following the instructions that had been part of a recent staff health and safety training session. He ran over to the kitchen to turn off the burners and oven, then to the study to get his old-fashioned index card telephone directory, and back to sit next to Kaya. She was still unconscious, breathing normally, and with a regular, normal pulse, as far as he could tell. He looked up and found the phone number of a former school mate of his, now a GP, with whom he kept in regular touch. He dialled the number, very relieved when Peter Small answered the phone. 'Hi, Peter, it's Caleb. Sorry for cutting out the small talk, this is business, my new girlfriend, Kaya, thirty, healthy as far as I know, has just collapsed and fainted. No injuries from the fall, because I caught her just in time, she is lying flat on her back with a pillow

under her legs. No vomiting as far as I can tell, breathing regular, pulse regular. What do I do?’

Peter giggled: ‘You have seen so many episodes of *Casualty*, my dear friend. But you forgot to mention what medication you have given her, and the BP values,’ he joked, briefly, to lighten the tension that was clear in Caleb’s voice.

‘I knew you’d say something funny, Peter,’ Caleb acknowledged. ‘So?’

‘How long has she been unconscious?’ Peter asked.

‘About thirty seconds, probably,’ Caleb responded.

‘OK. Is the window open?’

‘No. It isn’t.’ Caleb jumped up and quickly opened the window wide. ‘It is now.’ He looked closely at Kaya, and saw her eyelids flickering. He reported this observation to Peter.

‘Good sign, Caleb,’ Peter reassured him calmly, ‘and well observed.’

‘She has opened her eyes, Peter,’ Caleb said in the exhalation of tremendous relief.

‘OK, Caleb. You should now reassure her, comfort her, and then after while she might try sitting up, then getting up. Call me again after five, ten minutes, if you like. OK?’

‘OK, Peter, will do, thanks so much,’ Caleb said gratefully and hung up.

Kaya had not yet been able to find her orientation. She had heard Caleb’s voice, though, and now his face came into view. He looked at her with very big, warm, loving eyes, and much relief. She blinked, as if to get some haze was obstructing her view, and frowned.

‘Where am I? I thought I was in the kitchen...’ she wondered.

‘You are in our bedroom, on the bed,’ Caleb explained. ‘You were in the kitchen, making funny noises, smashing a plate, and called for help. I just caught you before you would have fallen to the floor.’

Kaya tried to get raise herself, but was not quite yet able to: ‘The burners.’

Caleb reassured her: ‘Don’t worry, I put them off.’

Kaya was relieved. ‘And you talked to someone when I came round just now. To yourself?’

Caleb smiled: ‘No, I had phoned a GP friend of mine about what to do. I seem to have got the most important things right, apart from opening the window. I hung up when you came round, but I can call him back in a few minutes to give him an update to see whether we need to do anything else.’

‘It was so strange. Something had happened, and then my head was just spinning, so much going on, total overload, and then I felt my legs giving in, and then the last thing I remember is looking into my mum’s face.’

Kaya stopped suddenly, turned pale as a sheet and continued: ‘into your face, Caleb.’

‘But now you’ve remembered what the thoughts spinning in your head were all about?’

‘Yes, I have. Can I try sitting up?’

‘Yes, of course.’ Caleb supported her gently, but Kaya had regained much of her strength anyway.

‘You calling me lollipop triggered it all,’ Kaya remembered. ‘It was an odd thing for you to call me that.’

‘I know,’ Caleb agreed, ‘I never use pet names, and lollipop is not really part of my vocabulary. I was quite surprised myself when I had said it, but then you already called me, and I ran over.’

‘It was only a few seconds, wasn’t it?’ Kaya mused, ‘but the amount of thoughts was enough for a year. I guess that’s what caused me to faint. Just as I had fainted so many years ago, into my mother’s arms, when I was thirteen years old. I think, to put it bluntly, I had been groomed and was just about to be harvested, pardon the crude phrase, by my uncle, Nathan, my dad’s brother, when my mum came home early and found us together, just before “the act”. She sent him to another room and beat him up, I think, and then I fainted and had forgotten about all of this until a few moments ago, when your ‘lollipop’ triggered the memory, because that’s what he called me.’

Kaya was red in the face from the memory, and from talking so fast. ‘You are taking this in your stride, aren’t you,’ she wondered.

‘Your mom told me about this soon after we had met,’ Caleb explained, ‘the time I stayed in London and visited my dad and her at her place. She was convinced that it would come up, out of hiding, at some point, she was hoping it might come sooner rather than later, and that you would feel free and confident enough of my love to be able to release this, I mean not worried what I might think of you, afraid that I might judge you or something like that.’

‘Oh, how sweet of mum,’ Kaya said, very moved and touched. ‘And you have been carrying this knowledge for all this time? Weren’t you tempted to simply tell me and trigger my memory in that way?’

‘I thought about it, but once when we talked about your dad, and you said explicitly that he was an only child. I then felt that it must come from within you, rather

than being provoked explicitly for that purpose from anyone else, your mom or me. I simply let go, asked nature to take its course, and asked nature to allow me to be alert and present when it happened. You and your mum had done so much to help me cope with the circumstances of my divorce, and to reconcile with Sophia, and to cope with the major test of Myrtle's attack on our relationship, I was hoping I would be able to be there for you to deal with this revelation of that part of your life that you had hidden away for so long and so successfully.'

Caleb now quickly phoned Peter, reported Kaya's recovery, and asked for advice on what to do now.

'Plenty of water, and something to eat whenever she feels like it. Better no coffee or other caffeine-products for the rest of day. And plenty of rest for a day or two. If you need a medical note, take her to your local surgery and tell them what happened. They can contact me if you like.'

'Thank you so much, Peter,' Caleb said. 'I owe you. I'll invite you over for a visit soon, if you like, to catch up.'

'That would be lovely, and always happy to help, Caleb,' Peter said, 'Bye.'

They hung up. 'According to Peter, you need water, and something to eat when you like, and rest for the next few days.'

'At least with the need for rest I would not have needed a doctor's advice,' Kaya laughed.

Caleb joined her laughter. 'I'll bring you some water, though, and then you can tell me what you would like to eat.' When Caleb came back with the water within a very short while, he found Kaya lying on the bed again, fast asleep, snoring gently. He closed the window and the blinds and curtains, and put a blanket over Kaya, not wanting to

wake her up by trying to get her under the duvet. He tucked her in and gently kissed her forehead. He put off the light, but left the door open so that he could hear her if needed. Then he went to the living room, leaving that door open as well, and speed-dialled Grace's number.

When she answered the phone, Caleb spoke in a hushed voice: 'Hello, Grace, it's Caleb. I wanted to tell you right away that Kaya remembered the events with Nathan earlier this evening. She is sleeping now, I have the doors open, therefore my slightly subdued voice.' He proceeded to give her the details of what had happened.

Grace was glad and thanked Caleb for having phoned her right away. 'I had been thinking of this possibility for the last few months, really, hoping for it to happen. She may want and need to talk about it all a lot when she has recovered from the first shock and has had the rest she needs. And I will be happy to share in the effort of helping her work it all through—after all, I was part of it at the time,' she said.

'Thank you for the offer, Grace,' Caleb answered, 'I will let her know, and she will be in touch if and when she is ready to.'

Over the next few days, Kaya took sick leave, and Caleb was at home with as much as his work commitments, mainly teaching, allowed. Kaya felt the need to talk much about the events she had so successfully repressed, and Caleb reminded her of the forgiveness procedure she had told him about in their memorable first meeting. In the course of their conversations, Kaya realised that she had been very angry with her mother, and even her father, for not having protected her, and she started forgiving her mother for that, and asking her mother, mentally, to forgive her if she had behaved inappropriately towards her mother, unknowingly, from this repressed anger. Then she turned to Nathan, the abuser, the paedophile, the child sex offender. She read the

material Caleb had gathered in his research for his book, she read the plays about child sex abuse from the English, American and German repertory, and the comments about those plays in the book, and found all this very informative and helpful. She realised the complexity of the issues, and the knowledge empowered her, made it possible for her to think through what had happened, and provided the basis for the possibility of forgiveness, although she realised early on that it would take a lot of tenacity and determined effort on her part to forgive. She was glad that the material she read never suggested that forgiveness should go ahead with forgetting, because that was just not possible. The memory of the events was now very fresh in her mind, and she felt they would stay like that forever. Over time, the memory might recede to the background and not demand front stage attention most of the time, and would not come back to the forefront of her thoughts and dreams uninvited, triggered by any arbitrary stimulus, it seemed. Over time, that memory would come into the forefront of her mind only if she wanted it to, for whatever reason, but even then, it would remain as fresh and clear as if it had all happened only moments ago. Forgiving was hard enough, forgetting was impossible.

Chapter 12

For the anniversary of their very first meeting, Kaya and Caleb decided to have a very early morning watching the sunrise again. The weather was on their side, with the early morning providing the kind of cool air that is refreshing in a heat wave but still carries the ambience of that heat. Caleb took a bag with him and was a little secretive about its contents. They found their favourite bench, not overlooked from anywhere, and offering

a gorgeous view across the bay. They sat close together, in silence. The sun had not yet made its appearance on the horizon, but was about to make its glorious entrance any moment now.

‘Kaya,’ he said.

Kaya laughed. ‘Whenever you have said my name in this way, it always means you have something special to say.’

Caleb laughed as well. ‘I do.’ He placed the bag on the ground next to the bench, and took out a large bunch of red roses. ‘This is a very special day for us, and it has been a very special last few months, meeting you, falling in love with you, moving in with you, living with you, and I want this to continue, and to continue to be as special every single day.’ He glanced at the horizon. ‘Look, the sun is rising. It has the colour of these roses, Kaya.’ With those words, he took the roses from their wrapping paper and passed them gently to Kaya. ‘I have removed the thorns,’ he informed her. As the sun rose further, he took a small jewellery box from the bag, knelt on one knee in front of Kaya, opened the box, revealed the beautiful aquamarine ring, and said: ‘Will you marry me, Kaya, please?’

At that moment, the sun had released its first full ray of sunshine for that day. Caleb held the box with the ring towards Kaya, with the happiest smile on his face, manly, determined and shy and modest at the same time. Kaya did not have to think about her answer. ‘Yes, Caleb, yes, with all my heart,’ she cried, taking the ring, putting it into Caleb’s hands to put on her finger. It fitted perfectly. Caleb got up, they hugged tightly and kissed, then sat down again on the bench, relishing the moment and the sunrise.

Kaya was the first to speak again. ‘How long should our engagement last before we get married?’

‘I think not too long, perhaps three, four months, also depending on the kind of wedding we want, and how long it will take to plan for it,’ Caleb suggested.

‘I like that idea,’ Kaya agreed. ‘I was thinking of a registry wedding with just you and me and closest family, and then an official celebration somewhere, with the speeches and a sit-down meal, at some place in the area that offers such events.’

And this is what they had, three months later, with fabulous weather of an Indian summer. They had scouted all the possible venues in the area, and decided on one located quite centrally, and thus accessible easily by those guests coming by train. They had selected around one hundred guests, with their secret reserve list in case some of the chosen hundred was unable to attend. Henry and Grace had of course had their wedding half a year ago, and were able to support Caleb and Kaya with their advice. They all thoroughly enjoyed preparing for the event, and the wedding day itself, with the small ceremony at the registry, followed by a few hours to go back home and change and get ready for the celebration. The food was delicious, the ambience and environment, created in coordination with Kaya and Caleb’s requests magical, and the speeches were brief and moving, or very funny and witty where appropriate, including someone dressed up as a decayed tooth that became miraculously healthy again at Kaya’s mere touch—dentistry of the future, which of course none else than Kaya would invent soon. So as not to disappoint Caleb, he was promised the Nobel prize for drama.

At the end of the day, Kaya, Caleb had had a very good time indeed, had been able to have many interesting conversations, and they had even been able to show off their skills at dancing which they had newly acquired for this event. Their guests had

enjoyed the day as well, as many later emails and phone calls and social media messages amply confirmed. A few days later they embarked on their honeymoon, for which they had decided on a one-week whirl-wind trip across Italy.

They flew from London to Venice, the main Marco Polo airport, and took a Vaporetto to Lido, where they had booked a nice little hotel. They changed from their travel clothes and walked across the island for about ten minutes until they reached the beautiful public beach. They took a locker, stripped to their swimsuits and went straight into the pleasantly warm water, spending a good hour splashing about. By then they were quite hungry, so they changed back into their leisure wear, carrying their wet swim-suits in a plastic bag, and walked slowly over to the restaurant half-way back to their hotel that they had already selected for their dinner on the way to the beach. The restaurant had a large space outside, in the shade, under Mediterranean-looking trees. It was not too crowded, and the waiter came over quickly with their menus. The range of food to choose from was considerable, all looked and sounded very delicious. They decided on a large plate of caprese salad as starter, with mozzarella slices, tomato slices and avocado slices with black pepper, olive oil and basil, and two pizzas to share, one with grilled chicken, one with cherry tomato, artichoke and mushrooms. They had orange juice with their meal, and selected panna cotta and semifreddo for their deserts, also sharing. The food was delicious.

‘All this tastes so different in Italy than even the best food in Italian restaurants back home in the UK,’ Caleb observed when they had finished and were waiting for the bill.

Kaya agreed. ‘Maybe the atmosphere of the environment has an impact on the food. You cannot get the Italian atmosphere anywhere else than in Italy, even if the chefs are Italian.’

They returned to their hotel after another leisurely walk. The next day they crossed by Vaporetto to the main part of Venice, near St Mark’s, and spent several hours walking around the streets and bridges of this inspiring city, then made their way to Santa Lucia train station to get a Frecciarossa train to Florence, where they changed to a Regionale Veloce train to Chiusi-Chianciano Terme. From there it was only a five-minute taxi ride to their second destination, picturesque Città della Pieve. Here they saw that year’s production of the Philadelphia-based International Opera Theater, and had a long post-show dinner with its artistic director. After a long sleep-in and delicious lunch, they travelled on up north again, to Verona, where they followed the trail of the characters in the film *Letters to Juliet* before taking their seats in the arena for a performance of *Carmen*. They criss-crossed to Rome, then to Naples, to Capri, and back up to Milan, where they spent a few hours before catching their flight back to London.

‘It was striking,’ Caleb mused on the plane, ‘how different the atmosphere is in each of the cities we just visited. Did you feel that too?’ he asked Kaya.

‘Yes, come to think of it,’ Kaya agreed. ‘Venice felt very vibrant, full of rough but pleasant energy. Verona is really a city of the heart. Milan is very tense, finance-driven, with lots of conmen in the streets and at the station.’

Back at home, they converted their hundreds of photos into a film and created a DVD, which they sent to Grace and Henry. Occasionally, they would watch the DVD themselves, getting all nostalgic about their honeymoon. They also created a much smaller collection which they could show their colleagues at work.

Chapter 13

On their return from their honeymoon, they finally managed to invite Peter and Monica over for a weekend. They had been at their wedding, of course, but after Peter's consultation over the phone about Kaya's health, they had not yet honoured that promise of an invitation. Peter and Monica lived further north, and came over after work on a Friday evening. Peter ran a small country surgery with one partner, a nurse and a receptionist, while Monica worked in the local library. They were not able to have children, which was a permanent cause for sadness for both of them, on an off, but they seemed to comfort each other. On their visit, they spent Saturday morning talking, had a relaxed lunch, then went out for a walk and returned for more talk. On Sunday, Peter and Monica came for a late and long breakfast, and then it was time for them to head home again.

Over the course of the weekend, Caleb became more and more concerned about some observations of very subtle interactions between Peter and Monica, which they perhaps were not even aware of themselves. He became ever more alert to them, and noticed more and more instances as the days progressed. At suitable moments on Sunday, when he knew himself alone with one of them, and definitely not in earshot of the other, he turned the conversation to allow him to slip in a casual "if ever the need arises, you can always get in touch and talk to us, confidentially, and trust us". Kaya had been with him in those moments and had not let on any surprise—rather, she had quietly and calmly confirmed Caleb's assurance.

When Peter and Monica had left, after what for all four of them had otherwise been a cheerful social occasion with much laughter, and after clearing up what was necessary, Kaya and Caleb sat down next to each other on the sofa.

‘Now, finally, out with it,’ Kaya urged. ‘I have been on tenterhooks all day. You are a wonderful actor, so they won’t have noticed anything, but I know you well enough: you were on edge, incredibly alert for something particular, all weekend, and then you kept telling them they could come to us with any problems.’

‘Well, you are a great actress yourself, Kaya.’ Caleb’s voice was full of loving admiration, but it also showed the strong surge of emotions he had been forced to keep under control, hiding them all weekend. ‘You just went along with me, and reassured them when I said that, it must have sounded crazy to you, but they knew, deep down, what I was talking about.’

‘Thank you,’ Kaya said, now getting really impatient. ‘Please!’

‘I think, to put it bluntly, that Peter beats Monica.’

‘No way,’ Kaya gasped, ‘he is so poised, so confident, so charming.’

‘He is, outwardly. But there are subtle hints. He is prone to making sudden movements, very unexpected ones, jerky. And she responds immediately, with her whole body, to each of them, terrified, although she has learnt to camouflage her terror well—over time. Makes him feel powerful, to have her live in fear of him every moment.’

‘But how did you notice?’

‘When I was in A&E some years ago, I observed a woman with a major bruise on her face, waiting for an x-ray, probably to see whether any bones were broken, and her husband or partner was sitting next to her with a very smug face, and whenever he

moved an inch, she almost jumped out of her wheel-chair with fear. It was obvious that he must have beaten her up, and was now calmly accompanying her to hospital. That was such a striking impression that I have never forgotten it.'

Kaya thought about this explanation, and sighed: 'You may well be right. I'd hope you are not, but you probably are. How awful for people to have to be attracted to each other under such circumstances.'

'A police officer came into one of my lectures once,' Caleb remembered, 'to talk to the students about the presence of police on campus, ready to help when needed. The officer talked to me a little before the lecture. He had been in the unit that deals with domestic violence, but he had asked for a transfer because he just could no longer deal with the tragedies he was confronted with on a daily basis. He also talked about the men beaten up by their wives, they were particularly difficult cases to deal with because often they would not want to admit that as men they were abuse victims.'

Kaya shook her head: 'I can well imagine that police officers and other who deal with such cases need lots of support to deal with all of this, and can't do it forever. They'd just break down. Let's hope, for Peter and Monica, they will come to us for support if they need it, and we should find out where we can point them, even at short notice, if we can't cope ourselves with what they bring to us.'

Caleb did the necessary research and shared the results with Kaya. Quietly they hoped that they might never need to make use of it, but at least they would be somewhat prepared.

Although Kaya and Caleb had been talking about their childhood experiences of being taken to the zoo by their parents, they had never been to one together. On their trip to

Vienna, on the occasion of their first wedding anniversary, they decided to change this and went to the Tierpark Schönbrunn, the first ever zoo in Europe. They were lucky with the weather, it was mild but a little overcast, not too hot, sunny or humid. They paid at the entrance and took a first look at the map of the zoo.

‘This is huge,’ was Kaya’s first observation.

They went to the giraffe enclosure first. Two giraffes were in the indoors, daintily nibbling at some green leaves that had been placed appropriately high up for them, looking with apparent curiosity at the visitors, and flicking their ears in response to the noises they heard.

‘It’s always such a shame that we don’t really know what goes on in animals, isn’t it,’ Caleb observed.

‘I know that animal behaviourists always make the point that we must not superimpose our human ideas on what we observe in animals. But I find that difficult,’ Kaya mused. ‘When that giraffe looks at us, I sense that it is curious, or at least interested, because it would not be looking at us if it were not bothered, and I expect we will come across plenty of animals like that as well today.’

One of the giraffes now walked slowly to an area further back in the indoors area, which probably led to their overnight cages. Caleb and Kaya walked over to the wallabies. Three were outside, foraging on the ground and feeding the occasional item. One came close to another with its snout, rubbing it on the other’s back, and uttering some sounds with it. The other wallaby stopped what it was doing, obviously noticing the activity of the first one, but initially unperturbed by it. The first wallaby let go of the other, hopped away, but returned shortly afterwards. Now the second wallaby seemed unhappy with that approach and in no time, both were on their hind legs, heads held

high and tilted slightly backwards, and attempting to hit the other with the front legs. They were dishing out punches to the other animal like boxers, clearly aiming for the other's head, and when one of them was shaky from a punch, the attacker would kick with the hind leg and if possible even jump on top of an opponent that had fallen to the ground. The punches and the bodies hitting the ground caused loud whacking noises. The third wallaby in the enclosure first remained uninvolved, but then joined in the fight. After a few minutes, when no end to the fight seemed in sight, and it was getting more and more fierce, a zoo keeper came in to the enclosure and immediately the wallabies stopped fighting. The zoo keeper crouched near the wallabies, and talked to them in a soft voice. Her movements were slow and calm as well.

‘They are all like children having been told off by their mother,’ Kaya observed.

‘See how they react differently to her, though,’ Caleb prompted Kaya. ‘One of them is genuinely contrite and apologetic. The other one is just waiting for her to disappear to be able to go on fighting, its front legs are still poised, see. And the third one is fed up with the fun fight being interrupted again. It’s the stroppy teenager using swear words behind mum’s back.’

At that moment, they heard loud roaring somewhere further inside the zoo. They looked at each other.

‘An elephant?’ Caleb wondered.

‘More like a big cat,’ Kaya ventured.

‘I got it: a polar bear,’ Caleb smiled.

‘Yes, that’s most likely.’

The zoo keeper had now left the wallaby enclosure, and the three brawlers were peaceful for a moment, but the fight flared up again soon enough and they were even

joined by two further wallabies who came running from the indoor area. Now it was five animals fighting, and the whacking sounds attracted further visitors to come over, look in surprise, laugh, and comment. The zoo keeper had to come back and tell the animals off again.

Caleb and Kaya walked further to the big cats, leopards, tigers and lions. The leopard was in an old and old-fashioned enclosure separated from the visitors by metal bars. The leopard in view was clearly suffering from his incarceration, displaying stereotypic behaviour of pacing back and forth near the metal fence. When it reached the perimeter of the wall, it jumped up the wall and turned its body around in the air on bounding back from the wall, doing a weird mixture of backflip and somersault in the process, opening its mouth wide in the moment of the twist. On reaching the ground, it paced forwards again. In all of this it never looked at a visitor once.

The lions had just been fed and were chewing away at meat and bones, some very close to the thick glass walls that allowed very close observation. One of the tigers was having a long walk in its enclosure—Caleb and Kaya were not too sure whether the path it had clearly trodden into the grass, and that it was not deviating from, represented a more hidden form of stereotypic movement. The tiger then jumped around several of the platforms that were part of the enclosure, and sat down on one of them, facing the visitors and looking very impressive and regal.

Kaya remembered something she had read about these big cats. She nudged Caleb. ‘Look at my eyes, Caleb, and the tiger’s,’ she said, excitedly. She made sure she was not staring at the tiger with wide open eyes, because that would come across to the tiger as aggressive, but with half-closed eyes. To their surprise, the tiger mirrored this, and looked at Kaya with similarly half-closed eyes.

Chapter 14

Later that summer, Kaya and Caleb were on a long Sunday afternoon walk, and Kaya had suggested, towards the end of it, to walk past their special spot with the special view across the bay. When they reached, and sat down on their special bench, Kaya felt that it was now the best time to share some thoughts she had harboured for a while.

‘Caleb,’ she started, and they burst out laughing both at the same time, ‘Was that my special announcement “Caleb” again, so obviously?’

‘Yes,’ was all Caleb could manage, having to struggle not to snort with laughter. ‘Out with it!’

‘I would like to have a baby, I mean us, to start a family.’

‘And, knowing you, you have been thinking about this for at least a little while, kind of since yesterday morning, and made all kinds of calculations and considerations and plans, haven’t you?’ he responded warmly.

‘Well, yes or no,’ Kaya insisted.

‘Of course, yes, no question, yes, wonderful, yes. Right away, yes!’ Caleb was clearly enthusiastic about the idea. ‘So, what are your thoughts?’

‘I think we could do with a bigger place. The current arrangement is perfect for us now, with the shared study, the share bedroom, the spare bedroom for guests or snoring, but for a baby we would need a nursery. Of course, a baby would first of all be in our bedroom for a long time. So, we could move when our child is old enough to get his or her own room, or we could move before I give birth. And I have been doing some fertility calculations, and I have read about how to prepare for a baby, and I have thought about names.’

Kaya shared all those thoughts with Caleb, and they decided to stay put for now, and to move in due course when they felt like it.

A month or two after this conversation, Caleb and Kaya woke up on what was supposed to have been a regular day, with her due in her surgery, while he had a lecture to deliver, and a seminar to teach in the university. Kaya felt poorly, with a headache, but decided to struggle through, without taking sick leave. Caleb noticed that she was a little “under the weather”, and comforted her accordingly before they both left. When Caleb returned from work, he was surprised to find Kaya already at home, and in bed, clearly in considerable discomfort. She had had to leave work in the early afternoon. While headache had receded into the background, she had developed what she could describe and explain to herself only as the most severe period pain she had ever experienced, together with the deepest sadness. She had left work early after having asked the nurse to rearrange routine check-up appointments. At home, had cried a lot, gone to bed, and managed to sleep intermittently. She had a high temperature, but had not felt like taking any medication against it.

Kaya was glad when Caleb came home, she needed comforting.

‘Oh, dear, what’s wrong,’ Caleb cried when he saw Kaya in bed, tears puffy from crying, and obviously unwell. Kaya explained her symptoms, the excruciating stomach pains, the deep sadness with tears, and the temperature. Having established that Kaya did not feel it was necessary to get their GP’s advice, let alone to attend the hospital’s accident and emergency department, Caleb prepared a hot water bottle for Kaya to put on her stomach, he aired her room, cooked her some oat porridge, and made lots of boiled water for her to drink. She ate and drank, and he sat with her and read to

her from her favourite novel. He also made an appointment for Kaya to see her GP the next day, which they had considered best under the circumstances.

The next morning, Kaya's pain had subsided only a little, but the temperature was back to normal, and she had a good appetite for her breakfast. At the surgery, the nurse took a urine sample and a blood sample, and a little later, Kaya told the GP, Dr Sharma, about her symptoms. Dr Sharma looked at the notes the nurse had passed him, and raised his eyebrows, then frowned.

‘Are you here with your husband, Kaya?’

‘Yes,’ Kaya confirmed, surprised. ‘Would you like me to get him in?’

‘Don’t worry,’ Dr Sharma answered reassuringly. Then he pressed the intercom and asked the receptionist to bring Caleb over. Caleb was leafing through some magazines in the waiting room, unable to concentrate enough to read any of the articles. He was startled and concerned when asked to join Kaya in the doctor’s office.

‘Take a seat, Caleb,’ Dr Sharma welcomed him. ‘It was a good decision to come and see me, Kaya,’ he continued. ‘Nothing to worry about, long-term, but sad news right now. The tests show that you were pregnant, Kaya and had a miscarriage. Very early on in the pregnancy, a few days, at maximum a week after conception. That would explain the severe pain, and the other physical symptoms you mentioned. It also explains that sadness you talked about. I am so very sorry to have to tell you this. The good news is that this happens in many pregnancies, and it does not affect future pregnancies.’

Kaya and Caleb looked at Dr Sharma, speechless, and then at each other. Tears welled up in their eyes.

‘You should take this opportunity to mourn together, because even though the miscarriage happened within days of conception, new life had formed and has now left,’ Dr Sharma said, taking the cue from their tears. ‘It may help,’ he continued, ‘to imagine that you gave this opportunity of life to a soul that needed this experience, and hopefully now you are ready to conceive a child to be born and raised, rather than miscarried.’

‘This reminds me of the *Mahabharata*,’ Caleb said, blinking away tears. ‘The great Indian epic. The goddess Ganga comes to Earth in human form to be married to King Shantanu of Hastinapur. He had agreed never to query her actions—if he did, she would immediately leave him and never return to him. He never questioned her actions, even though she drowned seven of her new-born sons. He only asked the question when she was about to drown their eighth son. She revealed that the babies were all celestial beings who had been cursed to be born as humans, but the curse had been softened so as to allow Ganga to bear them and to drown them soon after they had been born. In this case there was a reason for the apparent murder. In a similar way, I guess there is a reason for that life to have come and gone so quickly. It may help to cope, but the grief is still real.’

‘A sad and strong story, Caleb. You may be familiar with it from your religion, Dr Sharma?’ Kaya asked.

‘Yes,’ Dr Sharma agreed. It is a most popular story from the great Epic.’ He collected some papers in a folder, and Kaya and Caleb took the hint that his ten minutes of NHS time with them was coming to an end.

Thank you, Dr Sharma,' Kaya said. They got up, left the surgery and headed home. They would need to find their individual ways of grieving, and of grieving together.

A few months later, they found themselves back at the surgery. A home pregnancy test had shown positive, and they came to have that result verified. Dr Sharma was happy to be able to confirm Kaya's pregnancy, and the NHS process for pregnancy set in, with regular check-ups at the surgery, scans at the hospital, advice from the hospital's consultants, and any number of advertisements coming through email and mail, with loads of free samples of all kinds of products for pregnancy, birth and infancy, in addition to maternity clinics, and paternity classes. There was a lot to take in, and it was all incredibly exciting for Kaya and Caleb, especially for Kaya to note the changes in her body from day to day, and to share them with Caleb. The pregnancy went well, without complications, and their daughter, whom they decided to call Leah, was born precisely on the predicted day, in hospital. Because of the time that elapsed after Kaya's waters broke, she had to be induced to go into full labour, and made good use of the pain relief methods on offer, gas and air, and an injection of pethidine. She became pleasantly groggy from that medication, hallucinating about a cherry tree in full blossom outside the window where there was none. After nine hours of labour (she was promised a much shorter time for subsequent babies, but that did not help her now!), Leah was born, happy and healthy.

They went through all the usual (so they were told, it was all completely, excitingly, sometimes frighteningly new, and thus far from "usual" for them!) ups and downs, exhausting nights, the first tears of teething, the insight that what Kaya ate for lunch or dinner had an impact, through the breast milk, on Leah's own digestion,

including uncomfortable wind. There were Leah's first utterances of sound, and the gradual development of speech and control of her movements. Caleb shared fully in all the related chores, especially changing nappies at night-time. Kaya went back to two afternoons of three hours each at work after her maternity leave.

When Leah was at the appropriate age, she joined kindergarten, and with that came six months to a year of constant bouts of flu and tummy problems that Leah brought home, and which then made the round to Kaya and Caleb. It was a good time for them all to boost their immune systems with all kinds of natural remedies and ingredients, and they assured themselves that it was working well. In due course, Leah was ready for infant school, and it was around that time that Caleb and Kaya decided to have a second child. They moved house to be able to create additional space needed for the new arrival. When Dr Sharma had confirmed Kaya's pregnancy and the NHS machine set in, they took the opportunity of a leisurely weekend to break the exciting news to Leah that she was going to have a baby brother or sister in a couple of months' time. Leah was shaking with happiness when she heard, and from then on wanted to know all there was to know about pregnancy, how it worked, and what could go wrong, and what to do if something went wrong. Kaya and Caleb made the effort of telling her as much as she wanted to know, in as much detail as requested, and more than once in those months they wondered whether with Leah they were looking at a budding scientist, given the nature of her questions.

Chapter 15

He still felt the cool, clear water of the brook against the back of his throat, a feeling that had not been much stronger when he had swallowed. It was refreshing, clear,

purifying, subtle. He could taste and feel nature in it. Then he had leaned back a little too much, lost his balance, and fallen over, going into slow motion, not noticing any more how his body had made harsh contact with the ground. He had been surprised, that was all he could remember. Pleasant, bright orange light now engulfed him, the sensations of the body receded, became nothing more than memory. The dimensions of space and time became vague concepts, no longer applicable to his current state of existence. He merely was, and the question of where he was seemed no longer relevant, or appropriate, let alone important. He was. His body had made him who he had been, but that identifier did not apply any more either. Wherever he was now, he was as a holistic being, not either man or woman, but holistic existence.

He was not alone either. As soon as he had become aware, in the first instance, to his new form of existence, and begun to adjust to it, he became aware of others, some like him, some not. They equally existed as such, not in the context of space and time, and therefore their presence was different from the presence of other people in life on earth. Their presence for him, and probably his presence for them, was without impact on, or consequence for each other, and it was up to him to want to perceive the others—he did not have to, and there was no automatic perception as in human life on earth. He realised that some other forms of existence had not emanated from, or lived on earth, but from and on other planets, and there were also forms of existence that had lived on earth as plants or animals.

Two individuals seemed to be regarding him more closely than others. He sensed them, as he sensed the other forms of existence, but did not perceive them as he had perceived through his human eyes, or with his other human senses. All forms of existence he encountered, and those two individuals, did not have the kinds of

characteristics he had come to associate with fellow-humans. They were neutral, in a neutral way, neither pleasant or unpleasant. He could sense both his and their form of existence as pure being. Those two individuals approached him, not in space but in consciousness, and communicated with him, not through human organs of vocalisation, not in human words, but abstractly, differently from what he had been used to in his life on earth, and yet so very lucid, clear, transparent, and completely without even the slightest potential of ambiguity. The writing here, with its recourse to conventions of human dialogue, can only hint at their mode of communication.

‘Welcome,’ one of the individuals said.

‘I feel like I am nowhere, at least nowhere in particular, and I have also lost any sense of what I was used to as “time”.’

‘We know,’ the individual said. ‘To make the transition easier for you, we will call you by the name you had in the life you just left, “Oliver”. You have left your life as Oliver. Those with whom you lived will come to know of you having died, passed away. You are now in a different form of existence, beyond space and time, to reflect on your past life, and to prepare for your next one, to choose your parents, and the tasks you will have an opportunity to tackle and master in your next life. We are here to guide you in this reassessment and planning. We are your spirit guides. We are souls, like you, and we have taken on the task, in the bigger scheme of existence, to support you, and many others like you, between lives.’

‘I have so many questions, and at the same time I seem to know all the answers,’ Oliver said. ‘How do I address you?’ he asked the individuals.

‘I am Ananda,’ one of them said.

‘I am Satya,’ said the other one.

Oliver smiled—or rather, he would have smiled if he still had had his body—so he felt like smiling when he commented: ‘Bliss and truthfulness in Sanskrit.’ After a pause, he added: ‘Will I get a Sanskrit name for my in-between existence?’

‘No, not on this occasion,’ Satya responded. ‘You will remain “Oliver”, but you will also come to remember other identities, each with its own name.’

‘We will now begin a process of reviewing your life, what you had taken on as tasks before you came to earth as Oliver, how you addressed those tasks, and where you might want to go for your next life, and which tasks you will address then,’ Ananda expanded. ‘I think fear may have been central to the life you just left behind?’

‘Yes,’ Oliver confirmed, ‘fear has been a major part of my life. Many children seem to want to be train drivers, it’s a cliché. When I told teachers and careers advisors in school that I wanted to be a train driver, the most common response included reference to the chance that I might involuntarily kill some people intent on suicide, and for that reason alone I should reconsider. When I applied for the training, this danger was a major aspect of the interview—I was asked how I proposed coping with the fear of such incidents. The teacher’s warnings had prepared me for that question. I said that I would make use of any counselling on offer from the employer, and that I had to live with the knowledge that in terms of statistics, there was a likelihood I would encounter at least one occasion in my career where someone would throw themselves in front of the train I was driving, and I would be unable to stop that person being at best seriously injured, or most probably killed. I was aware of that risk, but my wish to pursue this career was stronger than the fear. I got the trainee position, and then progressed quickly to the top of the profession, and I was lucky that I never had a person under my train throughout my career. But the fear was always there, it was always on my mind. I came

across colleagues who had had incidents. Every time when there was news about train delays because of a person under the train, I was grateful that I was not the driver on that occasion, and I was afraid that it might happen to me. I think I prayed before each journey, please let this not happen.

A good friend of mine has an incident, very early on in our careers, and it completely destroyed him, he had to leave his job, he never quite recovered. It was then that I realised I need to deal with this fear. Otherwise it would destroy me as well. So, I took a few days off work, went away for a few days from the family, and thought all this through, very thoroughly. The chance of such an incident was part of the job. I loved the job, I loved it so much that I wanted to find a way of dealing with that risk and the fear of something happening. If it happened, it was not my fault. There was nothing I could have done any differently to prevent it from happening. I was not to blame. That was the starting point. I was not in a position to know the person who would have chosen my train to commit suicide, and finding out about them afterwards would not be of any use either. I would deal with the situation as best as I could if it occurred. To be afraid that it might happen was of no use either, it was a waste of energy, it only made my life a misery now, where nothing had actually happened. I really confronted that fear. I imagined it being another person trying to threaten me, and I said to that other person: "Fear, what do you want from me? You are no longer real for me, I am no longer afraid of you. You are only a *fata morgana*, an illusion, and from now on you have no more power over me". The fear dissolved like fog in the sun. Whenever I felt fear coming back, I sent it away in that manner.'

Ananda and Satya had listened to Oliver's words intently. The equivalent of full concentration was the norm in this mode of existence, anyway.

Ananda now observed: 'Imagine you enter a dark room. Giving yourself over to fear means that you try to get rid of darkness by fighting it. That is futile. You did the right thing: you faced your fear, and you dissolved it. You got rid of darkness by switching on the light.'

Satya complemented: 'Dealing with fear was a major challenge and task you had selected for your life as Oliver.'

'You did quite well, overall,' Ananda concluded. Then he added: 'Can you sense why this was such a critical issue for you?'

Oliver hesitated only very briefly. 'On this level of existence, a mere hint is enough for many long-lost memories to come to the foreground as if the events had happened only yesterday. I always loved gladiator movies, and now I know why. I was a gladiator once, many lives back, and I was very good at it. I was then far too involved with the daily fight for survival for me to have any time to think about being afraid, but it was there in the background. I survived because I was so successful, and I built my reputation on my ability to survive. That of course implied others died, many of them, and prospective opponents were terrified of me. I did not have any personal issues with any of them, but my survival meant someone else's death, on a daily basis. I could sense, smell, their fear. But I had to push it aside if I wanted to have the clear head I needed to survive.'

'This is a good connection you are making, Oliver,' Satya praised. 'We have to confront our fears. Not fight them, but address them. Fighting them would only keep them alive. Addressing them dissolves them, as you said earlier. Suppressing them, as you did in the gladiator life, or waiting for them to disappear on their own accord, is like waiting for Father Christmas.'

‘I noticed another challenge or task of yours, both in your life as Oliver and the one as gladiator,’ Ananda remarked. ‘You mentioned in both contexts that you were “good at it”. Is there an issue with perfectionism?’

Again, Oliver did not need long to confirm: ‘Yes, of course there is. I perfected my mode of killing as a gladiator, and was very proud of it. As a train driver, I was obsessed with accelerating and braking smoothly, without the train going into jerky movements. I was really harsh with myself in both contexts. The slightest perceived mistake and I considered myself a failure. I had to function at 100% all the time, otherwise I was unable to accept myself and I feared (fear again!) that others would think badly of me or think that I am a loser. I judged others along the same lines: those who were not perfect were losers. I thought that others could love me only if I was perfect, and I found it difficult to love others if I saw them not being perfect. I was constantly trying to find mistakes and weaknesses in others.’

‘Nothing wrong with being perfect, or with striving to be perfect,’ Satya explained. ‘As long as this does not deteriorate into perfectionism.’

‘This is an area for further development in the future’, Ananda concluded.

‘Let’s turn to your private life, your parents, and partnerships.’ Satya added.

As if observing a movie he was watching, and therefore safely and securely distanced from the events, Oliver first allowed himself to consider his parents.

‘My father was a teacher, and he was very disappointed that I was not very strong intellectually, that I was not at least a teacher as well, but ended up (as he put it) as a train driver. I felt under constant pressure from him, and no matter how much effort I put into something, he never seemed to appreciate it, always finding fault, always shrugging his shoulders, almost desperate, almost close to tears, when he had to realise

yet another aspect of my perceived shortcomings. He made me feel inferior all my life, right from the beginning when I was slow to learn to speak, and I never spoke very elegantly. He made me very unhappy. I never thought that he loved me. I realise now that he did, in his own way, but his expectations always got the better of him. My mother realised, at some level, what was happening, and tried to provide some balance. She had realised early on that she would not be able to change my father, but she tried to soften the blows and comfort me when he had hurt me again. This constant tension between my father and me, and through that between herself and her husband, wore her down in the end. She died quite young, when I was only ten years old. My father of course blamed me, although he never said this explicitly, at least. I internalised that blame, and made feeling guilty the centre of my life from then on.'

Oliver paused, and Ananda took the opportunity to come in. 'Children, in particular, are very open to developing feelings of guilt. They go along with fear and insecurity, they take away our energy and make us weak, and they take away any joy of life we might otherwise experience. Feelings of guilt often relate to us believing we are responsible for someone else's fate. If I had behaved in this way, such and such would not have happened. You should realise several things in this context, Oliver. First, it may well be that we are being employed, by our creator, as tools to enable others to encounter an experience that is necessary for them.'

Oliver interrupted: 'You mean that I had to be as I was to enable the tension between my mother and my father because that represented a task for them to work out?'

'Yes, precisely,' Satya confirmed.

Ananda carried on: 'Feelings of guilt are like strange, dark clouds that suddenly come up and dampen our mood. They are not really feelings either. They are thoughts that we pick up and internalise, deeply inside, allowing them to gain the impact of an avalanche and the speed of an electric shock.'

'This is clearly an area to revisit in a future life,' Satya concluded.

'When my mother died, I was devastated,' Oliver further remembered. I was angry and desperate. I did not want it to be true that she was gone, nor that I had to live on without her.'

'Your "no" caused pain and fear,' Satya explained. 'A response of "yes" would have allowed for sadness and fear to wash away in the flow of life. When someone dies, it is always the right thing to happen, it is part of that person's divine plan, and also in the divine plans of those left behind. Life tells you: one era is at an end; please accept it, because it is the best for everyone: it is part of the divine plan, even if we cannot intellectually tell why, because we can never comprehend the entire divine plan in its multitude of layers of complexity.'

'You can move on to partnerships now, if you like, Oliver?' Ananda suggested.

'Yes, sure,' Oliver agreed. 'I had lots of very short-lived relationships throughout my teens. I think I introduced a new girlfriend to my father every few weeks, driving him crazy. I had lots of fun. When I had been with the railway for a couple of years, I met Abigail, a maintenance controller, and we hit it off right away, and got married within a year. I was very happy in my marriage—I mean there were ups and downs, of course, but overall... We didn't quarrel much, especially not in front of the children. I had a good income, we could afford things, a nice car, and holidays to Mallorca.'

'Was Abigail happy?' Satya asked.

Oliver was thoughtful. 'Now that you ask me,' he responded, 'I don't really know. I never asked her, we never talked about it, I simply assumed she must be because I loved her, and I was able to provide well for her. She did not have to work, she didn't want to, she said, and could focus on the home and on bringing up the children.'

'A little one-sided, perhaps,' Ananda observed.

'Affairs, escapades, infidelity?' Satya asked.

'There were two women I had developed a crush on while I was married to Abigail,' Oliver admitted. 'I felt guilt about it then, but I am not feeling guilty talking about it now'.

'Your current level of existence is beyond guilt,' Satya assured him. 'Go on.'

'I was rather calm and laid-back, and the crushes were not strong enough to make me actually act on them. I was just drawn to these two women, as if by some magnetic power. Abigail must have noticed, but she was generous and did not tell me off. On each occasion, it did not last too long, and it may even have triggered Abigail to make extra effort to keep me interested in her. I also remember that she seemed to have a crush on another man every now and then, and when that happened I made a special effort for her as well.'

'You still had karma from previous lives with these women, and Abigail with these men,' Ananda elucidated.

'You mean I had known them, in a previous life, or even more than one, and that's what made me feel attracted to them this time round?'

'Precisely', Ananda confirmed. 'Such karma is often the reason why we like or dislike people right away, at first sight, without knowing why. You did the right thing, on these occasions, not following your impulse of attraction. In other cases, not in

yours, it would have been the right thing to follow that instinct, because what seems like a chance meeting is never chance, and a change or partner may be on the cards as the right development in line with your divine plan.'

'So much depends on intuition, doesn't it?' Oliver mused.

'You are right, Oliver', Satya said. 'Intuition means that we are open to higher truths, believing in ourselves, and allowing intuition the appropriate space to unfold. Intuition reveals completely new perspectives to us. It can never be forced or conjured up—it is always a godsend. We must become aware of, and get rid of, old, mistaken belief patterns. Intuition functions through the sixth of the energy centres, or chakras. It is called Ajna- chakra, forehead chakra, also called third eye, eye of wisdom, inner eye or command- chakra. It is located a finger's width above the root of the nose in the middle of the forehead. It opens to the front. The colour of the third eye is indigo blue, also yellow and violet. The forehead chakra is associated with all senses, also in the form of extra-sensory perception. It is called 96-leaved lotus.'

Satya and Ananda discussed many other issues of Oliver's life. Then Ananda concluded: 'It may now be time to consider which aspects you want to work on, as tasks, in your next life.'

'How exciting,' Oliver beamed. 'And then you match what I need with what others need, and slot me in accordingly?'

'Not us personally, no,' Satya smiled, explaining: 'That's for the creator, too much for us.'

'We will inform you of the result, though,' Ananda added.

‘As Oliver, I was an only child,’ Oliver mused, ‘and we came across the need to work out some issues with sibling rivalry—perhaps I could get a chance for that next time round?’

‘I’ll make a note of that,’ Ananda confirmed.

‘That may go nicely hand in hand with addressing perfectionism again,’ Satya suggested.

‘Good idea’, Ananda and Oliver agreed, almost at the same time.

‘You could also consider getting rid of what is left of fear and guilt?’ Ananda asked.

‘Because you dealt well with your father’s disapproval, you might this time get a break on that front with very approving and supportive parents’, Satya suggested.

‘That would be wonderful’, Oliver concurred. ‘And I should learn to be more aware of others from their own perspectives, rather than merely assuming their feelings.’

‘Indeed,’ Ananda said. ‘There will also be some people in your next life who have some karma with you to resolve, even though you may not have karma with them, and you may become a tool to teach them lessons. Those situations will train you further in remaining in the observer position.’

‘Sounds good, but can you please remind me what “being in the observer position” means, precisely? You have mentioned it in passing several times, so it must be quite important’, Oliver pleaded.

‘No problem,’ Ananda assured him. ‘The idea is that you should not get overshadowed by your daily experiences. You achieve a healthy distance if you observe

everything that happens to you, in relation to you, and around you, as if you were watching a movie.’

Meanwhile, Satya had closed his eyes, and opened them again now. ‘We have a family for you, Oliver. You will be born as the second child, a boy, of Kaya and Caleb White, and brother of Leah, who will be four years old when you are born. Your family lives in England, your mother is a dentist, your father teaches drama at the university.’

Chapter 16

This was so care-free and relaxing. In a warm, not-too-bright environment, cosy, comfortable, he felt very much at home. At first, changing status from a body-free spirit in infinity to relocate to the constrictions of the body of a human being had seemed strange. The spirit resides in infinity, beyond space and time in between incarnations. His parents were very much in love with each other, and with the full approval and goodwill of their families. He was their second child, and he had been with them since his conception in a wonderfully cool August night which had followed a particularly hot July. He could still recall some events of previous incarnations at will, but they did not crowd his thoughts unwanted. This was just as well, because ever since his new incarnation had taken place, he was preoccupied with observing the growth of his own body in his mother’s womb. Witnessing the division of cells, and the formation of specialised tissues, organs and structures brought ever new blissful waves of joy and wonder at the workings of creation. He could observe not only his own development but also his entire immediate environment, as well as that of his parents. He loved the house they were living in, the space they had allowed for their arrangement of practical but elegant furniture, and the large windows providing ample sunlight which had to be

dimmed occasionally by drawing exquisitely shaped and patterned silk blinds of various tasteful colours. He was fascinated by the harmonious blend of natural candle-light and ordinary electrical light from various sources intricately distributed over the rooms in the evenings. His aesthetic intuition found a rich source of enjoyment in the imaginative juxtaposition of colours used in the rooms, together with round or angular shapes of the walls, and ample use of distinct types of wood carved to astonishing finish. All this, however, would have been only half as pleasing for him without his parents, who had created this house and filled it with their souls, with life.

Something was happening. He had been feeling too tight in his environment for a while. He sensed the presence of Ananda and Satya, sensed the great trust he could have in them, but had already lost the full awareness of their nature, their role in his existence, and much detail of what he had learnt from them. He knew there was more, but he did not have access to it any longer. Their presence still assured him. He glided through a very narrow passage, then came into an altogether new and unfamiliar environment. He inhaled, quite automatically. A strange feeling, liberating and restricting at the same time: restricting because it was more of an effort, but liberating because now he was independent of his mother's body. He felt comfortable, and explored breathing, quietly and calmly. His eyes were still closed. Then he suddenly, unexpectedly felt a painful sensation on his buttocks, and both the shock and the pain caused another unfamiliar reaction of his body in this new environment. He expressed both pain and dismay in a sound that came spontaneously from his throat: he cried, in two angry, determined bursts. And he opened his eyes. The lights were bright, very bright, and it took him a while to adjust his eyes to this—everything so new and unfamiliar. His body felt cool, first comfortably so, and gradually too cold. But then he

felt something warm and soft being wrapped around him, took a look, and saw a beige flannel around his body. He felt being lifted in the air, and then placed on a soft surface. He heard comforting words from the voice he knew from his time in the warm, cosy, homely environment. This was his mother's voice, he realised, and his eyes searched from where the voice came. He saw her face, her eyes, full of love, and he felt snug and secure, drinking in his mother's love with his eyes and all his body. His eyes shifted to locate the person associated with the other voice that was coming his way, a deeper, darker voice, which he was familiar with as well, although not as much as his mother's. That must be his father—his face came into view now, equally full of love. Both his mother and father kept repeating a word, "Evan", and that, he realised, must be his new name.

A new sensation then made itself known—so many things happening, how exciting. It was hunger, and he instinctively latched on with his mouth to the part of the flannel that had moved over his mouth. He noticed that his mother reacted to this movement, her eyes sparkled, her throat created a lovely sound, laughter, and he noticed that she took the flannel out of his mouth, very gently. Then he was being moved around again, and his mouth was guided to latch on to something else, and when he now repeated the movements with his mouth that he had tried with the flannel, he felt his mouth fill with the most delicious liquid he could imagine, and by reflex he swallowed it down, moved his mouth again, his mouth filled up, and he swallowed. The feeling of hunger disappeared, making way for a warm and comfortable feeling in his stomach. He thought about the voices he had heard, and remembered the sound of his own voice, when he had cried, briefly. He had to work this one out, he promised himself. He became sleepy, forgot to swallow after some gulps, noticed the liquid dribbling out of

his mouth, and he choked when he inhaled again, with his mouth still half-full. His mother lifted him up gently, and patted his back, which helped getting the sequence of breathing and swallowing right—it was not advisable to do both at the same time. He then drank a little more, then wriggled around to get a look at his mother face, followed his instinct to move his face in response to the joy he felt, and love, and gratitude, and fell fast asleep to the sounds of the voices of his mother and his father, recognising his name, Evan, in what they were saying, and the much-repeated word “smile”.

When he woke up again, he realised that the surroundings were different. Gone were the bright lights and the strange smell. The light was comfortable now, pleasant, and the smell was that mainly of his mother and father. He moved his body, his arms and legs, and felt decidedly uncomfortable in the middle, kind of wet and sticky. He was also hungry again. Neither his mother nor his father were in sight. He recalled that he had heard their voices when they were talking to him, and he had heard his own voice when he had cried out in pain. He had not had a chance yet to practice his voice further; now he repeated the body movements that he remembered from the crying, and after some unsuccessful attempts, he burst out with a series of well-defined wails that resounded in the room. He enjoyed this new-found ability, and, getting the hang of it, continued for a while for its own sake, almost forgetting how uncomfortable he was and that that was why he had started crying in the first place. In a pause between wails, he heard a noise and then his mother’s voice, softly calling his name, Evan. She came into view, smiled at him, wrinkled her nose, smiled again, and said some more soothing words. She went out of sight, he heard more noises besides her voice, a little further off. Then his mother came into view again, lifted him up gently in her arms and carried him a short distance and put him down again, flat on his back, on a soft surface. He felt the

presence of Ananda and Satya, not really localised. His mother talked to him gently, lovingly, he looked at her, into her face, into her eyes. She moved her hands around his body, and he realised that he was not wearing the same flannel that he had been wrapped in earlier. Whatever it was he was wearing now was removed by his mother, and he felt a little uncomfortable with his body exposed to the air in the room and not protected by the soft fabric any more. He expressed his discomfort by a short wail. His mother touched his body gently and comfortingly. He felt that the wetness around his middle was gone, and felt another soft material in his mother's hands remove what had felt sticky. She then put his clothes on again, and his body felt fresh and comfortable. But he was still hungry and made this known through a brief cry. His mother laughed—how he loved that sound. He tried to remember the movement of his own face when he had felt happy some time ago, and in response felt the touch of his mother's lips on his cheeks. He then felt himself lifted up again, placed in his mother's arms, and found the source of the delicious liquid to latch on to. He was alert, and thus able to both remember and apply the lesson he had learnt about the sequence of sucking, swallowing and breathing, and he did well. After a while he did not feel hungry any more, and was surprised not to feel ready to sleep again either. He was quite widely awake, in fact. His mother held him closely, upright, and gently patted his back. After a while, he felt a new sensation, something coming up inside him and then releasing through his mouth with a little sound. His mother said something that sounded like "burp". She then placed him on his back again and looked at him. Time to work on this sound thing. He was able to cry, and did that well, but the sounds he heard from his mother and father were different. Before he could start focusing on this, however, there were noises, similar to those when his mother had come after his first crying, and he could hear other voices,

which he also remembered. It was not his father, or his mother. One voice was similar to that of his mother, but higher in pitch. Now the face that belonged to that voice came into view. His mother and father were in some way similar, he realised, but this face was different altogether. His mother and the new person kept repeating the word “Leah”. Evan remembered from Ananda and Satya that he would have an older sister, Leah. The way that her face was different from that of his mother and father was because she was a child, she was younger, whereas his parents were older, of a similar older age. Leah looked lovingly at him as well, but in a different way from his mother and his father. With the sensitivity of a new-born, which is highly refined but deteriorates in the course of days and weeks, he sensed some worry, concern, or even alarm, behind, underneath and mixed in with the love that dominated in Leah’s eyes and in her voice. Almost ready to cry, Evan noticed that Ananda’s presence had become more distinct, and he picked up a communication from Ananda, not to worry about Leah, and that working on sibling interaction was on the cards for him in this life. This allowed Evan to smile at Leah instead of crying in response to her presence.

Another voice and face now came into view, and his mother handed him over for that new person to hold him. It was different again in the same way that Leah and his mother and father were different—only this time the new person was older than his parents, and much older than Leah. He remembered the voice also from the time he had developed in the womb. The new person was like Leah and his mother, in some ways, not like his father. She was apparently “grandma”, and he also noticed the name Grace in relation to her, just as his sister was Leah and his mother, or mama, was Kaya, and his father, or dada, was Caleb. Grandma talked animatedly at Evan, and he smiled at her, causing much laughter. Then he was passed by grandma to the final stranger that

day, more like his father, but also similar to grandma. He was grandpa, and, looking at him closely, Evan could see the happy smile on his face, but something else, which he was not yet able to place, and he saw that grandpa's eyes were quite red and wet. He remembered his own eyes feeling wet when he was crying with pain earlier on. This grandpa, however, was not in pain, to judge by his face. The name associated with him seemed to be Henry.

But now it was really time to work on his voice, and his father, who had meanwhile joined them, and his mother and Leah talking animatedly with their different, distinctive voices, gave him opportunity enough to observe and then to try for himself to create a sound through his throat that was similar to what he heard from them, and different from his crying. He realised that the production of sound was related to breathing, so he first tried to produce sound on breathing in. It did not really work, sometimes resulting in choking, and his mother or father sat him up and patted his back. After a while, his mother seemed to understand what he was trying to achieve, however, and placed one his hands in front of her mouth when she talked, so that he could feel her breath on his hand. She also placed his hand on her throat, so that he could feel the vibrations of the voice. On this day, he did not quite succeed. He got tired and frustrated and let out some crying sounds, both to vent his feelings and to check whether at least those sounds still worked. Then he fell asleep.

The next time he woke up, he did not feel particularly hungry, and not wet either. He spent some time exercising his arms and hands to make more coordinated movements, as he wanted them to move, not as they seemed to want to move on their own.

Remembering his unsuccessful attempts at producing sounds with his voice that were

not crying, he tried again, and managed to produce some very clear sounds, shaking all over with joy at this success. Then he alerted his mother, or father, to the fact that he was awake by a few determined bursts of crying, followed by some of the newly-found, clear sounds. It worked again, his mother came in, checked whether he was wet, and offered him something to drink, but he was not interested. He repeated his other sounds, and his mother shared his joy. His mother then took him to a different area which he did not yet recognise, and he subjected his environment to careful and critical inspection. The smell was again different, and there were many quite bright and shiny surfaces. He heard a new sound, his mother removed his clothes, then she took him gently up and placed him in pleasantly warm water, holding him safely.

A certain kind of routine seemed to develop—at least there were recognisable phases of sleeping, waking up wet and sticky, being cleaned, having a bath, feeling hungry or not, drinking, working on the movement of his arms and legs, and working on his voice. He learnt the meaning of the words his mother and father and sister uttered, both from association with objects they pointed at when saying the words, and from memory of some other time—it grew more and more hazy, distant and indistinct. He was still aware of Ananda and Satya, but no longer remembered details of what they had told him. They helped him sense them by appearing as beautiful patterns of colour within his field of vision, and when this happened, Evan felt particularly joyful and loving, and smiled and laughed. His parents' and sister's reactions on those occasions suggested to him that they did not sense the presence of Ananda and Satya, and did not see their expressed form of colourful patterns, but that they nevertheless shared his joy at whatever he apparently saw. Thus, ever new experiences came Evan's way.

He found that the delicious liquid he received from his mother was milk; it tasted slightly differently every day, and he liked some of the flavours decidedly more than others. There was also a link between the flavour of the milk and how he felt in his stomach—particularly unwelcome were occasions when he felt his belly rumbling uncomfortably. His parents and Leah, and grandma and grandpa, when they happened to be around, could hear it as well, and they commented with reference to “wind”. On those occasions, his father would usually rub his belly with his big, warm hands. This eased the discomfort, and he showed his appreciation through grateful smiles.

He particularly liked laughter, that of others, and his own. It was even better than smiling. Quite often, his mother and father, sometimes grandpa and grandma, and on occasion even Leah, would do something that made him laugh. Often, he could sense that it was intentional, when they pulled funny faces or told stories that had funny sounds, or showed pictures that were amusing. Some things worked only once to make him laugh, others made him laugh again and again, just as much each time as the time before. Some wore off after a while, some sooner, others later. He loved those occasions most where the cause for laughter came unexpectedly. Being tickled also caused laughter, he realised with delight, but it could get a bit much after a while.

One day, he was placed in a new chair, not the one that would bounce in line with his movements or those of the others, but one where he sat quite upright, resting his back against a comfortably padded but firm surface, and with a horizontal board in front of him. His mother placed a bowl on that board, similar to the ones he had seen the others eating from. It was smaller, however, and displayed a range of bright, cheerful colours. A lovely smell came from the bowl, and he was curious to see what would happen with it. He saw his mother place a spoon into the bowl, take out some of the

food from the bowl onto the spoon, and move it gently towards his mouth. He instinctively opened his mouth, even though some apprehension mixed in with the excitement. He felt the food in his mouth and closed his lips over the spoon—his mother gently removed the spoon from his mouth, and used a soft cloth to wipe his mouth. He used his tongue to get a feel for the food in his mouth. The texture was pleasant, and the flavour delicious. He realised he was able to breathe through his nose, though not through his mouth, while he worked on the food. Eventually he swallowed the food down, and opened his mouth in the hope of receiving another spoon-full of the food. In this way, he ate quite a lot, until he felt really full in his belly, and did not open his mouth for a further spoon-full, and kept his mouth shut when his mother offered another spoon-full. His mother then took him away from the new seat, and placed him over her shoulder, tenderly patting his back until he burped.

He now had some milk from his mother, and some food from the spoon, whenever he felt hungry. The spoon-food seemed to come at quite set times, the milk mainly when he asked for it by crying, and this seemed to be at less regular intervals, and often when it was dark outside. The milk was always the same, only with very subtly different flavours, while the spoon-food was very different one time from the next, both concerning texture and flavour. There were some foods that he did not like at all, and on those occasions, he would not take more than one spoonful, and his mother, or whoever gave him the food on the spoon (sometimes his father, sometimes grandpa or grandma, but never Leah), would smile and sigh and return with food he liked after a while. Usually they did not try to offer him food again that he had not liked.

He learnt much of what he had to learn by closely observing and then imitating others. In the context of food, he realised that the others would take food into their

mouths with a spoon, or something else, and then they would move their jaws up and down with mouth closed. He tried this out. With open mouth, he realised, the food would come out of the mouth and need to be wiped off. The others did not do this, so he tried to avoid it, too. He could move his mouth as he saw the others doing, but he saw no point in this for his eating, there was no difference to him whether he did this or not. He then saw that the others had something white showing when their mouths were open, a row of little white pieces close to each other. When he felt his own mouth with his lips or fingers, he could not find any such things in his mouth. He sought to touch these things in the others' mouths, but only his mother would allow him, and only once. She explained that they had teeth, and he would have some soon.

He forgot about all this, but remembered when one day he felt a sharp, stinging pain in his mouth, and started crying immediately. He also noticed that he had much more spit in his mouth, which had soaked his sleeper quite considerably. His mother came, but he was neither wet, nor hungry. He continued crying. She noticed the wet sleepsuit, changed him, and checked his mouth. His mother walked away and came back with a bright green thing she gave him to put into his mouth. He tried, and soon bit heartily on it in the area that the pain was. His mother pointed to her teeth, and then to his mouth, and said that he was teething.

At certain times of the day, his father or mother, sometimes grandpa or grandma, would take what they called a book, and sit with him and read to him. Often there were interesting pictures in the book as well, and often the language was funny because of its distinct rhythm. These books helped him develop his ways with words. He had been able to understand much from very early on; now was the time to develop that understanding from grasping the gist of what was being said to achieve attention to

detail; it also meant further training his mouth, tongue and voice to comply with his wishes to express himself towards his parents, grandparents and sister.

Chapter 17

Over time, Evan's skills relating to his body became more and more sophisticated, and his parents and grandparents took every opportunity of praising both his efforts and achievements. Early on in his life, they had observed a particular pattern in this regard.

'Did you observe Evan moving his arms and legs today?' his mother, Kaya, asked his father, Caleb, one evening after Evan had fallen asleep after a meal.

'Yes', Caleb responded, 'he is trying so hard, and when it does not go to plan, he gets very angry with himself, red in the face with it.'

'I think he's a little perfectionist,' Kaya observed. 'Otherwise he wouldn't get so frustrated and be more playful about the exercise itself—he seems to be working almost according to a planned programme in his little head.'

'That is quite possible,' Caleb confirmed. Then he wondered: 'Is there anything we can do to support him with this?'

'We could join him in moving, give him a clear model to imitate, to make it more playful, and of course praise him a lot when he has achieved something, and be very loving and perhaps distract him a little when he takes it too seriously or does not get right away to where he wants to be.'

'Good idea,' Caleb agreed, 'and we could also talk to Grace and Henry about this'.

Kaya interrupted with a smile: 'Grandma and grandpa, as they now like to be referred to. They have been so happy to be grandparents.'

‘Yes, grandma and grandpa,’ Caleb smiled as well.

‘Not to forget Leah, I guess sibling imitation is a key factor in Evan’s development,’ Kaya concluded. ‘But let’s try it out in practice ourselves first, whether it works for us?’

Caleb shared this view, and they took the next opportunity of testing their ideas with Evan. On that day, sitting in his high-chair, he had decided to work on moving both his arms together, rather than at random. Kaya and Caleb observed him closely, and soon figured out his intention.

‘Do you think we should try to show him how to clap, so that he can then try to imitate us?’ Kaya suggested.

‘Hmm,’ Caleb considered this, ‘clever idea.’

They clapped their hands, with slightly exaggerated movements. The sound of the clapping caught Evan’s attention, and he responded with a smile and laughter.

‘See how closely he is watching us,’ Kaya quietly said to Caleb.

He nodded, and they continued clapping. Soon Evan tried to imitate them, at first missing the hands or not creating a sound when they met because the palms were not flat. Soon he was showing first signs of frustration. After exchanging a glance, Caleb and Kaya took up Evan’s way of clapping as if they were inspired by it and were imitating him. They moved their hands towards each other, but missed, or almost missed, or avoided the sound effect. They laughed and giggled all the while, showing Evan how much fun they were having. Their enthusiasm and playful mood caught on, and Evan laughed and joined them in light-hearted movements. At Caleb’s signal, Kaya and he moved on to seeking to touch not only their hands in an attempt at clapping, but each other’s, and soon they sought to integrate Evan in his, holding out one of their

hands for him to touch. Squeals of laughter from Evan accompanied every successful hit he achieved, and there was so much going on that he did not have the space to get frustrated and grumpy. During their playing, they noticed that Evan was getting better at the more purposeful movements he had tried to achieve at first, having his palms straight for impact with his own hands, or with those of one of his parents. He would also become better at hitting the target and not missing it, and even managed to produce some clapping sounds in the end. In a while, he was happy and got tired, losing interest in the game without frustration, and then beginning to stare hard at his mother, and smiling happily when she understood that he wanted a feed.

While drinking, he sensed Ananda and Satya's presence, and he had a brief phase in which he could reflect calmly, even though not in words he had learnt as if anew in this life, but in terms of more abstract processes of consciousness, about what had just happened. He realised that he had had fun, he had been playing, had had a wonderful time with his parents, and he had practised and progressed a lot with the movements of his arms. This was so much better than previous occasions when he has tried so hard. The fun just now had not been hard at all. And working hard made him tired much sooner, and he was not happy when he worked hard. Just now he had been happy with himself—when he worked hard he was mainly frustrated with himself. Satisfied both with the experience, and his insights about it, he snuggled up to his mother to allow himself to fall asleep.

Ananda and Satya were satisfied as well, as this had been Evan's first, and successful, encounter with the task of addressing perfectionism. Kaya and Caleb, too, were happy with the way this had gone.

‘I think our idea was right, and what we did worked out great,’ Kaya said after she had placed fast-asleep Evan into his crib for a well-deserved rest.

‘Yes,’ Caleb confirmed. ‘We should tell Grace, Henry and Leah when we get a moment’.

They did so, and particularly Grace and Henry expressed their surprise at this insight and how well Evan seemed to have taken to it. They tried themselves in due course, and found it a very uplifting experience. They initiated the game of clapping themselves, and as expected, Evan joined in, already familiar with the game, and still keen on playing it. Grace and Henry pretended not to be able to hit their own and each other’s hands, while Evan was successful right from the start, making him visibly happy. For a moment, he seemed to be teaching his grandparents rather than the other way around.

On one occasion, Kaya observed Leah playing the game with Evan, at first in line with their instructions, but then she did her own clapping very fast and loudly, and Evan had no chance of imitating his sister successfully. He frowned, and started crying—to Kaya it seemed he was in fact angrier with his sister than with himself. Sticking to their number one parenting principle not to react right away and without consideration to unexpected events unless there was immediate danger, Kaya did not interfere at this point, but discussed the observation with Caleb later that day.

‘It seemed to me that Leah was winding him up intentionally, and he cried because he was angry at that,’ Kaya concluded her narration of what had happened.

‘Sometimes Leah has this tendency to be a bit nasty to Evan, very sweetly and lovingly so, but still,’ Caleb responded. ‘I bet Evan senses it, just as we do, but he can’t defend himself properly yet—all he can do is start crying. Usually that then brings one

of us on the scene, at least popping our heads around the corner to see what's up, and even if we don't interfere, our presence gives him reassurance.'

'You think it's sibling rivalry from Leah's perspective?' Kaya ventured.

'Must be,' Caleb agreed. 'She was happy when we told her that you were pregnant with Evan, and when he was born, and we came home with him from hospital. She really loves him, deeply. But there is still something there in the background that bubbles up to the surface every now and then. Sometimes I get the feeling that Leah does not quite know herself what's hitting her on those occasions.'

'I think talking to her directly about this would not be the best way forward,' Kaya developed this train of discussion further.

'I agree,' Caleb said.

'It would foreground the issue too much, take away the innocence and intuitive level which this is currently on,' Kaya went on.

Caleb picked up from there: 'We should make sure we have time with her on her own, and when we are with both of them, not to give our attention only to Evan, and arrange for situations where we have reason to praise her in his presence, not only the other way 'round.'

'It is so easy to take all the things Leah can do already for granted, because she is four years older than Evan, after all,' Kaya added.

His parents had interpreted his behaviour quite well. He enjoyed Leah's company, he really did, but he had sensed, right from the moment he had first set eyes on her, that there was some tension, which they seemed both aware of, in distinctly different ways. Evan felt very close to Leah, and he sensed that she felt the same way about him. That feeling formed the foundation and core of their relationship. But there were moments,

very brief but also very poignant, when Leah slipped into hostility—very subtle, possibly not perceptible for the others, but he most certainly noticed, and felt hurt. Sometimes he was strong enough to outwardly ignore the attack—although he was sure that Leah, somewhere deep down, realised and knew that her attack had hit home. Sometimes he simply had to react immediately, to get the shock and hurt and anger out of his body—and the only way he could react at that point in his relatively new life was to shout out his feelings by crying.

The days, weeks and months passed. Evan was by now a little more than a year old. He had come to feel pain when he moved his arms, hands, legs or feet. He became reluctant to move, to crawl, and engage in all those things that he had enjoyed so much until a while back when this pain had started, and it was getting worse. His parents seemed to notice, looking at him with concern, comforting him, but unable to help, for some reason. One evening he felt particularly weak, there was a lot of pain, and he also felt very hot. While he had developed a satisfactory level of control over the movements of his arms and legs, suddenly he felt his whole body shaking violently, all jerky, and he did not have any control over it. Fortunately, his mother was close by and immediately lifted him up on her shoulder. Food came up from his belly and out of his mouth, spreading all over his mother's back. Then everything went completely black and quiet. When he could see again, the shaking had stopped, fortunately, he was lying on his bed, his parents looking at him with great concern. He was changed, he heard his father talking to someone, but could not hear the person he was talking to. He was placed in the car, into the car seat he liked so much, and they drove off quickly. After a while they took him out of the seat and into a large building where he had never been before. Bright lights made him wince, and there were unfamiliar sounds and smells as well.

Normally he would have been excited, but he was merely tired and weary. Several people looked at him, poked him here and there, felt his arms and legs, made him move them this way or that way. He felt a sharp sting on his arm, cried out briefly, and was comforted by his mother. He was given something to eat and drink, which did not taste either familiar or nice, but, judging by his mother's expression, it seemed necessary that he accepted it. Soon he fell asleep, and felt a little better when he woke up, at least not as hot any more. He was not at home again yet. He had something tasty to eat and drink, and soon some people, some he had seen before, and some others, again looked at him closely. His mother was there, always providing reassurance when he needed it, and his father and Leah were there as well. Leah seemed very concerned, and their father had to reassure her a lot. There was not enough peace and quiet in that environment for him to sense or see Satya and Ananda, and he hoped he would be home again soon. There were several more occasions when he felt a sharp, stinging pain, but his mother's reassurance was enough to comfort him.

At long last, they were at home again. His mother talked to him for a long time, and he understood that normally he was healthy, but he had just been very ill, and was now getting better again. Being ill meant having pain and not feeling well, feeling hot, shaking, not being able to see anything anymore for a while, and much more. The place they had taken him to was a hospital, and the people who had looked at him so carefully again and again were doctors. He was now taking medicine with his food to help him get better.

Chapter 18

Leah proceeded to primary school, then secondary school, Evan to kindergarten, then infant and primary school. Caleb and Kaya had organised a big family party for Evan's

eighths birthday, which Grace and Henry, who were very involved with their grandchildren, had of course also attended. They had returned to London later that evening, still full of both the buzz and the emotional current of the special event. At home, Grace and Henry had a glass of wine, and an early night.

The next morning, Grace woke up with a mild headache, which she was not usually prone to. At first, she did not pay much attention to it, but after showering it got worse, and in the kitchen, while she was preparing breakfast, she noticed that she was also feeling dizzy, with everything in her vision suddenly spinning anti-clockwise. She just about managed to sit down, because the dizziness was making it difficult for her to sit straight with her eyes open, let alone stand or walk. She got worried, and called out for Henry, who was still fast asleep in bed when she had last looked. Fortunately, Henry was just about waking up and therefore able to hear a strange, gurgling sound from the kitchen—this was all Grace could utter, although she was certain she had called Henry's name. He rushed to the kitchen and found Grace slumped over the kitchen table, still making unintelligible sounds. He established that she was conscious, but his attempts at making her sit up or talk were futile. She needed medical help. Henry dialled 999 and gave information and instructions to the emergency services operators as prompted. Within ten further minutes, an ambulance had arrived, the paramedics efficiently and professionally assessed the situation and then strapped Grace on a stretcher and carried her to the ambulance. They told him briefly that they suspected Grace had suffered a stroke, and she needed to be treated in hospital urgently. Henry joined them on their way to the nearest available hospital. He phoned Caleb, who answered the phone quickly.

'Good morning,' Henry said.

‘Oh, good morning, dad.’ Caleb sounded surprised. ‘I tried phoning you at home a moment ago, but you didn’t answer. And this is clearly your mobile phone you are calling from, and a lot of noise in the background, an ambulance very close by,’ he observed.

‘Caleb, listen,’ Henry said, his voice reflecting the urgency of the situation, ‘I am in an ambulance with Grace, on the way to the hyper acute stroke unit at King’s College Hospital, Grace seems to have had a stroke.’

‘Oh my God, no,’ Caleb exclaimed, and called out for Kaya to come over to the phone. ‘Please call again when you know more, use Kaya’s mobile number to be on the safe side, I think we’ll make arrangements to come over right away. Yes, bye.’ Then he turned to Kaya. ‘That was Henry,’ he said to her, ‘it seems your mum’s had a stroke. They are on the way to the hospital now.’

Kaya was of course very upset, and started crying. Leah and Evan had woken up from the phone ringing and the excited talking, and came down the stairs sleepily, to ask what was going on. Kaya explained to them. They decided to have breakfast first. They needed that, whatever happened and whatever they would be doing next.

‘I suggest,’ Caleb said, ‘that I stay behind with Leah and Evan, and you take the next train down to London to be with your mum, Kaya.’

They agreed that this was the best solution for the moment. Kaya quickly packed a few things and they booked a taxi to take her to the station—she reached just in time for the next possible train, and was in London within three hours of first hearing about the stroke. She took a taxi from the station to the hospital and enquired about the whereabouts of her mother at the reception. She was given directions to the relatives’ waiting area, where she found Henry. They hugged.

‘It’s great that you were able to come over so quickly, Kaya,’ Henry said. ‘Did Caleb stay with the children?’

‘There was no alternative to me coming over immediately,’ Kaya stated. ‘Yes, Caleb is with Leah and Evan. What is the latest you have on mum?’

‘They are doing all kinds of checks on her now. I think that includes an MRI scan. She is stable in terms of heart and other vital functions. She was awake during the trip to the hospital, in the ambulance, but not able to talk properly. But I am certain that she did recognise me, and her environment. The paramedics checked on that as well and said it was a good sign. So now it’s a question of waiting.’

Kaya and Henry helped themselves to a coffee from the machine provided in the waiting area, and remained quiet for a while, caught in their own thoughts.

Caleb at home tried to distract the children as much as possible, but that was not so easy any more, given that they were now twelve and eight years old, respectively.

‘What exactly is a stroke, dad?’ Leah asked.

Before he could start on his response, Evan took over: ‘It’s when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. Then lots of blood comes out of the vessel, and puts pressure on the brain, and the brain goes dead in those areas where the pressure is too much.’ He looked proudly, but also quizzically at Caleb.

‘Yes, well explained, Evan,’ Caleb praised his son. ‘This is one type of stroke, bleeding in the brain. There is another type, where the blood vessels do not burst, but get blocked, and blood does not reach important parts of the brain. Does it make sense to you, Leah?’

‘I think so,’ she considered. ‘What makes a blood vessel burst?’

Evan did not know the answer, and Caleb stepped in: 'It is probably, in granny's case, a question of age. The walls of the blood vessels just get thinner with age. So much blood flows through them all their lives, it's wear and tear. It's the same in the body as it is with clothes. Remember your favourite shirt, how sad you were when it got so thin from all the times it had been in the washing machine that it tore?'

Leah nodded. 'And what do the doctors do?'

'They try to stop the bleeding, or they try to unblock the blood vessels. They try to do this with medicines, but if necessary they have to operate,' Caleb explained.

The answer was enough for Leah.

'Which kind of stroke did granny have?' Evan asked.

'We don't know yet,' Caleb responded. At that moment, his mobile phone rang. It was Kaya, who gave him an update on the situation at the hospital.

'That was mum,' Caleb said, she sends her love. 'Granny is in hospital having some tests and treatment, but the doctors have not yet told them what they found.'

'Is granny in a lot of pain?' asked Leah, concerned.

Caleb thought for a moment. 'Grandad said this morning that nanny had had a headache when she woke up. I think the doctors will take pain relief into account when they work with granny,' he tried to reassure her.

'I see,' Leah said. 'Am I asking too many questions?'

'No, not at all,' Caleb smiled at her warmly. 'Ask as many questions as you like, please.'

Encouraged. Leah went on: 'And if the doctors cannot help granny, will she die?'

Evan was clearly uncomfortable with that question, which had been genuine and open from Leah's perspective. He swallowed, and complained: 'That's a bit much, Leah!'

Caleb caught the atmosphere. 'No, it's alright. Stroke can always lead to a person dying, depending how strong it is. But in granny's case, the paramedics were quite hopeful that she will get through it alright.'

'And if she does die, what is that like?' Evan now asked.

'We don't really know, because nobody who has died is able to tell us later what it was like,' Caleb said, in a very matter-of-fact voice.

Still Evan had to laugh at the logic.

His laughter was not quite free, though, Caleb realised, and therefore he added: 'There are some people who were considered dead by the doctors, but who came back to life, after a very short while. They often write about their experiences, and psychologists try to study those "near-death experiences", as they are called. Many of those experiences have in common that people are quite surprised how pleasant they seem to be. Death is the aspect of life we know least about, and because we don't know much we could get afraid of it, but it seems not to be frightful at all, but in fact somehow a pleasant experience.' Caleb paused to let this sink in.

Leah considered this for a while, and then added: 'I would be afraid of death because I don't know what happens afterwards.'

'Very good point, Leah,' Caleb praised her. Different religions tell us different things about us. For example, our soul goes to God, or it goes to a space where it reflects on the life just ended and prepares for a next life. And people who do not

believe in God, no matter what religion, think that it simply all ends at death, nothing happens afterwards.’

‘That’s rather sad, to have to be thinking that. What’s the point of life in that case?’

‘Can we stop all this philosophy now, please, my head is hurting,’ Leah complained at this point. ‘I’m hungry from all this talking.’

‘That’s good,’ Caleb said, ‘let’s stop talking for now, but if you do have any further questions, always ask me,’ he encouraged them.

At the hospital, Kaya and Henry were pulled out of their silence when they saw a doctor approaching. He looked at the notes on his clipboard, puzzled.

‘Mr and, ahem, Mrs White?’

‘Yes, and yes,’ Kaya confirmed, and managed a smile. ‘Confusing, isn’t it? I met my future husband, Caleb White, and our respective parents, Grace, your patient, my mother, and Henry, here, my father-in-law, met as well, fell in love and got married. Make sense?’

The doctor tried to solve the puzzle by mumbling and pointing to imaginary objects with his hands. Having succeeded, or given up, Kaya was not sure, he introduced himself:

‘Sorry, it is rather complicated at first sight. I am Mr Anand, I am consultant neurologist in the hyper acute stroke unit here. Mrs, ahem, White had what we call a TIA, a transient ischaemic attack, caused by a temporary blood clot in one of her brain vessels. The lay term is mini-stroke. We did MRI and CT scans, and can rule out any other kind of event. All the symptoms that you will have noticed, or that your wife mentioned, Mr., ahem, White, are consistent with that diagnosis, headache, dizziness,

and the problems with speaking. We call that dysphasia. We have treated this with aspirin in the first instance. The symptoms have gone back, she is now resting, as such attacks can be quite draining, in addition to the tension of having to go to and be in hospital. We are monitoring her closely, and would like to do so for another day or so. You can go in and see her now, if you like. Do you have any questions for me?’

‘What is the prognosis?’ Kaya asked.

‘A fellow medic?’ Mr Anand smiled.

‘Dentist,’ Kaya corrected him.

‘Really?’ Mr Anand sounded surprised. ‘You...’

‘Now don’t say that I don’t look macho enough for a dentist,’ Kaya protested.

‘You hear that a lot, do you?’ Mr Anand apologised.

‘Far too often. Prognosis?’ she reminded him.

‘Oh, sorry,’ Mr Anand remembered. ‘She should make a full recovery, it will just take time to regain her strength.’

‘Thank you,’ Kaya replied, and turned to Henry. ‘Henry?’

‘Nothing at the moment. Presumably we will get some advice when she is being discharged?’

‘Yes,’ Mr Anand confirmed, ‘lots of leaflets with all the info you need.’

He called a nurse and she led Kaya and Henry across to the room where Grace was resting.

‘Hello there,’ Henry said gently, and Kaya said: ‘Hi mum.’

Grace looked at them, tired but relieved. Many thoughts had gone through her mind after she had realised that she needed help, and called, as she remembered, for Henry. She was aware that she had been on her way to the hospital, and that lots of

people had made a lot of fuss around her, and now she saw both Henry and Kaya. She had wondered what had happened. Someone had told her something, at some point, but she had forgotten again. Grace smiled: ‘Hello. You too look very concerned, is anything wrong?’

To mainly Henry’s relief, because he still remembered the disjointed sounds Grace had made in the early morning, Grace’s words now had come out clearly and cogently. He told Grace briefly what had happened, and that they were so happy she was feeling better.

‘Tired, now, mostly. I’d like some water to drink, and then I’d like to have a long beauty sleep.’

The nurse advised them that Grace might be sleeping for quite a long time, possibly through until the next day, and she would not be woken up by hospital staff. She took down Kaya’s and Henry’s mobile phone numbers and promised to call them if there were any changes. Henry and Kaya left the hospital and made their way back to Henry and Grace’s flat, stopping on the way to buy some food. Then they called Caleb and set up a skype session with him and the children. Henry and Kaya explained in detail what had happened, the diagnosis and the treatment.

Grace was discharged from hospital two days later, Caleb had travelled over to London with Leah and Evan for the occasion, and they were all given many information leaflets about life after a mini-stroke, as well as details of websites and support groups—enough to keep all six of them busy for a long while. Caleb, Kaya and their children returned home again soon, leaving Henry to take care of Grace in the weeks she had to take it a bit easy.

The children went back to school, and only occasionally came back in their conversations with each other, and with their parents, to the events around Grace's stroke. Grace recovered apparently very well and quickly, but she did heed the advice and for a few months at least, she held back on too strenuous activities. They cancelled all their planned travels as well, with the insurance paying out after a sharp letter from their solicitor.

Chapter 19

The events around Grace's stroke did have another, unexpected, effect on Kaya and Caleb. Reflecting about the events, Kaya realised with considerable surprise that Mr Anand, the consultant, had openly flirted with her, and that she had felt flattered by his interest. She also remembered her irritation at the way Caleb had behaved with the nurse that had discharged Grace. Come to think of it, he had been flirting. She had never attracted flirtatious behaviour from any man since she had met Caleb, fourteen years ago, and had never been flattered by any man's behaviour in the way that she was flattered by Mr Anand's behaviour. She had never seen Caleb behave the way he had with the nurse in the hospital with any other female. Alarm bells were ringing for her.

She took the next opportunity of talking privately with Caleb, a few days later, when he came home from work after the children had gone to bed already. Kaya had prepared some light dinner, and afterwards, on their way to the living room, she said: 'Caleb, I need to talk to you.'

'That sounds serious,' Caleb responded. 'Is Grace alright?'

'Yes, all fine there, children as well,' Kaya reassured him. They sat down.

‘I noticed something the other day that makes me concerned. When the consultant told us the news about Grace, he flirted with me, and I liked it. And you flirted with the nurse, and you liked it, and I didn’t,’ Kaya said.

Caleb was quiet for a moment. ‘Yes, I did flirt with the nurse, and I did like it,’ Caleb admitted. ‘Was it the same for you and the consultant?’

‘Yes, it was,’ Kaya confirmed. ‘I realised later that this was the first time I flirted with someone else, and that I saw you flirting with someone else, since we met. That made me sad, and made me think, and that’s why I am raising it now.’

‘In other words, what is happening, has been happening, to our relationship, to our marriage?’ Caleb concluded.

‘I have no doubt in my mind, for myself, that I love you, with all my heart, Caleb,’ Kaya stated.

‘I have no doubt in my mind that I love you, with all my heart, Kaya,’ Caleb assured her.

‘And yet there is something wrong, and we have to find out together what it is, and do something about it,’ Kaya insisted.

‘I agree,’ Caleb admitted.

They followed their own thoughts for a while.

‘We have worked out our lives so well together, Kaya,’ Caleb began again.

Kaya stopped him right there. ‘That’s it. That’s precisely it. It all works perfectly, doesn’t it? We have a plan A for everything, and plans B and C and D and in many cases even plan E of plan A does not work and so on. We just need to shift from one to the other, without thinking.’

Caleb looked puzzled. ‘And you mean there is a problem with that?’

Kaya took this thought further: ‘Not in its own right. But all this becomes functional. We talked about being functional in our first meeting, remember?’

Caleb smiled: ‘I will never forget our first meeting, Kaya. Yes, I remember us talking about functionality. Everything has become routine, nothing is spontaneous any more, everything is automated, there is, as you say, a plan for every situation in life, at least for everyday life. No immediacy, nothing new, as it was when we had met and got to know each other, nothing new as it was when we had Leah,’

Kaya interrupted: ‘And with Evan’s birth and his infancy and early childhood we already had routines we could rely on. For example, we know exactly what to do when one of the children gets ill, and we follow that routine without fail. We have much of our daily lives planned-out, day by day.’

‘Our love for each other is falling victim to this routine,’ Caleb concluded.

Caleb and Kaya decided that it was absolutely worth making a major effort of reviving their marriage. They started with each of them spending a good amount of time writing down the things they loved about each other, and their marriage, and then they shared the lists. They were very long, and only some of the points were on both lists. They made copies of the lists, so that they both had both. They made the effort of setting time aside for each of them to be able to be on their own, and for them to be together on their own also during the day, not only in the evenings when the children were in bed and they were too exhausted to do much anyway and went to bed soon as well. They planned more visits to Grace and Henry, and would invite them more often, and not only them, but other friends and colleagues. Each of them thought about surprises for the other, which needed some effort on their own part. They were also able to foreground and pay special attention to some items on the list of what they liked

about each other and their marriage. For example, they made an effort to look smart and sexy, as defined by the other, also when relaxed at home. They went back to their special bench on the promenade more often, after realising with some alarm that they had not been there for several years. They promised not to take each other for granted any more, and they agreed that they would check up on their progress of reviving their marriage, and then ultimately of keeping their marriage lively, on a regular basis, initially once a month, and then, in due course, perhaps three to four times a year.

‘I am very glad you noticed this happening and that you did something about it right away,’ Caleb thanked Kaya.

They stuck to their plan, and it worked out. They were able to stop the downward spiral they had found themselves in.

Chapter 20

Some years later, when they had said goodnight to the children and they were fast asleep, Caleb and Kaya were just about to settle down for some music when the door-bell rang repeatedly.

‘Who this can be,’ Kaya wondered, ‘so late, and so urgent.’

Caleb went to open the door.

‘Open it with the chain on, just in case,’ Kaya called after him.

He did so, and saw Monica. She was shaking, shivering, pale, her face puffed up from crying, and there were several fresh bruises in her face as well. Seeing the state Monica was in, Caleb called to Kaya: ‘Come over here, please Kaya. I think you better help her.’ He released the chain and opened the door, Kaya caught Monica, who was swaying with fatigue, and helped her inside, into the kitchen to start with, and eased her

on to a chair. Caleb locked the front door and joined them, dimming the light in the kitchen, hoping to make it more comfortable for Monica. He filled a jug with water and poured some into a plastic tumbler, passing it over to Kaya. She offered it to Monica, who drank all of it in almost a single gulp. Caleb refilled the tumbler. None of them had said a word so far.

Now Monica spoke, stifling sobs in between; ‘You said I could come if I needed help. It’s a long time ago, several years, but I never forgot it. I always thought that things might improve, but they have not. I’m now really fearing for my life, and my sanity, and Peter’s life, because if we carry on like this, either he is going to kill me, or I am going to kill him, or one or both of us will be committing suicide.’

‘Yes, we, actually, mainly Caleb, feared, at the time, that something like this might be happening, and we did mean it and do mean it that you are welcome here for help,’ Kaya assured her. ‘Does Peter know you have left, where you have gone?’

Monica hesitated. ‘I left when he was in his surgery, but he will have found out when he got back in the late afternoon. I did not leave any indication of where I am, and I don’t think Peter would be phoning or driving around all the places I could be.’

‘OK,’ Caleb took over, ‘do you think he might become aggressive and violent to us if he found you here?’

‘I don’t think he would,’ Monica sighed, after stifling another wave of sobbing and drinking her third glass of water. ‘With others he is really shy, and careful, and afraid, and he has been violent only with me.’

‘I think, then,’ Kaya continued, looking at Caleb for confirmation, ‘that you can stay here for the time being. Caleb, would you mind getting the spare bedroom ready, while I stay with Monica?’

‘I agree, and I’ll get the room ready for you,’ Caleb said. ‘You didn’t bring any clothes or anything else with you?’ With that he went over to the guest bedroom.

‘No,’ Monica said apologetically.

‘No problem,’ Kaya comforted her, ‘you can have some of my things, they should fit you quite well. Now,’ she added, ‘let’s take a look at your face. Are there any other injuries on your body that you are aware of?’

Monica was deeply embarrassed. ‘Only old bruises, nothing fresh,’ she said very quietly. Kaya looked at her face—from her dentist’s medical training, she could establish that while the bruising was considerable, nothing seemed to require immediate medical attention in the hospital’s A&E. She also checked the inside of Monica’s mouth and could not find any damage. She would take Monica to her local GP tomorrow for a closer look, but all that was needed for now was to get Monica settled in for as much sleep as possible. Monica has a sandwich to eat, drank some more water, and by that time Caleb had finished preparing the guest bedroom. Kaya found some suitable pyjamas and a set of fresh clothes for Monica to wear the next day, and Monica withdrew for the night. Kaya and Caleb could hear her sobbing for a little while longer, but then she seemed to have fallen asleep. They checked on the children, who had remained undisturbed during all that had happened, and then went to bed themselves, rather quiet and withdrawn, each enclosed in their own thoughts.

A few days later, after they had delivered Monica to the local branch of Refuge and returned home, Caleb phoned Peter, as they had agreed with the counsellor from Respect, the charity helping perpetrators. Fortunately, Peter answered the phone right away. He was surprised to hear Caleb’s voice. ‘What’s up, old friend,’ he asked, jovially, ‘another medical emergency?’

Caleb's voice sounded pressed and hoarse. 'No actually, Peter, it's about you, actually, and Monica.'

'Oh, I see,' Peter said, dumbfounded. 'How, I mean, what? Why?' he stammered.

'Monica came here a few days ago, after you had beaten her up again. She is now somewhere safe, not with us anymore.' Caleb had to clear his throat repeatedly. 'I don't find this easy, to talk to you at all, I mean,' he explained, 'but I promised Monica to do this. You need help, Peter. I don't know whether your marriage to Monica can be salvaged, but you need help anyway, you cannot go on living with whatever leads you into acts of domestic violence, makes you a wife-beater.'

There was a pause at the other end of the line. Caleb was by now wiping the sweat off his forehead. Kaya, who had been with him, nodded encouragingly.

'I am so sorry, so sorry.' Peter's voice sounded hollow and empty. 'I love Monica, but so many things about her just make me lose my temper, so badly I hit out at her. I don't know what's wrong with me, it's not much fun, I can tell you. Is there help for people like me, or only contempt and prison?' He sounded genuine, not self-pitying.

'You should get in touch with RESPECT, a charity that can get you in touch with local support services. See how you respond to their approach. If that does not do the trick, there are other approaches, and they can guide you there.'

After these dramatic events, Kaya and Caleb withdrew from the forefront of the further development of Peter and Monica's relationship—after all, they were not trained counsellors or therapists. Peter and Monica realised that, and did not impose themselves on Caleb and Kaya—they were grateful for the help they had offered, and kept them informed about developments as a matter of courtesy: they reconciled, but decided, each

encouraged by their respective support group, that too much had occurred for them to try to re-establish genuine love and live together again. They divorced, and sought to rebuild their lives independent of each other, with continuing support from the relevant charities and organisations.

Chapter 21

In bringing up their children, Kaya and Caleb placed much emphasis on a balance of arts and science, combined with physical activity. They realised and supported Leah's potential for science, but also nurtured her interest in the arts, taking the children to see live classical music, opera and theatre, and talking about it at home. They realised Evan's strength in drama, but also nurtured his interest in science, by ensuring Evan knew all about, and was able to talk to Leah about her science projects, while also supporting Leah to communicate meaningfully with Evan about all his drama projects.

After completing her secondary education, Leah had left home to study Neuroscience at Cardiff University for a B.Sc., had followed this with a Masters at King's College, and was now embarking on a PhD scholarship at University College London. Evan was just starting his undergraduate studies in Drama at Canterbury Christ Church University. With both children out of the house, Kaya and Caleb took the considerable change in their home life as an opportunity to take stock of their lives, their careers, their relationship and marriage. This happened initially in private, for each in their own thoughts, in their own time, which they had made sure they had available, after Grace's stroke many years ago by now. They noticed this desire for reflection not only in themselves, but also in the other, and were curious about the joint outcome that would reveal itself in due course.

One evening, Caleb had come to a point where he was ready to talk, and what he had to say would be of considerable impact for both. It was a genuine crossroads. ‘I would like us to go to our bench tomorrow morning for sunrise, Kaya,’ he said, ‘would you like that?’

There was no surprise in Kaya’s voice when she answered: ‘Yes, I’d like that. It might become a long conversation, right? So, we should bring enough to eat and drink to make us comfortable.’

They prepared some provisions that night, then went to bed for the early rise, packed a bag and left in time to reach the bench before sunrise. It was still chilly that early, but they had brought warm clothes to see them through the time until the sunlight brought natural warmth—the weather forecast had been favourable.

‘It is strange, the house so empty without the children, even more so now that both have gone than when only Leah had left for her studies,’ Kaya started.

‘I feel the same,’ Caleb agreed. ‘It made me think a lot, about me, about my career, about us, about the children. About my parents and yours.’

‘I noticed that about you, and I was doing the same,’ Kaya mused. ‘I have come to a set of far-reaching decisions, Caleb,’ she added, ‘which will be quite monumental for all of us, I think. And I bet you have arranged this meeting here today because it is the same for you?’ Her voice here combined question with statement.

‘You are right, or course,’ Caleb smiled. ‘I think we have been blessed with each other, right from the start and throughout. We have had much happiness and joy together, with our relationship, with our parents and in-laws, respectively, and our wonderful children. There were ups and downs, naturally, we had a lot to work through from our respective pasts, with Sophia and Nathan, but we were always there to support

each other. We picked up quickly, after the scare with your mum's stroke, on a low point in our relationship, and we worked hard and together to avert the danger of getting stuck in routine.'

'I agree,' Kaya nodded. 'We were brought together, if you like, to learn those things, how to cope with what Nathan did to me, what you suffered with regard to Sophia, to be there for each other the way we were, to develop a wonderful relationship with our parents and in-laws, and to be given the great honour of bringing up Leah and Evan.'

Caleb took over again, but hesitated a little in what he had to say. 'We made mistakes along the way, of course, but where we realised those mistakes, we owned up to them, and put a lot of effort into making up for mistakes and not making them again. We always did the best we could, at all times. Without wanting to doubt, or question, or in any other way reduce the validity and memory of any of this happiness and joy and luck we had, I think, somehow, we have come to the end of what we were meant to do, to tackle, to achieve together.' Caleb ended with a big sigh. The cat was out of the bag.

Kaya sighed as well, not with sadness, but with relief. 'I have been thinking along the same lines as you about all this, over the last few weeks, since Evan left,' she said. 'We said this when we first met: in the past, marriages were probably meant for life, until death do us part, but time is moving much faster, we have, as you said, achieved what we were brought together to achieve, what we, before this incarnation, decided to achieve together. It will be sad to part, but staying together now that we have achieved all we wanted to achieve together, would mean blocking our own further spiritual development, blocking us and the other from achieving whatever else we planned to do before we chose this incarnation. It would also block the spiritual

development of family members affected by this decision we are about to make, or have made on our own already and are now discussing with the partner, because Leah and Evan, in particular, would also have come to us to be able to address these issues in this life that our separation will mean for them’.

‘What we are talking about, then,’ Caleb summarised, ‘is that we have realised that we have achieved what brought us together as husband and wife, and that we now want to separate to make way for whatever else is due for us?’

‘In very sober terms, yes,’ Kaya confirmed. ‘I said earlier that I have also thought about my career. I want to do a three-year full-time training to become an orthodontist, while carrying on as a regular dentist here with Em, then open an orthodontic wing at Em’s practice, or join one of the local orthodontic specialist practices.’

‘That sounds like an exciting development of your career, Kaya,’ Caleb said warmly. ‘In a way, it is a shame that I will not be part of that development as closely as I would have been, were we to have remained husband and wife. But even after we have separated, I guess we will remain very fondly interested in each other’s well-being and progress, and will visit, and the children will be visiting, and so on?’

‘Yes, of course,’ Kaya agreed, and took this further. ‘There will be sadness, grief even, at first, even though we both want this turn of events. That is inevitable because we have been together for so long, and so closely. We may also feel at times, at first, or even in years to come, that this development is not fair, but there is, I think, no viable alternative. Staying together for the sake of the past, to perpetuate the past, would only make us unhappy in the long run.’

‘I have also had thoughts about my career,’ Caleb now told her. ‘I feel my professorship, my teaching in higher education, and my research in more and more restricted frameworks, have all run their course. I have had my say. I have been able to have an impact, hopefully a good one, on two to three thousand or more students across the years. I have established a new field within research, developing it from its infancy to a prominent, mainstream place in the research landscape. I can leave that to the next generation to develop further, if they like, or leave it to become an episode of the past. I have had all the administrative or managerial experience I want—I have never aspired to be a full-time Head of Department, or, even higher up, Dean (or assistant or associate Dean), let alone Pro Vice Chancellor or Vice Chancellor—and I have not developed any such aspirations now.’

Kaya had listened intently. ‘What do you want to do, then?’ she asked.

‘I think I will take early retirement, once we have worked out all the logistics of the separation, and see what comes my way then.’

At that moment, the sunrise was in its fullest glory, and Kaya and Caleb paused, remembering their first, and their many important visits to this special place, and realising, with a mixture of nostalgia, melancholy, sadness and—excitement that this was likely to be their last visit together, as a couple, to their special bench to experience the sunrise with the view across the bay.

Chapter 22

The announcement of their separation, at the time, had caused quite a stir with Grace and Henry, and with Leah and Evan. They were surprised, stunned, and, above all, had many, many questions, which Kaya and Caleb answered patiently over the weeks. They

sold their home, split all the proceeds, agreed on how to divide their joint possessions, and found their own places to live. Kaya enrolled in her studies of orthodontics, while continuing her work in the surgery on a part-time basis. While Kaya was thus busier than ever in terms of her professional life, Caleb went through with his plan to take early retirement, and found himself with much more time on his hands than ever before.

Kaya never regretted her decision to embark, quite late in life, relatively speaking, on the new career path of orthodontics. She threw herself into her studies with full energy, juggling her part-time role as conventional dentist in Emily Smithson's surgery with her study commitments in London. Initially, she used her car for the commutes, but found driving in London too straining, and driving to a tube station on the outskirts of London did not save much time, either. After a while, she relied on public transport, becoming quite expert at the intricacies, devoid of any logic, of the advance booking systems. When her graduation approached, Emily added orthodontics to her surgery's official profile, with Kaya initially as the only orthodontist, and relevant technical and nursing support. The new orthodontic branch of the surgery was thus well advertised and marketed. Because of a shortage of orthodontists in her area, which had meant many patients had to travel far to be treated at over-subscribed orthodontic practices, they received plenty of registrations. The investment for new equipment, the dentist to replace Kaya, a new technician, paying for Kaya's tuition fees, and the fees for additional training of existing nurses, was recovered in full already in the first year and returned profit in the years after that. Kaya was very happy with her new role, and was very popular with her patients—especially the young ones were keen to get her smiling approval of, and praise for, their efforts at wearing their removable braces, or properly cleaning their teeth underneath permanent braces.

Yellow, or better even, golden, had always been Sophia's favourite colour. From an early age, she had loved her mother's amber jewellery, and later discovered tiger's eye. When it was her turn to buy flowers, they were always yellow, and she asked for yellow bedlinen and pyjamas. On a family holiday in Italy, she almost burst into tears, so moved was she when they travelled by train through a beautiful landscape and came across their first vast field of sunflowers in full bloom. Yellow and golden continued to be her favourite colours for clothes, for her cars, for her stationary. In her paintings, yellow and golden dominated, and she was renowned for her skill in depicting even dark topics and themes with an ever-increasing range of shades of yellow and gold, thus adding a dimension of hope where many would not be able to consider the possibility of hope at all.

In moments of despair in her private life, looking at the patterns in the core of the sunflower blossom helped her without fail. The pattern resembled mandalas as she had come across in India, and she realised that the pattern, carried by the colour, combined stillness and unity with purposeful, orderly, dancing activity and movement that radiates powerful, joyful and at the same time gentle and full beauty.

Since Sophia's mother had interfered in her life and tried to bring disharmony into the life of her ex-husband, Caleb, and his then new girlfriend, Kaya, Sophia had withdrawn from Caleb and Kaya's life almost completely. She had resigned her artist-in-residence post at the university department where Caleb taught, returning full-time to her career as a painter, which was thriving then, and had developed to further heights since. She did stay in touch with Kaya's mother, Grace, however, at her own request, and they would meet every two or three years at a convenient café in London, catching

up with the latest news about themselves and Caleb and Kaya. In this way, Sophia learnt about the births of Leah and Evan, about their progress in life, about various health scares such as Evan's rickets, or Grace's stroke.

In turn, Grace found out that Sophia got married, but had no children of her own, because she felt that, by approaching her 40s, some years younger than Caleb, she was too old. However, her husband, Lucas, brought two daughters from his first marriage into their new home—he was a widower. After initial problems, because the girls were still grieving for their mother, and not quite ready to accept their father's new wife, Sophia had been able to develop a very strong bond between herself and her new step-daughters, coming to love them like she thought she would have loved her own children. She was happy with her husband, he appreciated her work and supported it fully, allowing, in particular, the freedom and time she needed in her particularly creative phases. Sophia's step-daughters, Charlotte and Jasmine, who had been twelve and fifteen years of age when she got married to their father, completed their school and left home to study: Charlotte was an avid historian, interested especially in the middle ages, and went to study Medieval History at Queen Mary, University of London, followed by an MA in the same field at University of East Anglia. She completed her PhD at Durham University and joined the University of Birmingham as a lecturer. Jasmine, on the other hand, was not as academically minded as her sister. She studied criminology at Loughborough University and moved straight into a career with the police from there, rising to the rank of Detective Superintendent.

Sophia's next meeting with Grace was coming up, almost twenty-four years after they had first met. Grace invited Sophia to her flat, because, by now in her mid-80s, she

found it too difficult to walk, or travel by taxi, to a café. Sophia had brought a large bunch of flowers with her, which she presented to Grace as Grace welcomed her in.

‘Oh, such nice flowers,’ Grace admired, ‘Of course yellow, as I expected,’ she added with a broad smile. ‘Make yourself comfortable in the living room.’

‘It’s always so good to see you, Grace,’ Sophia said. Grace noticed how genuine and open Sophia’s voice sounded, and was curious to detect the cause for this in the events of Sophia’s past few years. On the other hand, she could hardly wait herself to reveal all the news of her own family.

Sophia settled down in a comfortable armchair. ‘Is Henry well?’ she asked.

‘Yes, he is, thank you, Sophia,’ Grace responded, having chosen the other armchair opposite Sophia. ‘It’s quite early in the afternoon, is it all right with you if we wait a little before tea?’

‘Yes, of course, Grace,’ Sophia smiled. ‘So, tell me straight away, what are your news since we last met?’

‘OK, it’s me to start, as always,’ Grace beamed. ‘Let’s see. Leah started on a PhD at University College London, and Evan started to study drama at Canterbury Christ Church University.’

‘They have both left their home, then?’ Sophia enquired.

‘Yes, they have,’ Grace confirmed. ‘In more ways than one actually. Because the home they left does not exist anymore.’

‘That sounds very mysterious, Grace. You were always great at creating suspense,’ Sophia mock-admonished her. ‘Come on, then, out with it.’

‘Kaya and Caleb separated, they are divorced,’ Grace said simply. Seeing Sophia’s reaction, she added quickly: ‘You turned quite pale, Sophia, dear, are you all right?’

‘That was quite a shock, Grace! What happened?’

‘Nothing specific, really, as far as I understood from them’, Grace explained.

‘They felt they had done together what they were brought together to achieve in this life. Now they are free to move on. Kaya did a degree in Orthodontics, and Caleb took early retirement. They separated amicably, they were both hurting in the process, they are still good friends, regularly in touch with each other, and with me. But they sold their house, got rid of loads of stuff through auctions, and have their own, smaller places now. That’s it, in a nutshell.’

‘Very unexpected. Poor Caleb with his second divorce, and left his job. Talking about new beginnings.’ After that, Sophia was quiet for a while.

‘What are your news then, Sophia,’ Grace nudged her gently after a while.

‘Quite momentous events as well, I’m afraid.’ Sophia paused again. ‘And so very sad. Lucas died, quite soon after we last met. A very short illness, pancreatic cancer. He was quite a bit older than me, of course, but still...’ Sophia hesitated, trying to stifle her tears.

‘Oh no, Sophia,’ Grace comforted her, got up and sat in the armchair next to her, taking her hand in hers. ‘I am so sorry, I cannot imagine what it feels like. How are you coping, and how are your step-daughters?’

Sophia was clearly moved by Grace’s expression of sympathy, and gratefully accepted the love extended to her. ‘Settling Lucas’s estate, with the help of some solicitors, took a while, and kept me busy. I got very close to Charlotte and Jasmine, as

you know, and we have supported each other a lot over the weeks after his passing. But then came the time that is probably worst, when the bustle in the immediate aftermath disappears, and you begin to realise the loss, and the real grief sets in. As you know, I have been prone to be miserable, especially in the years between Caleb and Lucas, and I was, and still am, to be honest, afraid of relapsing into full blast depression, and that because I am older and weaker, I might not be able to pull myself out of that swamp by my own hair, not even through my art practice.’

‘I can understand your concerns, Sophia’, Grace said warmly. ‘At my age, I think occasionally what might happen if Henry died, and believe me, so many of my and his friends and acquaintances are leaving us, I can’t avoid thinking about this. At least you have your step-daughters to comfort you.’

‘Lucas was sixty-six, not very old for our current times, Grace,’ Sophia said, with more than a clear hint of bitterness in her voice. ‘And I need to comfort Charlotte and Jasmine possibly much more than I can hope to be comforted by them—after all, Lucas was their father, I was only his second wife.’

Grace was about to interject, but Sophia carried on after a determined glance: ‘In a way you are right, though, I have to remain calm and collected for them, and that gives me strength.’

‘Good,’ Grace assured her. She had developed some further thoughts and was not sure whether to share them with Sophia. Then she decided to do so, if only not to be left with the eternal “what if”. She spoke slowly all the same when she addressed Sophia: ‘You have known me for the past twenty years or so, Sophia, and there have been several occasions when you were surprised at how adventurous I was. I think I still am’.

Sophia could not help but smile. 'I saw that you were hatching one of your ideas, Grace. Well?'

'It was not too late for Henry and me when we were in our early sixties, and it may not be too late for yourself and Caleb either,' Grace said, bluntly but from the heart.

'You are not one to beat around the bush, are you,' Sophia gasped. 'To be honest, something like that was the first thing I thought earlier when you told me that Caleb and Kaya had separated. I have lived much of my life from the head, not enough from the guts, not enough from intuition, as I probably should have. I channelled all my heart and my intuition into my painting. Getting together with Caleb, and later Lucas, came initially from the head as well, the heart followed suit only in due course, and perhaps not enough in Caleb's case, otherwise I could not have betrayed him. Maybe it's time to at least try to do what is completely devoid of reason or logic, and follow my initial reaction?'

After returning home from visiting Grace, Sophia prepared a light dinner for herself, because it was still quite early in the evening, and thought about the unexpected developments of that afternoon, and the important decisions she now had to make. Should she follow her instinct, her intuition, her gut feeling, and explore a future with Caleb? The example of Grace and Henry was promising. The worst-case scenario she could imagine was that Caleb turned her down at the first opportunity. Even if a relationship did not develop from initially rekindling acquaintance, nothing much would be lost, for either of them. How to go about it? Just to turn up at his doorstep was probably too much. Sophia decided to go with a brief, honest email. Their

communication before and while they were married had been like that. In an instant, she also decided that in an attempt at a new relationship with Caleb, she would abandon her post-divorce name, Sophia, and re-create herself as Olivia. Olivia searched and found Caleb's email address, and quickly wrote to him, signing "Olivia", then pressed the "send" button, all within a few minutes. Then she took a deep breath, sighed, and left the rest to fate, destiny, God, whatever.

On this day, Caleb woke up early, and, rather than turning around in an attempt to go back to sleep (which was often very successful), he had decided instead to get up. He put on his bathrobe and headed straight to his study and turned on the computer, smiling at his curiosity, burning as ever, to check emails. Usually there was nothing exciting or worth getting up early for, since his retirement, but he was still curious. Today he was therefore quite surprised to find, among messages from the e-lists he still subscribed to, an email from "Olivia", no last name. He opened this email first, and was very surprised by its contents.

'Dear Caleb', it read, 'I had tea with your mother this afternoon. She told me that Kaya and you had separated and that you are divorced. I told her that my husband, Lucas, passed away after a short illness about three years ago. Remembering the candour that was key to our relationship in our marriage, I wanted to tell you that I would like to meet with you, to see whether there is the potential for us to make a fresh start with each other. Please let me know what you think. Olivia.'

Not only was Caleb surprised to receive an email from Olivia, and to find out about her husband's death—he was even more surprised when he observed his immediate reaction that she wanted to meet him, and why she wanted to meet him: he felt joy and excitement, and those feelings were like the feelings he remembered he had

for, and regarding, Olivia when he had first met her and when they were married. Of course, so many years had passed since, he had been on his own after the divorce first, then had the wonderful years with Kaya, they had Evan and Leah, and even though he and Kaya were now divorced, he still felt very close to her. But although the feelings he realised he still had for Olivia had been sculpted by those experiences, their core was the same as it had been so many years ago. He wrote back immediately, then headed for the bathroom to have his morning shower, followed by breakfast.

After sending the email to Caleb, Olivia found herself quite restless. It was early evening, but she turned off the computer, not ready to read any response from Caleb now, should he send one this evening. She tried to calm herself with music and a favourite film, but gave each up quickly. The only respite came from painting. Olivia rushed across to her studio, created a soulful arrangement of light in the large, airy, very uncluttered studio space, and, for the first time in months, selected watercolours to paint with, rather than her usual oils. She painted a sunflower blossom, from memory, starting with the central core, and working her way to the periphery and the blossom's aura. More settled, and well after midnight, she went to bed, and woke up in the late morning, refreshed. Breaking with custom, she did go to her computer and her heart missed a beat or two when she found Caleb's email in the inbox.

'Dear Olivia,' it read, 'Your email surprised me no end. I am so sorry to hear that Lucas passed away. I did not meet him often, but you looked happy with him, and Grace confirmed this impression occasionally over the years. Please accept my most heartfelt condolences. I was sad, in a way, that we did not see more of each other over the past 20 or so years, since our memorable reconciliation facilitated by Grace. I also understand the reason why we needed distance. That said, I agree we should find out

whether we can indeed, as you put it, make a fresh start. Now retired, I am quite flexible with my time and will be happy to meet. Please suggest date, time and venue. Caleb.’

Caleb and Olivia arranged to meet, and after their first meeting, many further meetings followed. In comparison with their own whirl-wind romance when they had first met, so many years ago, and in contrast to the fast pace of the relationships between Caleb and Kaya, and Grace and Henry, Caleb and Olivia now took their time, all the while keeping their eyes open for a different partner. Eventually, however, they made the decision to take their new relationship further—explicitly not as a compromise because they could not find anyone else, let alone better. Their meetings became romantic dates. After many of those, they decided to move in together. Both relished the opportunity of a fresh start, together again, possibly with the prospect of marriage on the horizon. That fresh start was to include “a change of scenery”, as they put it, and they leisurely decided, in the end, to move to the seaside on Anglesey. They sold their respective houses and selected one that offered ample opportunity for Olivia to set up her studio without compromise in comparison with the gorgeous London facility she had become used to.

Chapter 23

Caleb and Olivia’s Anglesey home also offered several guest bedrooms for a constant stream of visitors. Over the years, Leah and Evan started their own families, as did Olivia’s step-daughters, Charlotte and Jasmine, and had children of their own in due course. Kaya got married again, and her husband, Adam, had two sons from his first marriage. Grace and Henry loved visiting their many children and grandchildren, or

inviting them to their London flat. Soon after returning from a trip to Anglesey, on a beautiful spring morning, Grace and Henry settled comfortably in their living room after breakfast. Grace had noticed that Henry was unusually withdrawn and quiet that morning. Now she looked at him quizzically, and asked: ‘What’s up?’

‘I’ve been somewhat quiet, haven’t I?’ Henry responded. He knew very well why, but found it difficult, for once, to share it with Grace—he was afraid of seeing her worried or upset. But now that she had asked, there was no way out—he would not start now to tell her anything but the truth. That had been his principle all his life, with Imogen, and with Grace, and with Caleb. ‘I was awake a lot during the night. I hope I didn’t wake you up, I was probably quite restless, moving around?’

‘Not at all, dear,’ Grace assured him.

‘Anyway, I was thinking about my life, childhood, my time with Imogen, my time after that, our time together. I thought that I was blessed, really, with this life, and that I tried to give back for that blessing, to all my pupils, colleagues, Imogen, Caleb, you, and the grandchildren. I have done so much, been so happy, really, for most of my life, seen so much. And now...’ he hesitated.

‘Now you have come to a natural ending point, is that what you are trying to say?’ Grace’s words came very spontaneously, and she was surprised at them herself after she had uttered them. Surprised and a little shocked, in the aftermath of the utterance, at its meaning and implication.

Henry stared at her, equally surprised, and relieved. ‘Yes, Grace, I feel, in a very strange way, that I have come to near the end of a very long arch, and that I am ready, for the final time in this life, to let go.’

‘To let go of this life, you mean,’ Grace prompted again.

‘Yes,’ Henry said, simply.

‘No wonder you were so quiet this morning,’ Grace sighed. She took Henry’s hands in hers. ‘I have been thinking about age, and dying, on a number of occasions over the last few years myself, of course, although we have never talked about it together. I had always hoped that I would not be the first one to have to go, so that you could be spared having to go through again what you had to endure after Imogen’s death. At the same time, I dreaded, naturally, losing you. Then I left it all to the creator, fate, whatever you want to call it. It’s just too much for me to be thinking about, it’s beyond our control. Whenever you feel that it is time for you to move on, please do not try to stop that from happening because of me. Nothing ever happens in our lives that we cannot cope with, ultimately, and even if only just about.’

‘You are amazing and wonderful, Grace,’ Henry said, looking at her very warmly, ‘and I love you so very, very much’.

After that, they were quiet, holding hands, looking at each other lovingly. After a while, Grace noticed that Henry’s grip got less firm. He turned his head to look straight ahead. A deep sigh of satisfaction raised and lowered his chest. His face seemed to lose many of its familiar wrinkles in a broad smile in response to something he seemed to be seeing at some distance in the room. The expression on Henry’s face reminded Grace of the expression on Evan’s face, in particular, when he was a baby. Briefly, his grasp of her hand firmed, then relaxed again. Briefly, he turned his head back to her, and regarded her with an expression of total, unconditional love, then his gaze returned to his vision at the other side of the room. His breathing had become shallow. He inhaled deeply, freely, one last time, then life had left his body.

Grace remained with him, in silence, for a long time. She felt the peace that had been characteristic of the moments before, and the moment of, his death. She was no longer afraid of death, anyone's death, her own death. Eventually, she took her hand away from his, and closed his eyes. She realised then that she was quite shaky after all. The telephone was in reach, and she dialled Kaya's number. When she heard her daughter's voice, she had to pause.

'Hello, darling, it's mum,' she said. 'I hope I am not disturbing?'

'Never, mum!', Kaya laughed, but stopped herself quickly. 'You sound strange—are you alright?'

'I am, yes, or rather, no, I'm not—I really don't know anything anymore at the moment.'

She paused again, and Kaya knew her well enough not to interrupt her at that point.

'No other way of saying it, love: Henry just died.'

When Grace phoned Kaya she was assuming she was on her own at home. Nothing was further from the truth, however. Unexpectedly, and for a whole range of different reasons, Caleb, their children and Olivia had all come for an impromptu breakfast. When Kaya had answered the phone, they continued their conversations at slightly reduced volume, both to allow Kaya to hear the caller properly, and to be able to eavesdrop out of curiosity. Thus, they were all aware, and immediately stopped their conversations in alarm, when Kaya had suddenly turned very pale and slumped into the chair by the phone.

'Oh my God', they heard her say. 'Oh my God! Oh no! So suddenly. Oh mum, I am so sorry, so sorry, that's awful. How are you? Silly question, sorry, but still.'

They saw that Kaya was too involved in her conversation to be able to share any news with them now.

After a while, Kaya said: 'I see, thank you. Leah and Evan, Caleb and Olivia are all here, as it happens. I will briefly tell them all, then you can talk to Caleb and the others, and then we will get ready to come over to help you with all the formalities. Hold on.'

Kaya put the receiver to one side and turned to the others. Having had her back to them so far, she now saw their concerned faces. 'Very, very sad news for the family, I'm afraid', she said, 'That was Grace. Henry died this morning, peacefully, sitting in the armchair next to her, they held hands, and he was smiling at something in the distance, just like Leah and Evan did when they were babies.' She moved over and hugged Caleb first: 'I am so sorry, Caleb'. Then she moved on to hug all the others as well.

Caleb, then Leah and Evan, then Olivia, took turns to talk to Grace, who repeated the details of Henry's last moments to each in turn—doing so, she realised, comforted her. Caleb and Kaya travelled to London to take care of the formalities, while the others joined them only for the funeral a week later. At Henry's request, he was cremated and Grace, accompanied by the rest of the family, scattered the ashes into the ocean near the bench with the view across the bay where he had proposed to Grace so many years ago, and which also held such special memories for Kaya and Caleb.