

# The Anger of Loss

## Chapter One

Mary peered through the curtains, aware of the pounding of her heart. It was just after four in the afternoon and she was waiting for her daughter Eleonora to come home. Every day for the last four years she had waited and watched, ever since Eleonora first went to school. She couldn't forget why she did it, why she watched anxiously until her daughter appeared.

Mary still struggled not to burst into tears as she recalled it. It was a day like any other. She was then ten years old and lived in a street with a row of houses close to each other. She had become friendly with the girl next door, a small mousy-haired girl called Georgina who had big teeth and two pigtails tied with ribbons. They would meet over the garden fence, a low wooden wall that separated their gardens. At first they only smiled at each other and then they found they went to the same school and their friendship blossomed. They became inseparable and people who didn't know them thought that they were sisters.

But then one day it all changed. Mary had waited at the bus stop as usual for her friend but when she didn't appear as the bus arrived, she climbed on and travelled alone. When she arrived at school and entered the classroom there was an unusual hush. Several of the children were crying.

'What's happened?' She whispered.

'Haven't you heard?' Someone said.

'Heard what?'

'Georgina?'

'What about Georgina?'

'She's dead. She was in an accident, she was killed.'

Mary had felt her chest contract as she struggled to breathe.

'Dead! It's not possible it must be a mistake.' She screamed, her voice rising hysterically.

'I saw her yesterday. I waited for her at the bus stop, a long time, she didn't come.'

Then the awful truth began to dawn.

'Oh my God, Georgina, I can't believe it - my friend?'

By now Mary was speechless, her face contorted, tears shaking her body. Her voice rose as she screamed in pain,

'No no it's not true. Say it's not true?'

At last the school bus appeared around the corner. Mary watched as it came to a halt at the bus stop. Two small girls holding hands alighted, then a young man in a baseball hat and finally a slight slim figure with a satchel slung over her right shoulder. Mary gave a sigh of relief and slowly closed the curtains.

Eleonora saw the slight twitch of the drapes and knew she was being watched but made no sign that she had seen the curtain slowly close. Swinging her bag, she walked up the short path to the front door and pushed it open.

'Hi Mum, I'm home.'

'Hi dear,' came her mother's voice from the kitchen. 'I'm in here, how was your day?'

'Fine.'

'And the test?'

'OK it was OK.'

'Are you hungry?'

'No, I'll just have a glass a milk. I'll go upstairs and change.'

Eleonora was uncomfortable. The ache in her leg was still there. She tried to remember when it began and decided that it must have been that time in the gym when she fell against the bars. She dismissed it from her mind and went into the shower. Having showered she lay down on her bed and stretched. She prodded her thigh in several places, they all felt fine. She knew she should tell her mother but she would worry so she decided she would leave it; it's bound to get better.

'Tea's ready,' she heard her mother say. 'Dad rang to say he would be late.'

'I'm coming, what's for tea?' Eleonora called as she lowered herself down the stairs and entered the kitchen

The kitchen was open plan with a large picture window overlooking a pristine garden that Mary tended lovingly it was her escape a place where she felt at ease and away from the stress of every day. Eleonora eased herself into her favourite seat facing the garden and admired its neat lawn, like a green sea gently ruffled by the wind. Her father Giovanni was also a keen gardener and had tried very hard to get her interested. He had marked out a small patch in the vegetable garden for her and patiently showed her how to prick out seedlings. She had tried it but it was all too slow, you had to wait so long for any result so she soon lost patience and in the end he gave up.

'You'll be sorry,' he said finally dismayed that he had failed to excite her in the way he was when his father first introduced him to the garden.

Mary watched the eggy bread slowly browning in the frying pan and for a moment it seemed to become a vivid painting so like those she had seen in Venice. She let her mind slip back to the time when she had first met Giovanni.

She was recovering from a schoolgirl romance and needed a change.

'I am going to Venice,' she had announced one day to her flatmate Anne. 'I need a break. I must get away from here for a while. Everything seems to be closing in on me. I dread starting the day. I must snap out of it. Why don't you come with me?' She said without much conviction and in the hope that Anne would decline the invitation.

'I don't know. I've just started this new job and don't think it's a good idea to take time off so soon. Are you OK to go on your own?'

'Yes I suppose so.' she said secretly delighted, as she didn't really want to go with Anne but felt she had to ask her.

Mary had never been on her own in a foreign country before and at first found it rather intimidating. She spoke no Italian but found most people spoke a smattering of English. She was staying at a small hotel painted a bright egg yellow, fronting onto a canal and soon became expert at using the waterbuses to get about. The hotel night watchman was a young man called Giovanni who always greeted her warmly on her return. He spoke a smattering of English and wanted to know all about her night out. It became a regular routine.

'Well how it go tonight?' he would say in his broken English and Mary would sit down in his cramped office and describe her evening. He was a teacher at the local University but had to supplement his salary by doing night duty at the hotel.

'Don't you find it tiring?' Mary had asked, 'doing two jobs?'

'Yes, but the hotel, it goes quiet after midnight, then I get sleep.'

One evening after Mary had told him about her night out, he asked.

'You like opera?' She was surprised by the question and somewhat embarrassed to reply that she had never seen a real opera only in films and on TV.

'You must see opera; we go to La Traviata by Verdi at Teatro La Fenice tomorrow night. I off-duty. I get tickets si?'

That night Mary took out her Guide to Venice and read about the Theatre. It was described as 'one of the most famous landmarks in the history of Italian Theatre.' Built in the 18th Century on the site of the burned down Teatro San Benedetto, it had been the leading Opera house for more than fifty years. It was in the neoclassical style with about 200 identical boxes in tiers set in a traditional horseshoe shaped auditorium. In front was a small piazza and at the rear a canal.'

By now she was fascinated and read on.

In 1836 the theatre was again destroyed by fire and rapidly rebuilt. Fifty years later it was again destroyed by fire apparently started by two electricians because the company was in severe debt over delays in repair work. The present building was commenced in 2001 and completed in 2003 being rebuilt in a 19th Century style.' There was a picture showing the sides of the semi-circular auditorium with its five rows of boxes and the huge stage at the open end reaching up to the ceiling.

Mary was excited and couldn't wait to the following evening. They had arranged to meet outside the theatre an hour before the performance. He arrived wearing a loose pale pink shirt, a green bandana and shiny black trousers. He looked so different that she hardly recognised him as the man she met nightly in the hotel.

'Wow you look great,' she whistled.

'So do you,' he said hugging her. All her fears vanished as they walked hand in hand into the foyer. Handing over the tickets they entered the auditorium. The sheer opulence of the hall overwhelmed her. The boxes on the three sidewalls were fronted by a rich tapestry of red and gold velvet lit up by thousands of twinkling lights. A huge chandelier hung from the ceiling painted in blue to resemble the sky. It was filling fast as they took their seats. There was a hush and then the curtain rose. The grandeur of the music and the richness of the voices filled the space. Mary was in a dream as the opera proceeded. She sat almost in tears as the tragedy unfolded, squeezing Giovanni's hand in anticipation. By the time the curtain fell she was exhausted, having experienced a mixture of sadness, hope and loss. Outside in the fresh air of the Venetian evening she whispered.

'Thank you, that was wonderful.' They walked hand in hand through the piazzas, two young people who had found each other.

It was inevitable that he would accompany her home to Scotland and they would set up house together. She wanted to start a family but they decided to wait until they were more settled. Coming from Italy he found Scotland alien and colourless, so unlike his native country.

'I can't bear it here,' he said repeatedly. 'It's so cold and grey even the people are grey. If it wasn't for my job and you of course,' he added kissing Mary. 'I would be on the next plane home.' But when Mary whispered to him one night that she was pregnant it all changed.

'Bravo,' he shouted pumping his fists in the air. Mary smiled it was so easy for the man.

After the first few weeks of morning sickness she began to feel really well. Boasting to her best friend Avril, she said,

'This is a dawdle, why do women make such a fuss?' But as the weeks passed and her abdomen became bigger and heavier she regretted her boast. The final straw was when the specialist said that he thought she might have a placenta praevia; the after birth had implanted at the neck of her womb and might obstruct a normal delivery. She thought he would just feel her tummy take her blood pressure and check her urine. But it wasn't what she had expected. After a longer than usual examination he sent her for a scan.

'Why am I having another scan?' she asked looking puzzled.

'Just routine,' he said avoiding her eyes.

While waiting she rang Giovanni.

'What is it darling you sound so worried?'

'I don't know I think there's something wrong?'

'OK I'll be there in ten minutes.'

When he arrived she was nowhere to be seen in the waiting room. He went to the desk and asked the nurse.

'Excuse me, where is Mrs Boxalli?'

'May I enquire who are you?'

'Yes I'm her husband.'

'I'm sorry we haven't met. She is having a scan she won't be long. Please take a seat.'

Giovanni glanced around. There were three other mothers waiting. He could see that they were in different stages of pregnancy. He felt a bit self-conscious so he busied himself by looking at a magazine. It was called 'Motherhood'. There was a picture of a heavily pregnant woman on the cover. He tried to read it but after several attempts gave up and sat with it on his lap. He was dozing when he felt his shoulder jerked.

'I've had the scan darling, come the doctor wants to see me.'

'Mrs Boxalli, it is as I suspected. The scan shows that you have a condition called Placenta Praevia. The placenta, the structure that feeds your unborn child is sitting blocking the outlet of your womb. It's not uncommon and is estimated to occur in about one in two hundred pregnancies.'

Mary felt herself go cold. She had secretly dreaded that there might be something going wrong with her pregnancy. Now it was coming true. She caught Giovanni's eye. He reached over and took her hand. It was warm and comforting. Neither spoke. They waited for the doctor to continue.

'There is really nothing to worry about. Nearer term you may get some spotting which needs to be monitored. When you reach term we can reassess the situation. You may need to have a Caesarean section but they are pretty routine these days. Let me see you in a month's time,' he added writing a note on her file. Mary said nothing but squeezed Giovanni's hand.

'Thank you doctor I will make an appointment.'

Outside in the fresh air, Giovanni spoke.

'That doesn't sound too serious does it?'

Mary didn't answer, she was thinking about an article she had read in a local newspaper about a woman who had bled to death from an unrecognised placenta praevia. The woman's baby had been delivered at home and she was rushed to hospital when the bleeding wouldn't stop. Despite an emergency Caesarean the baby had died. It was a terrible story that made Mary shake to recall it.

'Let's stop for a drink before we go home,' suggested Giovanni.

'OK but I won't have any alcohol,' said Mary.

'Not even a little one?' added Giovanni holding his finger and thumb apart to suggest a small drink.

'OK just a single and then I think we should go home. The Last Drop Pub is not far from here.'

The smell of the bread burning brought Mary to her senses.

'Mum I can smell burning,' called out Eleonora.

'Sorry dear I was just daydreaming. It's not spoiled,' she replied carefully panning the crisp bread onto a plate.

'How much can you eat?'

'Two pieces I'm hungry,'

Having collected all her school things and her lunch box, Eleonora kissed her mother goodbye and closed the front door. Mary watched her until she got on the bus.

An advert on the side of the bus caught her attention. It was advertising baby foods. There was a picture of a bonny child being fed. Her thoughts were thrown back to that day when her pregnancy all seemed to go wrong. She was just passing the third month, the sickness had gone and she felt really well. Hugging Giovanni as he left for work she said,

'It's amazing I feel so much better. Let's go out tonight, I feel like celebrating. It's as if I have come into the light after being in a dark tunnel.'

Mary recalled the evening with a sense of guilt. She had selected a loose chiffon dress that hung in folds hiding her bump, which was just appearing. She could no longer wear her close fitting clothes. Giovanni had rung saying he was going to go straight to the restaurant from work. Mary said she would drive. Stepping out of the shower she glanced briefly at her profile in the mirror. Not bad for thirty-five she thought. Having dried herself she put on the dress and sat in front of her mirror to put on her makeup.

It had stopped raining when she emerged from the house and walked briskly towards her car parked in the drive. The streetlights reflected shadows onto the walls and the paths in between created areas of darkness. The raindrops dripping from the trees twinkled in the light. She felt really excited as if on a first date, it was a long time since she felt so alive. The car started immediately and she nosed out into the street checking in her mirror. She thought she saw a fleeting movement ahead but dismissed it and then there was a sudden terrifying bang as she was propelled forwards against the windscreen. Her seat belt was not yet fastened allowing her unprotected belly to crush against the steering wheel as her head hit the windscreen. That was all she remembered before the black enveloped her.

Marcel the Maitre d'hotel greeted Giovanni,

'Good evening sir, your table is ready.' Giovanni made his way to their favourite table overlooking the harbour.

'Champagne,' he ordered and watched as the cork was skilfully removed by the sommelier with a deft twist. He was sipping a flute of the wine with the waiter hovering to take his order when he glanced at his watch. Mary was late, that's not

like her he thought. She's always meticulous about time. He rang her number but there was no reply.

Mary was completely unaware of what happened next. Fortunately, the other driver was unhurt and rushed to her aid. Within minutes an ambulance had arrived and she was rushed to the local A&E Department. By the time she arrived she was just stirring, her mind still fuzzy.

'What happened?'

Then she remembered, the bang and the sudden jerk. A bright light was flashing in her eyes. Someone was speaking.

'She's responding,' and then black descended.

She surfaced two days later unable to understand where she was and confused by her unfamiliar surroundings. Then she saw a nurse in a starched apron smoothing her bed.

"Where am I? What has happened? My baby, is it all right?"

'Shush! You are safe and your baby is fine, not ready to come into the world.'

Mary touched her tummy, smooth and round and felt a rush of relief. Gradually she began to remember.

'Your husband is outside may I bring him in?'

Giovanni his tanned face strained, his eyes swollen, leaned over and kissed her.

'I'm sorry it was so stupid. I'm sorry,' Mary kept repeating.

'It's OK, these things happen. As long as you and the baby are safe that's all that matters.'

## Chapter Two

Mary heard the clock strike four, dropping what she was doing she rushed to the window. Eleonora was just getting off the bus and walking toward the house. She looked different. Her face was set and she wasn't smiling. She looked as if she was in pain and seemed to be limping slightly. Mary opened the door and took the satchel from her.

'What is it dear, why are you limping?'

'It's all right mum, I have a pain in my leg I get it occasionally.'

'What sort of pain, why haven't you told me before?' said Mary.

'It's nothing, I didn't want to worry you,'

'Worry me? You worry me more when you don't tell me things. Come in and sit down. I want you to tell me all about it now!'

'Oh Mum it's nothing really, please I want to go to my room.'

'OK come down when you're ready, but please I need to know.'

Mary busied herself in the kitchen but couldn't stop thinking about Eleonora. Why was she limping, was it something serious? Her mind went round in circles. She knew that she was being overprotective but didn't seem to be able to stop it. Then she heard footsteps it was Eleonora coming downstairs. She crept into the hall so she couldn't be seen and watched. Eleonora was struggling to keep her balance. She held onto the bannister and eased herself down taking the weight off her right foot. She stopped several times before reaching the hall and then waited before joining Mary who by that time had returned to the kitchen. Mary looked up as she entered.

'OK young lady what's going on?' Eleonora sat saying nothing and then her face crumbled and she began to cry.

'I don't know mum; I don't know what's happening.'

'How do you mean? What is happening?'

'It's this pain in my thigh; it keeps coming and going, I think I must have strained it.'

'When did it start?'

'I can't remember.'

'You must remember,' Mary said her voice rising.

Upstairs Giovanni was just finishing dressing when he heard Mary's raised voice. He listened.

'Eleonora I need to know what's going on.'

'Mum, I've told you what more can I say?'

He grabbed his tie and rushed downstairs, his anger rising.

'Mary leave the child alone. Please stop nagging her,' he shouted.

Mary's face paled,

'I only...'

'I knew all about it. Eleonora told me a few days ago. I told her to stop sport for a while'

'You knew? She told you. Why didn't you tell me?'

'Because.'

'Because what?'

'You worry so much that I try not to tell you things, you make everything into a tragedy.'

As the words left his mouth, Giovanni realised he had gone too far.

'Mary, no I didn't mean that I meant,' he faltered reaching for her.

Mary glared at him,

'Don't touch me. How dare you tell me how to deal with my daughter? What do you know about having children? It so easy for you,' she shouted. 'Don't you dare tell me not to worry, it's a mother's duty to worry.'

Giovanni turned away he couldn't stand the bickering over their daughter anymore.



'I'm going out I need some fresh air.'

'That's right run away when the going gets tough, just like a man.' Mary sneered.

Giovanni turned and stared at her.

'I don't know that I can stand much more of this.'

'I know what you mean; you think I'm hysterical don't you? You think I exaggerate everything I know, but you will never understand how could you?'

Sitting on the landing, Eleonora felt her chest tightening as she listened to her parents arguing over her. She struggled downstairs.

'Please mum, dad stop. I'm sorry I didn't tell you mum, it's my fault I didn't want to upset you.'

Mary knew she had over-reacted. She put her hand on Giovanni's arm.

'Giovanni, I'm sorry. You're right I must try and control my fears. I'll try and stay calm, I will I promise.'

Eleonora couldn't sleep. The ache in her thigh just wouldn't go away. She tossed from one side to the other but just couldn't get comfortable. She lay in the dark wondering what was happening. Perhaps mum was right. I shouldn't keep secrets from her.

Then she heard their voices. Her dad's insistent.

'Mary please leave it. She's all right, just having some growing pains, that's all. Don't make her into a hypochondriac.'

Then her mother's quieter but more frenzied reply,

'I know. But I feel there is something wrong. I am going to take her to the doctor.'

'I can't stop you but I think you are making a big mistake.'

The following morning at breakfast Mary told Eleonora,

'Darling I'm worried about your thigh pain. I think you should see the doctor. I will make an appointment tomorrow.'

Eleonora was taken by surprise,

'I thought you and dad had agreed to leave it and see what happened.'

'That's what your dad wants to do but I need to know that it's nothing.'

Throughout the day Mary thought about Eleonora. She still marvelled how the child had grown from that two-kilogram mite who was extracted from her womb by caesarean section so many years ago to the girl she was today. She still blamed herself for the accident. If only I had not been so careless so full of myself. She had mentioned it too many times to Giovanni who in the end couldn't stand her constant reproaching herself. It came to a head unexpectedly one Sunday. They had driven over to Leith to visit some friends for a barbecue.

Eleonora was out of earshot when Mary began, as if speaking to no one.

'I blame myself.'

'Please Mary not that again. You know it's got nothing to do with Eleonora's pain it was too many years ago.'

'I don't agree; things can take a long time to show.'

Dr John Campbell was one of six doctors practising at the Prince's Surgery in Edinburgh. His father founded the practice soon after the end of the First World War. After his father's death John took over. Over the years he took on more partners including a young female doctor called Beatrice McLeod. After the death of his wife they married and worked together. He soon developed a special interest in children's disorders.

Now in his sixties he was a forbidding figure with a fulsome reddish beard tinged with grey, overflowing eyebrows, florid cheeks and piercing blue eyes. He spoke with a broad Scottish accent. At first meeting, he appeared a stern figure but his soft voice and gentle manner immediately endeared him to his young patients.

Eleonora had an appointment for 10 am. Mary insisted that they arrive early hoping to be seen sooner if a vacancy occurred. But to their disappointment the waiting room was almost full. While they were waiting, Dr McLeod walked in and spoke to the receptionist, who whispered,

'Doctor have you a moment to speak to that lady and her daughter sitting by the window? She seems very agitated? Her name is Mrs Boxalli.'

Mary saw the doctor approach and wondered why and then he spoke.

'Mrs Boxalli, I am doctor McLeod. Please don't worry you and your daughter will be seeing Dr Campbell. He is an excellent doctor and I am sure will be able to help you.'

'Thank you doctor I was feeling a bit nervous but thank you for reassuring me.'

Twenty minutes later Eleonora saw her name come up on the screen. It read,

'Would Eleonora please go to Room 4 to see Dr Campbell?'

Eleonora read it out slowly and clutched her mother's hand.

'It's OK Eleonora don't be afraid.'

Dr Campbell was seated looking at the screen when Eleonora and her mother entered the doctor's office. It was a small room with one window overlooking the drive. Beneath the window was his desk with a screen and keyboard. Nearby were a couch and three chairs. One wall was covered by several fully stocked bookshelves but otherwise the room was bare.

He stood up and shook their hands.

'I have some details on my screen. Let me run through them. Eleonora you are now 16, is that correct?' Eleonora nodded. 'You were born by Caesarean Section and weighed 2.4 Kg. You sat up at 4 months and stood at a year. You attend a local school.'

'Now then Eleonora tell me what is the problem.'

'Doctor,' began Mary

'No please Mrs Boxalli let Eleonora tell her story.'

'Well doctor,' Eleonora began. 'It's not easy. It all started so slowly. About 3 months ago I noticed this aching in my right thigh. I thought I had knocked it and took no notice.'

'Was there any bruising?'

'No,'

'Go on,'

'It made me want to get up and walk about. I couldn't get comfortable. I then noticed stiffness when I first tried to walk.'

'Does it affect any other joints?'

Eleonora looked at her mother as if reluctant to continue.

'Yes my fingers, they are swollen and stiff in the morning but it gets easier as the day goes on.'

'OK Eleonora let me have a look at you.'

After the examination Dr Campbell spoke.

'Mrs Boxalli, I don't quite know what's going on. I think Eleonora seems to have some sort of joint inflammation. First, I think we should have some blood tests.'

On the way home Mary was very quiet.

'I'm sorry mum, I should have told you but I didn't want to worry you.'

'I know dear but in future promise me you will tell me everything.'

Giovanni was waiting when they arrived home. As soon as they had entered the house he pounced on Mary.

'What did the doctor say?'

'He thinks that Eleonora has some sort of joint inflammation. Did you know that she was having stiffness of her hands in the morning?'

'No, she never said anything about that.'

Mary turned to Eleonora,

'You didn't tell anyone, why?'

'I didn't want to worry you and in any case I thought it would get better.'

## Chapter Three

Mary couldn't sleep worrying about what Eleonora's tests would show. She lay awake listening to the clock ticking and waiting for the dawn. When the light finally burst through the curtains she got up and dressed tiptoeing so as to avoid waking Giovanni. She didn't want to meet anyone and came down to make breakfast bleary eyed and short tempered. Soon after Eleonora came in and could see that her mother was unsettled. She knew she would need to be brave when she and her mother returned to the doctor to hear the results of the blood tests.

'It's going to be OK mum. I'm sure the tests will all be normal you'll see.'

The doctor was staring at his monitor when they entered his office. Without looking up he greeted them with a curt,

'Good morning, I have the results of your tests Eleonora. They have come as a bit of a surprise to me. They show, young lady, that you have a positive test for rheumatism with a raised Plasma Viscosity, which indicates that the condition is active.'

'What does that mean Dr?' Asked Mary beginning to panic.'

Looking up from his monitor he adjusted his spectacles and said quietly.

'It means that Eleonora's joints are prone to inflammation causing pain and disability. This is a very specialised clinical condition and I think it would be wise for her to see a Consultant Rheumatologist, we have a very experienced one here in Edinburgh and his name is Dr Smithers. He is always very busy so there may be a few weeks before you can get to see him, Meanwhile I will prescribe some tablets that I think will help.'

Mary was very quiet on the journey home. Eleonora glanced at her now and again and could see a furrowing of her brow.

'Mum I'm OK. Please don't get upset about me I'm fine.'

'I was just thinking about something else.' She lied. 'You're going to be fine.' But deep inside a tiny doubt was beginning to stir. What if? Was the question she tried to avoid?

Giovanni had come home early so as to be there when they returned from the doctor.

'How did it go?' he asked as they entered the house.

'OK I suppose, said Mary without emotion. 'The tests were positive.'

'Positive? How do you mean positive, positive for what?'

'Rheumatism!'

'What does that mean?'

'Oh dad leave it,' interrupted Eleonora, 'I'm going to see a specialist, a Rheumatologist, then we'll know the answer.'

'Try and come with us this time,' sneered Mary, 'then you'll know.'

Giovanni ignored her dig. He hated anything to do with illness.

## Chapter Four

Eleonora, Mary and a reluctant Giovanni plodded up the three flights of stairs in the Medical block to Dr Smithers' office. Mary was fighting back her fear that something really serious was affecting Eleonora and was trying to put on a brave face. Giovanni just wanted to be somewhere else and Eleonora just wanted to get it over. There were several patients already waiting when they arrived.

'Take a seat,' said the receptionist pointing to some empty chairs. 'Doctor is running a bit late. He will be here soon.' They then heard some footsteps and heavy

breathing as the doctor entered the room his face flushed with beads of sweat on his brow.

'Sorry sorry,' he gasped to the room at large as he disappeared into his office. Several patients later, the nurse called Eleonora. The three got up and entered the office. Doctor Smithers was seated behind a huge desk that seemed to stretch across the whole room. He began to speak still staring at a screen.

'I have the results of your tests.'

He then glanced at Eleonora before continuing.

'They show that there is some active rheumatism in your blood. Tell me what's been happening Eleonora?'

'Well Sir, I've has a dull ache in my right leg for the last few months. It comes and goes and is worse when I'm tired. When it's really bad it makes me limp and I take some tablets which help.'

'Have you noticed anything else?'

'Um, my hands, my fingers are sometimes puffy and stiff in the morning but they get better,' she rushed to add.

'Let me have a look at them.' He leaned forwards. 'I see what you mean, your fingers are still a little swollen, do they hurt?'

'No not really, they just feel tight.'

'Come and lie on my couch so I can examine you hips and knees.' The doctor watched as Eleonora struggled to get on to it and lie down. When she was settled, he began to move her hips and knees and then gently felt her fingers.

'Good they seem to move OK.'

'What do you think the problem is doctor?' Asked Mary who had been very quiet throughout the consultation.

'I think your daughter has Juvenile Rheumatism. It's a rare form of inflammatory disease that affects young people. We don't know the cause.'

'What's going to happen?' Mary asked fearing the worst.

'It varies; in most cases patients recover and have no further problems. In others, they can go on to have recurrent bouts and a very small number become progressively worse and may even be confined to a wheelchair. But let's look on the bright side.'

'It's important that your daughter is kept under regular review.'

Giovanni looked at Mary. He could see the fear in her eyes. He touched her arm.

'Thank you doctor we will arrange for our daughter to see you regularly.'

## Chapter Five

Eleonora knew that her condition was getting worse. The stiffness in her hips was more severe particularly when waking and she could no longer run. It felt like she was a machine that was seizing up and needed oiling. School was very

under-standing and allowed her to miss games if she needed to but she hated to complain. It was so humiliating not to be unable to take part in normal activities. She hated to have to stand on the sideline and watch the others. It often reduced her to tears.

Mary knew she couldn't just sit and wait while her child became an invalid, she had to do something. She searched the Internet and arranged for Eleonora to seek more opinions. But they all said the same, take the tablets and do the exercises. She also thought of seeking the help of alternative therapies but waited. Eleonora often said she felt better just to appease her mother. Mary hoped that the medicine would soon cure her, that is what the doctor said and for a while it did. Eleonora began to feel stronger and managed to discard her stick. Her face filled out and colour returned to her cheeks. Even the muscles in her legs grew stronger and she could walk to the shops and back. It was as if the whole episode was a bad dream.

But it was only short lived. The pain came back slowly and more severely dragging her down. It even became a burden to get going in the morning and sometimes she gave up and just lay there sobbing. Mary would often hear her moaning in frustration. Eleonora found that the longer she avoided a movement the more difficult it would be to start. So taking a deep breath she would begin to drag herself towards the side of the bed then struggle to sit up on the edge. Then adjusting her feet on the floor she leaned forwards, reached out and grabbed the edge of the door and then slowly pulled herself upright. As if straightening lead pipes, her knees and legs began to move and she was able to shuffle slowly to the bathroom where she collapsed on the toilet breathing heavily.

Mary watched her coming down the stairs, her heart breaking. She ached to go forwards and help but knew that Eleonora had to do it herself. That night in bed she unloaded her fears to Giovanni.

'I am so worried about Eleonora she is not getting better.' He listened without answering. There were no words he just waited. Mary had to unburden her pain to find the strength to hold on to hope.

## Chapter Six

Eleonora let herself sink into the salty water feeling the warmth slowly entering her body. She relaxed and let her legs and arms hover weightlessly. She moved slowly marvelling at the way her stiff joints floated away from her body as if on their own. For the first time in many weeks she didn't feel the drag of gravity.

'It's wonderful,' she shouted to the assistant, her voice echoing in the small room containing the hydrotherapy pool. After many weeks of argument, she had finally given in and agreed to seek Hydrotherapy. Her doctor arranged it at the local Physiotherapy department. Eleonora loved the feeling and looked forward to her

sessions. But it didn't last long. Within a week of stopping the treatment, her stiffness and pain returned.

Mary then found out about a residential Homeopathy centre on the net and phoned them. It was a treatment that she had read about but didn't understand.

A receptionist answered the phone, her voice curt.

'Can I help you?'

'I am the mother of a teenager who has been diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatism.' She had difficulty in pronouncing the word. 'I would like to.'

The phone clicked and a dialling tone began. Then another voice more mature and measured.

'Hello I am Miss Victor, Matron of the unit. Can I help you?'

Mary repeated her request and added,

'Can you help her?'

'I think so; would you be able to bring her so that I can assess her problem.'

'Yes any time we are desperate.'

The unit was housed in a private hospital but was unlike any hospital Mary had been in. On entering the building, both she and Eleonora were taken aback by the light open spaces with soft matching colours. They felt a tranquillity and safety in the room.

'You are here to see Matron?' a young woman said. 'Wait here and she will come.'

A few minutes later a tall striking looking woman came walking towards them. She had a broad smile, which lit up her face as she introduced herself.

'I am Miss Victor, Matron.' Turning to look at the young woman she said,

'You must be Eleonora? Welcome my dear, I'm sure we will be able to put you back on the road to full health.'

That was a week ago. Since then she had gone through an intensive programme of medication using highly diluted solutions of active ingredients together with hydrotherapy and exercises. Eleonora was intrigued by the theory behind the medicine. She learned that it was based on a dictum said to have been postulated by Hippocrates the Greek Father of Medicine in the 4th Century BC that 'Like cures like'.

Later in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a Dr Hahnemann was attracted to it and developed it into a treatment involving a comprehensive collection of medicines comprising over 2000 substances. The dictum then stated 'Minimum Dose' so the medicines were prepared through a series of dilutions until there was no detectable chemical substance left. Finally, the dictum stated 'Single Remedy'- one remedy at a time. Although the treatment could be for acute problems the practitioners prefer long standing illnesses like Eleonora's.

Eleonora was puzzled by the whole business but didn't tell her mother. She continued taking the medicine three times a day. It tasted just like water but she was

reassured that it contained the ingredients that she needed. She just went along with it, as she was feeling much better for whatever reason. Mary felt a surge of hope as she could see that Eleonora seemed to be walking more easily and didn't speak too often about her pain.

For a while the improvement continued and Mary began to hope that the worst was over. Even Giovanni began to encourage her by saying that she should be more positive and not always think the worst. But the improvement was not long lasting. Slowly Eleonora's stiffness returned and with it came a sense of hopelessness. She could no longer see any future and in her worst moments thought of suicide.

## Chapter Seven

Desperate because of the insidious deterioration in Eleonora's condition, Mary continued to search for treatments. One-day she was discussing her worries with Deirdre her hairdresser.

'Deirdre I'm really at my wit's end not knowing where to turn. The doctors keep reassuring me but all I can see is poor Eleonora getting worse. We have now arranged her bedroom downstairs because she can no longer climb the stairs safely.'

'Have you tried Acupuncture?'

Mary's pursed her lips

'Acupuncture? Sticking needles into someone, how can that help her?' The friend persisted.

'You have nothing to lose. My neighbour swears by it for her rheumatism so why not give it a try?'

Mary spoke to Giovanni when he got home that evening. She greeted him as he came in.

'You look good,' he said kissing her.

'I went to the hairdresser I'm glad you like it. It's the new shorter style I think it suits my face better. Giovanni I know you will think I'm mad but something came up at the salon and I wonder what you think. I was telling Deirdre about our concerns about Eleonora and she suggested Acupuncture. Do you know anything about it?'

'Yes there was something in the newspaper about it some while ago. Apparently it's a very ancient Chinese treatment, which has been modernized. Very fine needles are inserted at special points to harness the body's energy.'

'Yes I know but I don't understand how can that possibly help?'

'You know how when you bump yourself you rub the injured part and it feels better? In the 1960's two guys, Melzack and Wall came up with a theory that when you rub a part you send messages up the spinal cord to the brain. If you send many you overload the system and the pain messages are blocked hence the pain is



stopped and the part feels better. They called it the 'Gate Control theory' visualising that a gate is closed so that the pain cannot reach the brain. They suggested that acupuncture might work in the same way.

Mary thought for a while.

'Do you think we should try it on Eleonora? You know she is getting fed up with nothing helping?'

## Chapter Eight

'Mum please I don't want to try anything else. I'll keep going to the doctor. I read a bit about Acupuncture, it sound hokus pokus to me.'

'Please do it for me, I need to know that we have tried everything. Please do it for me', begged her mother.

Giovanni was in his study and overheard the conversation. He struggled to contain himself. Why can't she leave the poor girl alone, she has been through enough? He stood up and was about to march into the kitchen and intervene but he checked himself. It was no good she won't change and will just go on nagging the girl.

Mary had found an acupuncturist on the web named Angela Windsor. She had a single-handed practice just off Princes street. Feeling a bit apprehensive Mary phoned for an appointment. A woman with a warm Scottish accent replied.

'Hello this is Angela; how can I help you?'

Mary hesitated,

'Good morning I am phoning to ask whether you can treat arthritis, Juvenile Arthritis my daughter.....' she waited.

'How old is your daughter?'

'She's sixteen.'

'I would need to see her to decide. Why not bring her to see me? There would be no charge for the initial assessment don't worry.'

The clinic was on the first floor with a shingle on the glass-fronted door, *Angela Windsor DipAc BacC Qualified Acupuncturist*. Mary and Eleonora pushed open the door and went in. The room was brightly lit with a number of diplomas hanging on the wall. Eleonora glanced at one. It was a certificate awarded to Angela Windsor by the University of Edinburgh. Looking around they spied two seats and sat down side by side near the window, neither spoke.

Through the window, Eleonora could just see a small boy playing on a swing in the garden. It was so peaceful and for a moment she forgot why she was there.

Then she heard subdued voices coming through a door marked 'Surgery' and

suddenly the door opened and a tall woman in a white coat appeared.

'Hello I'm Angela, I'm sorry to keep you waiting. It's Eleonora isn't it?' She said smiling to the young woman.

'Yes,' Eleonora stammered.

'Please come through,' she said retiring to the surgery. Mary stood up to follow.

'Could I just speak to Eleonora alone for a few moments?'

Mary was a bit taken aback but nodded. The door closed and she heard voices through the door but couldn't make out what was being said. After a few minutes the door opened and Angela beckoned Mary to enter. Eleonora was lying on a couch with her knees resting on a pillow.

'I have explained to Eleonora that the treatment won't be able to affect the progress of her condition but should help to control the pain and therefore improve her movements.

Mary turned to Eleonora.

'What do you think dear?'

'I think it's worth trying mum, anything to ease the pain would be good.'

Eleonora began to attend for treatment twice a week. After the first visit she told her mother what had happened.

'Angela explained that she uses different energy points on my body from G 28 - G34 to ease hip back and knee pain. I'm not certain what that means. The needles were placed at these points. I only felt a slight prick it wasn't painful. I then relaxed for about ten minutes before getting dressed.'

'Do you think it's helping?' Asked Mary eagerly.

'I think so, it's difficult to be certain but I would like to finish the course.'

## Chapter Nine

Mary could see the change. Eleonora no longer spoke about the future. It was as if she had given up all hope of getting better. She was losing more and more time from school until one day a letter arrived for her.

Mary opened it and read it aloud.

*Dear Mrs Boxalli, the school is becoming increasingly concerned about Eleonora's poor attendance. We feel that a meeting to discuss her future is necessary.*

The meeting was held in the Head's office, a large airy room with a window overlooking the playground. Mary could hear the sound of voices and a ball hitting

the walls. The school nurse Miss Broad was present. Mary wheeled Eleonora in. She was now finding it easier to get about in a wheelchair.

'Thank you for coming Mrs Boxalli, this is Miss Broad the school nurse. I think you have met before,' said Miss Alexander. Mary nodded.

Miss Broad began,

'This is very difficult because the head and I think Eleonora is a very bright and talented student. I must speak frankly. Over the year I have seen a slow deterioration in her mobility, which is making it increasingly difficult for her to attend classes. I have talked to Eleonora about this and she agrees,

'Don't you?'

'Yes Mum, I often arrive late and miss things.'

Miss Broad interrupted.

'We are planning to install a lift but it won't be ready for a least a year. What we are saying is that reluctantly we think Eleonora should go to another school, one which can cater for her special needs.'

There was a silence in the room as Mary digested what she had heard.

At last she spoke.

'What you have told me doesn't really come as a surprise. I have realised for some while now that Eleonora has been struggling and I am amazed how well she has done considering her difficulties.'

Mary reached out and clasped Eleonora's hand.

'She has been an inspiration to us all,' added Miss Broad. 'There is a highly regarded residential school, which, I think, will suit her needs, it is called Windermere School. Over the years we have sent several girls there.'

Mary looked at Eleonora and saw a shadow cross her face. She knew what she was thinking. Eleonora had already said that she didn't want to go away from home.

'Eli let's talk about it when we get home.'

Over tea Mary raised the question.

'Darling, you heard what your teacher said. They can't provide you with the education you have a right to.'

'They could if that wanted to,' murmured Eleonora.

'What! I don't understand, how do you mean?'

'Well at the moment the senior classes are held upstairs which I can't get to. But if they swapped them around and put the junior classes upstairs instead and moved the senior classes downstairs, I would be OK.'

'Did you mention that to the head?'

'I tried to but she wasn't listening.'

Mary was confused, she didn't know whether to press the point at school or send Eleonora to Windermere a school for the disabled. In bed that night she couldn't decide whether to mention it to Giovanni. She was frightened he would get indignant

and try and lay down the law. As he got into bed he saw Mary lying on her back staring up at the ceiling. He knew something was troubling her.

'OK Mary what's on your mind?'

'Nothing just dreaming.'

'No you're not, I recognize the signs, tell me.'

'It's Eleonora's school, they want her to leave but she says that if they swapped the classes and brought the senior ones downstairs she would be able to stay there which is what she wants to do.'

'So what's the problem?'

'They don't seem to want to do it.'

Even in the dark Mary could feel his anger smouldering. She felt his body stiffen.

'What are you going to do about it?' he growled.

'What can I do?'

'Object woman, that's what you can do. Object! If you won't I certainly will.'

Morag and Aileen two of the senior girls realised something unusual was happening at the school. They were passing the head's office when they overheard the Head explaining to Eleonora's mother that her daughter could no longer stay at the school, because Eleonora could not get to the classes. When Eleonora had suggested the class change they heard the head say it was not possible.

'Did you hear that?' said Morag. 'The head's not prepared to make a change to the classes to allow Eleonora to stay. That's not fair we must do something about it.'

When they got back to their class they spread the word to everyone. After a noisy discussion Aileen spoke up.

'Are we all agreed, we will send a letter to the head demanding that Eleonora stays and the classes are swapped?' There was loud clapping in agreement.

The following morning a letter was slipped under the head's door. Miss Alexander saw it when she returned from the morning break. Puzzled by the handwriting she tore it open and read.

*We, the students of Class 9 support Eleonora's request to continue as a student at the school. In order for her to do so the senior classes should be held on the ground floor and the junior on the floor above.'*

*Signed Morag and Aileen (on behalf of the whole senior school).*

Miss Alexander could feel herself getting angrier and angrier as she read. How dare they contradict my orders? Who do they think they are? I make the rules in this school not the students. I'll show them who is the head here. Picking up the phone she spoke to the school secretary,

'Please send Morag and Aileen to my office at once.'

The two students were in class when the message got to them.

'You may be excused,' said their teacher. The two girls glanced at each other as they hurried along the corridor to the head's office their shoes clattering on the

tiled floor. They both felt decidedly jittery as they reached the Head's door. They knocked and waited. After a long pause and as they were about to knock again, they heard 'come in'. The two walked in and stood side by side in front of the head's desk. Without looking up she said, holding a sheet of paper.

'Morag and Aileen did you write this letter?'

'Yes Ma'am,' they replied in unison.

'What did you hope to achieve by it?'

'We hoped that...'

'Silence, I run this school not the pupils.' She said tearing up the note.

Morag looked at Aileen,

'Miss please our request is serious. It has the support of the whole senior school. We know our rights, this is not a frivolous request.'

'I don't want to hear anymore the subject is closed. You're dismissed now return to your class.'

Morag and Aileen were crestfallen when they returned to their classmates.

'I can see it didn't go well,' said one of them.

'She just wouldn't listen she had her mind made up and wouldn't budge,' said Morag

'What do we do now?' said one of the group in desperation.

The following morning Miss Alexander arrived early as usual and parked her car in the still empty car park. She walked briskly towards the front of the school, her thoughts preoccupied with what she would say at assembly. Suddenly she stopped; she couldn't believe what she saw. Through her gritted teeth she read the twelve-foot wide banner that had been hung across the front of the first floor of the school building.

It read 'Eleonora stays or we all go'.

No they don't, she said to herself as she rushed to her office and switched on the intercom. Her voice boomed out across the school.

'Attention, I want the students who erected the banner in my office now!'

The twenty-three students of the upper six were ready. Morag looked around the class.

'OK let's go.'

Miss Alexander wasn't expecting so many as they crammed into her small office. Many were taller than her and she felt overwhelmed by their sheer size and numbers. They stood silently like an army before a battle. Her voice faltered as she tried to summon up courage to confront them but their silence intimidated her. Finally, she cracked.

'Let's talk about this.' she croaked. 'We don't need to be so confrontational do we girls?' She said forcing a smile. They said nothing.

Next morning Eleonora arrived at school and wheeled herself up the ramp and into the front entrance. Morag and Aileen were waiting for her.

'We have a surprise for you, close your eyes,'

'Where are we going?'

'Wait and see,' they giggled.

Eleonora felt herself being pushed through a door into a room on the ground floor.

'Open your eyes, surprise this is our new classroom.'

## Chapter Ten

The surgeon Mr Simon Satchelor was a tall impressive looking man who towered over most of his colleagues. Now in his fifties he still had a luxuriant head of light brown hair greying at the temples. He rarely smiled and that gave him a stern look that intimidated medical colleagues meeting him for the first time. Born in New Zealand he came to England as a child with his family. His father a GP had responded to the NHS demand for more doctors and decided to return to the motherland from where his ancestors had left many years earlier. It was assumed that Simon would follow his father's footsteps into the practice. But he had other ideas.

Simon was married to Julie. Tall and slim with a dewdrop mouth and perfect teeth, she exuded joy. When they first met she was going out with a dental student. He was captivated instantly. At a medical school dance the two men almost came to blows causing Julie to walk out in disgust. Overwhelmed with embarrassment Simon phoned her the following day and pleaded forgiveness but she refused him.

'You behaved disgracefully I never want to see you again.' Crestfallen he was devastated and fell into a depression. He was still living at home with his mother at the time and could recall their conversation.

'Don't be such a baby,' she had said coming into his room at ten in the morning and finding him still in bed.

He moaned,

'I don't want to live if I can't be with her.'

'It's not as easy as that. Just pull yourself together and find another girl.'

But Simon disagreed. He thought his life had come to an end. Her face kept coming into his thoughts. He tried to forget her but just couldn't and continued to think of her. He saw her everywhere. Time and again he would catch a glimpse of her in the supermarket or on the bus, rush over only to realise it was another girl a bit like her. It was becoming ridiculous.

It was some years later that chance brought them together again. Unbeknown to him she had become a nurse and they bumped into each other at a hospital dance. He had been on a late shift and arrived long after the dance had started. He had

gravitated to the bar and was looking around when he saw her on the dance floor. He immediately recognised her. She hadn't changed. She was as beautiful as when he had last seen her. He waited for the music to stop and although paralysed with fear tentatively walked over to her. She was walking back to join some friends when he intercepted her.

'Hi Julie, he stuttered, 'what brings you to these parts?'

At first she didn't recognise him in the dim light but she his voice was familiar.

'I work here.'

'You work here?'

'Yes in Intensive care. I could ask you the same question.'

'I work here also, in the Orthopaedic Department.'

They started meeting.

'How did you get into surgery,' she asked one day.

'It's a long story,' he replied. I was about thirteen when my father who was a GP asked me if I would like to come with him on his rounds. From that moment I knew that that was what I wanted to do, my love of surgery came later. I saw the way in which illness destroyed families, that the cost of medicines was often beyond their means and that children died for want of simple remedies. I saw the tenderness and gentleness of my father and sat with him when he comforted the dying

One day my father said, 'would you like to see an operation?' I jumped at the opportunity and couldn't wait for the day. My father used to stand in at the local accident and emergency department at the weekend so when he was next on duty he took me. I remember the evening started very quietly and I was getting bored when a man was admitted with an extensive laceration of his hand. He had caught it in a machine. I watched fascinated as the wound was painstakingly put back together, so that at the end the anatomy of the hand was restored.

I told my dad that it was amazing and that I wanted to be able to do that.

'Well Simon,' he said, 'there is no reason why you can't.'

Having qualified as a doctor he was instinctively drawn to surgery. After the usual run of junior jobs he found myself appointed to a Consultant Surgical post here in Edinburgh.

'How did you get into hip surgery?' Julie asked.

'It was at the interview that I was asked whether I was equipped to set up a hip surgery practice a technique that was going through a revolution.

'Yes,' I had replied enthusiastically. 'I have had a wide experience in hip surgery and want to set up an internationally acclaimed Unit. The development of low friction plastic and metal implants well tolerated by the body, had seen a mushrooming of designs, the most successful to date was one developed by Charnley an engineer cum surgeon in the north of England.'

Simon had had a long day in the OR. He parked his car in the garage and let himself into the empty house. He always hated that first few minutes of silence when he was

reminded how stupid he had been. He remembered their conversation as if it was yesterday. Julie had obviously had a bad day he could see it on her face, pale and drained but instead of understanding he started on her.

'I don't know why you have to work so hard, I never see you these days,' he complained.

'That's rich coming from you; if I didn't make a fuss I would never see you. Isn't that why we decided I should continue nursing? It was your idea you know and now you're complaining. I don't seem to be able to please you. I don't know that I can take much more of this!'

'Darling I'm sorry, I've had a really heart breaking day. I have a sixteen-year-old with severe arthritis now confined to a wheel chair. I think I am going to have to do both her hips.'

'But she is so young?'

'I know but what else can I offer her?'

But the peace didn't last and the arguments began again. It came to a head one night when that had both come in late.

In desperation Julie said.

'Simon I can't go on like this.'

'I see,' he began gaining momentum. 'In that case why don't you go?' No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he regretted them.

'Sorry I didn't mean that I'm really stressed out.'

Julie went silent, her face showing her disgust.

'Its OK,' she said, turning and going upstairs.

But it wasn't. He could feel the difference. There was a distinct change especially in the bedroom.

Simon began to dread going home only to meet a barrage of complaints. He had recently joined the local golf club and used to stop by on the way home for a drink to give him courage to face Julie. One evening after he had greeted Bill the barman and ordered a drink, he noticed a young woman sitting alone at the bar.

'Who's that?' He asked nodding towards her.

'She's a new member,' Bill said. 'She comes in most evenings'.

'Is she alone?' Asked Simon casually.

'Usually,' winked Bill.

Carrying his drink, he walked over to her.

'May I join you?' My name's Simon.'

'Sure I'm Patricia. Most people call me Pat.'

'Pat, Bill tells me you're a new member.'

'Yes I've just taken up golf. I didn't realise how hard it was. It seemed such a simple idea banging a ball into a hole. But on the green it's a different story. Do you play much?'



'I try and play once a week at the weekends,' said Simon. 'Say why don't we have a game together I would be happy to help you. Let's exchange numbers and I'll ring you to arrange a game.'

Three weeks later they were on the fifth hole. Pat had just missed her third putt. She stood up shaking her head in belief.

'Let me show you how to hold the club,' he said putting his arms around her to reach her club. He felt her body yield as he adjusted the stroke. It had been a long time since he had held a woman so closely. He smelt her warmth and without thinking kissed her lightly on the cheek. That night they made love in her apartment.

'I don't even know what you do,' she asked.

'I work at the hospital and you?'

'I work in a law office in the city.'

## Chapter Eleven

Simon was reviewing Eleonora's notes as she wheeled herself into the clinic to see him. She was struggling to remain calm. It had been a difficult year during which she had fought against a wheelchair life but finally had to give in. She hated the way it made her feel, so vulnerable, so weak. She knew she couldn't go on like this.

Something had to be done

'How are you getting on Eleonora?' Simon asked. She had been under his care for over ten years. They were like old friends.

'I think I'm ready to have the operation. I'm not getting any better, it's my hips, they are both really bad now.'

Simon stood up and went over to the X-ray box where Eleonora's latest films were being displayed. He studied them for a while and compared them with the films taken one year ago. He saw a significant deterioration. Both hips joints had virtually disappeared and the heads of the thighbones were now collapsing.

He returned to his desk and sat pondering her future.

'Well Doctor what do you think?'

'The x-rays are much worse. I agree, both hips need replacing.'

Eleonora thought for a moment and then asked,

'Can you do both at the same time?'

'Mmm I don't know. It's a bigger operation and adds a greater risk of complications.'

'Such as what?' she asked.

‘Infection and death.’

Looking around he asked,

‘Why hasn’t your mother come with you, she usually does?’

‘I decided it was my decision so she agreed to stay at home.’

After a few minutes Simon looked up from the computer screen on which he had been typing a new medical note.

‘Eleonora, I think you should go home and speak to your mother about your decision and both come back to see me when you have decided.’

‘I have decided, it’s my decision, I’m an adult.’

‘I know but please do it for me, speak to your mother.’

No sooner had Eleonora let herself in at home than she heard her mother ask, ‘How did it go? Did you see the surgeon?’

‘Yes Mum, I just need to go to my room. I’ll see you shortly and tell you what he said.’

Despite her apparent acceptance that she needed surgery the idea frightened her. She had read about the operation and knew that it was a big decision. It was usually done in older people and here she was having it in her twenties. Her heart was still thumping as she scrambled onto her bed and lay there panting; everything was now such an effort. She needed some time to calm down before she told her mother.

‘What should I do?’ She wailed to the ceiling. If only she had a magic crystal ball and could look into the future? Finally plucking up courage she wheeled herself into the kitchen.

‘Well what did he say?’

‘Mum, I’m scared. He said I need an operation, both hips. It would get me out of the wheelchair.’

‘That’s wonderful.’ Mary knew she couldn’t feel what Eleonora felt but in her way she was just as frightened. It was wonderful that something could be done and she didn’t want to think beyond that.

‘He wants you to come with me next week.’

‘I thought you had decided?’

‘I have but he wanted you to be there when the arrangements were made.’

Simon greeted them with a smile as Eleonora and her mother sat down.

‘Thank you Mrs Boxalli for coming with Eleonora, I assume she has told you that she has decided to go ahead with surgery to both hips?’

Mary nodded.

‘I know Eleonora can make the decision herself but I wanted you to be present in case you had any questions, do you?’

‘You said that you will try and do both hips at the same time and that she will be in hospital for about five days.’

'Yes, I would like to explain about doing both hips at the same time. I don't usually do a double operation as most patients only need one but as you know both of Eleonora's hips are irreversibly damaged so both need to be replaced. We could do them one at a time but I thought it would be kinder if we could try and do both at the same operation.'

'How would that be?' Asked Mary not certain how he could do both hips at the same time.

'When we had completed the first hip we would assess Eleonora's condition. If all her vital signs were stable and I felt OK,' he said smiling, 'we would turn her on the other side and continue with the second hip. I have done that on a number of occasions. Patients are usually very pleased to have it all completed at one sitting so to speak.'

## Chapter Twelve

Grace was a first year nurse student on the orthopaedic ward at the General Edinburgh Hospital, the ward to which Eleonora had been admitted. She was the youngest of four children. Her grandfather came to England from Jamaica to work on the buses. He married a local girl. They had two sons the eldest of whom was Grace's father. He brought the family to live in Edinburgh. While he was working on a building site he had a fall. She remembered visiting him in the hospital and saw the loving devotion of the nurses. It was then that she decided to become a nurse. Sadly, her father remained in a wheelchair until his death.

She had finished the day shift and was going off with the other nurses when she remembered.

'You go ahead I'll catch up with you, I've just got someone to see.'

Eleonora was dozing, her mind in a turmoil. No matter how many times she told herself that it was just a routine operation; no matter how many similar successful operations the surgeon said he had carried out, she couldn't dismiss the fear of what was going to happen the following day. What did I do to find myself like this? The question had no answer. She had asked it too many times. Tired and frustrated, she snuggled down, pulled the blanket up to her chin and tried to sleep.

She was just slipping off when she felt a movement by her side. Someone had taken her hand. She looked up and in the dim light saw Grace, her huge brown eyes smiling at her.

'Hi how're you doing?' Grace said leaning forward to see her more clearly.

'OK I s'pose but I wish it was over.'

'Everyone says that but it won't be long now and you'll be walking, no longer confined to your wheel chair.' Eleonora smiled wanly. She couldn't think that far ahead, just to get over tomorrow was enough.

'Good night Eleonora, I'll see you tomorrow try and sleep.'

The operating list for the following day arrived during her coffee break. Theatre sister Brady almost due for retirement studied it over her cup of steaming Horlicks. Speaking aloud to the room she said,

'We have a possible double hip replacement first thing in the morning on Mr. Satchelor's list, I'll take him. I've spoken to CSSD and asked for two sets of small size hips as the patient although 22 is very small for her age. They should be delivered by this afternoon.'

Later that morning CSSD received the order to prepare two hip packs for small and medium sized hips. Jonathan Beagle a trained Theatre technician was in charge of the department. He had always wanted to work in a hospital. He still had memories of the weeks he spent in the Burns Unit as a child after he pulled a kettle of boiling water over himself. It missed his face but scalded his body and legs. He recalled the many operations he had had to suffer until his body was healed but at a price. It was festooned with white and pink scars some raised and others thickened. Then came more operations to free the contractions and allow his elbows to bend and his knees to straighten. Throughout that terrible ordeal he had one abiding memory, that of the kindness and gentleness of the nurses most of whom he only knew by name. When he was able, he knew what he wanted to do.

## Chapter Thirteen

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Simon looked into the anaesthetic room. Eleonora was lying with her eyes closed on the trolley.

'Hi Elie, hope you're comfortable. We'll try and do both hips if we can,' he said, 'see you later.' She forced a smile.

He turned and walked towards the scrub area. Pressing the knob on the floor with his foot he started the flow of water from the tap. Reaching for some soap and a brush he began to scrub up. It was a mechanical process he had done so many times. He then went over in his mind the stages in the operation. He visualised the incision then the exposure and finally the opening up of the hip joint. It was all very familiar but he still felt that slight fear, that it wouldn't be as he expected, that something untoward would happen. Although he had done the operation many times he never lost that feeling. Pushing it aside he approached the operating table.

Eleonora was feeling very woozy. She could still feel the slight pin prick in her right arm where the injection had been given. She tried to reach over to touch it but her hand didn't seem to be able to find it and just flopped by her side.

'A prick,' Grace had said, 'it will make you feel sleepy.' Eleonora had braced herself and then felt the cold liquid running up her arm. It didn't feel bad.

'Ready lift slowly.'

She felt that she was moving. The bed, it must be the bed bumping; a gentle breeze was washing over her face as if on a beach. Then another movement and she was on a hard surface. She heard the surgeon's voice.

'OK we're ready, put her to sleep,' and slowly the dark curtain came down and Eleonora was just a mind without a body floating in space. She faltered and then opened her eyes. She seemed to be high up above the operating table looking down. It felt so normal. She could see a human form on the table a young woman lying on her back, her shape just discernible beneath the green drapes that were covering her.

For a moment she was confused, and then the sudden realisation, it was herself asleep. She watched fascinated as the surgeon made the first incision. He was cutting into her but she felt no pain. She had never seen the inside of a body, it was all so tidy, and each layer was separated gently. Then the hip joint came into view. She could see that the surface was rough and irregular.

The surgeon was speaking,

'You see how the arthritis has damaged the lining of the joint; it ought to be smooth and shiny. It is now too damaged to repair itself so we are going to replace it with a new joint. Slowly he began to smooth the surface preparing it for the new cup. He checked the size. He turned to Sister Brady.

'I think we'll try the smallest one. There was a sound of paper tearing as the pack containing the instruments and the two components of the new hip joint was opened. The instruments were all laid out ready for the next stage. Eleonora watched with amazement as the surgeon shaped the bones and recreated the new hip. She even forgot that she was watching herself she was so taken up with the details. Then came the biggest surprise. The surgeon casually asked, the anaesthetist.

'Can we proceed with the other hip?' Eleonora hadn't remembered her second hip in her preoccupation with watching her operation.

'What's her blood loss,' he asked.

'About 150 mls,' replied the assistant looking at the markings on the drainage bottle.

'I don't like that let's let her settle and see. She sweating a bit, I think we should wait a while to see how she settles, said Dr Oliver the anaesthetist

'Doctor,' interrupted Sister. I have an emergency waiting can you make up your minds? It's an emergency Caesar, the child can't wait.

'OK sister we won't be long let's proceed to the other hip.'

'Simon, I don't think she's fit yet, please wait.'

'I can't, let's get on with it.' Dr Oliver wrote in the notes – *Simon has over-ruled me and plans to continue against my advice*

It was a further hour before both hips had been replaced with new ones.

'Dr Oliver you can wake her up now,' said the surgeon. Slowly Eleonora began to feel sleepy and the scene seemed to become faint and slowly disappear.

'Wake up Eleonora it's all over,' said Grace gently rocking her. 'It all went very well; you now have two new hips.'

'I know,' she whispered.

## Chapter Fourteen

It was just after 8 pm when the Nurse's night shift came on duty on Ward 12 at the General Edinburgh Hospital. Seated around the desk with the day staff and the patient's notes at hand they immediately began to familiarise themselves with the day's activities bed by bed. They had almost completed the change over when sister Macintosh heard something. Her years of experience had taught her to be alert like a trained hound to the slightest unusual sound. She heard behind the normal moans and sounds of breathing, a slight rasping sound followed by a gasp. Immediately she reacted and rushed towards the sound. Her torch lit up the face of Eleonora in bed 4, the hip patient who had returned from IT following a hip replacement four days earlier. The young woman was pale and sweating and gasping for air, her chest heaving in and out in desperation. The signs were immediately familiar to her. She shouted to the desk.

'Get the crash team NOW!'

In IT some distance away the red alarm flared on the desk indicating an emergency. Almost immediately the telephone rang and a frenzied voice shouted,

'Crash team to ward 12!'

In the nearby restroom Dr David Holmes, the senior on duty heard the request. He grabbed the Crash trolley and alerted his team of three who together sprinted at breakneck speed towards the ward. The lights led them to bed four where they saw an unconscious young female patient struggling to breathe. It was a familiar scene and indicated respiratory obstruction. The team sprang into action; a tube was inserted into her throat to provide Oxygen, an IV was set up, an ECG was attached and external cardiac massage started. Immediately the colour returned to the young woman's cheeks and her pulse became discernible but she remained unconscious.

'We'll take her into IC,' declared David as the patient was lifted gently onto a trolley together with all the attachments and wheeled slowly out of the ward along the corridor to IT where she was settled into one of the fully equipped bays.

It was 7am when Mary's bedside telephone rang. Suddenly awake she glanced at the clock. Her heart wrenched with fear as she heard a female voice.

'Mrs Boxalli this is the hospital; Eleonora has taken a turn for the worse. Please come as soon as you can. She's in Intensive care.'

Mary shook Giovanni who had slept through the phone call.

'It's the hospital, they want us to come immediately.' Scrambling to dress they rushed out of the house and set off in their car. The journey to the hospital was a nightmare every red light was like a death sentence.

'Please let her be OK,' Mary prayed silently.

As soon as the car had parked Mary rushed into the hospital.

'IT please,' she shouted to the desk.

'Down the corridor third entrance on your right you can't miss it.' Mary followed by Giovanni sprinted down the corridor and almost missed it. Mary saw the letters ICU over the entrance and pushed open the plastic see-through doors. A nurse immediately confronted her.

'My daughter Eleonora where is she?' The nurse took her arm and gently led her to the bedside.

Mary had watched many hospital dramas on TV but was not prepared for what she saw. Eleonora seemed to be sleeping peacefully her face was relaxed her eyes closed. A tube was in her mouth giving her oxygen; an IV was running a clear fluid into one of her arms and a monitor above her head was tracing out an ECG. Mary leaned over and kissed her, her skin was cold and clammy.

Dr David Holmes saw Mary and Giovanni enter and rushed over to them.

'I'm Dr Holmes in charge of the unit. Eleonora came to us just now. She took a turn for the worst. Her blood pressure dropped and she became unconscious while on the Orthopaedic Ward. We think she may have had a pulmonary embolus I'm afraid.'

Mary looked blank and Dr. Holmes seeing the confusion in her eyes continued.

'It's an uncommon complication of surgery. A blood clot forms somewhere, usually in a leg vein and if dislodged travels towards the heart, it passes through and becomes stuck in the lungs where it blocks the blood going to the lungs from receiving Oxygen. Unfortunately, that is what we think has happened to Eleonora.'

Mary was trying to follow what the doctor was saying. She looked in desperation at Giovanni.

'I think I understand,' he said. 'I thought there was something you gave patients to prevent this from happening.'

'Yes your daughter was given all the usual anti-clotting agents routinely.'

'Then I don't understand, if she received it why didn't it prevent this from happening?'

Dr Holmes looked pained.

'Because it doesn't always prevent it especially in someone as inactive as your daughter, I'm afraid she is very ill but we will do our best to save her.'

At that moment his bleep sounded.

'That's me I must go. I'll be back later She's in good hands try not to worry.'

'Oh my God Giovanni, did you hear what he said, *do our best to save her?*'

'I heard, I think we must be prepared for the worst.'

'How can you say that? No I won't believe it; I can't bear to think of losing her after all she has been through.'

'Darling we must be realistic.'

'Realistic? What sort of word is that? It's my daughter they're talking about. She can't die I won't let it happen. I need to be with her,' said Mary. 'I'm going to stay by her side. I will 'will' her to get better.'

The next few days were torture as Mary sat watching her daughter's struggle to survive. She watched every breath that Eleonora took urging her to recover. But by the third day she was exhausted through lack of sleep and Giovanni persuaded her to go home.

At home she sank into her bed and was soon fast asleep. Giovanni watched as the strain on her face was replaced by calm. He tucked her in and got in beside her turned off the light and slept.

The night silence was shattered by the bleep of her mobile. Mary was instantly awake. It was like a replay. She turned, Giovanni was snoring quietly, the lines in his face had smoothed in sleep. He looked years younger. She reached over and saw the name 'Hospital' lit up on the screen. Suddenly all her thoughts were on one thing. Oh my God! It can't be?

'Hello.' she stammered.

'Is that Mrs Boxalli?' A voice said.

'Yes, my daughter is she all right?'

'Mrs Boxalli please come to the hospital,' a pause, 'as soon as you can.' The line went dead.

The unit was almost in darkness when they arrived. The nurse stood up from the desk and began to mouth, 'I'm sorry,' but stopped. Instead she pointed to the light over a bed some distance away.

'Over there,' she whispered. Mary almost stumbled but clung on to Giovanni's arm. She saw Eleonora in the overhead light her face blanched white. There was no sound, no repetitive bleep. Above the bed she could see the monitor tracing a straight line against the black. The crash team was standing by their faces drawn.

'I'm sorry,' someone was saying, 'we tried but.... '

Mary had relived this moment many times and never got beyond it and now she was here, her fears turned to reality. She didn't move as the scene embedded itself in her mind, the white sheets and the silence. It could have been a movie but it was real.



Automatically she turned blankly to look at Giovanni. His face was crumpled as he fought back his tears. His voice gruff with pain as he muttered,

'She's at peace at last.'

Mary moving like a zombie fell onto the bed grasping her daughter trying to breath life into her body.

'No! No! She's not dead, she can't be, don't say it.' No one moved and then Giovanni struggling to control his pain reached forwards and gently lifted her from the inert body of their daughter.

'Dearest, there is nothing more we can do. Let's go home.'

## Chapter Fifteen

Later that night just after lights out two attendants slipped silently into the ward and carefully bundled the featherweight body onto their trolley covered it with a white sheet and wheeled it out into the corridor and down to the Mortuary. In the morning the other patients would see the empty bed and know the tragedy that had occurred.

Dr Cynthia Burgess was gowned and waiting as the body was wheeled out of the freezer compartment and transferred to her operating table. In a gravelly voice she began to read the medical notes into a Dictaphone. She was a tall handsome woman with short brown hair. She had always wanted to be a vet but didn't get the grades and settled for medicine. Now in her fifties she had drifted towards pathology the study of disease through examination of body tissues.

'The body is that of E B a 21-year-old female with severe progressive Rheumatoid Arthritis predominantly affecting her knees and hips. Despite extensive medical treatment her condition deteriorated and she became chair bound. Four days ago she underwent a bilateral hip replacement. She received routine prophylactic anticoagulant therapy. On the fourth day she collapsed with a provisional diagnosis of a Pulmonary Embolism. Despite intensive resuscitation she died.'

Dr Burgess put down the notes and took up a scalpel. Feeling for the breastbone she made a midline incision over the middle of the sternum. Then taking an oscillating saw she cut through the sternum. Separating the two halves of the rib cage she exposed the heart and lungs. Immediately she could see that the Pulmonary artery was swollen. With a scalpel she slit it open revealing a shiny black snake-like clot of blood, which was extending into the lung.

'Here it is. This is what killed her now to find out where it came from.' She began to examine the legs and found extensive clotting in the left calf. She continued the routine post mortem and finally dictated her notes.

'Cause of Death Extensive Pulmonary embolus originating in the left calf.'

## Chapter Sixteen

The church was overflowing and people were speaking in low tones. A large number of students had come from Eleonora's school including her best friends Morag and Aileen. They sat in the two front rows chatting and flitting about like frightened birds. The rest of the hall was made up of family and friends. In the centre of the isle was a simple mahogany coffin bedecked with flowers lilies and roses an image of flesh and blood.

Mary was dreading the day. She tossed and turned throughout the night moaning and crying. Giovanni lay beside her powerless to help; in the end he simply cradled her head in his arms and let her cry. As the dawn light lit the bedroom Mary got up and sat at her dresser. Her colourless face stared back at her. She felt drained unable to function. Then she remembered the funeral.

'I can't go, I can't. I can't bear seeing the coffin. Please Giovanni say I'm ill, anything please Giovanni.'

'All right dear of course I understand.' But then as if having forgotten what she had said, Mary began to prepare to go. She selected a long black chiffon dress with a silk scarf.

Turning to Giovanni, she asked

'Should I wear makeup?'

'A little, dear, you look so pale.'

The car slowly backed into a parking space the only one free despite the size of the parking lot.

'There's a lot of people here,' whispered Mary clutching Giovanni's arm. Her legs felt heavy as she walked along the cobble drive to the entrance conscious of the crunching sound of her footsteps. As she mounted the steps she was momentarily dazed by the beams of sunlight radiating through the large stained glass window at the far end of the church. Her steps faltered and she steadied herself against Giovanni.

'It will soon be over,' he whispered. 'Just try and relax.' Then she saw it a dark shadow in the aisle ahead.

'No I can't, I can't go in. I can't bear to be alive while she is...,' her voice faltered. She couldn't bring herself to say the word 'dead'. It was as if by not saying it, it had not happened and that what she was seeing was unreal, a dream from which she would wake up. The congregation sensed their arrival and stood up. Mary was suddenly acutely aware of her surroundings as the bright sunlight illuminated the room.

At that moment the choir began to sing, 'Abide with me, fast flows the eventide.' The music soared up into the ceiling filling the church and blotting out all other sounds. It

was one of Mary's favourites and as she listened she was suddenly drawn back to that time many years before when she had attended her mother's funeral. The image cleared as the final verse was echoed around the hall,  
'In life in death, O Lord abide with me'.

There was a loud clattering of chairs as everyone sat down. The Minister a man in his early forties stepped forwards in front of the altar, Mary recognised him. Although not a regular churchgoer she attended during high holidays. In recent months she had sought refuge in the church and had shared her grief with him. They had got to know each other very well.

He began to speak:

'My dear Mary and Giovanni, there is probably no sadder an event for a parent than to lose a child. It flies in the face of what is sometimes called natural justice. And when that child has suffered for so long and with such fortitude the loss is even greater. Our hearts go out to you at this sad time.'

'We cannot help but ask why? Why does a caring loving God allow it? That question has been asked throughout the ages by every generation when war, disease and pestilence are visited upon God-loving people. We have no answer. All we can do is to carry on, to remain true to our values so that that no life is lost in vain. Eleonora's fight against a crippling disease which eventually claimed her life was an example to us all, of courage, of hope and above all fortitude. She never gave up even in her darkest moments. Mary told me that her daughter was to her a shining example of what makes us human. Even during your saddest moments Mary and Giovanni, you can be proud of your daughter and the noble battle she fought.'

There was a pause before a pale figure in a short cotton dress stepped up to the lectern. For a moment Mary didn't recognise Morag who was now a young woman. Her face stained by tears and struggling to keep her composure, Morag waited until the congregation settled down before she began to speak.

In a voice wavering with emotion she began,

'Dear Eleonora we will never forget you. Your strength and bravery have been an inspiration to us all. From the moment you knew that you had a crippling condition you never ceased to fight to live a normal life. We still talk about the way you encouraged us to fight for your right to remain at school despite the overwhelming odds against you. Your spirit has remained a guiding light in our lives. You will remain in our hearts forever, goodbye dear friend.' As she finished tears gushed from her eyes. Coming forwards her, one of the ushers helped her to her seat.

'Mary and Giovanni, please come forward and stand on either side of your daughter,' requested the Minister. As if in a dream Mary hand in hand with Giovanni walked forwards and stood their hands touching the coffin.

'Let us now sing,' said the Minister. '*Guide me O thou great Redeemer.*'

At that moment a tall figure stepped out of the sunlight into the darkness of the church and stood for a moment. No one saw him. He bowed his head, turned and left. Mr Satchelor had paid his respects.

## Chapter Seventeen

It was a grey overcast day, typical of Edinburgh in the autumn when Mary and Giovanni arrived at the Procurator Fiscal's Office behind Prince's street. A young woman was waiting for them. She shook their hands and whispered,

'I am so sorry for your loss.'

The enquiry was to be held in the conference room on the second floor, a narrow space with a central table able to seat several people three on each side. Mary and Giovanni made their way up the two flights of stairs to the room. Mary was trying to keep her mind off the events of the last few days. She needed to be calm and concentrate on what was to come. She knew that every detail mattered and she was preparing herself. Giovanni thought the whole thing was unnecessary and wanted to get it over as soon as possible.

They were seated when the others arrived. They recognised Simon Satchelor the surgeon together with Grace, Eleonora's nurse. Then a third person arrived, Dr Burgess who introduced herself as the Coroner who had performed the post mortem. They sat in silence waiting for the Procurator. They turned as the door opened and in walked a tall thin-faced man with a greyish beard and a mop of untidy hair.

In a broad Scottish accent, he greeted them.

'Good Morning, I am the Procurator Fiscal.' He turned briefly to Mr. and Mrs. Boxalli,

'My condolences on your loss, let's begin. Mr Satchelor please let us have the medical history.'

Mary listened as the details of her daughter's medical condition were outlined calmly. When the surgeon came to the operation she listened more intently.

Mr Satchelor continued,

'Having completed the first hip, we decided to proceed to the second as her condition was stable.' Mary saw the officer look up from his notes.

'Doctor, you say you went on to do the second hip.'

'Yes, I checked the patient's condition with the anaesthetist. He confirmed that she was stable and we decided that to complete everything at one time was in her best interests.'

'Do you still hold that view?'

'Sir, I am not quite certain what you are asking?' Mr Satchelor said surprised by the question.

'Let me repeat the question. Do you still believe that you made the correct decision when you decided to operate on the second hip?' There was silence in the room, the only sound coming from the traffic passing in the street outside.

Mr. Satchelor straightened his papers. His voice now strained and high pitched,

'I made the decision on the basis of the patient's condition as determined by the anaesthetist and myself.'

'OK let me try again. Do you often operate on two hips at the same time?'

'I have done so on many occasions.'

'How many?'

'I haven't kept count but at least three times a year.'

'And how many hip operations do you do in a year?'

'About forty.'

'Three out of forty.'

The officer rolled the words around in his mouth.

'In retrospect looking back did you make the correct decision to do the second hip?'

Mary held her breath. Was it possible that Eleonora's death could have been avoided? She clenched Giovanni's hand struggling to breathe. Mr. Batchelor took out a handkerchief and dabbed sweat off his brow.

He repeated,

'I, we made the decision based on the condition of the patient.'

The officer waited, his chin resting on his hand. He looked intently at the doctor.

The doctor continued.

'We had a hospital enquiry and it was agreed that we had done all we could, everything.'

The officer said nothing but continued to look at the doctor. At last the surgeon relented.

'Perhaps we were too ambitious.'

Mary was stunned; she couldn't wait to hear any more. She rushed from the room with a loud cry of disbelief. Giovanni caught up with her on the pavement outside. Her thoughts were in chaos, images of Eleonora running and playing flashed into her mind and then a drumming in her head as if it would burst.

'No no!' She screamed. 'No I don't believe it. It wasn't necessary she didn't need to die. Oh my God! They murdered her, my baby, my lovely precious daughter.' Her voice trailed off as she sank to the pavement. Giovanni gently lifted her and held her as she sobbed uncontrollably. Gradually her sobs ceased and she began to wipe her face.

'I want to go home please.'

## Chapter Eighteen

Mary was very quiet on the way home from the enquiry. The initial shock of what she had heard had been replaced by numbness. The hall light was on as she entered the

house. She looked around, nothing had changed but it felt different, everything felt different. She walked from room to room searching for Eleonora, calling out her name, her voice becoming increasingly insistent. Giovanni waited in the hall not knowing what to do. He heard her cries of despair. He remembered the words of a counsellor.

'She must let it out; she must grieve in her own way. Don't try and stop her. It is the only way she will become whole again.'

His body shaking, Giovanni wept. He watched helplessly as Mary drifted about as if in a dream. She walked aimlessly from room to room, her face ashen, her hair dank and her features drawn.

'Please Mary,' he pleaded. 'She's gone. We can't bring her back. We have to try and live'

'Maybe you can but my life is over. I just want to be with her. I can't bear the thought that I will never see her again it's too much to bear.'

Mary struggled with her fears. She stood outside Eleonora's room hesitating, her hand on the doorknob. She turned it slowly and entered. Immediately she inhaled the faint smell of Eleonora's perfume. For a moment she saw an image of Eleonora at her dressing table combing her long black hair and then it faded and the stool was empty. On the counterpane she saw the faint imprint of Eleonora's body as if she had only just got up. She reached over to touch it hoping to feel its warmth. Then she sat down on the stool and looked at herself in the mirror. A haggard face with sagging eyes and lifeless hair stared back at her; all the joy of life had ebbed away. Automatically one by one she picked up the small bottles neatly arranged on the table and read the labels, familiar names, many of which she had given to her daughter. Now they sat like tombstones staring back at her.

Mary heard a sound and turned. Giovanni had followed her upstairs. He looked around; he had rarely been in Eleonora's room. It was less familiar to him. She gave him a wan smile.

'Darling look what I found,' said Mary handing him a leather bound book. 'It's Eli's journal.'

Sitting together on her bed they read,

*I am coming to the view that this arthritis that I have may never get better so I have decided to write this journal so that one day after I have gone someone may read it and share with me these days, these frightening days.*

*I know that mum and dad try to understand what is happening but I don't think that anyone who has not faced it can. I should have started writing this at the beginning but it is only now that I recognise the beginning. Then I thought it was just an ache but looking back I now realise that the ache was the beginning.*

*I have had a much better week almost pain-free. I think the tablets are helping but they make me feel a bit sick. I must remember to take them after eating. Managed to get on the bus without help and get up the school stairs but it was hard work. I don't understand, every day is different even the weather affects me it's so odd. I can almost tell what the day will be like. I seem to be in a good spell, my fingers are not stiff and I can put my shoes on by lifting my legs a great improvement from last week.*

*I am really getting scared I keep fighting back the thought that I might never get better. I need someone to talk to. Mum is so strung up that I can't have a plain conversation with her. I manage better with dad although he always tries to avoid the subject. It is as if he thinks that if he doesn't talk about it doesn't exist.*

*School is becoming a real drag. I can struggle onto the bus although I think Peter the regular driver is getting impatient, as I take too long to get up the stair. Getting a lift is easier but not always available. I can't get to some of the classes in time and can't hope to climb the school stairs.*

*I wish mum would stop looking for miracles. I keep telling her they are for the fairies but she doesn't give up. Now she wants me to try Acupuncture. I'm really fed up. I don't think I will ever get better.*

*I look forward to sleep. It takes me a long time but once a sleep it's like heaven. I wish I could be awake when I am sleeping I know it's crazy but it would be wonderful to be like I was; I didn't really know then. I just took it for granted now I would give anything to be free of pain, to jump out of bed, to stand in the shower without holding on to someone or something. I watch kids walking and I want to shout out,*

*'Grasp it; be happy that you are whole.' I see them look at me, no words just that look of pity. I want to say I don't want pity I want to be like you.*

*Lately I've been thinking a lot about death. I now understand why the kid at school did it. It sort of makes sense. After all I'm great when I'm asleep. Isn't death a bit like that no pain any more no fear of getting worse it's very tempting. Maybe there is a heaven where there is no suffering- that would be heaven.*

'Come dear,' Giovanni said. 'You have been here long enough. Come downstairs and I'll make us a drink.'

Mary sat cupping the hot drink, her face swollen and her eyes bloodshot.

'My life is finished. I can't go on. I don't know what to do. Why did it happen? The surgeon said it was a straightforward operation, she would be running around in weeks. What went wrong? Something must have, we need to find out.'

'The coroner's reviewing the case next week,' interrupted Giovanni.

'I want to go,' said Mary. 'We need to know what happened and why.'

'Are you sure you're ready. You may hear things that you don't need to know. I can go and tell you what they say.'

'No no,' said Mary her eyes blazing, 'I want to know the truth. Why did our daughter die? I need to know why.'

## Chapter Nineteen

Mary felt empty. She ceased to care about her appearance; she let her hair grow long and ragged. She no longer saw any purpose in the struggle and longed to die and be with Eleonora.

Giovanni watched helplessly.

'Pull yourself together,' he would say in his moments of frustration. 'You can't go on like this.' But she just stared at him as if the words no longer had any meaning. He knew he had to do something. He couldn't just let her decay. It broke his heart to see her day-by-day fading as her life ebbed away.

He had heard about counselling but always poohed, poohed it as being too simple.

'Talking therapy?' How could that help?' Finally, in desperation he rang Pruse a volunteer counselling organisation.

'Good morning,' replied a soft Scottish voice, 'can we help you?'

'Yes please, I, we need help. We have just lost our daughter and.'

'It's all right sir, you don't need to say anymore. Let me have your address and a counsellor will be with you within the hour.'

'Darling,' he called up the stairs. 'I've arranged for someone to come and talk to us.'

'About what?' came the puzzled reply.

'About what's happening to us, you know since Eleonora died.' He could hardly say the word.

'A stranger, what could they do? I don't want to speak to anyone I don't know.'

Later that day the front doorbell rang. Giovanni opened it tentatively to find a young woman standing on the doorstep. She was not much older than Eleonora. She had long fawn hair tied in a chignon. She wore little makeup.

'I'm from Pruse may I come in?'

Without waiting for a reply she entered and stood in the hall.

'My name is Fiona.'

'Who is that at the door?' shouted Mary.

'It's Fiona from Pruse.' There was a silence.

'Is that your wife...the mother, upstairs?'

'Yes, Mary...'

'May I go up and see her?'



'She's in the first bedroom on the right at the top of the stairs.'

Giovanni watched as Fiona mounted the stairs and disappeared from view. He heard a knocking then a 'come in' and then silence. He waited for the rejection but it remained silent.

'Hello Mary my name is Fiona. I've come from Pruse, the counselling agency.'

'Counselling I don't need counselling. I think you've made a mistake.' 'Your husband asked me to come. He said you needed someone to talk to.'

Mary sat up and gazed through the young woman as if she was invisible.

'I don't understand,' she said wearily. 'Why did it have to happen she had all her life ahead of her. She had suffered so much.'

'Tell me about her.'

'She was,' the word stuck in her throat, 'a wonderful daughter. When I became pregnant I was so happy. But after the accident I was fearful that she would be abnormal.'

'How do you mean, what accident?'

'I thought her brain would be affected and that she would be unable to walk.'

'What happened?'

Mary began to talk more freely as she described the accident.

'It was my fault I should have been more careful. I think it was the cause of her arthritis.'

'When did the arthritis appear?'

'She was about five or six.'

'So you think the accident before her birth caused that?'

Mary went quiet,

'Yes.'

'Mary that makes no sense, was she a healthy baby?'

'Yes it was only later...'

Slowly Mary began to release her guilt, to see the arthritis as not her fault.

'If it wasn't me why did it happen?'

'There is no answer to why these things happen.'

Over the weeks, Mary spoke about her grief, she cried and railed against God. All the while Fiona sat quietly listening.

Soon Giovanni noticed a change. Mary was coming down for her meals. She began to cook and one day she said she was going out to do some shopping. He was amazed at the difference.

## Chapter Twenty

Simon Satchelor left the enquiry confused. He was still shaking with a mixture of anger and resentment as he reached the pavement and the fresh breeze hit him. He

decided to walk and made his way to Prince's street and sat on a bench looking up at the castle. Slowly the turmoil in his brain subsided and he could think more clearly. He positively recalled the moment when he had turned to Dr. Hussein his anaesthetist and requested permission to continue to do the second side. Had he got it wrong? Did his colleague misread the patient's condition? Was he persuaded because he wanted to cooperate?

His mobile beeped. Julie's name appeared.

'Where are you?' her voice strident and demanding.

'I'm on the way home,' he said not wanting to explain where he was.

Mechanically he walked back to his car and drove.

Julie could see from his appearance, his grey drawn face that all was not well.

'What is it darling?' she asked, 'you look exhausted.'

'I don't know; it didn't go the way I expected. I thought we would just review the medical details and he would say we did all we could. Instead he raised a question that I struggled to answer.'

'What was that?'

'It's one I've asked myself time and again since. Should we have stopped after the first hip? Was she really fit for us to continue? Was it bravado on my part so that I could collect more cases of double hip operations? The question haunts me; it won't let me go.'

'Darling,' Julie said stroking his face, 'try and relax, I'll get you a drink and then come to bed.'

Simon was not at peace, he lay staring up into the dark wondering, trying to recall that moment when he decided. Is it possible that he misheard, misunderstood? That it was he alone who made the decision? Was he so keen to show his prowess that he had lost sight of his patient's needs? He went over the question again and again but was always left with it hanging over him.

Over the next few weeks he returned to the subject time and again. It was beginning to affect his work. He felt as if he was not in control. He couldn't concentrate. He began to make silly mistakes.

## Chapter Twenty-one

Mary had an appointment at 10 am to see her Counsel representative. She had come alone as Giovanni refused to continue with the claim.

'We've lost her,' we can't get her back. All the apologies and compensation won't change anything. I can't go along with this any more.'

Mary knew he was right, she knew that no amount of searching, blaming, finger-pointing would bring Eleonora back but she needed to hear it said, she

needed to see the face of the surgeon as he admitted his mistake. Somehow she believed that would help her to rebuild her life, a life that was hanging on a thread.

She sat in the small dark office waiting. At last she heard footsteps, the door opened and a man entered.

'Sorry to keep you waiting, it's Mrs Boxalli? I'm Paul Lloyd, the manager of the chambers,' he said extending his hand. It was warm and soft as if the owner was indecisive. He wore a dark suit wrinkled at the shoulders with a sprinkling of dandruff.

'Please sit down,' he said pointing to a chair in front of his desk, a desk littered with papers. He began to hunt for Eleonora's papers. She watched him as he sorted through the pile.

'They're here somewhere,' he said. Then, 'Ah! Here they are,' and lifted up a bundle of files tied with a red ribbon.

'Mrs Boxalli, I have asked you to come this morning in order to have a preliminary chat before you meet counsel. I have all the papers, copies of the hospital records and the surgeon's statement. I wanted to ask you a few question which will help counsel to represent your case.'

The word 'case' jarred in her mind. She wanted to say it's not a case it's my daughter's death we are talking about but refrained.

'Tell me Mrs Boxalli what is it that you would like us to do?'

Mary paused for a moment. She had gone over that question many times and had argued with Giovanni about it. Trying to find the right words she said,

'I want to know what happened. Should the surgeon have gone on to do the second hip and why did Eleonora get an embolus? I was told she had been given blood-thinning medicine to prevent it.'

'Thank you Mrs Boxalli, I will leave you now and Counsel representing your case will talk to you in a moment.' Mary waited in the small room. She felt incredibly alone. She looked around and saw a thin layer of dust settled on the bookshelves and an almost full ashtray. They need a new cleaner she thought just as the door opened and her advocate came in. Mary was surprised, somehow she expected it would be a man instead it was a woman presenting her case. She was tall, slim and smartly dressed in black with a white collar and a striped tie.

The Advocate had noticed the slight surprise on Mary's face, it was something that she had met many times and it no longer troubled her.

'Ah Mrs Boxalli I am pleased to meet you. My name is O'Donnell, Patricia O'Donnell. I will be representing you in court.' Mary watched as she sat down and sorted her papers, her fingers were long and slim with tobacco staining. She had smelled it on her as she came in. Sitting back in the chair with her hands in her lap, she began.

'These cases are never straightforward and the hospital always has the upper hand. They provide the documents from which we try and build our case. So I would like to go over the details.'

'You and your daughter Eleonora went to see the surgeon because of her failing independence. She had suffered from arthritis for many years.'

'She was confined to a wheelchair,' murmured Mary.

'Yes I read that in the notes. He diagnosed bilateral hip disease and advised surgery.'

She picked up the consent form and read it.

'Your daughter signed this consent form which explained the operation and the fact that there was a risk associated, even a very small risk of death and your daughter in sound mind read it and signed. She even agreed to have both hips done at the same time if her condition allowed it. Is that your understanding Mrs Boxalli?'

'Yes I was present,' she mumbled.

'I'm sorry I realise this must be very painful. I'll try and be as brief as possible. As far as you were concerned the operation went well, the surgeon said as much?'

'Yes he was very pleased that he had been able to do both hips at the same time.'

'And so were you?'

'Yes it was a relief to know that she wouldn't need a second operation.'

'When you went to see her after the operation, how was she?'

'She was fine, a bit sleepy and her speech was a bit slurred but the nurse said it was normal due to the painkillers she'd had been given.'

'How was she the day after the operation?'

'Much better, she was sitting out of her bed and was reading when we arrived.'

'I am sorry to ask you this but when did you find out that something was wrong?'

Mary thought for a moment.

'I think it was on the fourth day; we were at home when the telephone rang. I was told that she had collapsed and was being taken to Intensive care.'

'Was that when they told you about the pulmonary embolus?'

'Yes.'

'Did you have an opportunity to speak to her after that?'

'No she never woke up.'

'Thank you Mrs O'Connor that's all I need. Please stay here as long as you wish there is no hurry,' said Patricia touching her lightly on the shoulder as she left the room.

Mary tried to calm her thoughts but the interview had vividly brought it all back. It was as if it had happened yesterday so sharp were the images. Mary could see Eleonora sleeping peacefully not realising that she was dying. She sat trying to digest what she had heard. She had forgotten about the consent form; she had helped Eleonora to complete. A hand lightly shaking her shoulder suddenly interrupted her thoughts.

'Let's go home,' said Giovanni lifting her gently to her feet. He had decided to come after all.

## Chapter Twenty-two

The Monday morning meeting of the Medical Protection Society (MPS) had almost come to an end when Cynthia, the manager, entered. She was tall and willowy with short blond hair and came from a long line of lawyers. Both her mother and father were in the profession but she had settled for management. She was in charge of distributing the new cases.

'Sorry to interrupt the meeting but we have just received a new case from the Hospital. One of the surgeons is accused of negligence. I need to allocate it to someone today please.'

'I'm free,' said Patrick MacIntyre a newcomer to the firm. 'I can take it on.'

'Is that agreed?' asked Cynthia looking at the chairman. He nodded it was about time the new boy took on a big case. It will be interesting to see how he fares.

'OK Patrick come to my office and I will let you have the papers,' she said.

A week later Simon received a phone message to attend a conference at the MPS office to meet his Advocate and to discuss the case of Eleonora. Fortunately, it was late afternoon so he was able to go after he had finished his clinic.

Although he had been a Consultant surgeon for fifteen years, this was the first case of litigation involving a death that he had been involved in and he was very anxious. He knew that if it went wrong he could be struck off.

The two men had not met before. Both were facing a new experience and were apprehensive about the other's ability. They eyed each other suspiciously. Simon saw a fresh-faced young man hardly out of school. Patrick faced an older man whose anxiety and mistrust he could feel. They shook hands. Patrick was the first to speak.

'My name is Patrick MacIntyre. I will be your legal representative at the court. I will go over the details and explain what will happen. Have you been in court before?'

'Yes but not in a fatality.'

'It will be very similar. At some stage I will call you to the witness stand and will ask you to describe in your own words what happened. Use your normal medical language. If there are any words the judge doesn't understand he will ask you to explain. Don't talk down to the judge, be yourself. Now I would like to go over the case with you if I may.'

## Chapter Twenty-three

As the date of the court hearing approached, Mary became more and more anxious. Giovanni heard her mumbling in her sleep. He tried to make out what she was

saying but it all seemed jumbled. Then she would take a deep breath and for a moment stop breathing. Frantic he would sit up and reach for her in the dark, then her breathing would start and he would fall back into bed shaking and sweating. At breakfast the following morning he asked her again,

'Please Mary do you still really want to go through with this? It's not too late to walk away. No one would blame you if you did.'

'What about Eleonora? Wouldn't she want me to find out the truth?'

'Mary,' he said in desperation. 'She's gone, please, she's gone.'

The case had attracted a lot of attention. It was mentioned in the local papers and on TV. Everyone was talking about it, as it was not often that a patient sued a surgeon for negligence. On the morning a huge crowd had collected outside the courthouse spilling out onto the road, eager to get into the court. Although the police had been called to control the mass of people, they were generally good natured and patient and were exchanging quips with the officers many of whom they knew personally.

As the town clock struck ten the huge wooden front doors swung open and the crowd surged in eager to claim the best seats. Particularly popular were the front seats in the gallery. In his chambers Judge Aidan McGregor was checking that he had everything he needed, his pen, notebook, mobile set on silence and cough sweets.

Finally he stood in front of the mirror and straightened his tie, a strong somewhat lined face with a small grey goatee stared back at him. He checked his teeth, ran his tongue over them, no bits of food. He was ready. He paused at the door leading into the court took a deep breath and pushed it open. He was conscious of his footsteps as he walked slowly towards the raised desk.

He heard the Court Officer call out,

'All rise for his Honour Judge Aidan McGregor.' Reaching the desk, he turned to face the court, stood for a moment viewing the scene and bowed. Then he sat down smoothing his gown around his legs. He turned to the jury box where twelve members of the public were seated.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, first of all I would like to thank you on behalf of the court for giving up your valuable time to help decide this difficult and sad case. It is a case in which a surgeon is accused of carrying out inappropriate surgery, which may or may not have led to the death of a young woman. First you will hear the case for the prosecution that's is the arguments against the action of the surgeon, the defendant followed by the defence which will attempt to justify his actions. You will then retire to decide which of the two you believe is true and after your deliberations, will provide the court with your decision.

The Court Officer called out,

'You may all sit.'

Mary was alone. Giovanni had decided at the last minute not to come.

'I'm sorry Mary I just can't cope with it. To hear our daughter's life displayed in front of all those strangers is too much.'

The Judge's voice interrupted her thoughts.

'Will the prosecution please set out its case?'

Patricia O'Donnell, adjusted her long black robe over her shoulders, walked a few steps into the centre of the court, paused and glanced around. Then looking straight at the judge she began to speak, her low melodic voice reaching all corners of the court. A hush fell as the onlookers strained to hear her every word.

'Your Lordship, it is the prosecution's contention that a young life just on the threshold of adulthood has been extinguished by the incompetence of a surgeon whom she trusted, the leader of a team working within one of our famous teaching hospitals. We will show that it was an injudicious decision by the surgical team that lead to her premature death. I will call upon an expert who will testify that the decision to operate on both hips at the same time was ill-founded and amounted to negligence.'

Miss O'Donnell paused, stood for a moment bowed her head and returned to her seat. The Court went quiet as the judge could be seen writing. After a few moments he looked up.

'Will the defence please present its case?'

All eyes turned to a figure that rose from the other side of the court. Patrick MacIntyre was a small compact man with dark hair combed closely to his head. He was clean-shaven.

'My Lord,' he began. This is a tragic case of a young woman crippled with arthritis who sought surgical help to avoid a life confined to a wheelchair. She had been reviewed at regular intervals and was steadily deteriorating. Ultimately she agreed to hip surgery. The surgeon a highly regarded specialist in hip surgery performed the operation on both hips. It went well and her immediate postoperative condition was satisfactory. Unfortunately, she suffered from a rare complication a Pulmonary Embolus from which she succumbed. I will be calling the surgeon to describe the situation that faced him and the reasons for his decision.'

'Thank you Mr MacIntyre, Miss O'Donnell please proceed.'

'I call Professor Stephen McDowell, Professor of Orthopaedic surgeon at the Glasgow Royal hospital.'

'I am Professor McDowell head of Orthopaedic surgery at Glasgow Royal Hospital. I have a PhD and an FRCSE.'

'Now Professor, please tell the court your opinion of the surgeon's decision to operate on both hips at the same session.'

'Your Lordship I have had the opportunity of reviewing the hospital notes and the post-mortem findings. I have spoken to the surgeon, the anaesthetist and the theatre staff. I am satisfied that the decision to offer this young woman hip replacement operations was appropriate despite her age, given the severe crippling

condition that she was experiencing. As you will know hip replacement operations are normally offered to older patients.'

As she listened to the Professor, Mary remembered the day when Eleonora's condition had deteriorated so much that she was crying out in pain as she struggled to get out of bed onto her chair. The tablets she was taking were making her so sick.

Professor McDowell was continuing,

'The decision to offer her hip surgery is not questioned. I am in agreement that she needed both hips to be replaced. The issue is whether both hips should have been replaced at the same sitting. Having completed the first hip operation, the surgeon had a choice. He could have stopped at that point and planned the second hip operation at a later date. The patient would have been woken up and allowed to recover. She would still have been at risk of a pulmonary embolus but the risk would have been reduced. However, in fact as the first operation went very smoothly he decided after consultation with the anaesthetist to proceed to the second hip operation. It was a difficult decision. We will I understand hear from the surgeon so I don't want to anticipate what he will say.

Miss O'Donnell stood up and caught the eye of the Judge.

'Yes Miss O'Donnell.'

'Your Honour I would like to ask the Professor a question concerning the conversation he had with the surgeon.'

'I think this not the right time. As the surgeon will be giving evidence later, I think it would be preferable that we hear his account of the events. You would then be able to question him directly.

'Thank you your Honour.'

'Professor please continue.'

'Where a patient has both hips involved with Arthritis, it is usual to replace both but at separate operations. There is however a significant amount of literature describing double hip operations so that is not so unusual'

Miss McDonnell rose,

'Your Lordship may I ask the Professor a question.'

'Please do.'

'Professor this is clearly the crux of the matter. In your opinion is it always acceptable surgical practice to carry out a double hip operation?'

'I cannot answer yes or no. It is a question of judgement made at the end of the first operation.'

'How is that decision made?'

'The surgeon asks the anaesthetist his opinion about the condition of the patient.'

'What specifically does the anaesthetist look for in order to determine the patient's condition?'



'He would note the patient's blood pressure and pulse and review the chart to see how stable they had remained since the beginning of the operation. He would examine the patient directly, is she pale and/or sweating. He would estimate the blood loss and confirm that she/he has had adequate replacement.'

'Professor I believe you have had access to the anaesthetic records?' said Miss O'Donnell.

'Yes I have reviewed the notes, in particular the records made at the completion of the first operation.'

'What did you find?'

'At the completion of the first operation, the patient's observations were a little conflicting.'

'In what way?'

'The pulse had increased by 10 points but the blood pressure was unchanged. She had lost an estimated 150 mls of blood, which was not replaced. She was noted to look pale and was sweating a little. It was at that point that the surgeon asked permission to continue with the second hip. The fact that she looked pale and was sweating should have alerted the team that something was wrong. I believe on that evidence he shouldn't have continued. I think what he decided to do was unacceptable even though the patient wanted it and had given permission to complete the surgery at one time. I would not have made the same decision and I believe that what he did constituted negligence.'

'Professor, I think you have reached the nub of the issue. In your opinion what is the difference between an error of judgement and negligence?'

'Your honour, this can be a very difficult and is often misunderstood by the layman.' Let me begin with the question of negligence. A medical practitioner is negligent if she/he fails to provide a treatment, which is of a standard consistent with the accepted norm. An error of Judgement on the other hand is an action take by a medical practitioner who despite taking all the correct precautions still results in failure.

'Miss O'Donnell any more questions?'

'No Your Lordship.'

'Mr MacIntyre?'

'No questions.'

'I think we could adjourn for lunch,' said the judge looking up at the clock. 'This afternoon we will hear the Coroner's report and the Hospital enquiry.'

Dr Oliver was puzzled. Sitting at the back of the court, he had listened carefully to the account given by Professor McDowell and in particular his statement that he had reviewed the notes, then why didn't he read my note the one I made at the time. I am sure I wrote that he we should wait. What happened to that note? As soon as he could he stopped Miss O'Donnell. XXXX

## Chapter Twenty-four

It was on the third day that the defence began its hearing. After being sworn in, Simon Satchelor turned to face his Advocate Mr Patrick MacIntyre.

'Mr Satchelor please tell the court your qualification.'

'I am a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. I have been the head of my unit for fifteen years. I specialise in Hip surgery.'

'What is your experience in hip surgery?'

'I carry out more than 200 hip operations a year, about four a week.'

'How many double hip operations have you performed?'

'About twenty.'

'I would like you now to tell us about your management of the late deceased Eleonora.'

'At the age of five years or so, Eleonora began to experience aches and pains in her legs which was eventually diagnosed as Juvenile Arthritis. Despite a wide range of treatments her condition deteriorated so that by the age of eighteen she had become wheel chair bound. I had reviewed her conditions at intervals and it became apparent that unless something was done she would never walk again.

X-rays of her both hips had shown severe destruction of both hip joints. After a discussion with Eleonora and her parents it was decided that despite her youth she should undergo replacement of both hip joints. We talked about trying to do both hips at the same time and I agreed to try.'

'Eleonora received the usual pre-op preparation including a blood-thinning agent to prevent thrombosis. Having completed the first hip, I asked my anaesthetist if the patient was fit for me to proceed to the second. He said she was and we proceeded. At the end of the operation her condition was excellent and I was very optimistic that she would be pleased with the new freedom that the operation would bring.'

Miss O'Donnell was listening very intently to his answers when she had a strange feeling that she had seen the doctor before. She studied his face closely. Then she remembered it was about a year earlier at the golf club. He was clean shaven then but now had a closely cut beard. For a moment she hesitated would this constitute a conflict of interest? She decided not as they hadn't seen each other for over a year. She continued,

'Excuse me Your Honour I would like to ask the surgeon a question.'

'Yes Miss O'Donnell please proceed.'

'Mr Satchelor, you know that my expert has on the basis of reviewing the records including the anaesthetic notes, concluded that the decision to continue to the second hip was negligent. What do you say in reply to that?'

Simon turned to look at the speaker. He had not observed her closely before. He then recognised her despite her formal attire. It was Pat from the Golf club. He almost choked but managed to control himself.

‘Your honour, medicine and surgery are not exact sciences. Decisions are dependant on judgements based on observations and experience. My anaesthetist and I made a judgement to the best of our ability based on the observations we made at the conclusion of the first hip. I would make the same decision again.’

Mary had leaned forwards to catch every word that Mr Satchelor had said. Now she sat back confused by the two opposing opinions. She turned to her Advocate and whispered,

‘Surely they both can’t be right?’

Miss O’Donnell picked up on what Mary had said and asked,

‘Then Mr Satchelor, are you saying that Professor McDowell is wrong in his view?’

The court went quiet. Mary could feel a distinct tension in the air. Mr Satchelor cleared his throat and said,

‘In the end medical decisions are matters of opinion not always a question of right or wrong.’

Miss O’Donnell pursed her lips and glaring at the surgeon asked,

‘Mr Satchelor, let’s get practical for a moment, do you consider that the death of this young twenty-two-year-old woman with all her life ahead of her was avoidable?’

Mary could hardly breathe as she waited for his answer. She saw the surgeon’s face tighten as he struggled to respond,

‘That’s not a fair question, I don’t know.’

‘You don’t know?’ Miss O’Donnell repeated. ‘Mr Satchelor you are on trial accused of negligence and you reply that you don’t know? Is there anything you do know?’

‘Miss O’Donnell,’ interrupted the Judge, ‘please stop, you are harassing the witness.’

‘I object your honour; the doctor must answer the question it is crucial to the whole case.’

The judge nodded.

‘But please reframe your question.’

‘Mr Satchelor let me rephrase the question. On the balance of probability did the second hip operation increase her risk of getting a fatal DVT?’

‘Yes I suppose so.’

‘Is that yes Doctor?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why is that?’ Mr Satchelor was now visibly sweating and wiping the moisture from his forehead. He knew that his whole career was on the line.

‘Because she would have been immobile for a longer period....’

Miss O’Donnell interrupted,

'And that would have increased her risk of thrombosis, isn't that so?'

'Yes.'

'So can we conclude that if you had finished the operation after completing the first hip she would be alive today?'

'No I didn't mean that,' Simon fumbled over the words.

'What did you mean doctor?' She said looking directly at the judge. She felt ten feet tall, a beacon searching for the truth.

Glancing at the wall clock Judge Aidan McGregor interrupted,

'I think we can break for lunch. Doctor you can answer the question in this afternoon's session.'

There was a flurry of noise from the back of the court as the journalists rushed out to write their reports and get them back to the press desk as soon as possible.

Simon sat and waited for the court to empty. He felt drained and needed to get away to somewhere quiet to collect his thoughts. He made his way to the back of the court building where he knew there was a small garden with benches near a pond. As he approached one he saw Miss O'Donnell now without her gown sitting going through her notes. His first impulse was to ignore her after all they were on opposite sides but she saw him and smiled.

'Simon I didn't recognise you at first. I'm sorry I gave you such a hard time, it's my job you know.'

'Yes I understand, trying to find the truth.'

'Why do you say it so flippantly?'

'Because I don't think there is just one truth like you legal people believe.' But then I don't suppose you would understand?'

'Try me,'

'OK, have you heard of the Rashomon Principle. I guess all advocates know it?'

'No tell me.'

'OK, in the 1950's long before you and I were born, a Japanese film was released called Rashomon. It presented a challenge to the conventional view that there is only one truth. In the film four passers-by see an incident in a field, I think a young woman was raped and her husband killed. Each on-looker described what he saw but each gave a very different view of what happened. The film leaves the viewer questioning whether they all could be right? In a strange way I think this case deals with the same issue. I think both versions, the expert's and mine are correct. How does your law deal with that?'

Arriving back home, Mary let herself into the house. She felt exhausted and confused by the events of the day. Giovanni was waiting for her.

'How did it go?'

'I don't know I am so confused. How can two experts say the exact opposite? It's crazy, surely the judge must see that one is correct and the other wrong but which one?'

'I don't know dear I think we will have to wait and see.' He yawned. 'I'm off to bed are you coming?'

'I think I'll stay down for a while I need to unwind,' she said kissing him on the cheek.' She watched him as he slowly climbed the stairs hanging on to the bannister. He's getting old she thought we both are. She entered the snug switched on the light and sat down on the settee. Her thoughts were in a tangle. She now wished she hadn't started but knew that she wouldn't rest until she knew the truth. But something was nagging at her. The comments by Simon troubled her,

The idea that there wasn't one truth, that both could be right jangled in her thoughts. She wanted some sort of finality. To be able to lift the weight of blame from her shoulders and free herself from the burden of guilt that she still carried ever since the car accident. Despite the assurances from the counsellor that guilt had not gone away.

The afternoon session began on time. My Satchelor returned to the stand and Miss O'Donnell took up her position in front of him.

'Mr Satchelor just before lunch you told the court that the second operation increased the deceased's chance of getting a pulmonary embolus, am I correct?'

'Yes.'

## Chapter Twenty-five

The following day the Judge invited both advocates to present their summing up. The court was buzzing with excitement. This is what everyone was waiting for. Most had already decided that the surgeon was guilty; they just wanted to see his face when the decision was pronounced.

'Miss O'Donnell will you please present the case for the prosecution.'

'Your honour, this is a case of the unnecessary death of a young woman at the hands of an experienced surgeon. Eleonora first began to experience symptoms of arthritis in her childhood. Despite many treatments, it got slowly worse. It was a severe progressive form of arthritis so that at the age of twenty-two she was chair-bound.'

Miss O'Donnell continued,

'At that youthful age she was imprisoned by her affliction. In the past nothing could have been done for her but today thanks to the ingenuity of our engineers and

doctors an operation is available. It is usually offered to much older patients, men and women in the twilight of their years but this young woman's circumstances were different. Without the operations her life would have been confined to a wheel chair.

She was lucky to find a surgeon skilled in the procedure that offered her a release from her imprisonment. She was naturally apprehensive, who wouldn't be but she had every confidence in her doctor, a very experienced hip surgeon whom she had known over many years. They discussed what he would do and agreed that if her condition allowed he would replace both. This is in fact what was achieved. Her initial post-operative condition was excellent and it was expected that she would have a very successful outcome. But on the fourth postoperative day she suffered what turned out to be a fatal complication and died soon after. The question that has been raised and which is the subject of this case is, was her death an unfortunate accident or was it as a result of the failure of the surgeon and his team to take reasonable care to avoid it. Your Honour you have heard two conflicting opinions both of which are feasible.'

'I beg a favour, the mother of the deceased would like to say something, would that be in order Sir?'

The judge nodded.

All eyes turned on Mary as she rose and walked unsteadily to the middle of the court her face frozen with fear. She knew she had to do this, to do it for Eleonora's sake but she dreaded it. She was not a confident speaker she had never spoken in public. She looked around and saw Giovanni sitting at the back. He had come. He said he wouldn't come to the court but as the hours passed he was torn by indecision. Finally, he knew he couldn't stay at home he had to be there for Mary. He arrived just as she began her address

'Your Honour, please excuse me. I am not an accomplished speaker I can only say what is in my heart.'

'Please continue,' said the Judge.

'It is every parent's hope that his or her child will grow up to be healthy and strong. Our daughter Eleonora was a gift from God, our only child. She was a normal vigorous baby and we looked forward to her growing up into a beautiful healthy young woman. But it was not to be. When she was five or six years of age the affliction that was to cripple her began insidiously. We at first denied it was occurring but as her disability became obvious we sought professional help. We were delighted to see Mr Satchelor. We had heard of his reputation and had every confidence in him. He was very kind and considerate. When the time came to make the decision he was very sensitive to our needs. The decision to have the surgery was not difficult for Eleonora. She had come to the end of her tether. I think if the operation had not been available she may well have decided to end her life; she was

so desperate. As it was she was looking forward to when she would be able to walk again. We went to see her the night before and found her calm and ready. The day of the operation came and by then she was a mixture of apprehension and anticipation. We saw the surgeon before the operation and he assured us all would be well. The hours seemed to drag and then it was over and we were thrilled to hear that he had done both hips at the same time. He was very happy with the operation.'

'We were over the moon. At last our beautiful daughter was going to be able to live again, to enjoy the freedom that most of us take for granted. To be able to go for a walk to be like others, not trapped in a chair for the rest of her life. It is difficult to describe our joy, it was as if God had shined his face upon us, we felt so blessed. And then her sudden collapse, the pain, our hopes were on hold it was as if fate would never release her from its grip. Then the final cruelty not to wake again, not to say goodbye it was so brutal unbearably brutal.'

As she whispered those words her face screwed up, her body shook and tears thundered down. All in the court were feeling her pain every parent shared her grief. Finally, as if having said all she wanted to say, having poured out her grief, she bowed up her head and rushed out of the court. She didn't hear the spontaneous clapping that rang out. Her distress was evident to Giovanni her face contorted with grief as he wrapped his arms around her.

Inside the courtroom the tumult slowly calmed. The judge banged his gavel several times.

'Quiet please the case will continue,' called out the court official.

## Chapter Twenty-six

'Will the defence please proceed?'

Mr MacIntyre stood up and walked to the centre of the court. He spoke with a Glaswegian accent.

'Your Honour Ladies and Gentlemen you have heard the impassioned speech by my Honourable friend and the moving account given by the deceased mother.'

'I do not intend to disagree with any thing that has already been said. I do not challenge the facts but would like to put a different slant on them. When a patient is afflicted by a disease and seeks the help of a doctor that person is putting their trust in someone whom our society has given that great privilege. Doctors have been required to show through hard application and dedication a commitment to their profession fulfilling the onerous training and undertaking the obligations inherent in that profession. When you see a doctor you know that person has promised to do everything in their power to help you. This is not a vain promise. It is something that they have sworn to do and to do in the eyes of their contemporaries. They are always mindful to do their best. My Satchelor was one such person. He had taken on the responsibility of a surgeon specialising in hip surgery. You have heard him speak and describe the challenge that this young patient presented. You have heard him

explain the difficult decision that he and his anaesthetist had to make that fateful day. They decided to complete both hip operations at one time so that the patient wouldn't have to endure another operation. This decision was made with due consideration of the facts, the condition of the patient and was agreed both by the surgeon and his anaesthetist. Your Honour, the facts presented to you are not in contention. We believe that the action taken was an error of judgement and not I would contend in any way negligent.'

The jury filed away to deliberate on their decision. They were mindful of the weight of their decision. It could destroy the career of a surgeon

The following day the court reconvened. On the stroke of ten, Judge Aidan Macgregor entered the court. The assembly quieten as they waited expectantly to hear his verdict. Neither Mary or Giovanni were present, they had decided to stay at home and await the result.

'Ladies and Gentleman You have heard arguments from both the Prosecution and the Defence relating to the untoward death of a young woman following an operation. It is often assumed that when a death occurs following surgery that someone must have made a mistake and therefore should be held responsible. We have heard the words of an eminent surgeon explaining the difficulty he faced in coming to his decision to operate on both hips under the same anaesthetic. In the event he chose to do so. In doing so he may have precipitated the death of this young woman. He may have made an error of judgement or was he neglectful and failed in his duty of care and is therefore responsible for her untimely death.

He turned to the jury.

'Have you come to a decision?'

He was handed a small piece of paper. He stood up and read the verdict to the court.

'We find the accused not guilty of negligence.'

Mary sat hunched forwards in the car staring ahead. Her eyes were blank as she tried to accept the verdict. Slowly a sense of outrage began to grow in her mind. The jury were wrong. How could they have got it so wrong? He killed my daughter and he is going to get away scott-free.

Giovanni glanced at her through the car mirror and could see that the verdict had shaken her, bringing back all the memories of the past year. He struggled to find the right words to help her accept the decision. As if speaking to himself he began, 'I wouldn't have wanted to be on that jury, what a difficult decision they had to make.'

Mary turned to him her eyes blazing.

'No it wasn't, any fool would have found him guilty. I'm going home.'



## Chapter Twenty-seven

The house was in darkness when Giovanni returned home. It was strangely quiet as he let himself in and called Mary,

'I'm home.' There was no answer so he called louder. That's strange he said to himself as he mounted the stairs. Mary's door was open and he could see a small area of light on the floor. He entered the room; she was lying on the bed apparently sleeping.

'Are you alright?' he asked and then he realised that there was no sound.

'Mary,' he shouted rushing towards the bed. He stopped, her eyes were open but there was no movement. He threw himself onto her dead body.

'No! No!' he shouted.

Giovanni sat half listening to the announcement from the plane intercom.

'Welcome to Venice - the city of Love.' He felt so alone as he recalled the events of the last week unable to take it all in, the death of his daughter and the suicide of his wife. Finally, he stood up and followed the line of passengers as they left the plane and made their way to the baggage carousels. He only had hand luggage and quickly passed through passport control and customs. It was a familiar journey remembering it from his childhood. He knew where he had to go.

The queue for the orange Alilaguna Service boat was short and soon he was seated with others being jolted about as it speeded across the lagoon.

'Santa Maria del Giglio.' He shouted over the crashing of the waves. After three or four stops, the boat arrived at the station and he alighted. It was only a short walk to the Teatro. As he came around the corner and saw it, memories came flooding back. He stood tears pricking his eyes as the aria from La Traviata swelled into the night.





