

Arc of Light

A collection of short stories

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Contents

Hat
Heinz
Hotel Rooms
Mines
No Strings
Rolex
Show me yours
The Chard
The journey
Trainee
Who is my father?

My Hat

It was about 5.30 in the evening when John usually left the house for his daily walk. A man in his early fifties, he had retired to Mombasa Kenya after a busy professional life. He was now enjoying the freedom that retirement had given him. He chose this time because the heat of the sun was subsiding and the welcome breeze off the sea was cooling the air. He cautiously crossed the road with care watching both sides. The road turned left and continued for another half a mile before turning left again. He had been sitting for too long at his desk and his knees felt as if glued together like stiff boards but after walking for a short distance they loosened as if oiled and he could move more freely.

He passed a few small makeshift cafes and shops made of scrap wood with corrugated roofing in which women were hard at work cleaning large cooking pots. He chose the right hand side of the road to face the oncoming traffic and walked past a wall of Bougainvilleas glowing in the late sun, their red, yellow and orange flowers appearing to be growing from one bush. About fifteen minutes later, John approached the Mosque, a grand building in white plaster with a prominent minaret and a large now empty car park. He had just missed the 4 pm call to prayers, a loud, bass intoning which echoed for miles. People, walking like him, passed by and exchanged friendly Jumbos'. Beyond the mosque the buildings thinned out until he reached a field of dead maize stems. The recent rains had sadly come too late to save them and the cobs were now only dried up husks.

Around the bend of the road was a small ramshackle shamba seemingly made of scrap iron. A man, his wife, many children, goats and chickens lived there. Some bunches of aging bananas were hanging up ready to sell. The hut was built within an empty plot no doubt illegally but until the owner developed it, the place was home. This despite having no access to water, electricity or sanitation.

John and the man were friends. They greeted each other whenever he passed by. They didn't know each other's names but John was called *rafiki*- friend and the man always admired his floppy sun hat. Some months earlier before he had returned to the UK, John had given it to him as a gift, which the man seemed to really value. He insisted on giving John two hobs of corn in return.

Some weeks later they again greeted each other but the man now had a tale of woe. A thief had broken into their home and stole what little they had including the hat. He told John this story as he admired John's new hat.

'OK', John said, 'when I next go to Europe I will leave it with you hoping that this time it won't be stolen.' They bade farewell and John continued on his walk. He passed a herd of goats grazing by the roadside under the watchful eye of a young girl; their coats of brown white and black glistening in the fading light. She had tied the ewes to rocks to discourage their young from roaming too far. Some were rubbing themselves against a low rock wall.

Although the road wasn't busy, passing cars went at excessive speeds throwing up clouds of dust. It was as if, driving fast even if you didn't need to do proved something perhaps a sign of masculinity. John's walk usually lasted about thirty minutes, which was about enough for him. Yesterday John approached the small-dilapidated shack and saw the man sitting in the shade with the hat on his head. He was surprised indeed amazed to see it after so many months.

'What happened?' He asked surprised by its re-appearance, and in his slow broken English, the man explained.

'Every Sunday, like many local folk around here, I walk with my family to the beach. It's not far, about 20 minutes. I carry the little one otherwise it would take us twice as long. Last Sunday we were on the beach and I was playing with the children when I saw it.'

'Saw what?' John asked.

'The hat,' he replied'

'The hat?' John said.

'Yes, the hat,' he said.

'I don't understand,' John said bewildered by this rat-a-tat exchange.'

'Well, it was like this. As I explained I was on the beach with my family when I saw the hat.'

'You saw the hat?'

'Yes, I saw the hat.'

'Where?'
'On the beach.'
'Yes, I know on the beach, was it lying in the sand?'
'No.'
'What then?'
'Someone was wearing it.'
'Who?'
'I didn't know him.'
'What did you do?'
'First, I had to make sure it was the same hat.'
'How did you do that?'
'I went near to him and looked at it,'
'Wasn't he surprised?'
'No, I don't think he realised what I was doing. When I saw that it was the hat, I went up to him and asked him where did he got it from?'
'What did he say?'
'He said that he bought it from a friend. I then told him that it was mine and I wanted it back. At first he looked surprised but when I threatened him, he gave it to me.' So there you are, its back where it belongs. They shook hands and John went on his way.
Some weeks have passed since then and the heavy rains were about to fall. The family was busy preparing the land for sowing the new crop of maize. As he rounded the corner, John saw that the man was wearing his hat at a jaunty angle.
'I am a Britisher,' said the hat owner proudly and they shook hands.

Heinz- Catch Up Cottage

He could feel her eyes on him. He took a deep breath and stifled the sudden sense of excitement. He wanted to look at her, to smile but he had made a fool of himself before thinking that he was the object of someone else's attention when it was the person sitting behind. How stupid he had felt, about to speak and then realizing. He had been caught out like that before.

She was tall and slim, dark hair with brown eyes, wearing skin tight black tights, a short top with a low cut neckline just low enough to make him want to look down it. He could feel her coming nearer. We must have met somewhere he thought racking his brains, no doubt she will know his name and he will remember hers. Now she was at his table and speaking, a soft sexy voice.

'Excuse me, may I have the Ketchup please,' she asked and his fantasy world collapsed like a balloon.

'Yes, yes, of course,' he stammered handing her the familiar red plastic bottle.

'Thanks,' she said walking back to her table. He watched her, her buttocks gyrating slowly beneath her dress and then he sensed it. What a fool I am, always building castles in the sky and never learning, always hoping. I should have had some bright funny remark.

'Sure, I love it too. It's my favorite. I hope you enjoy your meal etc.'

Then he thought about the tomato sauce itself, what was its appeal? It had a pleasant enough taste and was made of healthy ingredients but that wasn't the reason was it? Had it become an icon like Coca Cola, something that the 'in' people used to show that they were with it? Is that the whole story, he wondered? What was it that made one product succeed and another fail? He really didn't understand but there seemed to be something more to it than that.

Why do generations after generation use it? Hadn't it become part of the fast food world, fish and chips, hamburgers, Hot Dogs, sausages and much more.

In 1896, Henry J Heinz saw an advert in New York for 57 styles of shoes and thought 57 was a lucky number, so it became Heinz 57.

A movement interrupted his thoughts. He looked up. She was coming back. What for he thought? He was frightened to catch her eye, too embarrassed, too hopeful.

'Thanks,' she said placing it on the table, smiling.

'Haven't we met somewhere,' she asked, 'your face is very familiar?'

He didn't recognise her but said, 'I'm sure we have, where do you live? Anything to keep her from leaving. They fell into an easy conversation. It appeared that they had both gone to the same Uni but probably hadn't met.

'What is your name? He asked,

"Kate,' and yours?

'Bob.'

Years later they would recall that meeting and laugh about it. She admitted that she could have got the sauce from any number of tables but liked the look of him. He would admit that he felt so shy, desperately trying to find something to say to keep her talking but not knowing what. It all seemed so unimportant now but then it was as if his whole life depended on what he said.

They had called their home Ketchup Cottage and were happy to explain why to anyone who wanted to know. 'We met over a bottle of ketchup,' she would say laughing, 'you don't believe me?' and then she would recount the whole story.

Hotel Rooms

Matthew had decided to take a trip on his own and just go where the mood and the road took him. He had set off about three weeks earlier stopping at Motels, and small hotels. So far he had had no difficulty in finding suitable places.

It was getting late when he nosed his Merc into the hotel car park, collected his hold all from the boot and made his way to the foyer. Having cleared hotel reception, he found his way to the fourth floor to room 411. Inserting the card into the lock, the green light blinked and the door opened with a click. As he slipped it into the wall slot, the room lights flared revealing a typical modern hotel room, a large double bed, a cupboard, a desk and in the corner, the bathroom and toilet. It had been a long day and he was relieved to be stopping and resting for a while. He helped himself to a whisky from the room bar and flopped onto the bed craving sleep. Suddenly without warning that sense of doom forcibly returned, bringing with it a strange empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, He was reminded that he was no longer married.

After 15 years his wife had left him, abandoned him, finding she no longer loved him. He had sensed things were not right. She had become irritable and bad tempered, often shouting at him for no tangible reason. But when the break came, it hit him like a body blow. It was as if he had been winded unable to gasp for air. He stood speechless desperately trying to collect his senses. She insisted that there was no one else and in a way that made it worse. He didn't believe her and looked for signs of the other man, or woman perhaps, he fantasized. Later when she was out he searched her computer and found emails from a person R but no name, Light-heartedly he figured he would rather be jilted by a man than a woman but then in a more serious moment realised he might never know.

He thought it would blow over as many of their previous arguments had but when the heavy white envelope flopped onto the hall floor, he knew something was amiss. She was in the kitchen when he opened it and read.

Divorce proceeding have been instituted by.... he stopped reading.

'What the hell is this?' he shouted.

'What are you talking about?' Came from the kitchen.

'This letter about divorce proceedings.'

'I told you, so why are you surprised? I'm moving out tonight so you won't be troubled by me anymore.'

That was three weeks ago and he was still trying to come to terms with his new status and the changes in his life which came with it. At first he didn't know what to do. So many things were different, going to bed on his own and waking alone. No breakfast on the table. He found himself watching the toaster in a dream like state. At times he felt she was still in the house and he called out to her before the silence reminded him that things were never going to be the same again. He felt tears welling up and he sometimes shouted in anger.

Helen woke with a start and for a moment was floating on an unknown sea. As her vision sharpened, she focused on the wall in front of her, sat up and struggled to get up out of bed. Pushing at it, she remembered with a start that she wasn't at home. Where was she pondered? In another room? Looking around she saw a large picture window and could just make out a panoramic view of a lake, and then in a flash, she remembered, I'm waiting for my lover, the words tingled in her mind. She smiled to herself at her wicked thoughts. At just forty, Helen had it all, a happy marriage, good job, her own home and many friends.

They had met many times before in different towns, different hotel rooms, spent many nights together and parted. It was a wholly sexual affair. She loved her husband and children but she just needed this extra excitement to brighten her otherwise dull domestic life. She checked her watch and realised he wouldn't be there for another two hours. I can sleep a little longer. She settled down and reset the alarm clock.

They had sat next to each other on a flight to New York. It all happened so suddenly as if preordained. She knew nothing about him apart from his name Marcel but it didn't matter. In the dull light she could see that he was quite handsome and they chatted amiably as strangers do. He suggested they had a drink while they waited for their different onward flights, she agreed. They had about an hour to spend and began to talk about themselves. It was if they had known each other for years so it didn't strike her as strange when he asked her for her mobile No.

She didn't expect to hear from him but a week later his number lit up on her mobile screen. She recognised his voice immediately and felt an unfamiliar excitement rising in her throat. He was going to be in Manchester and wondered if they could meet. He suggested an up-market hotel, the cocktail bar at 7 pm the following evening. She struggled with her conscience and then why not she decided. Her husband would be away on business and the children were at a holiday camp.

She packed a slim fitting black dress which she knew showed off her figure. He was waiting for her when she arrived. She recognised him and responded to his kiss on both cheeks. After a few drinks she felt herself becoming more talkative laughing easily, she was enjoying herself. Almost unaware of what was happening she allowed herself to be escorted to his room. It was moments later that they were in each other's arms. He was

very accomplished and she responded willingly to his lovemaking. A note on the dresser when she awoke suggested another meeting this time in London. So began a regular liaison, once a month in different cities. It became part of her life giving her an extra excitement.

It seemed like moments later, that the alarm sounded and she was awake. She felt alive, excited by their imminent meeting and already anticipating their pairing. Showering and dressing she had put on her favourite dress and the perfume that he had chosen. She smiled at herself in the mirror, not bad for forty she thought. She poured herself a G & T with ice and lemon and sat watching the news on the TV. The cool familiar taste stung her lips and aroused her further, feeling the tension building in her groin. She was ready and eager, waiting for his footsteps and the sound of his key in the door.

He must be late she thought as the minutes ticked by. He will ring any minute now and come bursting through the door engulfing her in his arms. She waited breathlessly. Then a familiar ring on her mobile shattered the silence, a message. It must be from him. She opened the Inbox, there it was. Click and she read it,

'Sorry can't make it, ever.' Five words that momentarily destroyed her life.

Disbelieving what she had read, she re-read the message her vision now clouded. I was so looking forwards to being with him and she collapsed into flood of tears. She bawled like a child. Why couldn't he have faced me and told me directly? Why chose such a cowardly way of breaking it off? No matter how or why she argued, she was distraught with disappointment.

In the next room only a wall, a panel thickness away, Matthew heard tears and cries of anguish. Placing his ear near to the wall he could even hear her breathing, her gasps and sniffs. They were so close and yet a world separated them. He listened and wondered what had brought her to this state. What tragedy had befallen her and why was she alone. He could hear no other voices; a woman alone in a hotel room sobbing her heart out.

Should he go and offer her help, solace? Would she accept his good intentions? Would she reject him and tell him to go away, to mind his own business? He struggled with indecision; he had always had difficulty making decisions, to way up the pros and cons, to evaluate the issues. It had always been like that, ever since he could remember. His wife had hated him for it

'Why can't you make up you mind?' She would shout. 'What do you want to do, to do? Tell me, don't just sit there not speaking, I need to know what you are thinking. Say something, anything? But not silence I can't bear your silence.' Over the years it had got worse to a point where he was almost paralyzed when an issue had to be decided even something simple such as, where shall we eat tonight, what restaurant would you like to go to?

So he was again in that situation, what should he do? Nothing, just leave her to cry and torture herself or knock on the door and offer help. He sat struggling with indecision. In the end he stood up and took a deep breath. I am going to be a man at last, I am going to do something positive no matter what, he said to himself.

There was a soft knock on her door, at first she didn't hear it but then again, yes someone was knocking. It must be the chambermaid, but not at this time she thought. Who could it be? Was it Marcel? Had he changed his mind and mislaid his key? Her heart leaped and she rushed to the door. She was about to open it when she paused. She noticed a small spy hole. Bending forwards, she lowered her eyes and peered through it.

A complete stranger was standing at the door. In that glance she noted his strong broad shoulders, bright blue eyes and a shock of light brown hair. Even in that moment of surprise she had time to appreciate his good looks. What did he want? Had to come to the wrong room? She hesitated and then tentatively eased the door open leaving it on the chain.

'I,' he hesitated, 'I heard you crying, I'm next door, the walls are very thin, I thought you might need some help. I wanted to help you. I'm sorry.' he floundered for words. Helen looked at him and then a slow smile crept across her face. Suddenly she was not so sad after all, was this Sir Galahad who come to rescue a maiden in distress?

'Wait a minute, I won't be a moment,' and she darted back into the room and quickly dressed and made up her face, washing off the smeared mascara. In a flash she had a new face to present to the world and with it crept an inner confidence.

No Strings

Angela stood at the crossing, waiting for the traffic lights to change. Dressed to kill, she was the object of many admiring looks from the men, and jealousy from the women passing by. She had on a skin-tight black skirt, the hem way above her knees. An equally tight scarlet bodice top loosely laced at the front and cut low to show the swell of her thrusting breasts. Pointed toed stiletto heeled shoes pushed her almost off balance and clattered as she walked. Suddenly her phone rang startling her and others standing with her. Opening her tiny red shoulder bag, she fumbled to press the receive button, knowing exactly who was calling.

'Well, have you got someone lined up?' he asked abruptly

'Yes, I met him earlier today and set it up,' she retorted confidently.

'How much will you ask for?'

'I think this one will be good for a grand,

'Good! I need money urgently. Did you have to make any promises?'

'What exactly do you mean - what sort of promises?' she answered. Why does he always have to think that, she wondered, yet again?

'You know what I mean, honey,' he replied and she could hear the threat in his voice.

'Yes, I do! And I wouldn't! No strings,' she replied defensively. In a quieter voice.

'OK, OK. When are you meeting him?' He asked.

'He said after work, at the Black Horse Pub.'

'Right, make sure you don't give him any details he could follow up on. Make it convincing. Get the money and bring it to me – intact!'

Before she could answer, he had rung off without even a goodbye. Feeling deflated, she set off down the street. It was a fair way to the pub, but she needed the exercise.

Why had he changed so? She was doing what he wanted, wasn't she? She wouldn't cheat on him – in any way – so why was he making threats? And where was the fun and laughter they used to have? He had changed? And when were they going to start the new life he promised? She had got him quite a lot of money – and what had he brought in?

Her thoughts went back to when she had first met him. It was at a business party, a friend of one of her bosses. Tall, a rugged, slightly rough type with a mop of blonde hair and deep blue eyes, he was her ideal, so mature compared to the amateurish advances from the immature boys she was used to. He had made a beeline for her and they had immediately hit it off. They spent the evening together, laughing, talking, sharing personal

stories and mocking observations about the others in the room. He said he was divorced and was living alone. She was vague about her background and told him she was temporarily staying with a friend but was looking for a place of her own. He pursued the relationship, and she was swept off her feet. Here was the future, a handsome man who wanted her, who said he would help her get a job, who had invited her to move in with him.

The friend with whom she had been bunking up on the sofa in her tiny one room flat was glad that Angela was going, but was also a good enough friend to be concerned about her – asked her if she was sure this was the right thing to do.

'Don't you think you are rushing it?' she had queried. 'What do you really know about him? Where he works, for example? And what is this job he has promised you that he's told you will make you so much money?' But Angela was blinded by this new-found, longed-for love, and wouldn't listen. 'Sour grapes' she thought, not listening to the wisdom in her friend's comments.

His flat was not what she expected. She had imagined something sophisticated and exotic, but this was a small, two-roomed shabby place above a shop, and in a low class area of town.

'Just temporary,' he explained. 'I am looking at something better, I don't want to move until I get the right place.' She couldn't find out where he worked. He was vague about it; his hours odd, his moods varied, but the lovemaking bound her to him like a strong thread. It was her first experience of breaking out of the confines of her background, and she was mesmerised by him. It didn't take long for him to persuade her to 'freelance' as he called it.

'People are suckers' he explained, 'and you are one hell of a good-looking chick.

'We can make money together like this, and then we can start up in a big way, open a company, take a holiday abroad.'

'When will we get married?' she asked him plaintively.

'Oh, when the time is right. Let's sort everything else out first' he replied evasively. And besotted as she was, she listened ... and learned . . . and set about her 'job'.

And now here she was, making her way along the main street, her heels click-clacking on the stone pavement, her thoughts clattering equally in her mind. Confusion – about everything – was uppermost. When she reached the Black Horse Pub, her feet sore from the long walk and the tight shoes, she paused, straightened her windblown hair, then pushed open the heavy swing doors and entered the darkened space. The pub décor was old style, dark beams, small mullioned windows, little snugs with cushioned seats around the walls, and a bar at the far end.

She waited until her eyes had accommodated to the gloom, and then spotted him over by the window. He waved, and she teetered over and joined him. He stood up and gave her a peck on both cheeks. He was an older man, rather weary and worn looking, reflecting a tired attitude to life. This assignment was a fillip in his boring routine. She had 'accidentally' bumped into him in the street, dropping her bag of groceries. He had immediately expressed concern, helped her pick up her possessions, and insisted he buy her a coffee in a nearby café. She played her role cleverly as Mark had taught her, looking worried and stressed. When he pushed her to say why she was so sad, she let a tear trickle down her cheek.

He, like others before him, was bowled over by this tart, beautiful girl, with the combination of a sexy outfit and an innocent face. She had put her handkerchief to her face, shaken her head, and then thanked him for the coffee in a muffled voice, and got up, saying she had to go. She had learned this approach worked well, it roused their curiosity.

'Can I meet you later and you can tell me what's the problem?' he said anxiously, hesitant to let this opportunity that had fallen, almost literally, into his lap, go. And after pretending reluctance, she had agreed.

'Come and sit down,' he now fussed. 'What can I get you to drink?' he asked solicitously. Still playing the troubled young innocent, she looked down, paused and then said shyly,

'Something soft.' He looked at her, her dark eyes so soulful and sad, the soft kissable mouth, the alluring figure, and could feel the attraction stirring in his groin. He pulled himself together and went to the bar.

'I was worried about you after you left me,' he said when he returned, putting their drinks on the table. He looking deeply into her eyes and took her hand.

'Are you o.k.?'

'Er, yes, of course,' she began bravely. Then she let her face crumble, and her eyes fill up.

'I don't think so' he replied tenderly, brushing away a tear that trickled slowly down her cheek. She looked down at her drink and stifled a small sob.

'What's the trouble?' he asked, his face compassionate and caring.

'I really don't want to talk about it, it depresses me so much,' she muffled through the hankie.

'Come on, it can't be that bad?'

'Oh yes it can! The truth is, I'm desperate.'

'Tell me about it. Maybe I can help' he said persuasively. She looked up at his face and gazing at him with hope mirrored cleverly in her eyes said,

'You are so kind. I'm alone, I have no one, and I don't know what to do. I'm in serious trouble. My parents are dead; I've lost my job. I can't pay the rent for my small room. I'm in arrears and the landlord said he's going to keep the few things I have and evict me tomorrow if I don't pay up', and she began to cry.

'This is getting harder,' she reflected inwardly. She really didn't like conning people. They trusted her even if the men had other intentions as well, and this one reminded her of her father. He leaned forward and patted the tears dry with his own handkerchief. Taking her hand, he whispered,

'I can't bear to see you so unhappy. You are too young, struggling alone in the world. Let me help you. How much do you need?'

'I couldn't,' she hesitated. 'I couldn't. You are so kind but I can't accept it,' prevaricating, as Mark had taught her.

'Win their confidence, act reluctant, but use your sexy looks. They'll fall over themselves to help little Miss Innocent,' callously he had instructed her

'I want to help you. I am getting very fond of you and I can't bear seeing you suffering. Let me be your friend. Let's sort this problem out and then we can get to know each other better. Now tell me, how much do you need?'

'£1000 to clear everything,' she whispered, burying her face in her hands. He leant forwards and slowly removed her hands.

'It's a lot, but I can manage it. Now dry your eyes. Should I give you a cheque right now?'

That gave her a moment of alarm. Mark had stressed not to take anything, sign anything, do anything that could lead to be traced back.

'I'll have to give the landlord cash tomorrow or I'll be out on the street with only the clothes I stand up in,' she answered in a tremulous voice. 'Won't a cheque take time to clear? I don't really know about such things . . . ' She let her voice tail away, and put her hand to her head, as if puzzled.

'You're right, of course. I wasn't thinking. It's too late now to go to the bank, but I'll go in the morning and draw out the money. Then we can meet and I can give it to you.'

'You can go and settle with this man who's being so harsh with you – I'd like to meet him and tell him what I think of his callous behavior. We can meet after I finish work tomorrow night, and then we'll talk about getting you a job and getting to know each other better.'

Stifling a nagging worry, but there was nothing else she could do – who carried a thousand pounds around in their back pocket anyway? she reasoned. It would just have to do tomorrow, and then she would have to disappear. This was getting too dangerous. Suppose she met any of them in the street again! She would have to talk to Mark about everything. She couldn't go on like this. She let a smile slowly cross her face and taking his face in her hands she kissed him lightly.

'Thank you, thank you. I don't know how to thank you enough. It will only be a loan; I will pay you back as soon as possible,' she promised as Mark had instructed her.

'A man will believe anything listening to you, but looking at your tits,' he had told her.

'Don't let's talk of that right now, my dear' he said. 'I'm happy to help you, with no strings attached. Now, shall we meet here, same place, say 9.30 tomorrow morning?' They finished their drinks, and kissed goodbye, Angela managing to press her breasts against him in doing so.

'No harm in keeping them on the boil,' Mark had told her. They parted outside, he with a feeling of excitement that he hadn't felt in years; she relieved, taking a deep breath of fresh air after the smoky pub interior. I've done it again, was her first relieved feeling.

Mark will be pleased with me. We'll have a nice supper, and curl up together in bed, and after I pick up the money tomorrow. I'll explain I don't want to do it any more; now we should start a proper business, take a holiday – maybe a honeymoon!' She allowed herself to enjoy this train of thought as she trudged home, wishing that she had asked 'the client' as she now thought of them, for five pounds there and then for a taxi. She let herself in with her key and called out to Mark. He was slumped in a chair, with a glass in his hand.

Drinking again? she thought, her mood plummeting. He was so difficult to talk to when he'd had a few, something which was happening more and more lately.

'You're late,' he spoke curtly without a preliminary greeting.

'Did you get it?'

'It went well. He fell for it. He wanted to give me a cheque, but of course I said no. It was too late for him to go to the bank, so he's going to do it tomorrow. Then we'll meet and he will give me the money - a thousand pounds. She went over and attempted to kiss him. He pushed her away, and stood up, his face furious.

'You mean you haven't got any money, you stupid little fool? Tomorrow he may have cooled off, changed his mind...Have you got a contact? A telephone number?' Aghast at his attitude, she stumbled a reply.

'No, I didn't ask. You told me not to get personal. If I'd ask him for his, he would have asked for mine.'

'I need the money tonight!' he shouted.

'You'll get it tomorrow,' she pleaded. 'He couldn't get any tonight. But he promised. You'll see.'

He suddenly stepped forward and hit her savagely across her face. She fell back seeing stars.

'You're a stupid little bitch. I can't trust you to get anything right.'

She looked up at him disbelievingly from where she had fallen. Half sitting up and shaking her head, she screamed,

'You can't trust me? Have I ever failed you? Haven't I brought you thousands of pounds, never keeping any for myself, trusting it all to you for our future.'

'What future? You stupid little whore. Do you really think I want to be tied to you?'

'But you promised ...' she began, tears pouring down her face. How much had he drunk? He was always belligerent when he had been drinking, but she had never seen him like this before, nor had he ever hit her.

'Promised what? That I'd marry you? How could you be so gullible? I'm not marrying a little tramp like you.'

'You got what you wanted – in bed – and I got what I wanted - the money you earned for me. Now I'm in shit! I owe the bookmakers, and they've threatened to put out a contract on me if I didn't take them money tonight and you've let me down.'

He tottered on his feet, then his glass slipped from his hand. She noticed the empty whisky bottle lying by the chair. Shakily he sank back in the chair and put his head in his hands. She looked at him from the floor. How could she have been so blind? So trusting, so . . . stupid? Thinking this was life, adventure, excitement, fulfilment . . . love!

Quietly she got up, went through to the bedroom, put her few belongings in a tote bag, pulled on her old tracksuit top over her flashy clothes and slipped out of the still open front door. The cold damp air hung around her, matching her inner mood. She walked aimlessly along the darkened street, real tears this time trickling down her cheeks; the bruise on her face not hurting half so much as the bruise in her heart. Sobbing sounds wracked her body.

'Where can I go now?' she shouted finally giving vent to her feelings of frustration, anger and disappointment.

She could no longer keep up appearances; no longer needing to pretend to be the smart young woman-about-town with a lover to justify her existence. She felt terribly alone, just like she had when she had heard her parents shouting and then seen her father walking away never to come back. And suddenly, like a flash, she knew what to do. Why had it taken her so long to realise how much she needed her? How much she had done for her and how she had repaid her by running away. And in that instant, she dialled the number,

'Mum. . . please forgive me.... Can I come home?'

Rolex

A sudden flash of light attracted my attention. It was from a shiny object on his wrist, a watch, one that had something very special about it. Although not a watch fanatic, I recognize a classic timepiece when I see one. This one I learned was made by Rolex, a company with a long pedigree and whose name was a household word.

'That's a magnificent watch,' I said admiring its simple lines, and then Suraj told me how he got it.

'It belonged to my Grandfather. He was one of the thousands of Indians who came from the Punjab to build the Uganda Kenya railway. After he had retired, we children often sat on the porch of our house in Mombasa spellbound as he looking up to the stars and told us how he came to live and work here.'

'I was 18,' Grandpa had said. 'When my father saw the advert from the British East Africa Company advertising for workers to build the railway, he had turned to me and pointed at the advert and said,

'What do you think about going abroad and working to build a railway?'

Grandpa had left school with poor results and was at his wit's end not knowing what he wanted to do with his life. He knew he didn't want to work in his father's workshop. He had been there and found the noise and dust too difficult to bear. So it was that the young man, Suraj's grandfather, found himself on a Dhow sailing west across the Indian Ocean to Mombasa, a coastal town on the East coast of British East Africa as it was then called. It

was a rough crossing and he was very seasick. He had never been on the sea before and marvelled at its immensity. Alone for the first time, he felt so small and unimportant and feared for his future. Leaning forward and in a low voice, Grandpa confided in us children that he often regretted his decision but couldn't turn back.

Having arrived in Mombasa he was taken to the depot at the Port where the material for the railway was being unloaded, 30-foot lengths of rail, over a million sleepers together with bolts and plates. He joined hundreds of others helping to unload the items that would eventually become the railway lines. The 1000 mm. single gauge track was to run 525 miles northwest from Mombasa to Kisumu on the Shores of Lake Victoria, passing through dry scrub land, along the rift valley and rising to 10,000 ft. at the equator. It was to be a major engineering feat. Started in 1896, it was completed in 1901 during which time, 2498 workers had died from accidents, Malaria, lion strikes etc. In all 1200 bridges were constructed, the most ambitious being the one across the Tana River. He told us so many exciting stories but the one we all remember was the occasion when after the railway had been completed, he and many others were given a reward, a priceless timepiece which he then proudly showed us. It was a Rolex watch, one of the finest Swiss watches of the day. We sat in awe as he brought it out from a special case together with a photograph of himself receiving it from the Company boss. Each of us was allowed to touch it gently.

It was many years later that the Rolex again came back into Suraj's life. Unbeknown to him, the watch had gone missing. Grandpa thought that it was taken from his clothes when he was swimming but he wasn't certain. He had looked high and low but eventually gave it up for lost although he never really got over it. The watch was a part of his life; his blood was metaphorically speaking mixed up with it. The old folks continued to live in Mombasa, having decided to stay and make their home there after the railway was completed. Suraj's father was the youngest of Grandpa's three sons, and he an only child.

Out of the blue, Grandpa had received a letter from the Rolex Company in Nairobi asking him to go and see them about his missing Rolex. It appeared that the watch had turned up in Brazil when the police raided the home of a well-known thief. They found a dozen or more watches including three Rolexes. Checking the unique number CY2386754, they traced it to the British East Africa Company in Mombasa and through them to my grandfather. He was overjoyed to see his old friend again, it was as if he had been given back some of his life. But, he had decided that it was too valuable to wear so he had bought a heavy safe and kept it there under lock and key.

Suraj was working abroad with an international company when he got a letter from his uncle to say that Grandfather was very ill. It was some weeks after Grandpa's passing and his cremation that Suraj plucked up courage to visit the family home and clear out his things. Grandma had died some years before and Grandpa had lived alone with the support of the family.

The house was dark and musty when Suraj entered. With the drawn curtains it had a distinctly creepy feel. Most of the furniture had gone and what was left was covered in white cloths now grey with dust. In his will Grandpa had left the contents of his safe to Suraj, but where was the safe, he asked himself. He began in the main bedroom opening the cupboards and drawers still filled with grandpa's clothing now smelling of the dry dusty odour of mildew. He knew that if he was patient he would find it. Eventually he did, in the most unlikely place, in the kitchen under one of the sinks enclosed in a large plastic bag which effectively concealed its outline. Dragging it out onto the kitchen floor, into the light, Suraj studied it for a while before inserting the key. The lock was stiff and he had to ease it several times before it turned and the heavy door swung open.

Suraj didn't know what to expect as he peered into the dark interior. There seemed to be very little there, some dusty papers, a few boxes of jewelry and then he saw it, the Rolex watch box which he remembered from his childhood. It was the one that Grandpa

had been given by the railway people on his retirement. Next to it was the photograph now brown with age of Grandpa receiving the watch from the company's manager. Suraj studied the picture for some minutes, how young he looked, it was so many years ago and for a moment he was that small boy listening to his Grandpa in awe telling them about the Railway. He carefully brought the box into the light and sat with it on his lap for some time, almost reluctant to open it as if in some strange way the watch had vaporized over the years.

The box opened easily revealing the watch nestling in a satin covered bed, the strap curled around it. He lifted it out and tentatively put it on his right wrist, it fitted perfectly. It had stopped at 5.30 pm. the time he later learned when his beloved Grandfather had died. Today it never leaves his wrist and from time to time he looks at it and touches it as the memories of that time so many years ago come flooding back, and of the people no longer with him who made him what he is today.

Show me yours

I think my eyes must have doubled in size when I first saw that beach. There is something quite mesmerizing about a wide expanse of pale yellow sand that stretches as far as the eye could see. On my left, it merged with the white cliffs of coral that seem to literally climb out of the sea. To my right, it continued until it seemed to disappear in the haze of the early morning sun. It was a glorious spring day in Bermuda, a coral atoll five hundred miles east of New York City but a million miles away from the noise and hurry. The cool breeze carried the smells and sounds of the ocean, that unmistakable freshness as if I was breathing pure oxygen and the faint calls of the birds, seagulls, terns and waders as they hurried about their business -survival.

I was eight years old and had arrived in this place as a result of a series of events not of my making and which unknown to me would shape my future.

One was the outbreak of the Second World war, the second was that I was Jewish and the third was that my father sent me, my two brothers and my mother here in order to escape the holocaust that he anticipated would befall England after the invasion by Nazi Germany.

We left England on Board the SS Orbita anchored in Liverpool harbour in early 1940 during the phoney war -that strange calm that followed the declaration of war until late 1940 when the air raids began. I have vivid memories of the sirens those frightening wailing sounds that tear at your guts. They still do to this day although they are now come from building sites telling the men it is time to stop work Then they had a different and much more sinister meaning.

But I am getting away from my story. We, that is my mother and two brothers, set up home with another woman and her son David. Mum had met her on board and they immediately took to each other and since both families were fatherless, it seemed a good idea to join forces and live together. The six of us, the two women and the four boys settled into small stucco faced white cottage in the Parish of Paget, a province just outside Hamilton the capital and towards the central area of the main banana shaped island. Our local beach was Coral Beach so named after the fine pink coral sand which covered it. Unlike ordinary sand, it runs through the fingers easily even when wet. When examined closely it is made up of millions of fine pink fragments of coral from the reef that surrounds the island.

Next door lived a Bermudan family with two daughters; the oldest Mary Jane was I soon learned a tom boy. She was about my age, with a pretty smile, loose blond curls and a delicious almost evil laugh, deep and reverberating. I think it was that which first attracted

me. I loved to hear her laugh. I remember she always wore shorts showing off her deep brown legs. Her hair was usually plaited and tied up with a ribbon. We used to meet after school and go down to the beach by crossing the large sand dunes held up with alfalfa grass. We imagined the dunes were large waves which allowed us to hide and chase each other.

One day after school we had gone to the beach when I found a half finished pack of Camel cigarettes, the ones that are in a paper pack which is torn open at one end to allow the cigarettes to be tapped out just like in the movies. I picked them up and showed them to Mary Jane. She seemed to know all about cigarettes whereas I had only seen them in the films. She got very excited about them and wanted one.

‘What for I asked?’

‘To smoke you ass, what do you think? Come on give me one,’ she pleaded.

But something inside me said no so we had a sort of bargain and it ended up somewhere I never expected

She suddenly blurted out, ‘If you give me one I will show you mine’ You won’t believe it but I wasn’t quite certain what she meant, so I said, ‘What do you mean?’

And before I knew what she was doing, she had peeled off her shorts and pushed her naked pelvis into my face. I didn’t know where to look. I must have gone bright red but she didn’t seem to notice so I peered closely but there really wasn’t any thing to see.

‘Where is it?’ I said, in a serious rather confused voice.

‘Don’t be daft, it’s here’ she said pointing to a small pink fold between her legs.

‘Is that it?’ I said somewhat disappointed, thinking that there would be something a bit more obvious, a bit like what I had.

It took me a long time to get over that experience but my next encounter with a girl was to be very different and rather wonderful but that came later. The incident with Mary Jane should have ended there but somehow my older brother got wind of what had happened and threatened to tell our mother. I felt very embarrassed and guilty and didn’t want her to know so I pleaded with him not to tell mum. He really took advantage of me and began to boss me about, getting me to do all sorts of chores for him including cleaning his shoes and carrying his books and if I resisted he would whisper under his breath,

‘Mary Jane Hutchinson, Mary Jane Hutchison,’ and I would blush and do what he wanted. This went on for a number of year until one day, I stopped doing what he wanted and when he threatened me I said,

‘OK tell Mum.’ He did so and she laughed and that was the end of it. All that fear and shame for nothing.

The Chard

I heard it clunk as it fell onto the floor from my bedroom table. I stared at it, not at first recognizing what it was.

‘Good God,’ I shouted. ‘I remember you, a comma shaped artifact like the end of a finger, sienna coloured like the earth. I recall where you came from.’ The scene flooded back, a rough piece of undeveloped land in the Old city of Jerusalem. We had been walking towards the Western Wall: we always went there when we were in the Old City. There was something mystical and beckoning about it although I didn’t believe in that sort of thing. On the way we stumbled across some rubble, the ruins of buildings that had recently been demolished. We were looking down to avoid falling.

I knew what it was; I recognized it immediately, the broken handle of a teapot. There must have been hundreds of them strewn amongst the rubble. It's not that they are rare but that they are old and were probably made by a Jewish potter many years ago. I held it in my hand and examined it. The surface was rough and unpainted, not heavy but solid. I imagined the hands that shaped it, the fingers that smoothed it and when finished the stove that fired it. Then it would have been used to make a watery thin tea drunk without milk in the cool of the day by a family sitting around a low table. I imagined the scene; the bearded father, the attentive wife and two children fighting over the cakes.

Holding it firmly in my hand I followed Diana as we walked towards the wall, down some steps and there it was, the wall so high that we had to strain our necks to see the top. Rough-cut stones larger than a man were slotted into place and held without cement relying solely on their symmetry cut by hand with simple tools the vertical from a weighted line and the horizontal from the surface of a bowl of water. It was already busy with men wearing black their heads covered, davening, the sound of their voices drifted up to us. We separated, Diana going to the woman's side and I walking down to the men's. Reaching the wall its rough worn surface became even more apparent. I leant forwards and pressed my outstretched hands against the cold stone. Even as I recall that moment I am flooded with emotion. There was a moment when I imagined I was no longer me but part of that multitude that had visited there over the centuries, men and women from all parts of the world.

Some years later I returned and again walked towards the Wall. I was reminded of the many times I had been there before but this time I was alone and the realization brought tears to my eyes. I don't know how long I stayed there, unmoving as if time had stood still. But then I focused on the wall itself, seeing the many pieces of screwed up paper stuffed into the crevices. Each a handwritten message for some event to take place, someone to be found, another to be healed, each a request for some miraculous event to occur. I stood for a moment wondering if I should do the same, but my innate disbelief overcame my desire to do so and after a while I walked away. I returned to my hotel room that seemed now to have become a prison holding me in.

The Journey (based on a true event)

The torn charred fragments of parchment, like black edged snowflakes floated onto the road, then lifted by the wind, dropped onto the hedgerows, the gardens and the fields. The old man watched bewildered from behind his curtains. He had lived all his life in the village marrying a local girl who had died five years earlier. Now he was on his own. When the German soldiers had left, he crept out and collected as many fragments as he could. They had strange writing on them, and he thought they could be of historical importance so he brought them inside, put them into an envelope in a safe place and forgot about them.

The wheels of the plane screeched to a halt as it landed at Fryderyk Chopin Airport in Warsaw. Anna had tried to persuade Szymon to come with her but he didn't want to make the journey. The memory of his years on the run from the Nazis was still so vivid and painful. He rarely spoke about them and when Anna wanted to find out what really happened, he went silent and refused to discuss it.

'It's a period of my life which is buried, I don't want to visit it again, ever.'
Anna realised that his mind was made up and she stopped questioning him.

They had met on an exchange program when he came to America to study archaeology. She was an undergraduate at the same college and Szymon was a mature student in his final year preparing for his exams. Like so many love affairs theirs was a chance meeting. A friend was having a farewell party and he was invited by one of her girlfriends. She was immediately attracted to his foreign accent, his dark complexion and his neat mustache. She realized he wasn't American, but didn't know where he came from until he told her, a small town in Poland with an unpronounceable name.

'No one has ever heard of it.' He smiled showing a row of white teeth.

Within two weeks they were married and gradually she got to know a little more about him. In particular, his life during the war when his country was invaded by the Germans and he had lived in hiding with the patriots. One night, when they were lying close together in front of the fire, Szymon began to tell her about his life as a child. His parents were simple folk and he was brought up on a farm near a village called Bogusze, on the outskirts of Grajewo. It had one main road, a Town Hall and a synagogue. About a third of the population was Jewish. He had gone to a school in the neighbouring town. When the Germans came, he was seven years old, tall for his age and was rounded up with the men who were being taken to a concentration camp. He had managed to escape and had lived in the hills until the liberation. He still had nightmares about the violence and the shootings and in particular he still dreamt about the synagogue going up in flames.

Despite feeling isolated and vulnerable, she had decided to make the journey alone. She knew the name of the town and the district but had no other information. Checking into a local airport hotel she handed the desk clerk a small piece of paper on which she had written the one word *Bogusze*. He shook his head. He had no idea where it was but said he would find out so she left it with him. At breakfast the following day, she went to the desk and gave her name to the reception clerk. Standing there waiting for her was an older man whom she had not met previously. He spoke to her.

'You want to go to Bogusze? I know the area and the town; it's a long way. You can get there by train and then taxi,' he told her.

The local station was a ten-minute drive. It had two platforms for local and through trains. She bought her ticket and within 10 minutes the train had arrived and she boarded. It was a steam train not unlike the ones she had seen in her childhood. The carriages had several compartments, each seating six people, three on either side facing each other. Each compartment had a sliding door which isolated it from the corridor. She found her seat in a compartment which was already occupied by four people, two couples both in their late sixties wearing clothes which had seen better days. After a while one of the women took out some food, black bread and sausages and offered it to her. Anna found the sausage spicy but not unpleasant. She tried to make conversation but her companions spoke very little English and her Polish was minimal. After that they rarely spoke staring out of the window with the occasional utterances which she could not understand.

She felt lonely and out of place and began to wonder if this had all been a terrible mistake and she should have listened to Szymon. Had she a right to dig into his past, another person's past even someone you loved, especially when he had not wanted her to? Was she not in danger of trying to take over his life? Something she had seen her mother do to her father until he hardly said anything. It was as if the very heart of him had been torn out. Anna tried to control her imagination but what if she found out something that Szymon was ashamed of, that he had been involved in some despicable cruelty? She had a recurring vision of her husband with a gun in his hands shooting German soldiers.

Very tired after the long journey, Anna must have fallen asleep because she recalled being shaken by one of the travelling companions who was pointing to the station name, 'Treblinka.' A shudder went through her as she read the name. She knew all too well what had happened there, she could never forget it. As a small girl she had seen the early Pathé news reports of the Americans entering the concentration camp, showing the appalling images of emaciated, weakened men and women hardly able to greet their liberators. Although it was so many years ago, that memory was always with her. She mused, how can you ever forgive such inhumanity? She thanked her companions, picked up her luggage and stepped onto the platform. She stared again at the sign hardly able to believe that she was really there close to the site of one of the most heinous death camps of the Second World War.

An English voice brought her suddenly back to reality.

'You look a bit lost, where do you want to go?' it asked. She turned to see a tall well-dressed man carrying a black leather attaché case.

'Thank you. I would like to go to Bogusze, my-my husband was born there,' she said shyly.

'It's not far from here, there's a bus but it's better to go by taxi. You will find a taxi rank just outside the station through that door.' He said pointing to his right.

'Thank you very much,' she said, curious to know more about him but by then he had gone.

Outside she found the taxi rank with one rather rusty broken down car waiting which she presumed was the taxi. Leaning into the open window, she asked the driver in her broken Polish to take her to Bogusze. He motioned her to get in. They drove through open country with wooded hills in the distance. It was so calm and peaceful; was it possible that these fields were the very ones where so many atrocities were carried out? It was so difficult to imagine. Time erases even the most appalling events, she thought. The driver indicated one field now grazed by sheep and in matter of fact broken English told her that 10,000 Jews had been massacred there.

The ten-minute journey took her into a small village. She paid the driver, got out and found herself in the town square uncertain where to start. She made out a notice board in the middle of the square and went over to examine it. It was a simple map of the town. She was able to identify a school and a church and then she saw a Jewish star and realised that it must be the synagogue. She decided to walk and see what she could find, feeling very conspicuous in her crumpled clothes and haversack. Although there were very few people in the town centre, she hoped she might find someone who spoke a little English. Meeting no one, she plucked up courage and walked slowly towards the synagogue.

Anna saw an old man pottering in his front garden. Smiling she walked up to him and said very slowly.

'I-wonder-if- you- could-help-me? My-husband-was-born-here-and- I- promised-him -I would come to find out what happened to his town. During the war, he managed to escape the German round up and hid in the hills. He wasn't really able to come back because..... ' and she stopped.

The old man looked up from his gardening. He had a wrinkled, kind face with unkempt white hair. In his 80's she guessed. He looked at her for a moment and then said in broken English,

'So many people can't come back here because of what happened,' and then he paused and she could see he was thinking.

'Wait! I have something I want to show you,' and he disappeared into the house. He was away a long time and as the minutes passed, she began to wonder whether he had decided not to return. After a while the front door opened and he was walking slowly towards her like an old man does. In his hands he was carrying an envelope—very carefully—as if it contained something very precious and very fragile. He laid it gently on the garden table and gestured to her to open it. The flap was not sealed and she carefully slipped her fingers into the envelope and tipped its contents onto the table.

She looked with amazement at the charred pieces of what looked like paper as they fell onto the table and then she noticed something which almost took her breath away. There was lettering on the pages, strange shaped lettering which she immediately recognised. It was Hebrew, hand written without vowels. She was still not certain what she was looking at but then she noticed that the paper was not ordinary paper but seemed to be thicker, parchment she thought. Then, as if in a dream, she realised that the charred torn fragments must be from a Torah scroll, the Holiest of Holies, the sacred manuscript from which the weekly Jewish prayer was read in the synagogue. For a moment she was stunned, tears filling her eyes as she gently touched the charred edges. She now knew why she had taken this long journey to Poland, to the town of her husband's forebears. It was a moment she would never forget.

'Thank you so much,' she stammered in her poor Polish. He watched her as she wiped her tears and smiled weakly at him. She could see his years of pain and fatigue, the deep wrinkles around his eyes and his crooked figure and then slowly as if the memory was too painful, he began to speak.

'I was in my garden when they came, that day, three truckloads of soldiers, German soldiers shouting and gesticulating. I rushed back into my house but watched from behind the curtains. It was not wise to let them see you. I saw them go to the synagogue, break down the door and after a while smoke began to appear and they came out with three or four heavy scrolls and began to tear at them. Then they set them alight. Very soon the bits of burnt paper were all over the place, flying in the wind. Charred fragments were blowing across the road into the gardens, it was as if large burnt snowflakes were falling. The brutes were laughing and kicking at the pieces. I saw one urinating onto a pile of them. After about half an hour they left. I waited and then I went into the street to see what I could recover. Pieces of parchment were still strewn over the street blown onto the hedges. I could see the writing on them and I knew what they were. Carefully I collected a few and put them into an envelope. I don't know why I did it but it seemed the right thing to do, to preserve this ancient writing, this sacred record of the pain and suffering of the Jewish people.

Anna had listened patiently to what he had to say, not wanting to interrupt. Finally, she leaned forwards and putting her arms around his shoulders, held him and shared his memories, his suffering, as he recalled that terrible day.

'Although I am not Jewish,' she recalled him say again, 'I somehow felt their pain and wanted to save part of that record so that later generations will know what happened here,

Waiting for her flight home, Anna was sitting deep in thought when she heard a familiar voice, the Englishman at the station.

'Well, did you find what you were looking for? He asked.

'Yes, I guess more than I bargained for,' she replied.

'Life is like that, we often get more than we expect,' and he was gone.

Szymon only once talked about the small Polish village in which he was brought up and which he believed was no more. Anna remembered that conversation as she sat in the

plane by the window watching the cumulus clouds build up below. He was waiting for her when she cleared customs and took her arm. They didn't speak. She knew that the right time would come to answer his questions. At home they kissed gently, exchanged pleasantries about his job. At last, after they had eaten, she took out the envelope and without speaking, handed it to him.

'What is this' he asked, 'a present?'

'Open it.' He gently tipped the contents onto the dining room table.

At first Szymon looked puzzled and then touching the charred papers with his fingers tips, he paused, bowed his head and began to cry, heavy shuddering sobs which shook his whole body. Anna held him and shared his pain. Three months later the fragments were on display in a glass cabinet at the local Holocaust museum. Anna and Szymon promised each other that if they were blessed with a child that would be the first place they would take her.

The Trainee

The prospect of starting a new job really excited me. I had seen that TV series about the lawbreakers and I was hooked. They seemed invincible, brave intelligent men and women fighting evil. It was inspirational and I decided there and then that that was what I wanted to do. My family was working class, my father a market trader and my mother a waitress but we always had books in the house and I was encouraged to read. Now eighteen, I could pass for twenty-five but I was gangly with long thin limbs and a head that seemed too big for my body. I envied the body builders with their rippling muscles so I was working out at the Gym trying to build up some bulk.

It was such a relief to have left school. I got so angry at the constant need to do as you were told especially if it made no sense. I often found myself in Detention. It could have been a positive influence but it turned out that all I was asked to do was a repetitive task such as repeating one hundred push-ups or 200 hundred steps on the spot. I found boarding school tough but I got through it a wiser person. The physical battles were a pain but I managed to get some good grades, good enough to apply for an attachment to a Legal firm.

So here I was having completed the application form and having found two referees. I was waiting impatiently for a reply and was overjoyed when I was shortlisted. Now I needed to prepare for the interview. I had done some background research and knew who would be on the interviewing board; Mr. Pete Grant the senior Lawyer, a grammar school boy who went to a redbrick university. Mr. John Sunson the son of the firm's founder, a man in his forties, quietly spoken with thin greying hair and a distinct tremor which he tried to conceal by holding his hands together as if praying. The third member was Miss Edith Macleod, the company secretary. I had seen a picture of her. She had a thin pointed face with straight grey hair combed into a tight bun at the back of her head. She was getting on and showing the frailty of age.

By the time I was called into the room, the three people were already seated behind a long table, their names printed on small plaques in front of them. I recognised them from their website photographs.

Mr. Grant started the questioning sending in a fast accurate low ball.

'Why do you want to be a lawyer?' I was prepared and kept my bat straight. I replied looking from one examiner to another, keeping eye contact. My father had drummed it into me how important eye contact was. He had made me practiced it at home in the mirror. I replied,

‘Although we have no lawyers in the family, I have always been attracted to the law. I don’t think the importance of it can be overestimated. A society without law is no better than a jungle. Every one in a civilized society has the right to be judged fairly and that means if necessary to be represented by a lawyer.’ They seemed to like my reply. Miss Macleod was writing down something furiously.

‘Why have you chosen this firm?’ I had prepared for this one I knew it would come. It seemed to me to be a superfluous question but I kept control and said,

‘Because I have heard such impressive things about it.’

The final question came from Miss Macleod. Clearing her throat, she asked in a thin wheedling voice,

‘Have you decided what branch of law you would like to pursue?’ That was a googly. I watched it as it landed and spun away, I didn’t take my eyes off the ball. How on earth could I answer that question. I thought that whichever branch I chose; someone could ask why not another so I decided to play safe.

‘At the moment all branches of law interest me. But maybe later as I learn more I will have the knowledge to decide in which one I should specialise.’

After some more grueling questions, some of which flummoxed me, I was invited to speak. My father had prompted me to say something nice about the firm.

‘I just want to say that I have heard only good things about this firm and I would be honoured to work here. I am hard working and ambitious.’

Looking back over the interview I was very impressed with the senior, a tall well built man in his forties with a shock of white hair overhanging his steely blue eyes. He knew what was what, no nonsense with him. He spoke such good sense I knew I was making the right decision. I waited for the letter which arrived two days later. I tore open the envelope and read,

The Committee regrets...

When my father came home that evening I told him the disappointing news.

‘Leave it with me son,’ he said. ‘They owe me a favour, I’ll get the decision changed.’

‘Dad,’ I pleaded. ‘Please don’t. I clearly wasn’t the best man on the day.’

‘I’ll see to it that you get the job, don’t you worry.’

I still smart as I recall that appointment. I have been with the firm for over twenty years and am now the senior partner.

Who is my real father?

The sun was low on the horizon casting long shadows across the school desks and onto the floor of the classroom. It was late afternoon; the school day was nearly finished and the children were restless, rustling their papers and moving their chairs; preparing to leave for home. The bell had not yet rung when the teacher looked up to see a hand raised in the far left hand corner of the room. He recognized it immediately. It belonged to Jonas III, a small very bright boy with red hair who was always asking challenging questions. He had been staring through the huge dome that surrounded them and in which all life now took place.

Outside, the atmosphere was unable to sustain human life or in fact any animal life, although there were some plants, bacteria and viruses, and a few primitive life forms. The source of energy to support the living areas came from hydrogen, of which there was an ample supply in the atmosphere outside. Hydrogen powered all the turbines and machines required to maintain the atmosphere and sustain life within. His mother was over one

hundred years old, and lived in a people-purpose house, with other people who were 80 years or older. As soon as a person became 80 years old, they were automatically given an apartment in the people-purpose house. Every person had a unique number, embedded in their left wrist, which allowed them to access the Webnet, and it was also a telephone enabling them to contact and be contacted.

Jonas was a loner. He had few friends and frequently went off on his own or sat around in the playground deep in thought. His parents were regular attenders at the parent teacher meetings and when the teachers mentioned that Jonas seemed to have few friends, his parents didn't seem to be unduly concerned. They had tried to interest him in ordinary things but he always seemed to have his head in the clouds. They had bought the usual children books about animals and fairies but he always went for the unusual. His favorite book was one on planets and stars.

'Yes, Jonas, what would you like to ask?' The teacher asked wearily, he wanted to get home. He had had enough of the day. There was a silence in the room, a feeling of tension, of expectation, because the other children knew that when Jonas asked a question, it would always be out of the blue and would set them thinking.

Jonas' teacher was called Allias. He had been with the school about five years. He trained at the Universal Teacher's College (UTC) in Main Town completing a course of three years and specialized in the teaching of Knowledge. This was a subject that included all the information that was known about the universe. It was continually being upgraded as new knowledge became available. Information could be found on the Webnet, a worldwide system which superseded the Internet.

He hadn't always been a teacher. Originally he wanted to be a doctor, having a passion for Biology. As a boy he used to wander into the woods and sit for hours watching the teeming life on the forest floor never tiring of the magical world of living creatures. But his family could not keep up with the fees, and although he gained a scholarship, it was not enough to keep him at Medical School. After three years he had to leave and as there was a shortage of teachers at that time, he became a teacher, and surprisingly really enjoyed it. He had a natural flair and readily gained the confidence of his students. His stature and general manner meant that he met very little bad behavior. While he was very patient with the slower students, he really enjoyed teaching the bright ones such as Jonas.

He was in his late 20s and lived with his wife and two children, both of whom were born through a donor as he was sterile. Most men were sterile, due to the accidental exposure to radioactivity before its dangers were fully understood. He was above average height, two metres plus and weighed 75 kg. He had fair hair, blue eyes, and a firm but friendly face.

Allias was quietly spoken, but he could raise his voice and command the children's attention. He enjoyed his work, and especially liked teaching the 11-year-olds, because as he often said they were so keen to learn. In his spare time, he enjoyed rock climbing in the Energy stadium on the specially constructed wall as it was not possible to go outside the boundary. In fact, all activities had to be carried out within the walls.

Allias' wife Medua worked in the medical centre, which comprised a hospital, a large rehabilitation unit, a swimming pool, a termination facility and a re-education Centre. She was at home waiting for him to return for his supper. But she knew he was never on time as he couldn't resist staying on to answer questions at the end of the day. She knew how much the pupils looked forward to it.

'When did we leave the Earth please Sir?' Asked Jonas in his rather casual manner. Alias was surprised. He was usually prepared for challenging questions from Jonas but this one really surprised him. He had never been asked this question before, and wondered how and why it had arisen.

'Jonas, what made you ask that question?' The teacher asked. 'Because I was talking to my daddy yesterday, and he let slip something which made me think?'

'What was that?'

'He said that a long time ago our ancestors used to live on another planet called the Earth and that they left it before it was burned up by the Sun.'

Jonas stopped speaking and looked up expectantly towards the teacher who had now regained his composure and had begun to understand the question.

Meanwhile something unexpected had happened to Jonas. He had drifted off into a dream world, where he imagined his ancestors might still be. He saw them as if in a crowded room, of all ages and appearances but all had red hair. They were talking to each other, but he could not hear what they were saying. He seemed to enter the room and walk about, but they appeared not to see him. He stopped in front of an older man with a long beard, wearing a small hat, He seemed to be on his own and he began to speak to him. But the man turned and walked away as if he could not hear him. Suddenly, Jonas felt very alone, feeling a deep ache in the pit of his stomach as if he was going to be sick. Someone must have switched on the A/C because he suddenly felt fresh cold air on his face, and he was back in the class listening to the teacher.

'Let me see,' the teacher was saying, looking up at the ceiling in a thoughtful manner. 'It is difficult to know exactly when our ancestors left the Earth, but what I can tell you is something about the event when they first escaped their atmosphere. It was in 1969 earth time when two men from America, one of the larger land masses, first set foot on their moon, a small satellite about 350,000 Km away. The whole world watched what was seen as a momentous and stunning journey.'

'At that time, they had no idea where it would lead but they knew that space was a place which had to be explored. Over the ensuing years, various space probes were sent out, the technology was improved and the first Mars landing was made.' He paused and looked around; every child was glued to his seat. He could see that they had forgotten about going home and wanted to hear more about what he had to say.

Another hand went up, this time Parson IV. The teacher turned to him,

'Yes, Parsons?'

'If our ancestors first reached their moon in 1969 what happened, to persuade them to leave the Earth completely and to come to our planet Tirana?'

The teacher paused,

'I don't think anybody really knows for certain because in the end, many of the records were destroyed by the fire.'

'What fire?' Was a question from another corner of the room.

The teacher continued,

'Many millions of years later, as the sun expanded, the earth heated up. There were many fires and large numbers of documents in libraries and offices caught fire and were destroyed. A lot of the information which existed about our past was lost. What we do know is that at a certain point, space exploration had found our planet Tirana, which had water and hydrogen and could be made suitable for the earthlings to live on. Then began a race against time to establish a new community here before the earth was completely absorbed by the sun. Much of this information is speculative because we have no records. We do know that it took many millions of years.'

'What year was it when they first came to this planet?' said a small musical voice from the front. It was Gloriana. She was a little older than the average and quite tall for her age, with black hair and brown eyes.

'I guess it depends on what timescale you use. If we had continued with the Earth timescale it would run into billions of years, but we decided to start again with our own starting date.' He replied.

The class went quiet; they were all thinking about time and were a bit puzzled that the measurement of date and time could be altered, according to our wishes. And then, another hand rose, and the question, which was on everyone's lips.

'How can you change the date and time? Surely that's fixed?'

'No! Strangely, it isn't, we can decide a great deal about time. We could for example, select the starting date that we wanted.' He replied.

'As you know we have thirty hours in a day, on earth they had twenty-four but because we travel slightly slower around our Sun than they did, our day is a little longer. We decided to keep the length of the hour the same but needed 30 hours from one sunrise to the next. We could have kept 24 hours and made each hour longer'.

The teacher could feel the excitement in the room, and the look of curiosity on the faces of the children who were having difficulty understanding what he was saying.

Suddenly, the bell rang.

'I think that's enough for today. We will continue this discussion tomorrow. We will stop now. Make sure you complete your homework. Have a good evening and come back refreshed for tomorrow.'

The children filed out one by one having rehearsed it many times, no one spoke. They were all deep in thought and were keen to ask their parents a bit more about Earth. Once outside the classroom, Jonas joined the others as he stepped on to the Monopav, a moving pavement and looked for the button, corresponding to his address A6245 where he lived. He pressed it and about five minutes later it took a left fork called 6 and climbed a slow incline to the sixth floor of a large block. He got off when it had reached 245, his front door and bending down peered into a small glass window. It immediately read and recognised his face and the door slowly slid open.

'Hi mum I'm home,' and a woman's voice from within, shouted, 'Jonas I'm in the conservatory. Your tea is ready, go and wash your hands and come and join me.' Jonas lived in one of the thousands of identical apartments, which made up the block. They were decorated in white with minimal furniture, and many labour saving devices. Each had its own robot to do the housework including the washing and dishes. An automated kitchen prepared food by order, including the shopping and cooking.

'Mum! When is dad going to be home, because I've got a very important question to ask him?'

'He'll be home as usual; about six o'clock,' came the reply, 'but you could ask him on the Telescreen. She paused, 'but then why don't you ask me the question?'

'I don't think you will know the answer mum, I'm sorry.' Jonas preferred to ask his Dad as it gave him an opportunity to spend time with him. Often he didn't see his Dad from one day to the next.

'Try me, you never know. I agree that your Dad is wonderful,' she said with slight sarcasm, 'but you know, I do have a university degree and a PhD.'

'Okay here goes then. When did our ancestors leave the Earth?'

Jonas could hear his mother take a deep breath.

'I'm not sure. I think it was many millions of years ago. I think the climate changed and it became hotter and hotter, and they couldn't survive despite air conditioning and

advanced technology. So they over many years they developed space travel and came here.'

'Hey Mum! That's great. You're quite right, that's what the teacher said.'

But to himself Jonas said that it wasn't exactly what he thought happened.

'So what do you want to ask your Dad?' His mother asked smiling.

'Oh! Nothing really' He shrugged, turning to his book...

He didn't really want to tell his mother that he seemed to be different from his friends; that he had this bright red hair and was much smaller than them. Jonas had only really noticed this recently. He was in the school toilet and had seen himself in the mirror. Something made him look more closely and then he realised that he was different. He began to worry about it and decided he must ask his Dad.

'Why don't you go and do your homework after tea so you will have done it before Dad comes in? His mother suggested.

Jonas went to his room but couldn't get down to the homework. He kept on going to the mirror and examining his hair. He really wanted to speak to his Dad as soon as he came in. Some time later he heard the front door slide open. He jumped off his bed to go downstairs. But then he heard his mother speaking in a low voice to his dad and overheard something like, 'I think he has found out?'

Then they both went into the front room and he heard the door close and he couldn't hear any more. It all seemed very strange. What's going on, he thought? Why has my Mum stopped my Dad before I could speak to him? Was it anything to do with the conversation I had with her about my red hair and smallness? He wondered. Anyway it will all be sorted out when I speak to Dad. Jonas then heard his dad's footstep in the hall. He bounded off his bed and raced downstairs leaping up into his dad's arms. He held him tight as if his life depended on it. He could smell his dad's familiar aftershave, like lavender, but stronger. After a while he released his hold and slipped down onto the floor.

'Well young man, have you had a good day Jonas? There is nothing wrong I hope,' said his Dad leaning forwards and looking into his face.

'Is there something worrying you? Mum said you seemed a bit troubled.'

'Dad there is something I want to ask you.'

'OK! Let's go into my study, and we can talk there.'

Jonas followed his father into the study which was just off the main corridor and entered a large room lined with bookshelves. Where there weren't bookshelves, there were pictures. Jonas had often stood in his Dad's office looking at the pictures and wondering about them. They were paintings and photographs of groups of people wearing strange clothes.

'You sit in that chair over there and I'll sit in my chair behind my desk as usual, and then we can talk,' said his Dad, pointing to the chair in front of the desk.

Jonas sat down, crossed his legs and waited for his father to settle himself.

'Dad,' he began, 'I have noticed there is something strange about me.'

His dad leant forward, scanning his son's face. He knew this question would come sometime, but he really wasn't ready for it yet. He had discussed it with his wife and she had advised him not to bring it up until Jonas did and so he had said nothing to his son. In fact, he had forgotten all about it until now. He had decided what he would say but now that he was faced with the question he felt unsure where to begin, so he decided to bide his time by asking Jonas, what exactly he had noticed?

'I seem to be different from the other children,' Jonas said.

'In what way do you think you're different? Said his father.

'I am much smaller than the others,' Jonas said, somewhat impatiently.

'Yes I know,' said his father.

‘And the other thing I’ve noticed, which I’m sure you know about is that I have a small tuft of hair at the bottom of my spine in the shape of a triangle.’

‘Yes, your mother and I noticed it soon after you were born. We asked the doctor about it but he said it was nothing to worry about.’

‘Why am I different from the others?’ He stammered a little.

‘Jonas, it is a long story and I am not certain that I can explain it to your satisfaction, but I’ll try.’

‘Like all parents, when your mother and I got married, we decided we would like to have a family but try as we might we were not successful. Eventually we went to see a doctor, and after some tests, I was told that I was sterile, that is I couldn’t have children. But mother and I wanted children Fortunately there were other ways of having a child. The one which we chose, or rather was suggested to us was IVF using donor sperm.’ He paused a moment.

‘Let me try to explain to you what that means. IVF means In Vitro Fertilization; that is the mother and father cells are joined outside the mother’s body and then put back into her womb. Because my baby making cells were no good, we used cells which had been donated by an unknown man and collected at a special centre where they were kept frozen, until needed. Your mother and I spent many hours discussing this and then decided to go ahead.’

‘We made an appointment with the Professor and had a long discussion with him about what we wanted. You see when you have artificially produced babies, you can to some extent be selective.’

‘How would you like your baby to be? He asked.

‘We wanted a baby who looked like us, fair-haired, tall and intelligent. And that’s what we thought we chose. However, when you were born, we realised things weren’t exactly as we intended.’ He reached forward and held Jonas’ hands.

‘Please remember, we love you very much but when we first saw you with your red hair, small birth weight and the hairy patch, we were a little surprised. When we spoke to the professor he explained that it doesn’t always work out as we wish. But as we loved you and were so pleased to have you, we decided it wouldn’t matter. Since then, you have made us very proud and we see you as a very special son.’

Jonas listened intently. His mind was in a whirl. He had no idea that his parents weren’t his real parents or rather that his father wasn’t his real father. He didn’t quite know how to deal with this information. He knew that some of his fellow students didn’t have a dad or at least didn’t know their dad, and others had brothers and sisters from different dads but his situation seemed to be different.

‘What do you think Jonas, does that make any sense to you?’ His dad asked. Jonas hesitated. He didn’t quite know how to answer the question, because he needed some more time to absorb the information.

Instead he simply said,

‘Thanks Dad for being so open with me. I think I understand the situation and won’t need to ask you any more questions.’ But of course, that wasn’t true, and he knew his father realised that as well. Jonas would need to take a long time before he came to terms with the shattering news about his beginnings. It also raised more questions about the people with red hair, short stature and a hairy triangle. Were they the descendants of Earth human beings? He wondered. Is it possible they were not part of the humans that came from Earth but came from somewhere else, possibly from another planet?

And what happened to all the others? So many unanswered questions were whirling around in his head as he tried to go to sleep that night. And then he had a dream. He didn’t usually dream and so it came as a great surprise, it was so vivid and clear. So much

so that he thought it was real, and it was only when he woke up that he realised that it wasn't. He could remember it clearly and decided to tell his dad about it.

He was in his classroom with his classmates and the teacher and it all looked as usual. He then realised that, as he looked round, all the students looked like him with red hair and short stocky builds. His teacher also had red hair and was not very tall.

It came as a big shock and he put up his hand.

'Please teacher, why do we all look alike in this class. Are we related to each other?'

The teacher paused for a moment not certain how much to say, not certain how well the boys would understand his answer.

'Yes,' we are all to some extent related because we all have the same father.

'How can we have the same father?' A chorus of voices asked.

'Because some years ago, a meteorite hit our world and sent out radiation which sterilized almost all men. Fortunately, there were still a few men who weren't sterile, and it was possible to preserve the human race by storing their sperm in frozen containers. We have been slowly using them since. Fortunately, the boy children are not sterile, and we hope that gradually we will be out to repopulate our planet with people who will appear different. But at the moment we can't do that. All the new babies have the same father or fathers. They don't know who he is, because we have promised anonymity to the donors.'

Jonas sat stunned by the answer.

Suddenly he was awake, crying, with heavy hot tears rolling down his face. He was shaking and felt a mixture of hot and cold. The room was quiet with the dawn just breaking and light beginning to appear at the edges of his curtains. He felt strangely alone as he had before, as if there was no one in the world who cared about him. He got up and washed his face, had a drink of water and went back to bed but he couldn't get back to sleep. Questions kept whirling around in his head.

How is it possible that we all have the same father? He thought. Is that all fatherhood is, providing a few cells which have joined with the mother cells to make a baby. Is that it? Is the father required to do nothing more than that? It's not good enough he shouted to himself. I don't want a father like that, a nameless man, living somewhere that I don't know. I want a father who is made of flesh and blood that I can talk to, who can show me examples of how to behave. It's not fair! It's not fair! It is not worth living if I have to go about without a father.

He must have fallen asleep because he was awoken by his alarm, and for a moment was confused. Did he have a dream or was it real? He just didn't know. He got up, washed, dressed and went down to breakfast. He felt unusually calm and was very quiet which was not like him.

'Are you okay?' Said his father, surprised by the unusual quietness of his son.

'I'm fine dad,' said Jonas. 'I had a strange dream which made me very sad. When you come home this evening, I would like to tell you about it and see what you think.'

'That would be fine,' said his dad. 'I expect to be home at the usual time and look forward to talking to you about your dream. I hope I can help you to understand it a bit better.'

It was still early so Jonas had some time before school. He felt restless and disturbed. He went outside the apartment and looked around. There were very few people about at that time apart from a man who was pushing an electric powered cleaner, which was picking up dirt from the path. He could hear someone pottering about next door. He then heard

someone calling him and went back indoors. It was his mother, who had come downstairs.

‘Good morning, Jonas, you’re up early today?’

‘I couldn’t sleep mum. I had that dream again about my ancestors. You know I told you about it.’

‘Don’t worry about it, dear, dreams are very strange and we often don’t know what they mean. Do you have anything exciting today at school?’

‘I dunno mum but I think that the teacher is going to continue telling us about how we got on this planet from the earth.’

The time seemed to go quickly. Jonas couldn’t wait until the end of the day when he knew the teacher would begin to talk again about the history of the planet.

‘Where was I? Asked Mr. Allias.

A hand went up

‘You were just telling us about time, and the date and how it’s different here than it was on earth.’

‘Ah! Yes, I remember. It was all because the day is longer here; because we’re further away from our sun so our rotation takes longer. Also we’re a bit bigger than the earth so a rotation takes longer to get back to where it started. The real mystery is what happened when the earthlings, our long lost ancestors arrived here and met the people who were living here. We believe that there was a big battle as we have found remnants of old weapons and skeletons, but the details are very hazy and no one really knows. Anyway, assuming there was a war, they eventually did make peace and began to live together learning each other’s language and customs, intermarrying and becoming more prosperous.’

‘But there are still some people who looked like the original inhabitants of this planet, more than they look like the earthlings and Jonas I think you’re one of those. It doesn’t mean that you have anything wrong with you, but as you’ve noticed yourself you are different from most of the other children. How do you feel about that Jonas?’

‘I don’t really mind. I don’t feel any different, and I like my red hair. I’m okay with it although I don’t like being called Ginger by some of my so-called friends who I won’t name but who know who they are.’ The bell rang, and the class rapidly emptied.

It was later that evening, when Jones’s dad arrived home. They both went into the study, as they had agreed at breakfast.

‘Dad,’ Jonas began, ‘I had that strange dream the other night. I was back at school with my usual teacher. When I looked round all the other students had red hair, like me. Teacher explained that a meteorite had struck our planet sending out a lot of radioactivity which caused most men to become sterile. Fortunately, they had kept some cells from unaffected men, and it was these that were used by the families to have more children. Did that mean that the children who have red hair, and born by AID didn’t really have a father? Does that mean that you are not really my father?’

As he spoke, Jonas watched his father’s face closely. This was the most important question he had ever asked and he wanted to be certain that he heard the answer correctly.

‘I guess it depends what you mean by, a real father. Biologically, I am not your father.’ He said reaching out and holding Jonas’ hands. ‘But emotionally, and responsibly I am. I love you very much and it makes no difference to me that you are genetically different from me. I hope the same applies to you.’

As Jonas heard these words, his head began to whirl, he didn't understand. And how could he? How could this man be my father, but not my father? There was a hammering in his head and he felt hot and began to sweat. He didn't know what to do or say, so he just said.

'That's fine dad, I understand, I must get on with some homework.'

With that, he left the room, closed the door behind him and walked slowly to his room. Somehow, the room did not feel the same. It no longer had the feeling of safety that it did. Part of him felt strange, he looked around at the familiar objects, but they no longer seem to be his. It was as if he was in a stranger's room, someone he hardly knew. I must leave, he thought, I no longer belong here. But where to go? He suddenly remembered his friend Dono. I will go and stay with him, he has often asked me to so now I will take up his invitation.

Jonas waited until it was dark and he heard his parents go to bed. The house was quiet as he tiptoed out carrying a small bag of his clothing and some money. The Monopav was only a short walk away. It ran continuously. He knew the address of his friend. About twenty minutes later he stepped on to the pavement and rang the doorbell. Dono's father, opened the door in his pajamas and showed surprise when he saw Jonas there.

'Is everything all right Jonas? It's very late, you know.'

'No, not really, I didn't know what to do so I came here.' He said with tears in his eyes. 'May I come in?'

Dono's father put his hands on Jonas' shoulders and gently drew him into the house.

'I'll ring your parents and let them know you're here?'

'No! Please. I'll explain everything.'

'Okay, we will make up the spare bed and tomorrow when you are rested, you can tell us all about it.'

Jonas followed him into the spare bedroom and flopped onto the bed. In an instant he was asleep. He woke once during the night but fell back to sleep and slept until the sun began to light up the curtains.

Jonas opened his eyes and for a moment didn't know where he was and then he remembered and a sudden fear engulfed him. What am I doing here he wondered? What am I going to do? He began to cry, soft gentle tears which became stronger until he was shaking and heaving and gasping for breath. Gradually his sobbing subsided and he lay still trying to gather his thoughts. He must have fallen asleep again because he was next aware of someone's shaking him gently by the shoulder. He woke to find Dono's father leaning over in.

'Are you awake Jonas?' He asked. 'Would you like to tell me what happened?'

Jonas hesitated; he didn't know where to start and he thought that he would sound foolish. Dono's father sensed the hesitation.

'Don't feel embarrassed. Just tell me what happened and I'm sure I'll understand,' he said gently.

'I don't know where to begin?' said Jonas, hesitating.

'Just tell me why you left home and then I think you'll find it easier to tell me what happened.'

'Well, I was asking my dad about why I look different from most of my friends. I'm sure you've noticed it also; my red hair, and my short height. When I asked dad about it, he told me that he wasn't really my biological dad at all and that I was born by I think the initials are AID. I didn't know what they meant but he explained that they had used somebody else's cells to make me because his weren't any good. I didn't understand that

at first, but it means that someone else's cells were mixed with my mother's cells to make me so that my dad isn't really my proper dad at all!

'What did that make you feel?' Said Dono's father.

'I didn't really understand at first and then I realised that my biological father was someone I would never know and that worse, he didn't care about me otherwise he would want to get to know me. I loved my daddy, but now I don't understand.'

Jonas began to cry.

'Who is my daddy and where is he?'

Dono's father put his hand on Jones's shoulder. 'It's all right, it's all right,' he said. 'I know it can be difficult for you to understand but you wouldn't be here at all if your daddy didn't want you. When he found he couldn't have his own children he did the next best thing. He used somebody else's cells to make you because he wanted you very much and I know when you were born he loved you. Does he tell you he loves you?'

'Yes he does,' said Jonas in a quiet voice beginning to wipe his tears.

'You see, just because you are not made from your dad's cells doesn't mean that you are without parents. What makes a father is not whether you are made from his cells but how he cares about you and how important you are to him. I know that your dad loves you very much and will do everything to look after you so that you have everything you need; that you get a good education that of course will help you when you grow up. These are all the things a loving father does for his son. Has your dad done all these things for you?'

'Yes,' said Jonas, his face beginning to light up. 'Oh! Yes. He has given me everything I need.'

'Well then, he is your real father after all. Not the other man who simply gave his cells and has done nothing else, not even to find out who you are.'

Dono's father could see that Jonas was beginning to feel better, his eyes were becoming brighter, and his face was relaxing.

'I know that right now, your mother and father are frantic wondering where you are. May I ring them up and tell them you're here safe and sound?'

'Yes, please do, I didn't want to frighten or worry them. I just didn't know what to do or where to go. Thank you for being so kind to me and explaining so patiently.'

About 10 minutes later, Jonas' father and mother arrived and he knew from the look on their faces that they were very relieved to see him. His dad gathered him up in his arms and said again and again.

'I love you, we love you. Please never forget that, you are our son and will always be so.'

Jonas put his arms around his dad's neck, and said,

'Dad! I love you and Mum very much and I'm so sorry that I have caused you to be upset.'

And then Jonas turned to Dono's Dad and said,

'Thank you so much. I now know where I belong and I will never run away again.'

