

DAUGHTERS

Chapter 1

The sign to the Crestwood Crematorium in Midtown Manhattan stared down at her. Rebeka remembered it as if yesterday when she had walked under it on the way to her late husband's cremation. She still hadn't come to terms with his death so young, his life so unfulfilled. They had had so little time together. Why had their life together ended so quickly? One day they met, the next they fell in love and the third they married and then their daughter Beri was born. Then in a flash it was over, the days and weeks compressed into a memory. Where had the time gone? How had their lives together vanished so quickly leaving her so little to remember, their marriage now merely a line in history.

Her life now seemed meaningless. She could still see his stark wooden coffin on the slightly raised dais, hear the organ playing softly in the background and the hushed silence broken only by the occasional whisper and sniff.

Here she was again, now with David and her granddaughter Elizabeth, mourning her daughter Beri. Rebeka's legs felt heavy and wooden as she walked slowly towards the vacant seats set aside for them. The hall was almost full. They sat down in the front row no more than two feet away from the dark mahogany coffin with its shiny brass handles containing Beri's remains. Rebeka was exhausted, the experience of the last few days had driven all the spirit out of her. Seeing her daughter's dead body so small and frail was the worst imaginable nightmare. It had been the last thing she had expected. She hoped she would wake up to find it was untrue. For a moment she wanted to rush forwards tear open the casket and find it empty - that this was a bizarre and grotesque pantomime. But she knew this wasn't a joke, unless the whole of life was a bad joke.

The music stopped and David stepped forwards, his face drawn and grey, his body trembling.

Stumbling, he began:

'My dear Rebeka family and friends, there are no words to describe the pain and loss felt by us all. Those who knew Beri remember her as a bright star illuminating the world around her. A loveable generous and talented human being whose presence graced any occasion. She grew up in a loving family but never recovered from the untimely loss of her father, a sadness which haunted her all her short life. Despite the support given to her by her mother Rebeka, she slipped into alcohol and depression. For a short while she blossomed after a successful Liver

transplant but soon relapsed into the grip of alcohol which finally claimed her. But she has not left us completely she had given us her daughter our grand daughter Elizabeth.'

Matt had arrived late just in time to hear David speak. Unable to face the casket containing Beri's body, he turned and walked out.

Rebeka withdrew into herself unable to face the reality of the occasion. She wanted to get away from that place with its terrible memories. They were too much to bear so she began to daydream. As David's voice continued on her thoughts flew back to their first meeting in Israel.

Chapter 2

It was at Nof Ginosar by the Sea of Galilee. The light filtering through the thin curtains had woken her and for a moment she was confused. Then she remembered where she was. Dressing quickly Rebeka ran downstairs and stood for a while outside on the lawn breathing in the cool morning air and scanning the wide expanse of water also known as Lake Kinneret in Northern Israel. Its surface was still and grey in the early morning light. She tried to picture what it would have been like 2000 years ago when Jesus came to preach by the waters. She imagined the crowds and heard their voices hush as Christ began his sermon. Standing there today that time seemed far away. Did it really happen? She wondered.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a flock of pied kingfishers swooping and twittering in the nearby trees.

She was hungry and it was time for breakfast. The main building was filled with the clatter of plates and the smell of toast. Hesitating and slightly self consciously she entered the dining room and quickly sat at the nearest table. A slim, smartly dressed woman in her early fifties, wearing a neat khaki trouser suit and open toe sandals, she soon caught the attention of another visitor. She hadn't noticed David at first but turned towards him after hearing his very British "Good morning". She returned his greeting.

'What brings you to these parts?' He asked and before waiting for an answer added, 'May I join you?'

'Yes, it would be nice to have some company, I've been travelling alone.'

So began a friendship between two complete strangers in a dining room overlooking the sea of Galilee. Her confidence had now returned and she showed no hesitation, smiling openly and conversing easily.

'My name is Rebeka Simons and I'm from New York,' she said. He was immediately attracted to her, this calm confident articulate woman. Conversation

flowed easily as she explained that she had been attending a conference in Jerusalem.

'It's my first visit to Israel and I had some time before needing to return home, I had a driver who was showing me around. Jerusalem was memorable. I was in a daze as I walked around the most ancient capital in the world absorbing the atmosphere, trying to capture the history. So many centuries of conflict and then peace so that today I can visit it as a tourist.'

As she spoke David noticed her unblemished skin and minimal make up. She had clear brown eyes which smiled as she spoke. There were fine wrinkles around her mouth. The conversation eventually turned to her husband who had died of cancer only a few weeks earlier. She had nursed him through a long illness, and watched him transform from a vigorous strong active man to a shell.

'In his last days I was hardly able to look at him. I felt deeply ashamed that I had failed him in his moment of greatest need.' She was surprised that she was willing to share these feelings with this complete stranger, feelings which she had kept secret from her closest friends and family. Her face was contorting with pain as she fought back her tears. He listened without interrupting as she unburdened her thoughts. He had gone through a similar experience many years earlier and was now able to forgive himself, something she was yet to do. She told him about her plans to visit some of the ruins in the area before returning to New York.

'What work do you do?' He asked.

'I am a freelance designer working for a number of Haute Couture houses in the States,' she said pronouncing the words in a southern drawl.

'What about you, what brought you to Israel?'

'I'm here retracing an earlier trip with my late wife to recapture the memories of that journey.'

'I hope it will be rewarding. What do you do?'

'Oh, I'm now retired, I live a life of pleasure and indulgence.' He smiled.

'What did you do to be able to live like that?'

'I was a solicitor, what you would call a lawyer. I was lucky, I went into property before the property boom so I was able to save a small nest egg on which I live.'

'Lucky you, most people I know lost money on property,'

The two sat in a comfortable silence finishing their meal and then David, taking courage into his hands and feeling less tongue-tied asked if he could see her again. She smiled,

'I don't usually see men who I don't know but,' and she paused. 'OK, let me give you my New York telephone number. If you are ever passing by ring me'

Chapter 3

Months had passed and David was still travelling alone. One morning, he was reading a travel brochure in a hotel lounge when he saw an advert for a trip to the Galilee. An image of Nof Ginosar and the lake sprang into his mind and he suddenly thought of her. On an impulse he looked up her phone no. Why don't I visit her? he thought. A trip to New York would be fun and if nothing came of it so what.

Ten days later he was sitting in the window seat of a Jumbo jet somewhere over the Atlantic admiring the cotton wool clouds drifting leisurely below. He had a momentary twinge of fear at the thought that this enormous machine depended on so many small parts to function and if one failed. No, I mustn't go there, he thought. At that moment a pretty air hostess drifted by smiling at him. They must be trained to spot the doubting passenger and reassure them.

As usual time seemed to fly and before he had a chance to organize his thoughts, he was standing with the other passengers easing his hand luggage out of the overhead locker, hearing the warning that things may slip and fall. He joined the line of passengers leaving the plane in what seemed to be in an unnecessary haste. They all knew that there were several hurdles to jump before they would be free to meet their love ones or find their cars, so why rush? He found himself caught up in the seeming frenzy and raced along with the crowd pulling his hand luggage behind him across the bumpy aluminium strips on the floor. A comfort stop slowed down his haste and as he used it, he wondered why the plane's toilets were closed twenty minutes before landing so that he always met the sight of a toilet in the airport with relief.

The first hurdle was passport control. Long lines of passengers greeted him when he entered the large hanger-like hall. He moved slowly towards the checkpoints and joined what seemed to be the shortest line but there was a hold up and he watched frustrated as his neighbours moved ahead in their line, secretly wondering whether a smile of glee would appear on their otherwise grim faces. Most people were just tired and wanted to get through as fast as possible.

At last he was at the front of the line. The young female officer looked up nodded and he advanced towards her brandishing his passport. As a UK passport holder he did not require a visa but was required to answer a number of questions about his visit. Should he tell her that he was visiting a female acquaintance he had met only once in Israel?

'Good morning Sir,' she asked politely, 'what is the purpose of your visit to the United States?' pronouncing the word States very clearly.

He had prepared his answer, 'I am a world traveller and haven't been here for many years and just wanted to visit.'

'Where are you planning to go?' she asked staring at her monitor.

'I'm staying in New York and then will decide what I will do.'

'Do you have any family or friends?'

He hesitated and decided that it could do no harm and in any case it was the truth.

'I am visiting a lady friend here in New York.'

'Oh, I see, have you known her long?'

'Look,' he said emphasizing the words, 'Do you really need to know that? Aren't your questions a bit too personal, I don't like them,' and stupidly he added,

'Are you jealous?'

The officer ignored his remark and repeated the question without looking up.

David stood speechless.

'I've had enough, No more questions.'

At that moment he heard a bell ring from within the desk and within a moment two Airport police had arrived. The Officer pointed to David and said,

'This man is refusing to answer simple questions and is being offensive.

Please take him away and find out the purpose of his visit.'

She paused and then said, 'Next! David suddenly realised his predicament.

'Look, there's been a mistake. I'm sorry if I have been rude. Please let me answer your question,' he grovelled.

By this time people behind in the line were getting angry. One shouted,

'Stop being such an arsehole and answer the officer's questions so we can all get home!'

David turned to the speaker and whispered,

'I'm sorry, you're right, I'm being an ass.'

'OK, then get on with it, answer the Officer's questions, she isn't playing games you know.'

David turned to the Officer,

'My acquaintance, I have only known her for a short while. We met in Israel and she invited me to contact her if I ever got to New York.'

'You could have said that in the first place and we could have avoided all this nonsense.' Scowling, she stamped his passport and he walked through.

Standing at the carousel waiting for his luggage, David felt really stupid. He had done it again, made a bloody fool of himself. What was it about authority that riled him? Why did he react so badly in these situations? It wasn't as if it was the first time. He remembered a time at Heathrow, when he was late for a flight. A woman assistant wanted to check his papers again but he didn't want to stop.

'I have had them checked already and I have a boarding card,' he screamed. Calmly she repeated the question,

'May I see it please sir?'

David saw red and leaned forwards to read the name on her badge. Unknown to him that movement constituted an assault in law. She immediately blew her whistle shouting, 'assault.' In seconds he was surrounded by two burly armed police officers.

'There's been a mistake,' he whimpered, 'I'm late for my flight. Here is my boarding card. I meant no harm, I was panicking.'

'All right sir,' said the largest of the officers towering over him.

'We will let you go this time but be warned, we won't be so lenient if it happens again, Sir.'

'Thank you, thank you,' David whimpered.

A large black trunk went by on the carousel with a red and blue strap around it. David recognised it immediately and chased after it as it circled away from him. Catching up with it, he nudged some people aside and dragged it onto his trolley. Now for the Customs, I must keep my mouth shut. Looking around he saw the familiar red and green signs and made for the green nothing to declare exit. No one appeared to be on duty as he walked through. He felt a lifting of his spirits when suddenly a uniformed officer appeared.

'Good morning,' David said but the officer didn't reply. Although he had nothing illegal in his luggage, David had a sudden sinking feeling. No matter how often it happened, that feeling of guilt remained.

He had almost reached the exit when he heard that dreaded sound,

'Sir, just a moment, could I have a word?'

David stopped feeling sick and turned,

'Over here sir,' said the officer pointing to a low desk. 'Just put your luggage on here please.'

David retraced his steps and on reaching the desk lifted his two cases onto it. He stood waiting as if for the executioner's axe.

'Sir,' the Officer began, 'I hear you had some issue at passport control. What was that all about?'

'Nothing really, I was tired and irritable, it had been a long flight.'

'You know what I am going to ask you?'

'Yes, have I anything to declare?'

'Exactly, have you read this declaration?' he said, handing David a list,'

'Yes, and the answer is No.'

'Good, thank you Sir, have a good stay,'

With that, he walked away leaving David flummoxed.

Chapter 4

It was just after 8 am New York time when Rebeka's telephone rang.

'Hello who is that? She asked sleepily.

'Hi, it's me David, you remember, we met in Israel some while ago.'

She paused and thought, who on earth could this be so early in the morning and then she recognized the accent. It's that man I met at breakfast in Israel. She had forgotten all about him.

He reminded her,

'Do you remember you were staying at Nof Ginosar near Lake Kinneret. We exchanged details and I said I would ring you if I ever got to New York, well I'm here. Can we meet? When are you free? I'm staying at the Pioneer Hotel on 3rd Avenue.'

'Yes, I remember, you've rather caught me by surprise. It's a bit early for me. Give me your number at the hotel and I'll ring you in an hour or so.'

David looked at his watch. He hadn't altered it from UK time. He did a quick sum in his head and realised it was only 7 am. Oh dear, I didn't realise it was so early, no wonder she wasn't up. I've made a fool of myself again, he thought. Not certain when she would ring he decided to go down for breakfast. Not being very hungry he ordered the continental breakfast forgetting that in America even a continental might be too much. It included several varieties of cheese, cold meats and a selection of fruit as well as the usual croissant, breads, cakes, marmalade, jams and coffee.

Half way through the meal his mobile rang. He pressed the green button and heard her voice.

'Hello David? This is Rebeka.' He tried to answer but was tongue-tied unable to speak. It had happened many times before to the point where he had come to hate the telephone. After a few seconds she repeated,

'Hello is that you David, are you all right?' He made a gurgling sound and then coughed and his voice returned strained and rather high pitched.

'Yes it's me, thanks for ringing back. How are you?'

'Fine just fine. It's a nice surprise to hear from you after all this time.'

'Yes, I was thinking about you and on a whim came to New York. Could we meet?'

'Um, I Um, don't know,' she hesitated.

David Interrupted,

'I would love to meet you; we could have some fun. You could show me your New York,' his voice had now returned to normal.

'OK let's meet for lunch at the MoMa. Do you know it?'

'Yes I know it.' He replied.

'There are several places to eat at the Museum.' She continued. 'Let's meet in the Cafe 2 restaurant. I think it is on the second floor. You'll need a ticket to get in but then I'm sure you would want to do that anyway.'

'Good, that sounds fine. I am looking forwards to it, what time?'

'Say 12.30 how would that suit you?'

'Perfect, see you then,' and she rang off.

David checked his watch, it was 9.30. I'll have a few hours to wander around the museum before I meet her. Being a devotee of Jacob Epstein, an American born sculptor who made his name in England, he decided to look up his work when he got there.

The sky was overcast and it was still raining when David left the hotel. He stood under the doorman's umbrella until a yellow cab drew up and he got in.

'Where to?' the driver barked in a rich Brooklyn accent.

'The Museum of Modern Art please.'

'You mean MoMa we call it that here you know. Your first visit?' He asked.

'No, no, I've been here several times before, I love the city.'

They drove through the splashing rain with the cab bouncing about from pothole to pothole. Why don't they repair their roads he thought? This is one of the richest cities in the USA yet the roads are almost the worst in the world. He checked his thoughts when he remembered the roads in Africa, they had to be the worst.

As if reading his thoughts, the driver turned to look at him and said.

'It's them potholes, the city never gets round to repairing them. They're terrible for the cab. The tyres get chewed up and the shocks need replacing every year.'

I am not surprised the way he is driving, David thought but said nothing. They soon arrived at the museum. The cab stopped.

'Here we are, that'll be \$20,' the driver said. David thought that it was a bit steep but was pleased to get out and under cover and paid up willingly.

He entered the large auditorium with its high ceiling supported by simple round columns. He had read a little about the museum and its origins in 1928 with the support of the Rockefeller family. It opened in 1929 at 730 Fifth Avenue initially in three rooms and then a further three were added over the next ten years. Later in 1937 it moved into its present space in the Rockefeller Center. Sixty years later in 1997, a competition was held to redesign it. It was won by the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi and reopened in 2004.

David noticed a large group of Japanese people in one corner of the open plan space. Near them he saw the sign to Cafe 2 on the second floor and made a mental note to get there in time. Then he went to the desk and waited behind a number of visitors who like himself wanted some directions.

'Could you please help me?' he asked, a young Afro-American assistant. 'I would like to see the Jacob Epstein Rock drill and any other Epstein works please.' She reached down and took out a program and began to leaf through it.

'We have a 1962 bronze cast of the 1913-14 original. Is that what you wanted to see?'

'Yes, that would be great.'

'It's in the sculpture collection on the third floor, you can take the elevator.'

'Thank you.'

David reached the floor and began walking through the galleries until he saw it. He had last seen the Rock drill reconstruction made in 1973 based on Epstein's original drawings at the Tate Gallery. It had then consisted of a plaster torso set upon an actual rock drill. Subsequently only bronze casts of the torso were made and it was one of these which was on show in the gallery. He stood in front of it for some time recalling the life of Jacob Epstein. Born on the East Side of New York in 1880 to German emigrants, he at the aged twenty made a trip to Paris where he met and was influenced by the great French sculptor Rodin.

He then went to London in pursuit of a Scottish woman whom he later married. It was there that he set up his first studio. His first major work, a commission to create eighteen over-life sized figures to adorn the outside of the British Medical Association Building in the Strand caused a storm of protest and this was to be the response to much of his work throughout the almost 60 years of his working life. It was this outspoken originality that attracted David. The Rock Drill was a statement about the futility of war, at a time when the First World War was about to be declared.

David wandered around the galleries stopping where the whim took him. Suddenly it was 12.15. Checking his watch, he made his way to the cafe, a brightly lit area with skyline views of New York. Along one side of the room was a counter. Visitors were already standing with trays collecting their food. He saw an empty table and made for it, repeatedly glancing at the door. He was sweating a little and felt anxious and uneasy. Would he recognise her he wondered, would she recognise him? They had met under unusual circumstances and in a place far removed from where he was now.

He saw her first, standing at the entrance, uncertain, looking around. He knew it was her although she was dressed very differently and her hair was now short and curled. Impulsively he walked over to her and extended his hand.

'Hi, Rebeka you haven't changed, I'm David.' For a moment she was confused and blushed.

'Oh, David yes, I remember, you haven't changed,' and then she hesitated. 'You said that didn't you, how silly of me, I need a drink.'

'Look, I've got a table over there, go and sit there. What would you like?'

'I know it's early but could I have a dry martini. It would settle me. It's all been bit of a surprise you being here after so long.'

'A dry Martini coming up.'

David returned to the table carrying two drinks and handed one to Rebeka.

'Cheers, lovely to see you after such a long time,' he said smiling.

'Cheers, thank you for contacting me, it's really great to meet you again.' she replied. They fell into a comfortable silence each studying the bubbles of gas rising in their glasses. Then she broke the silence,

'Have you had time to see anything of the collection, its one of the best in the world?'

'I've just spent some time looking at the Epstein's. I came about an hour ago. It's a wonderful place, I've really enjoyed it but there's so much to see I could be here a lifetime and not see it all.'

'I come here several times a year and try to concentrate on just a few artists gradually covering the collection but you're right it's a lifetimes task,' she added.

'Let's get some food shall we?' David said. 'Lead away and I'll watch what you do.'

Rebeka set off to food counter. He followed. Turning to him she asked,

'How hungry are you? Do you want a cooked meal? I prefer something light at lunch, a salad. They have a wide selection to choose from.'

David watched as Rebeka selected a mixed salad with Tuna, some brown bread and a glass of fizzy water.

'Is that all you're eating? I need a lot more than that,' he said and began to select some chicken with potatoes and salad. He chose a beer and collecting them, followed her to the cashier. They were settling down to eat when she asked,

'What are your plans, how long are you staying?' David paused and looked at her. I don't know what to say he thought, I haven't made any plans as I didn't know how she would welcome me, and then he said,

'I guess it all depends on you. I didn't know whether you would remember me or whether you were still working.' Plucking up courage, he blurted out,

'I would like to spend some time getting to know you better. I don't have any fixed plans, what about you?'

Rebeka paused and then smiled,

'I'm pretty free, I have a day's work and then I could take some time off, what had you in mind?'

'We could explore this great country of yours, I am sure there are places you haven't seen?'

'Many, it sounds exciting, let me think about it.'

They finished their meal in silence and then David asked.

'Have you time to look at some art? It would be a pity to be here and not see anything more'

'Let me see,' replied Rebeka checking her watch, 'I need to be home at about 5. My daughter promised to phone and I don't want to miss her. We don't speak that often.'

Rebeka thought about the last time she had seen her daughter Barbara. When she was in her teens Barbara had changed her name to Beri, it had been a difficult time for both of them. Rebeka was trying to hold her marriage together having found out

that her husband was having an affair with one of her workmates. He had denied it fervently but she knew. Meanwhile Beri had moved out and was living with Matt a most unlikely partner, a musician who was heavily into Hashish.

'What haven't you seen?' asked David, looking at the MoMa programme.

'It's a long story, I really don't want to think about it now,' said Rebeka misunderstanding David's question. She was preparing herself for the call from Beri. David noted her reply but disregarded it.

'I see there is a new exhibition of David Hockney the British artist who lives here in the States. He returned to his roots in the North of England and has done a series of paintings of the Yorkshire countryside. It was a very successful exhibition in London and is now here at MoMa.'

'That sounds interesting, I love landscapes,' she murmured trying to calm herself for the call from Beri. She checked her watch again.

'I've about two hours. We could see the Hockney if you like. Yes, let's do that.' Rebeka repeated focusing on the present.

They left the restaurant, David leading, and made their way to the elevator. Alighting at the third floor they followed the signs to the Hockney Exhibition to find a large crowd already milling around the desk waiting to buy tickets.

'Two tickets for the Hockney please.' David said handing the assistant a twenty-dollar bill.

'Thank you Sir, it's a timed entrance. You are due in, in half an hour. There are some seats over there,' she said pointing to her right.

They sat down and David began to read the programme. Rebeka had returned to thinking about her daughter. How am I going to avoid another row when we speak? What can we talk about that won't provoke a shouting match? Even the most innocent sounding question could be interpreted as a criticism. She struggled with her thoughts.

Suddenly David was pulling at her sleeve,

'We can go in now,' he whispered and she followed him into the first gallery. Rebeka was not prepared for what she was about to see. The sheer brilliance of the colours seeming to dance off the canvases, dazzled her. The rich reds, oranges and greens battling with the blues took away her breath.

'Wow!' she cried holding David's arm. 'They are terrific, what an amazing artist, the colours are unreal.'

'Yes, he has a wonderful way with colours, they seem to glow and sparkle.'

'Rebeka,' it was the first time he had used her name and he liked it, 'you are right, they are out of this world. They are so surprising because his native Yorkshire where he was born and brought up and where he painted these pictures is usually dull and grey usually with an overcast sky.'

'So where did these colours come from?' Rebeka said, her eyes glowing.

'He says they are the colours of his youth, how he remembers the countryside with the blossom on the trees and the fields in full bloom. The critics are divided,

some understanding what he is saying others think the work is artificial and pretentious. You take your choice.'

'Well for me, the colours are real and vibrant. They make me feel happy and joyful as if I want to dance. Thank you for choosing this gallery I would never have thought of going on my own.' Leaning over, she kissed him lightly on the cheek. He felt a warm glow and squeezed her hand.

Chapter 5

It was later when David lets himself into his hotel room. It was small and dark. Rooms in New York were more expensive than he thought so he had to settle for a very basic hotel. It was in a poorer part of town where there were a lot clubs and casinos. It was only after dark that he realised it was a mistake. The city came alive with neon lights flashing, cars hooting and the occasional police siren. He lay in the dark struggling to suppress the sounds so that he could sleep.

I wonder what is going to happen with me and Rebeka he pondered. He knew what he wanted, to get to know her better and perhaps more. He didn't want to let his imagination go that far but did she have the same idea? He would have to wait to find out. He unpacked his few belongings and took a shower. He had some difficulty working out the shower but eventually realised that the main tap controlled the water flow. He adjusted the temperature and stepped in. There was something very relaxing about a good shower so he stayed in it for over ten minutes enjoying the tingling feeling of hot water on his back and shoulders. I'll have a short rest he decided and having dried off lay down on the bed and was soon asleep.

He was walking along a beach he could smell the sea air and feel the breeze on his face. He seemed to be alone when he spied a figure walking towards him. At first he couldn't make out who it was but as it came nearer he realised it was Rebeka. She was wearing a loose skirt and a bikini top. She didn't seem to recognise him. As they came side by side he said hello but his voice failed and no matter how hard he tried no sound would come out. Not hearing him, she took no notice and continued on her way. Was it an omen of their future relationship he wondered when he woke?

He was suddenly awakened by a bell ringing. He was in his room with his mobile ringing impatiently.

'Hello, is that you David?'

'Hi Rebeka I must have fallen asleep, are you OK?'

'Yes fine. I wondered, did you have any plans for this evening? If not would you like to come to my place for dinner?'

'Yes that would very nice thank you, what time would you like me?'

'Seven for seven thirty, it will be very informal, see you then.'

David lay back in his bed. Wow! that's amazing. He checked his watch it was 5.30, an hour to prepare and then a taxi to her place. He looked in his diary to make sure he had her address, Flat 808, 3464 Park Heights, off 31st Street. What to wear? He opened the cupboard and surveyed his very few clothes. He settled for a dark blue loose linen jacket and jeans. I'll need to take a bottle. I know, I'll ring the concierge, I am sure he would know where to get one.'

'Hello is that the concierge?'

'Yes Sir, George speaking, how may I help you?'

'I want to buy a bottle of wine for a friend. Is there a liquor store near the hotel?'

'Yes, not far, what did you want? I can get it for you.'

'A Chilean Merlot if possible?'

'How much do you want to spend?'

'I don't know; how much do you think it will be?'

'About fifteen dollars not more.'

'OK, that's fine, please go ahead.'

'Leave it to me Sir, you can collect it on your way out.'

David was surprised by the offer and had accepted it before thinking. Can I trust him? Will he bump the price up? It's too late now, I've done it so I'll pay a bit more than what he had decided. At half past six David left his room and took the elevator to the ground floor. At the entrance he met George dressed in his finery.

'Good evening Sir, I have the wine for you. It was 13 dollars,' George said handing David the bottle, the receipt and the change.

'Thank you very much George, here is something for yourself,' said David handing him a dollar.

'Can I get you a taxi?'

'Thank you.'

Chapter 6

Five minutes later, David was on the way to Park Heights, 33rd Street. As they approached Rebeka's Address the driver asked,

'What No?'

'3464 please,' David replied.

Facing the glass entrance, David pressed 808 and waited.

'Come in David,' said Rebeka. The front door latch opened with a click and he entered making sure the door closed after him. He crossed the small foyer to the waiting elevator. Entering, he pressed eight and watched the dial as it took him to the eighth floor where Rebeka was waiting to welcome him. She was dressed in a

simple three quarter length white cotton dress with a red waistband and a pearl necklace. She was wearing a new perfume from Chanel.

'You look beautiful,' he stammered overwhelmed by her appearance. They kissed cheeks.

'Welcome David, please make yourself at home. Come and sit by the window there is a panoramic view of the city.'

David sat down on the settee and looked out across the city. It was now dark and the buildings were illuminated by millions of pinpoints of light and the roads outlined by twinkling moving spots as the evening traffic struggled home. Beyond, the darkened hills were visible against the lighter sky in which stars were just beginning to appear. It was a wonderland of light and dark. What a magnificent view I could sit here and watch it forever. His thoughts were interrupted.

'What would you like to drink? I have most things,' Rebeka asked.

'A glass of red wine would be perfect,' and then remembering the bottle that he was carrying, handed it to her. 'Would you like me to open this?'

'No need I have some already opened, it's from the Napa Valley, a Cabernet Sauvignon I think,' she said peering at the label. David took a sip,

'Delicious just what I needed,' he said and turned and looked around the room. It was a well balanced room containing little furniture, all in white with the walls in pale blue. At one end was a well stocked bar and at the other a small table was laid for two beneath a glittering glass chandelier throwing the surrounding room into shade. In the centre was a simulated gas fire with two settees.

'Let me tell you what we are having for dinner. No perhaps I will let it be a surprise.'

They raised their glasses and toasted each other, 'cheers!'

'Come and sit down, the first course is cold. I hope you like it,' said Rebeka pointing to a chair.

'Do I recognise a Greek salad? It's one of my favourites,' David guessed.

'Full marks, I get all my fresh food from Greenwich village which is not far from here.'

David was hungry and soon tucked into the salad, eating it all.

'I see your mother taught you to eat everything on your plate,' Rebeka joked.

'As a matter of fact she did and we weren't allowed a dessert if we didn't.'

Years later I realised how illogical that was. If I ate everything on the plate I usually didn't have room for anything else.' He said laughing. 'You will be pleased to know that we didn't insist the same for our children.'

'David how many children do you have?' Rebeka asked leaning forwards on her elbows.'

David felt excited by her nearness and found himself admiring her lips, full and kissable.'

'Three boys, they are all grown up and happily married I think, and I have 5 grandchildren.'

Rebeka thought for a moment, wondering what it had been like having such a large family. She collected the dishes.

'May I help?' David asked.

'No, I've got everything under control, just relax and enjoy the view,'

'I am doing just that looking at you', smiled David.

'You have made me blush. I haven't done that for years. You must have some sort of magic?'

'I do, I assure you,' he joked.

'Well, I must find out. I like it,' she added. 'Dinner won't be long,' Rebeka called out from the small kitchen, 'I just have to warm the potatoes.'

She came back carrying two serving dishes and placed them on mats in the middle of the table. Then she returned carrying two dinner plates and put one in front of each of them.

'Be careful the plates are very hot, don't touch them,' she warned.

David thought the food looked delicious; pink grilled lamb cutlets, new potatoes with mint and broccoli in a light curry sauce. He admired the visual contrast, the pink meat edged with brown against the white potatoes and the green broccoli, it was a perfect food painting.

'Don't wait, it will get cold,' Rebeka said and he began to eat using his knife and fork. In contrast, she cut up some of her food and ate it with her fork. Both noticed the difference and laughed.

'Isn't it strange?' she commented, 'I wonder how the two different eating methods developed?' Neither had the answer.

The final surprise was the dessert that Rebeka brought in on a silver platter. It was a flaming ice bomb which they both tucked into.

'That was delicious,' David exclaimed. 'You are a very talented chef. Where did you learn how to cook?'

'Not from my mother I'm afraid. She wouldn't let me in the kitchen. After I was married I went on a Cordon Bleu Course here in New York.

'David, why don't you relax while I tidy up in the kitchen?'

'Come on, let me help I'm very domesticated.'

'I don't think you need to I've got all the necessary tools to help me.'

'OK, but let me stand by and talk to you while you are clearing up.'

David followed Rebeka into the kitchen and stood on the side while she loaded the dishwasher. He admired the efficient way in which she went about clearing up. She obviously belonged to those who believed a dishwasher should do all the work as she put in all the soiled dishes just as they were. It took no time at all before everything was clean and tidy.

'Come David, let's sit by the fire. Would you like a liquor, Brandy or Port?'

The warm glow from the fire reflected David's relaxed feeling. They settled down in front of the fireplace. I am having a great time he thought. I don't want it to stop. Sitting close together they watched the blue flames licking the artificial coal in the grate, both deep in thought.

Breaking the silence David offered Rebeka a penny for her thoughts.

She said nothing for a while and then her face clouding over she said,

'I was thinking about Beri, my daughter. I wish we had a better relationship.'

'Do you want to talk about it?' said David, reaching out to hold her hand.

Rebeka squeezed his hand.

'I don't want to bore you with my problems, it isn't fair on you.'

'Let me be the judge of that. I'll soon let you know.'

'OK, I guess it started with my grandparents, they were the old school.'

Grandpa was very stern and the whole house revolved around him. Grandma tiptoed to his every whim and we kids somehow got drawn into it. I was continually being told *Shush*, you are disturbing Grandpa whenever we were talking or playing. He never seemed to see us certainly never kissed or hugged us. I grew up always keeping my thoughts to myself. Even when someone was being unfair I said nothing. I began to believe that was how I should be. My mother and father never seemed to have time for us. Both worked so many hours that my brother and I saw very little of them. I was never allowed in the kitchen so I grew up unable to do the simplest domestic chores.'

She suddenly stopped and turning to look at him, cupped his face in her hands.'

'David am I boring you? please tell me?'

'No, my sweet, I am very interested, please go on.'

'Where was I? Oh yes, when Barbara was born I was over the moon, I so wanted a girl and I was blessed with one. But I found it very difficult. I had to learn everything from scratch. Unfortunately, I had to give up breastfeeding and Barbara became a very fractious and difficult child. I wanted to ask for help but my husband was often working away and my parents were now living too far to help. I resorted to smacking to control Barbara. She responded by becoming sullen and withdrawn. I knew things weren't right but I didn't know what to do. By the time she was a teen-ager, she had lost any respect she may have had for me so as soon as she could she left. Over the years I have tried to rebuild the broken bridge but without success. I know we love each other but don't know how to express it.'

David listened without saying anything until she had stopped. His heart went out to her as she sat staring into the fire so alone and forlorn. He reached forwards and putting his hands on either side of her neck, gently massaged the tense muscles. He felt her relaxing. Finally, after a while he said,

'I am sure you're right, you love each other very much but have lost the means to say it.'

'What can I do about it? I can't leave it like this, it's breaking my heart.'

'I can see that on your face, the pain that you are feeling must be devastating.'

'It is.' Rebeka replied, 'I have never had to face anything like this before. I feel so terribly helpless, so alone, not knowing which way to turn.'

'You're not alone, I want to help you,' David said.

'But how can you? we have only just met, you hardly know me.'

'Yes, that's true, but you don't need to know someone for a long time to feel their pain and share their suffering.' Then lowering his voice David said,

'May I ask you a very personal question?'

'Yes, of course and I will do my best to answer it,' she added.

'Have you ever said you're sorry to Barbara, I mean Beri that's her name now isn't it?'

'I don't understand, it's not me who is being difficult, it's her.'

David sat holding her, he was conscious of the quick sand he was on.

'Sometimes in life we have to swallow our pride and see the other person's point of view.'

Rebeka sat up suddenly and turned towards him angrily,

'What are you saying? you want me to apologize to her and say I'm sorry. Sorry for what?'

David paused and let her hear her words sink in. Slowly and as if realizing it for the first time she seemed to have some sort of understanding.

'Are you saying that, I was in some way to blame for the present situation?' Rebeka exclaimed.

'Well, you did say that once you had got over the miracle of her birth, you began to resent her. She was difficult and demanding and you found yourself in an impossible situation.'

'I know but?' Rebeka interrupted impatiently.
David continued,

'Everything was new and dare I say a bit frightening and you had to face it alone without the support that you should have had from your mother. Where was she in your hour of need?'

'My mother, leave her out of this. What's it got to do with her? David, I don't think I can do this, it's getting too painful. Do you mind if we leave it?' Rebeka pleaded.

'No, of course not, I hope you don't feel I was too clinical like a therapist, I didn't mean to make you unhappy,' replied David.

'Oh! David, please I know you didn't. You are very sweet and I know you wanted to help me. Perhaps I can try again another time.'

They sat each struggling to break the silence and lighten the mood. David spoke first.

'Look, I have an idea. You know I suggested that we take a trip, let's do that and visit your daughter on the way?'

Rebeka sat not moving. Then after a while, she touched his cheek,

'Can I think about it?' and then as if a switch had been turned on, she said,
'I've got some great music what do you like.'

They listened to music for the rest of the evening, every variety from classical to jazz, soul to heavy metal, sometimes just listening, then getting up and dancing. Her

mood had lightened and for a while she forgot about her daughter and the wall between them.

'Look at the time,' Rebeka suddenly shouted, 'it's past midnight?'

David looked at his watch. The time had just flown but he knew he didn't want the evening to end just yet.

'You're right, the time has just flown. It's been a lovely evening thank you. I have not enjoyed myself so much in years.'

He wanted to say that he did want to leave her that he wanted to spend the night with her but knew that that was impossible, it was too early in their friendship for him to suggest it. She would rightly be offended that he had misunderstood her friendship for something else. But she also was confused. She knew that the evening should end now but she didn't want to face the night alone. How could she suggest it without seeming too pushy too forward? They were standing at her door saying good night when she impulsively kissed him on the cheek. He felt her softness and the sweet smell of her skin and turned so that their lips touched. For a moment neither moved and then they kissed.

'It's been such a long time,' she whispered. They both stood not saying a word and then David took control.

'How about a drink for the road?' he laughed lifting her up by the waist.

'What a good idea', she replied, 'a night cap.'

Chapter 7

Rebeka had been shopping. Loaded down with her purchases, she let herself into her apartment on the eighth floor. She threw them onto the settee and walked over to the picture window. She never tired of watching the city unfolding beneath her. She had only just removed her coat when the telephone rang.

'Hello Mum,' she recognized the voice immediately.

'Hello darling, how are you?'

'Fine Mum, fine.'

'What have you been doing?'

'The usual Mum, the usual.'

I see it is going to be another one of those tip toe conversations Rebeka realised, so she tried to find a neutral subject.

'Anything exciting? How's the work going? Anything new to tell me?'

'No, just the usual.'

Rebeka paused and took a deep breath.

'When am I going to see you? You know your room is always ready for you.'

'I know Mum, I know.' Beri paused. 'You know how it is, I'm not ready for that yet.'

'OK honey, I just want you to know I love you.' Tears welled up and she coughed.

'Goodbye Mum, I will ring again soon," and the line went dead.

Rebeka put the receiver down. Tears coursed down her cheeks as her body was racked with emotion. I just don't know what to do. I feel so guilty but don't know how to deal with it. Was I such a bad mother? I only did what I thought was best. It's so hard to know when things are going wrong.

Beri let the receiver fall and sat staring out of the window.

'Who were you talking to?' asked Matt seeing how upset she was.

'Mum, I said I would ring her I haven't spoken to her for a long time.'

'How did it go?'

'Terrible, I just clammed up and behaved like a child.' Beri cringed.

'She did it again, Matt, she did it again.' She shouted through the door.

'What? who did what?' he called from the lounge.

'That bloody woman. I hate her, I hate her,' Beri screamed.

'Hey hey, take it easy, you'll have a heart attack,' Matt said coming into the hall and holding her. Calm down, you know what we said, you're not going to let her get at you again.'

'I know, I know,' sobbed Beri.' I can't help it. I don't know why she upsets me so much. Am I like her? Please tell me, I am not becoming like her?'

'No, of course not, you are very different.'

'In what way, tell me in what way?'

'Oh come on Beri we have been through this so many times it's getting boring.'

'Oh! so that's what you think, that I'm boring.'

'No, I didn't say that, it's you and your mum fighting that's boring you know. Let's go out to the club I feel like getting hammered. It's not your fault you know, she treated you real bad.'

'I know, but do I have to wait until she's dead before I forgive her?' Beri said turning to Matt, her eyes brimming with tears.

Matt put his arm around her shoulder and drew her to him kissing her lightly on her wet eyelids.

'Beri I love you very much you know that and I hate to see you hurt.'

'I know I know; I love you too.'

Beri recalled how she had met Matt. She had been feeling particularly low having had another interminable row with her mother. She felt abandoned and needed to get out of the house and try to forget her problems. Accompanied by a friend she walked into the bar just after midnight when she knew it would just be warming up. As her eyes got used to the dim light she could see that the place was still heaving, people were dancing to a threesome playing soft sexy music in the corner. She was at the counter about to order their drinks when she met him.

'Hi,' he said. She turned to see a slim long haired young man with a winning smile. She was immediately attracted to him, his smile showing a row of white teeth. He had a gold chain hanging round his neck, his open shirt showing a hairy chest. They hit it off immediately. He came from a world she had only read about or seen in the movies. He seemed to have no hang ups, and was willing to accept every way of being not like her mother who had such a narrow view of what life was about, what mattered and what didn't.

'You look thirsty let me get you a drink?

Before she could say what she wanted he had disappeared in the direction of the bar. He was suddenly behind her pressing a glass of a pale pink liquid into her hand.

'This will hit the right place,' he smiled.

'Cheers.'

The liquid was cold and tingled in her mouth with a slight fiery taste,

'Mmm it's nice, what is it?'

'My own concoction, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Let's dance.'

They moved onto the floor joining the other dancers crushed together, she smelled a sweet odour on his breath. She would later learn that it was the smell of Ecstasy. As the dawn broke he invited her to his flat a small single roomed apartment in a high-rise building. By this time, she was agreeable to anything. It was late the following day that she awoke. She looked around and couldn't remember where she was. She heard some noise from the kitchen and got up to see what it was. Matt was preparing coffee dressed only in his Y fronts.

'Good morning,' he said and they kissed.

Chapter 8

David woke early and lay watching the light streaming through the curtains. Life was so strange and unexpected. He felt a movement to his right and turned. Rebeka was snoring gently a smile on her lips. She must be dreaming something happy to make her smile he thought. He slipped out of bed and stood by the large picture window. The whole of Manhattan was laid out in front of him - the Empire State Building and the familiar high pointed Chrysler Building. He noted the gap where the Twin Towers used to jut up into the sky. For a moment he thought about 9/11 that tragic attack on innocent people. Suddenly he felt a movement at his side. Rebeka had seen him at the window and joined him.

'I was just thinking about 9/11.'

'I guess we can never look at the New York skyline in the same way ever again,' she whispered taking his hand. 'I'm hungry she lets go to that diner I told you about. Its only a few blocks away.'

The diner was heaving when they entered. Immediately Rebeka grabbed a table and sat down.

'Go and get your food David while I hold on to this table.' He walked to the loaded counter and followed behind the other diners as they selected their breakfast. He returned with his plate piled high. He couldn't resist things that he knew were no good for him: hash browns, crispy bacon, smoked salmon, toast dripping with butter, sausages, the list went on and on.

'Wow David you've done well.'

'It's your turn Rebeka I'll wait for you.'

'No tuck in, your food will get cold.'

It was just about to drizzle when they left the warmth of the diner and walked the short distance back to the apartment. Rebeka took his arm, it felt such a natural gesture.

'That was a veritable feast,' said David. It's been a very long time since I have eaten so much and enjoyed it. It makes the full English breakfast back home look insignificant in comparison.

Chapter 9

David was getting restless. Rebeka was still hung up on her daughter Beri. She was trying hard to build a relationship with her so he was at a loose end. He hadn't seen his father for a long time and since the old man rarely answered the telephone he decided to visit him. After his mother died, David's father had fallen apart and drifted aimlessly. Eventually he settled in a small bungalow by the sea in Filey, a popular tourist town on the East Coast of Yorkshire, David had visited it as a child and had wonderful memories of the sea and sand.

One evening after he had dined at Rebeka's home David broached the subject of visiting his father.

'I haven't seen my dad for many years and really need to do so before it's too late. Is that Ok with you?'

'Sure I think you will have a good time. Just keep me in touch and don't be too long.'

They had developed a close relationship, but not an all consuming one as they each had their own issues to deal with.

The BA flight touched down in Heathrow in the early morning. David was finding flying increasingly tiring and felt jaded not having slept well. He followed the other passengers into the terminal. He joined the long line of fellow travellers making their way towards the custom hall. Once through he looked for the luggage carousels and after a short while his case came bumping into view. He had nothing to declare so made for the green exit. He had almost reached the hall when I heard a voice

'Excuse me Sir, could you please bring your luggage over here?'

He looked up to see a black Customs officer beckoning to him. What on earth did he want he wondered feeling slightly irritated by the unnecessary delay.

'Good morning Sir, please put your luggage on the counter. I would like ask you a few questions.'

'Yes what do you want?' He blurted out. He saw the officer's face cloud over.

'Where have you come from?'

'New York.' He answered

'I see you have a British passport what was the purpose of your visit?'

What was it to do with him David said to himself but aloud he replied,

'I was visiting a friend.'

'What are you here for?'

'I live here and I am going to visit my dad.'

'Are you carrying any cigarettes or alcohol? Please open your case.'

The officer began rummaging through his possessions and came out with an envelope.

'What's in here?' He demanded now speaking with more authority.

'Paracetamol.' David replied. 'Please open it you will see the name on the tablets.' He smirked

'Thank you Sir you may continue with your journey.'

Once in the hall David stopped and sat down. Why did he keep behaving like that? The officer was only doing his job. What gets into me when I face authority? It is as if I don't recognise the need.'

David saw a bar and went in. He needed a drink, something strong and was about to order a whisky when he remembered he was driving and the last thing he needed was to be hauled over for drunk driving. He settled for a coke.

Chapter 9

David had booked a car with one of the many car hire firms based at Heathrow. He waited a few minutes in line and then was handed the keys.

'You will find it in row D in the car park,' said the receptionist. He walked over and met an assistant waiting to show him the car. He checked its layout. The gear lever was on the dashboard and like many modern cars, the hand brake was on the floor activated by a foot pedal. He spent a few minutes setting up the Satnav and set off.

The route was familiar and leaving the M25 at the M1 turnoff, he was soon speeding north. The traffic was light and the road clear. He felt the exhilaration of the open road and his mind soon lightened. He was aiming for the A64, the road that divides Yorkshire and passes the capital York before reaching the East Coast. It was almost lunch so he stopped at one of the Motorway Service stations and filled up with petrol.

Two shining new electric filling units standing beside the petrol pumps surprised him. He hadn't appreciated just how soon the drivers of tomorrow would be driving electric cars and that petrol and diesel engines would be a thing of the past. The restaurant was very full and rowdy with a large group of tourists that had just come in from a coach parked on the tarmac. They were waiting in line to buy their lunch, their indecipherable chatter filling the room. He grabbed a sandwich and a coke from a dispenser and escaped to the quiet of his car.

Leaving the M1, he joined the A64 and was soon seeing signs to York and beyond. Suddenly a familiar sight appeared, a Little Chef one of the many cafes that dotted the roadside. He knew this one well having stopped there many times in the past. He felt a jolt of sadness as he recalled the memory of things and people no longer present. He and his family had often rested and dined at these small intimate cafes. He pulled into the parking area and stopped facing the road. He sat for a while with the flowing hills of Yorkshire forming a backdrop to the modernity of the dual carriageway. It was getting dark as he entered the cafe. The place hadn't changed, there were the same small tables with their plastic menus slotted upright into a box. The counter was to one side and the window to the other. He sat facing the view. He knew what he wanted, the same as he had had many times in the past. The uniformed waitress arrived and he gave his order,

'A toasted teacake with butter, red jam and a pot of tea please.' He really wanted strawberry jam but never got it so the phrase red jam covered any variety that was red. The bun soon arrived piping hot and slightly burned the way he liked it. He repeated the familiar routine of buttering the cut surface and smearing it with jam. Milk first in the cup and then the tea watching it slowly turning the white milk into a light brown infusion. He stirred it as his eyes followed the small bubbles swirling in the steaming liquid. He was hungry and picking up the bun in both hands took a big bite into the crisp surface tasting the sweetness of the jam and the slight oiliness of the butter. For a moment he was reliving a past which was now only a memory.

Replete he continued on his journey and was soon seeing the signs to Filey. He entered the one-way narrow streets and followed the directions on his Sat Nav to the coast road which he knew led to a row of Fisherman's huts, small bungalows perched high on a headland overlooking the sea. His father lived at No 6. He had moved there after his mother's death. As David approached the house he became increasingly anxious. He stopped and wiped his face. How would he greet me after all this time? What would he look like? Would I recognise him and he me?

David found No 6 and stood hesitating at the gate. The small front garden was overgrown with weeds and a few straggling rose bushes almost replaced by brambles were all that remained of a once pristine flower garden. His father had been a keen gardener and in his heyday would have had it a picture of neatness and beauty. What else would he find that had changed since they had last met?

Unsure David walked along the short path to the front door. He stood for a moment then tentatively tried the bell. He heard no sound and tried again. It didn't work so he knocked and then a gruff voice shouted,

'Who's that? Wait.' Then 'Damn' why don't they leave me alone?'

David heard soft footsteps and the door opened slowly.

'What d'you want?'

His father had aged and was now stooped. His white hair was sparse and hanging down his face. His eyes were bloodshot with sagging lids. David hardly recognised the man standing in front of him. For a moment he thought he had come to the wrong address then slowly as if a fog was clearing the face became familiar, older and more lined but familiar.

'Dad, it's David.'

'David?'

'David your son. How are you Dad? I'm sorry it has taken me so long to visit you.'

'Come in and shut door it's cold,' he barked. David entered a small living room with a smoking wood fire burning in the hearth. The fumes stung his eyes. Through an open door he could see the bedroom. The place was in a terrible mess, clothes were thrown on the chairs, papers on the floor and there was a strong smell of damp.

'How long have you been living here?' asked David looking around. He doubted if the place was ever cleaned and could see that it was hardly suitable for human occupation.

'Since your ma died. We were often at coast in Filey when you were a nipper. I cum by one day and saw 'For Sale' sign. Your ma had often spoke about settling in coast. I saw it, I took it and moved in. It suits me grand, not too big.'

David automatically began tidying things, picking up books and papers from the floor.

'Leave it boy. I like it as is.'

'But Dad?' David wanted to say it was a pigsty but stopped. His father was right, he had no business interfering so he just said nothing and settled himself into a rickety chair.

'What do you about food?'

'I make for myself or eat out There's a grand chippie nearby.'

'Let's eat there this evening,' said David trying to lighten the atmosphere. His father grunted and began to prod the fire sending up spirals of smoke into the room. David said nothing, it wasn't his home.

The café was a short walk from the house up a path away from the beach. It was not busy. One or two locals sitting alone were eating at the small tables. Others were queuing before pushing off home. David's father nodded to one or two and was greeted by the owner.

'Good Evening George good to see you. Who have you brought?' he said pointing to David.

'He's my young'un, David from south.'

'Welcome,' said the owner extending his hand. David shook it. It was slightly oily and smelled of fish.

'The usual?'

'Yes, make it both.' His father said without asking David what he wanted. David followed his father to a table by the window. He felt as if he was a small boy again.

'This's my place, always sit 'ere you can see the sea. Today tis calm, sometimes so angry, spray sends up almost to window,' he said, pointing to it. 'I remember bringing you 'ere when you were a wee boy.'

David had no recollection. He remembered so little about his childhood and his father. The food arrived, thick battered fish with piping hot chips on plastic plates. They ate in silence.

Then David spoke.

'Dad, what did you do before mum and I came along?'

His father pursed his lips and thought for a moment.

'Life was 'ard. I was oldest of four bairns. We were poor and me dad struggled to put food on't table. As soon as I could I left class.'

'What age were you?'

'Sixteen.'

David thought about his own life.

'He had stayed at school until he was eighteen and then went to Uni. In one generation things had changed so much.

'What did you then do, Dad?'

'I loved the watter even at that age and wanted to become a sailor. I saw job in paper for deckhands. I get missen to Portsmouth and make way to the P & O Offices. It was a grand building in centre of the town. I was very frightened as I entered the foyer and went up to the reception desk. I ain't never done nothing like this before and had to fight the desire to leave.'

'Can I help you?' said a young woman dressed in a naval uniform.

'I.I want to join navy.'

'Have you any qualifications?' she asked preparing to complete a form.

'Qualifications?' I asked. What are them?'

'Something that you have already done as a seaman.'

'I done nought. I wanna learn.'

'I see. You're in the wrong place. You need to go to our training school. Here are the directions,' she said handing me a map with a large cross in the middle.

'Did you go to sea?' David asked seeing that his father was tiring,

'Yes, about ten years till I met mother.'

His Dad was beginning to droop, constantly rubbing his eyes and yawning.

'Dad I can see that you're tired and as there is no room for me to stay with you, I need to find a bed for the night. I'll come by in the morning before I leave for London.'

As soon as they got back to the house, his father just turned and went into his bedroom. David let myself out into the cold night. He had noticed a B & B on the way. The place was in the dark when he drove into the small car park. There were two other cars parked. He rang the bell. A woman in a nightgown rubbing her eyes opened the door. She had been disturbed from her sleep,

'I'm sorry I am so late but I have booked a room for the night.'

'Come in,' she said curtly. 'Your room is no 8 on the second floor. We can deal with the formalities in the morning, good night.'

David gingerly climbed the creaking stairs and entered the room. There was a single bed by the wall with a small dresser and a mirror. The one central light cast a dim shadow. Beggars can't be choosers David said to himself as he settled down to sleep.

He didn't sleep well. He could hear the sounds of his neighbours through the paper thin walls, a deep rumbling snore and then a thin whistle from one side and the creaking of a bed from the other. Lying in the dark he thought of Rebeka and wondered how she and Beri were getting on.

He woke early as the rumble of a passing truck shook his small bed. The shower water was lukewarm so he got in and out as quickly as possible. He was the first to breakfast. The meal was served in a small front room set with three tables, his was a single by the window. The owner appeared soon after he had sat down. He could now see her. She was heavily built in her sixties with her white hair tied up in a bun. Her face was devoid of makeup apart from yesterday's lipstick. She wore a stained apron.

'Full breakfast?' she barked. He nodded. 'Tea or coffee?'

'Tea?'

Eating quickly, he paid the bill and escaped into the fresh air of the early morning. The only sounds were seagulls wheeling and diving against the breaking of the waves on the beach as he walked slowly along the promenade, memorising each item knowing he would never return. He needed to say goodbye to the many familiar sites and sounds. His hand stroked the railings painted blue with patches of rust as if they were old friends. He peered down the steps leading to the beach now uncovered but lined with slippery seaweed, grown when the tide was in. The smell of the ozone was sharp against his nostrils. He breathed in deeply feeling the cool air fill his lungs. He wanted to linger, to hold the memories but he had a long journey ahead and had to get started.

His father was up when he knocked and they drank a cup of tea together. Saying farewell to his father was difficult. The two stood outside the house by the car. David didn't want to leave. Something told him that this would be the last time he would see his dad.

'Goodbye Dad, it's been really good seeing you again and knowing that you are doing OK.'

'Goodbye boyo, tanks for coming to see me. Have a safe journey wherever you go. You come again if you are in these parts.'

David turned and walked to his car tears filling his eyes. He started the engine turned and waved. As he drove away he saw the frail figure of his father in the mirror and tried to capture the scene so that later he would remember. Struggling with his emotions, he stopped by the front, got out and took a deep breath, unable to fight back the tears. His heart was heavy as he returned to the car. He and his father had grown so far apart. They no longer shared anything. He felt that the old man he had left was the shell of the father he had known and that a chapter in his life had passed that could never be revisited.

Chapter 10

Rebeka wasn't sleeping, she missed David's presence. She had tried to phone him but the call wouldn't go through. Suddenly her phone rang, that must be him. Excited she pick up her mobile,

'Hello David,' she said. A serious and solemn voice spoke,

'Is that Mrs Phillips?'

'Yes speaking,'

'This is Sinai Hospital.' Rebeka swallowed what could they possibly want?

Then the bombshell struck, she was speechless.

'Your daughter Beri has been admitted. She is in ICU.' Rebeka recoiled unable to take in what she had heard, Beri in Intensive care how could that be? The phone went dead.

Responding like a robot, Rebeka shoved on her coat and rushed out of the apartment. I can't wait to get my car out of the garage, I'll get a cab. She reached the street and called out 'Taxi.' A yellow cab came to a halt.

'Sinai Hospital please as fast as you can.'

'Yes ma'am.' The cab sped through the early morning rain soaked streets weaving in and out of the traffic and ignoring red lights. With a screech of its brakes it drew up outside the Emergency Entrance. Shoving ten dollars into the driver's hand she rushed into the foyer and up to the desk. She knew the hospital by heart, Beri was born there.

'ITU please,' she shouted.

'Over there, follow the signs.'

Rebeka didn't wait for more information. She rushed along the empty corridor her footsteps echoing in the silence. The entrance of the ICU loomed up in the shadows. She pressed the button and the door opened.

'My daughter's here, her name is Beri.'

'Follow me,' said the nurse. The room was long and thin. In the dim light

Rebeka could make out a row of beds lined up against a wall. A bank of monitors was emitting a repetitive ticking in the otherwise silent room. Beri's face was lit by a small bedside lamp. She looked asleep her face and lips colourless. By her side was the tall figure of Matt. It was the first time Rebeka had met him. She could see his earrings shining in the light with his unkempt hair hanging down the side of his face. He was wearing a leather jacket and jeans; his feet were in sandals. Nodding to him she leant over Beri's body and called her name.

'She can't hear you.' he grunted, 'she's unconscious.'

'What on earth happened, what have you done to her?'

'Look Missus, I tried to stop her, your daughter's very obstinate and took no notice of me.'

Rebeka was staring at Beri. She was dumbstruck to see her daughter like this. It seemed impossible and yet here she was looking down on her pale almost death-like face.

Her anger welled up in her.

'You bastard.'

She turned on Matt. 'It's your fault if she dies. You will be held fully responsible. Now leave us, get out of here. I don't want you near her, do you understand.'

Matt shrugged his shoulders.

'It wasn't nothing to do with me,' he said and slunk away.

'Beri Beri, it's mum, can you hear me?'

'I'm sorry,' said the nurse. 'She can't hear you, she is deeply sedated so we can control her breathing. She was hardly alive when she came in, we think she took an overdose of Ecstasy.'

'I don't understand how did she get it?'

'It was probably in her drink, she smelled heavily of alcohol. The mixture of Ecstasy and alcohol can be lethal.'

Rebeka's mobile lit up. It was David.

'David thank God, something terrible has happened. Beri is in hospital, in Intensive Care.'

'I don't understand did you say Intensive Care?'

'Yes, she became unconscious, they think her drink was spiked.'

'Oh my God how is she?'

'She's being sedated and on a life support machine.'

'I'm coming right back I'll get the next flight. See you soon'

The BA flight from London touched down at 9.40 am at JFK airport. Once in the terminal David texted Rebeka. *Landed safely be with you in an hour.* He made his way through Passport Control and Customs to the car park. Snow lay on the ground and he was shivering by the time he reached his car. He turned the key and waited. The engine coughed and then started. He knew the way and was soon on the Grand Central Parkway - Route 678. Forty minutes later he was parking outside the hospital.

Rebeka saw her screen light up and read the message. She relaxed, David will soon be here and take the burden off my shoulders. She heard the door of ICU swish open and saw David's silhouette in the light. He saw the circle of light and a hand waving, that must be Rebeka. He followed the nurse to Beri's bedside. He hugged her and whispered,

'How is she?'

'They don't know; she is still heavily sedated as she is not yet breathing on her own?'

'How will they know if she's improving?'

'Apparently as she lightens she will try and breathe on her own, against the machine. The nurses have been wonderful turning her every two hours and treating her pressure areas.'

'How are you?' David asked.

Rebeka turned towards him.

'It's been a nightmare David, the sudden news and not knowing whether she will recover and in what state she will be. Oh David, I am so frightened that she could be brain-damaged.'

'What do the doctors say?'

'They're optimistic. They say she's young and that's a good sign. But are they just trying to calm me? I'm so tired. It's exhausting living in this uncertainty.'

'Why don't you go home and get some rest? I'll stay here and keep you informed if there is any change.'

'Thanks David,' she said hugging him. 'I could do with a break. Please don't hesitate to call me whatever.'

David was getting bored nothing seemed to be happening. The doctors came by every half an hour and checked Beri's condition and the apparatus, nodded and left.

Suddenly his screen lit up. It must be Rebeka he thought. He didn't recognise the number.

'Hello, is that David?' the voice asked.

'Yes speaking, who is that?'

'You don't know me I was a friend of your father's,' The word 'was' startled him. He felt his chest tighten.

'Is he OK?' he asked, his voice strained and forced.

'I'm sorry,' the man continued. David held his breath Oh! no, so soon? 'Your father died last night I am very sorry.' Silence

David sat, the only sound was the clicking of the life support machines. A great weight was bearing down on him. He wanted to cry but no tears came just an emptiness. He knew it could only be a matter of time, his father had looked so frail when he visited him. But that didn't help.

'I need to tell someone, to share my sadness but I can't tell Rebeka, she has enough problems of her own.

A nurse came by and saw him sitting his shoulders hunched.

'Are you all right?'

'No, I've just heard that my father has died.' He whispered the words.

'I am so sorry sir, I know how it feels, my father died last year, we were very close.'

'Thank you nurse, I am so sorry for your loss, you are too young to lose a father.'

'He had cancer. He died very quickly.'

David sat in the gloom feeling very alone. Everyone carries a scar; no one gets away scot-free.

The ICU seemed somewhat surreal to David. The outside world went by oblivious of the fight that was going on there behind closed doors. It felt as if he was in a parallel world. Most people only knew it from the Films or TV, the amazing technology that could take over the vital systems of a person. David was living it, watching the pump blowing air into and out of Beri's lungs. Periodically he looked up at the monitor on the wall above her bed and watched the tracing of her vital parameters. It was all beyond him. Just an amazing world.

He watched Beri as she lay still as if sleeping her eyes occasionally flickering, her hands moving erratically. He reached out and held one. It was warm the skin soft and moist. He squeezed it gently and was startled to feel a responding squeeze.

'Nurse, Nurse,' he shouted out. 'Beri's squeezed my hand she's awake.'

'It's all right Sir, it's a common response. She still has a little way to go,' whispered the nurse.

Chapter 11

Rebeka let herself into her apartment. A small table light lit up the familiar room. She felt very alone and the thought of losing Beri horrified her. What a waste, why does she need to drink? What did I do wrong? How did I fail her? She slumped on the settee unable to find any answers. Feeling taut and stressed, she went into the bathroom and ran a bath. Stepping out of her clothes she let herself slowly into the

hot water. The warmth enveloped her like a loving touch soothing her jangled nerves.

She closed her eyes and lay back, the only sound being the drip drip of the tap. She leaned forwards and tightened it. She wiggled her toes watching the foam swirl on the surface. Her life seemed to have come to a halt. All she could think about was Beri. The thought of losing her was unbearable.

She remembered when she was born. They had tried to have a baby for years and had visited a number of specialists. In desperation they had thought of using AI but rejected it when they heard what it involved. Then when they had given up hope she found she was pregnant. She would never forget the moment when she first heard her baby cry. Thinking about it now brought tears to her eyes. They had had such hopes for their treasure and spoiled her. Nothing was denied her and she grew up not wanting for anything.

David was snoozing when he felt a jog on his shoulder. It was Rebeka

‘Hi David I’ll take over,’ she said. ‘Why don’t you go and get some rest. How is she?’

‘No change. Still on the machine.’

‘Any news?’

‘My father has died.’

He had said it; the words came more easily as if about somebody else.

She hugged him, ‘I’m so sorry David.’

‘He was very frail I knew it couldn’t be long. But...’

‘I know, losing your father is always a jolt, it’s the passing of an era.’

The two sat, each alone with their thoughts about the wastefulness of death and the difficulty in coming to terms with its inevitability. So many ‘whys’ remained unanswered.

Suddenly Beri moved and momentarily opened her eyes.

‘Nurse she’s coming round,’ they shouted together. Within minutes the doctor arrived and checked her reflexes.

‘Yes I think she is coming back. We will stop the machines and see how she responds. We may have to reset them but let’s see.’

The next few minutes were almost unbearable. Time was standing still as Rebeka and David watched the drama unfolding. Minutes passed. The monitors’ tracing remained steady. Beri took a gasp of air then another, she was breathing on her own. The doctor watched as she slowly returned.

‘I think she’s back,’ he said.

The excitement of Beri’s recovery affected the whole ward. Nurses and doctors walked with lighter steps, their voices excited. There was the occasional laugh heard

in what was normally a dour and cold place. Another miracle had occurred, another soul pulled back from eternity to struggle on.

At first Beri was confused looking around like a frightened child entering a dentist's office. The paraphernalia of recovery was so alien to an ordinary person. Soon she was sitting up in a chair taking food. The IV was taken down and she was offered her first tentative walk. Shuffling between two Physios, she tottered across the room counting her steps, ten then she stopped a smile on her face. The next time it was twenty, then she was holding one arm only and finally unaided. With whoops of joy she showed off her new skill as if she was walking for the first time in her life.

Rebeka knew that sooner or later Beri would want to see Matt. But she had other ideas for her future.

'David I think we're going to have a fight over where Beri lives once she comes out of hospital. I want her to come home with me and stay until she has regained her strength. I don't want her to ever see Matt again. He was the cause of all her problems.'

When the subject came up Beri was adamant. She had very different ideas,

'I want to see Matt, where is Matt?'

'Please darling,' pleaded Rebeka, 'he's no good for you.' I don't want you to see him.'

Just as they were leaving the hospital Matt appeared. He was unshaven and smelled of alcohol.

'Oh Matt, take me home please,' pleaded Beri, "I don't want to live with my Mom, I want to be with you.'

'Rebeka please don't stop her,' said Matt taking her hand.

'No Matt leave her, you're the cause of all her problems.'

'Don't you think she can decide for herself? Beri what do you want?'

'To come with you.'

Then David stepped in.

'Rebeka let her go. She's an adult and must make up her own mind.'

'No I can't let her. She's going back to the same life.'

'I know you're right but it's her decision. Please Rebeka let her go.'

Chapter 12

That year the winter in New York was very harsh. The whole city ground to a halt. The snow ploughs were no match for the elements as the roads and sidewalks were slowly buried in a blanket of snow. Rebeka and David holed up in her apartment.

Neither wanted to move. They had late breakfasts, early nights: played chess, Monopoly and watched their favourite movies.

Beri was never far from Rebeka's thoughts but her phone calls were not returned.

'What's going on?' said Rebeka one evening. 'I've heard nothing from Beri. She ignores my calls. I'm getting worried. David do you think she's OK?'

David was reading a murder mystery and looked up from his book. He didn't know what to say. He had tried to keep off the subject of Beri. He knew it upset Rebeka but he had nothing of any value to add. He said nothing.

'Do you think she's OK?' she repeated as if talking to herself. 'I think I should go and see her.'

'I don't think you'll get far in this weather.'

'I'm worried.'

'I know.'

'Who was that?' asked Matt coming into the bedroom.

'Mum, she keeps ringing.'

'Why don't you answer her she only wants to know you're OK.'

'I know; she makes me feel like a baby always mothering me. Let's go to the club I'm fed up staying at home I need a drink and some fun.'

'Do you think you should it's only a month since you got out of hospital?'

'I feel fine. I'll go on my own if you don't want to come. I'll ring up Patsy she's always ready for some fun.'

It was after midnight and Matt began to worry. He had expected Beri home long before then. She wasn't answering her phone and he began to dread the worst. I should have gone with her. How could I leave her? I know what she is. He was worried. Having had a few drinks at home he decided to take a cab.

The club was crowded when he arrived, some friends acknowledged him.

'Have you see Beri?' he asked one.

'Yeah I saw her a while ago, she was dancing with a tall guy, I didn't recognise him.'

Matt began searching amongst the dancers and the two bars. No one had seen her for some sometime. He knew there was a grassy area at the back of the club and went out to look for her. He called her name fearing that something had happened to her. He was about to return to the bar when he heard a faint cry. Switching on the torch of his mobile he combed the area. A movement caught his eye. Someone was lying on the grass, a girl. He could hear her moaning. It was Beri, her face was screwed up, her make up smeared, her clothes torn. He knelt down to help her.

'Beri are you OK? What happened?'

'This guy I knew him, a friend we had a few drinks. Then Oh my God, he attacked me I couldn't stop him.'

She began crying 'I'm sorry Matt I'm sorry.'

Beri wasn't herself. She didn't want to get out of bed. She seemed tired all the time.

Matt was worried and wanted to phone Rebeka but Beri wouldn't hear of it.

'No I don't want you to speak to my mother. I can deal with this on my own.'

'At least go and see a doctor, if not for you do it for me.'

The doctor's verdict was swift and decisive.

'The blood tests show it all,' he said. 'You have Cirrhosis of the Liver.'

Matt spoke up,

'What does that mean doctor?'

'Beri's liver is damaged and unable to do its job properly.'

'What has caused that?'

'The commonest cause is alcohol and drugs.'

Matt looked at Beri, she wouldn't catch his eye.

'Is there any treatment?' He asked.

'It's a serious disease. The liver is unable to function properly and as a result poisons are building up in her blood. They will eventually kill her. Beri needs to be on a strict diet, low protein, low salt, high carbohydrate, vitamins and medicines. I'll get nurse to give you a diet sheet. She will need to avoid red meat, but can have poultry and fish. She will need to eat plenty of pasta, rice, potatoes and cereals.'

'Doctor, can I get better?' Pleaded Beri.

'Yes the liver is very forgiving and has great powers of regeneration, it can replace diseased cells with healthy ones. But there is one thing you must avoid and you know what that is. From now on you are teetotal (I think this is a very British expression and so perhaps would not be used in the US?) - you must never drink alcohol again, do you understand?' Matt looked at Beri, he knew that she would find that almost impossible.

The days and weeks seemed to stretch out as Beri struggled to remain off alcohol. Matt was no help, he teased her about her fear of alcohol.

'There's nothing wrong with a few drinks,' he would say. 'They relax you and make you happier. Your problems seem to melt away and the whole world is yours for the taking.'

'That's not what my doctor says, he calls alcohol's poison. He says it damages our whole system.'

'What does he know? He's old and out of date. I read that drinking a glass of red wine a day reduces the risk of a heart attack.'

'OK Matt I have my follow up appointment with my doctor, I would like you to come with and tell him what you told me,' said Beri one morning.

'Oh no you don't want me there, I would probably have a fight with the doctor. I couldn't just sit still and hear him telling you rubbish.'

In the end Beri went alone. When she got home Matt was waiting for her.

'Well what did he say'

'He wants me to see a surgeon.'

Chapter 13

Beri didn't want an operation. She was scared. She had heard about a woman who had had the operation and died soon after so she put off visiting the surgeon.

Some weeks later she was making her face up in the mirror when she noticed her eyes. She called Matt.

'Look at my eyes what do you see?'

'Come over to the light so I can have a good look.'

Matt was horrified, the whites of her eyes were tinged yellow.

'Can you see what I mean?'

'I think so.'

'What do you think it means?'

Beri was shaking with fear. She didn't like seeing doctors and now she was seeing a surgeon. The thought horrified her. On the day of the appointment she feigned illness and stayed in bed until Matt persuaded her to get dressed. She decided to go on her own despite Matt's protestations.

'I'll manage,' she shouted as she left the apartment.

Arriving at the doctor's building Beri stood for a moment looking at it. It was an old building with none of the clean lines that she was familiar with. A stone plaque by the side of the entrance indicated that it was built in 1894 and was originally an office block later converted into a Doctor's Plaza.

Beri entered the darkened hall and stood letting her eyes accommodate to the apparent gloom. She was looking up at the high ceiling admiring the decorated frieze when a voice suddenly surprised her.

'Good morning Madam may I help you?' Turning she saw a young man at a desk.

'Yes thank you,' she stammered. 'I have an appointment...' she fumbled with her purse.

'Let me see?' She said taking out a small card. 'Yes I have an appointment to see Dr Broad, a surgeon.'

'Yes Madam his office is on the second floor. You could take the elevator.'

'I would prefer to walk.'

'The stairs are over there,' he said pointing to a corner of the hall.

A sign to Dr Broad's office directed her along a carpeted hall to a glass-fronted door. She pushed it open and entered a small waiting room. There was one person waiting. Slightly confused as to what to do, she went over to the window and sat down. After a few moments a nurse appeared,

'Good morning Beri, the doctor won't be long. Please help yourself to coffee.'

Beri sat aware of the humming of the A/C. It all seemed like a bad dream. She couldn't understand how everything could be going OK outwardly but inside her body was struggling with the effects of her abuses. Apparently her liver was packing up unable to deal with the toxicity of the chemicals that she was drinking.

She really wanted to run away from the reality of it all, to bury herself and yet here she was sitting waiting for the verdict. Her brain was screaming out, 'get away, don't stay and let them butcher you.'

The office door opened and she was beckoned in to the chamber of horrors as she would describe it later. Her legs were shaking as she walked towards it. Sitting at a desk was the surgeon. He looked very ordinary in a white coat and a bow tie. Could he be the devil she so feared?

'Good morning Beri.' He spoke in a soft gentle voice. 'I have been sent the result of the tests. It's not good news. Your liver is failing.'

'What does that mean doctor I feel a bit tired but otherwise I'm OK.'

'You are young and for the moment you are holding your own but unless we do something things will get much worse. You need to go on a strict low protein diet and most important no alcohol, none, not a drop.'

'If I do what you advise, what are my chances of getting better?'

'They are excellent, the body is very forgiving and the most forgiving part is the liver. So treat it right and it will last you a lifetime.'

'How did it go?'

'Fine he said that I'm OK.'

'Didn't he suggest anything in the way of medication or a diet?'

'No he said I was OK'

Beri felt relieved that all the fuss about her liver was exaggerated and she lapsed back into her old habits. The weeks went by and she continued to drink. It was at the club that her condition was noticed.

'The usual please,' said Beri as she arrived at the club. Her regular barman became concerned as she seemed to be drinking more than usual. Somehow Matt didn't notice, he was tied up in some deal and was away a lot of the time.

'How's it going Beri?' he asked. 'I hear that you weren't well.'

'Yeah I had to see the doc about my liver but he said all was well.'

That evening, Matt let himself into the apartment, the hall light was on but it was very quiet.

'Beri I'm home,' he called. There was no answer. He waited and called again. He called her mobile fighting back the fear that something was wrong, there was no answer. *No news is good news* he repeated to himself as he searched the house. He ran from room to room calling her name.

'Beri Beri where are you?' The silence shouted back at him. Then he heard a muffled cry coming from the bathroom. Frantic he pushed open the door. Beri was

sitting on the floor, an empty bottle by her side. In front of her was a pool of vomit, her face was ashen.

'Beri my God what have you done?'

She looked up at him unable to speak.

Chapter 14

Rebeka was half asleep under the hairdryer when she heard the name Beri mentioned. She opened her eyes and listened. It must be a coincidence she thought, there must be many girls called Beri. Then she heard the name again.

'Did you hear Beri's in hospital again, the same problem drinking? The family knows nothing about it. They say she needs a liver transplant; the hospital is looking for a donor.'

Rebeka was stunned, speechless, it didn't seem possible. It can't be our Beri? I must ring Matt, he'll know.

'Matt is it true?' She demanded. She heard him hesitate. 'Matt tell me the truth, is she back in hospital?'

'Yes.'

'Why on earth didn't you tell me?'

He began to mumble,

'She-she made me promise not to tell you. She told me not to.' His voice faltered.

Calling the assistant, she said,

'Hurry I need to get home!'

Once in the street Rebeka rang David.

'David I must talk to you. Where are you?'

'Whoa take it easy, I'm at home. I was going out but I'll wait for you, please calm down.'

David was waiting at the front door when she arrived.

'What's going on?'

'It's Beri: David something terrible has happened. She's back in hospital.'

'How do you know?'

'Matt told me. Beri had made him keep it from us. David I need to know how she is, can you go to the hospital and find out?'

Thirty minutes later David was in the Sinai Hospital walking up to reception.

'Excuse me I believe a young woman called Beri was admitted recently.'

'Are you a relative Sir?'

'No just a friend.'

'I'm sorry Sir, I can't tell you anything about the patients here, it would be a breach of their confidentiality.'

But David needed to find out how Beri was. He was uncertain what to do and was walking away when a female voice called,

'Hello David how are you?' He recognised it immediately. It was one of the nurses who had looked after Beri previously when she was admitted as an emergency.

'Fine how are you?'

Then lowering his voice, he asked,

'Is it true that Beri has been admitted again?'

'Yes she came in two days ago in a terrible state. She had gone back to drinking and was very jaundiced.'

'Could you get a message to her?'

'Yes but I don't think she will be able to understand it; she is very confused. You should try and see the doctor looking after her.'

'Do you know who she is under?'

'Yes she's a patient of Dr Broad.'

'Dr Broad can see you now.'

'Good Morning David, it's good to see you again. How can I help you?'

'Good Morning Dr Broad, it's not me I have come about, it's Beri.'

'I see you've heard?'

'Yes and her mother and I are very worried.'

'I guess neither she nor, what's his name, her boyfriend Matt, have told you?'

'No we heard it by chance on the grapevine. You know people can't stop prattling especially when it involves conflict in families. It feels like a real-life soap.'

'Yes I know I have it all the time. There is a problem. Beri doesn't want her mother to know about her illness.'

'Does that mean you can't tell us what's happening?'

'Yes to do so would be a breach of confidentiality.'

He walked to the window and looked out onto a playground where children were playing on a swing.

'On the other hand, I am a parent and we don't stop caring when our children become adults. Nurse what does my diary look like this morning?'

'Your next patient isn't due for an hour.'

'Good I'm going to take a coffee break with David, we will be at my regular coffee bar you know the one. Phone me if you need me. Now David let me buy you a coffee and we can talk.'

While Dr Broad was closing up his desk, David rang Rebeka.

'Meet me at the coffee shop near Sinai Hospital as soon as possible.'

The coffee shop was quiet, the breakfast rush was over and the lunch service had not yet begun.

'Good Morning Dr Broad we haven't seen you for a while.' Asked a vivacious young woman.

'No I've been really busy Ann, may I have my usual table?'

David and the doctor sat at a table overlooking a small empty playground.

'I love to sit here and watch the children when they come out for their break. Now let's get down to business. You realize I can't tell you anything about Beri but I can talk in general about my work do you understand?'

At that moment Rebeka came in and saw the two men sitting by the window. She was about to join them when David beckoned to her to stay away. Nodding she sat on her own out of sight of the doctor but within hearing distance.

Dr Broad was speaking.

'David when I became a doctor I had little idea of what I wanted to practice. There were so many choices but at an early stage I was lucky to work with an amazing surgeon, gentle, humble and technically superb. I decide to become a surgeon. As time went on I was exposed to a wide range of surgical specialities and finally decided on Abdominal Surgery which included surgery of the liver. Time and again I would be asked to see a patient with severe liver damage. In the early days we could do little but advise on diet but then in 1963, the first transplant was performed. Sadly, the patient died but since then the operation has been improved and over the years I have performed over 100 Liver transplants. They are sad cases because the majority are self induced due to alcoholism and drugs. A typical case would be a young women aged twenty-two that is Beri's age. Of course I am not talking about her that would be a breach of confidentiality. I am talking about a theoretical case. The liver is one of the body's unsung heroes. It performs a wide range of essential functions. It is hidden and rarely intrudes on the patient, in fact for most people it is silent and unknown.'

David listened fascinated by what he was hearing.

Playing along with the doctor David asked,

'How would you manage this theoretical patient?'

'It would depend on the health of the liver. It has amazing properties of recovery so I would emphasize diet and no alcohol or drugs.'

'At what stage would you consider surgery?'

'When the patient is in Liver Failure.'

'What are the symptoms of Liver Failure?'

'The early ones are nausea, anorexia, fatigue and diarrhoea. Later jaundice, swollen abdomen, confusion and sleepiness going on to coma.'

'If your patient needs a liver transplant where does the healthy liver come from?'

'That's a good question. There are two main sources: a member of the family, a friend or benefactor or from a deceased donor maintained on a life support system.'

David thanked the doctor and accompanied by Rebeka left the cafe. She was reeling from the information she had just overheard.

'I must see Beri, I must be with her now of all times,' she whispered.

Beri felt sick, her head was throbbing and she felt exhausted. She could hardly lift her head off the pillow. She didn't know where she was.

'Nurse I feel terrible what's happening?'

'It's going to be OK we will give you some medicine. There is a visitor for you.'

'Who?'

'Your mother.'

'I don't want to see her, tell her to go away.'

'But Beri she's come to see you. She's worried about you.'

'Worried? All her life she's never thought about anyone else other than herself. I don't want to see her. Please send her away.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yeah I'm sure.'

The nurse waited a while and then returned to the desk.

'Mrs Simons, Beri says she's very tired and doesn't want any visitors.'

Rebeka's face dropped she was afraid that might be Beri's response.

'How is she?'

'Not very well I'm afraid, her liver is failing. The doctors think she is going to need a liver transplant if she is to survive.'

Rebeka felt utterly bereft. Her only daughter was disowning her as if she was a stranger. Nothing she could say or do seemed to be able to change her mind.

As soon as she arrived home, David saw on Rebeka's face that something had happened. He took her in his arms.

'What is it darling? What's upset you so much?'

'It's Beri. I don't know what to do. She refused to see me today at the hospital. What have I done to be treated like this from my own daughter? Tell me David am I a bad person?'

'Rebeka it's not you, you know that. Its Beri, unable to face you because of the choices she has made. You have nothing to reproach yourself for, nothing.'

Chapter 15

Rebeka was silent as they prepared for sleep. It was not like her to bottle things up but David knew that sooner or later she would talk about her feelings. He fell asleep quickly but was disturbed when he heard Rebeka mumbling and unable to settle.

'Are you awake?' he whispered.

'Yes I can't sleep. Thoughts keep whirling around in my head. I can't get what the doctor said out of my mind. He talked about a liver transplant for Beri. Where would she get it from? She would have to wait for one to be donated by the family of someone killed in an accident. There is a waiting list so she could die before one became available. I couldn't live with that.'

'Rebeka what are you thinking about?'

'Could I donate part of mine if it was a match?'

'Rebeka do you know what you are saying? Are you sure? It's a big decision.'

'I know but I think it's what I want to do.'

'I think she might refuse. In her present frame of mind, she might do it out of spite.'

'She wouldn't need to know it came from me. It could be a secret we could make up a story.'

'Gosh, you're serious aren't you. I thought when you began you were just trying out ideas. It's an amazingly selfless thing to offer.'

'She's my daughter. Wouldn't any mother do the same?'

'Even after the way she's treated you?'

'That's nothing, it's only bravado.' She smiled. 'Thanks for letting me rant on. I think I can sleep now that I know what I will do, good night dear.'

At breakfast the following morning David broached the subject.

'You made an amazing offer last night. I wondered if you meant it?'

'Yes of course I meant it, why do you ask?'

'Because, it's the most courageous act I have ever heard. I am so proud of you.'

'Oh David come off it. Don't be so soft. Just kiss me I need to go shopping.'

While she was pushing her trolley down the aisle at the local supermarket, Rebeka began to plan how she would approach the liver transplant. I need to speak to Doctor Broad and tell him my idea.

Doctor Broad was both surprised and intrigued by Rebeka's suggestion. He had never been faced with such a dilemma before. A potential family donor not wishing to be named. He was perplexed.

'I have to get my head around this. Rebeka are you saying that if Beri comes to need a liver and yours was compatible then you would be prepared to donate half of yours to her.'

'Yes I would.'

'That is a very brave thing to do. I have to advise you that there is a morbidity and even a mortality involving the donor?'

'Yes I know but I am prepared to take the chance.'

'OK, let's take it step by step. Before we can even think about the transplant we need to know if your liver is compatible with hers. I am sure you have done a lot of reading about the procedure and realise that it is very complicated. Your liver

needs to be healthy and the right size, not too big and not too small. The vessels need to be suitable for grafting. Your blood group etc. needs to be compatible. All of these can be determined by a battery of tests. Are you up for that?’

‘Yes the sooner we get started the better.’

‘OK I will arrange the tests. They can all be done as an outpatient over two or three days.’

Rebeka let herself into the house. She was excited after her discussion with Dr. Broad. It all seemed very straightforward. But it was David’s question that brought her down to earth with a jolt.

‘Have you really thought about the risk?’

‘Yes if she doesn’t have it she would die. There seems to me to be no other choice.’

‘No dear, I mean to you.’

‘To me?’

‘Yes to you. You are contemplating undergoing a major operation.’

‘Yes I know?’

‘Have you thought about the risks?’ He repeated. Rebeka hadn’t. She just wanted to do something for Beri, wanted to make up to her for the things she may have failed to do. She remembered David’s question, had she ever said sorry? Giving part of her liver was like trying to compensate Beri for all the things she hadn’t said or done. It was like assuaging her guilt.

But she realized he was right. She had to be realistic and for a moment she hesitated. Then a second inner voice spoke up and pushed her doubts aside.

‘I don’t want to think about it. I just want to help Beri.’

The chance came sooner than Rebeka expected. The phone rang a week later. An anxious female voice spoke,

‘Mrs Simons, Dr Broad would like you to come to the hospital as soon as possible, Beri has taken a turn for the worse.’

Rebeka’s heart jolted she could hardly breathe.

‘David’, she croaked, ‘wake up it’s the hospital. Beri’s got worse, they want me now.’

When asked later what happened that morning, Rebeka would look confused.

‘I remember the phone call but I can’t remember the journey. I can still feel the sharp prick of the needle and the rest is blank until I woke up.’

David had a much clearer recall of the events of that day. They were engraved on his memory.

‘I was asleep when the phone call came, I didn’t hear it. Rebeka jolted me.’

‘David, wake up it’s the hospital. They want me there. Beri has deteriorated. I think they want to do the operation, get dressed hurry.’

‘While Rebeka was getting ready David put on some clothes and got the car out of the garage. He drove carefully. The roads were empty but a bit slippery due to

the overnight rain. They got to the hospital in no time and were ushered through the foyer to the surgical ward. A nurse was waiting to escort Rebeka to her room. David followed. He tried to keep out of the way as Rebeka was being prepared for the operation. She smiled wanly at him. He gave her the thumbs up. She quickly changed into a surgical gown with a paper cap. An IV was set up in her left arm. David read the label, it was a glucose and saline mixture, a clear fluid that dripped slowly into her arm. Within minutes the surgical porters arrived and rolled her onto a trolley. Then she looked frantic. David held her hand and mouthed 'I love you' but before he could say anything more she was whisked out of the room.

Suddenly I was alone. he didn't know what to do. He checked his watch it was half past eight. He heard the rest of the story later from Dr Broad.

The surgical team had set up two operating rooms side by side. Rebeka in one and Beri in the other. They were both put to sleep. Dr Broad scrubbed and began the removal of the left half of Rebeka's liver. Meanwhile the other team were opening up Beri and removing her diseased liver. It was a tricky operation that had to be done in the correct stages. They had checked that the sizes were compatible. The scans and X-rays had confirmed that before they started. David remembered what Dr Broad had said,

'In the early days we didn't recognise the problem of size and had to abandon many operations because the donor organ was either too big or too small for the recipient.'

The first task was to define the division between the left and right lobes, the place where he would separate the two halves of Rebeka's healthy liver. It took him about two hours to free the left lobe and remove it ready for implant into Beri. It was placed in a container full of ice to keep it cool to slow down its metabolism.

Meanwhile the other team was removing Beri's diseased organ. It was grossly swollen and irregular. Its normal smooth shiny dark surface had been replaced by misshapen grey areas of scar tissue.

The two teams then changed operating rooms. Dr Broad's team then worked on Beri, taking Rebeka's healthy left lobe and connecting it to Beri's divided vessels. The second team worked on Rebeka, checking that all the divided vessels to her remaining right lobe were secured before closing the abdomen. It took them very little time and Rebeka was soon in recovery slowly waking up.

David saw her begin to open her eyes, her confused gaze moving around the room until it settled on him.

'Hello David. Where am I? What are you doing here?'

'Darling you're in Recovery room; you have just given Beri half your liver.'

She smiled,

'That's good.'

'How are you feeling?'

'Fine I've just had a wonderful sleep. How is Beri?'

'She is fine just waking up.'

David saw a ripple of fear cross her face.

'She doesn't know does she?'

'No but don't you think it's about time you made her face up to the truth. She's been running away from it for too long.'

'I know; I know you're right but I am frightened of losing her.'

Chapter 16

Beri was slowly floating upwards to the light. She heard voices and unfamiliar sounds. She could feel pressure on her back her shoulders and her head. She turned over and opened her eyes. A wall loomed in front of her. Where am I? How did I get here? So many questions flickered through her mind. Then she remembered the dream - it was lovely. She smiled as she recalled it. She was walking holding hands with her mother and father, skipping along. She could feel the sun on her face. She looked up and smiled at her mother and father. She felt happy. Then the scene changed, they were shouting at each other and she fled into the bedroom so as not to hear the loud voices. She was now a young woman. She had a boyfriend and had smuggled him into her bedroom. Her mother caught them lying together on the bed. She remembered how angry she was. She heard her say,

'You are no more than a slut, get out I don't want you living her any more.' Her father had tried to intervene but her mother was adamant.

Someone was calling her name.

'Beri wake up it's all over. Everything went well you have a new liver.'

It was some time later that Beri began to ask questions. She had taken a long time to get used to her new life and had been so involved in getting her medicines and her diet right that she had completely taken the operation for granted.

It had happened by chance. She read in the newspaper of a serious road accident in which a young man had been killed.

Matt listened to her as she read out the details.

'The parents had agreed to donate his organs, his cornea, his heart, his kidneys and his liver. She stopped a look of surprise appearing on her face.

'Matt I've only just realised. Someone alive or dead must have donated their liver to me. I need to know who it was; I want to thank them for saving my life. How can I find out?'

'Are you sure you want to. Why can't you just accept their kindness and leave it at that?'

'No I need to know, to thank them, after all they saved my life. What greater gift can you give someone?'

'Why don't you ask Dr Broad when you next see him?' said Matt. 'He'll be able to tell you.'

It was as she was leaving her follow up appointment that she remembered to ask Dr Broad.

'Dr Broad, I feel so much better; I want to thank the donor for my new liver. How can I find out where the liver transplant came from?'

'Beri, sooner or later everyone asks that question. It's only natural to want to know, to acknowledge the sacrifice, the generosity of the donor. But as it raises all sorts of ethical issues, the profession has established a strict protocol. It's a very simple process. Write a thank you letter but don't sign it. Send it to the Organ Procurement Agency. They will forward it and you may get a reply.'

One morning after Matt had gone out Beri sat down and began to compose the letter.

Dear Liver Donor,

I am not very good at writing. I have just recovered from a serious operation to give me a new liver. It was all my mistake, my fault. I thought I could get away with it, living life without caring about my health, throwing caution to the wind. But it caught up with me and I became ill. So ill that I would have died if you hadn't come to my aid.

You gave me that second chance, a second chance to live. No words can express my feelings of gratitude, to see the sun, to taste an ice cream so many simple things to enjoy.

I just want to say 'thank you'.

Beri

'David, David come quickly something unbelievable has happened.'

'Can it wait I'm shaving?'

'Please your shaving can wait. I don't care what you look like I want you to read this now please.'

'Ok I'm coming.'

David entered the kitchen.

'What's all the excitement about?'

'Look what arrived in the post, read it.'

Rebeka put the letter in his hand. He took it, sat down and read. Rebeka watched his face as he digested its content. As he finished he looked up.

'It's from Beri.'

'Yes it's amazing, what a wonderful letter.'

He got up and hugged her.

'It was wonderful thing that you did. So brave and unselfish. You must reply.'

'I can't, I don't know what to say to my own daughter. It would be different if it was to a stranger.'

'Try to write it as if to a stranger.'

'Please David will you write it for me you are much better with words.'

'No I think you should write it but I am happy to read it if you insist.'

'OK I'll let you see it when it's done.'

It was several days later before Rebeka sat down and wrote:

Dear Recipient,

Thank you for your letter which I most appreciated. It was my privilege to be able to donate half of of my liver to you. I feel a special pride in saving another person's life even if the reason for your illness was self-imposed.

Your friend.

After a number of corrections, she showed it to David.

'Are you sure you want to add the blame statement? After all you are not meant to know why it happened.'

'Well I do, she's a junkie, she said so.'

'Wait Rebeka, don't forget you are also not meant to know who the recipient is.'

The reply reached Beri the following week. Her name and address was typewritten on the envelope. She examined it closely turning it around and around before opening it. She sniffed it. The smell seemed familiar but then so many people wear the same perfume. Then she read it slowly savouring each word. The writer had selected them from the thousands available. She pondered, why where these words chosen and not others? What did it say about the writer? Was it a male or female, young or old, educated or not. The questions buzzed around in her head like bees unable to settle. Still confused she handed it to Matt.

'What do you make of this?' She watched him as he read it, his lips moving silently over each word. Then he looked up.

'It's a nice friendly letter, why?'

'I don't know, there is something about the wording that seems familiar.'

'How do you mean?'

'I can't put my finger on it. It's almost as if the donor knows me.'

'That can't be possible, everything is kept anonymous.'

'I know but it feels peculiar that's all I can say. It didn't come from the family of a deceased person. The letter was written by the donor. Why would someone risk their life to give part of their body to another?'

'Some people are generous like that.'

'Would you?' He thought for a moment repeating in his head the words 'who would I risk my life for?'

'Yes for someone I knew, perhaps a close friend or a family member.'

'What about a stranger?'

'I would need to know something about them, something that touched me.'

'Exactly that's my dilemma. Who knows me so well as to want to save my life.'

'Beri do you really want to do this? Isn't it enough that someone thought you important enough to risk their own life for you, can't you just accept that?'

'I guess so.'

Beri let the conversation drop but the question continued to irk her.

Home at last, Rebeka stretched out her arms and felt the weight of the last few weeks fall away. David could see the smile on her face.

'It's so good to be home. They were very kind at the hospital but there is nothing like your own bed to sleep in,' said Rebeka stretching and leaning over to kiss him.

'How are you feeling?' he asked.

'Better and better each day, the scar is fading and soon will be almost invisible.' There is something that is niggling me. I suppose its natural. I want to know how Beri is doing. She keeps on popping up in my thoughts.

'How do you mean?'

'It so strange. In the past I just wanted to know she was all right but now I keep thinking about her. What's she doing? How she's getting on? I want to talk to her, to hug her as if she was a small girl.'

'Surely this is natural after all she now has part of you in her body.'

'Maybe but I didn't feel it before, rather I wanted little to do with her. What's changed?'

'I don't know. Is it possible that by giving part of your liver you are sharing more than just an organ, maybe it carries part of you and that part is connecting with part of her?'

'That sounds crazy how could it?'

'I don't know; how else do you explain it?'

Chapter 17

'I want to have a baby,' Beri announced one morning at breakfast. Matt looked up from his newspaper and turned the radio down. Had he misheard her? Surely she couldn't be serious after all she had gone through. He decided not to answer her. It seemed a crazy idea.

'Matt did you hear what I said?'

'No,' he lied. 'What did you say?'

'I want to have a baby. I think I am ready. I spoke to the doctor and he said it would be okay as long as I saw him regularly and took all my medicines.'

'Have you thought this through?' It's only a year since you had the Op. You're doing great, do you want to upset everything?'

'I knew you wouldn't understand. I asked you to come with me to the doctor and you would have heard what he said. Matt I'm serious I want a baby I want to be a normal mum. Please don't fight me over this. It's my choice?'

'Is It? Don't I have a say? So you can do it on your own can you?'

Beri was about to say yes. She knew that she could have A.I. without his permission but she wanted his agreement.

'I want you to want a baby also, to be a father and love our child.'

'You say you spoke to the doctor and he said it would be OK.'

'Yes.'

'OK I'm happy to play the game.'

Beri was excited at the prospect of becoming pregnant and having a baby. She began feeling her tummy to see whether it was growing. She would stop and look at herself sideways in a mirror to see if she was getting a bump. When out in the street she would peer into Children's shop windows imagining what she would buy for her new baby. She couldn't pass a pram without stopping the mother and asking to see the baby. Leaning over the child she would make cooing sounds and admire the little one.

'What a lovely baby you have,' she would say to the delighted mother hoping that she would be asked,

'Are you expecting?'

The answer was always yes even though she wasn't. It was as if by saying she was; the happy event would occur.

Then it happened. The clinic was thrilled. Beri was a very special mother-to-be because of her history. It wasn't often that they had someone who'd had a liver transplant so they took special care of her. At first she went on her own but as the pregnancy progressed Matt became more involved and would accompany her. He turned out to be quite an expert and was very popular with the nurses who weren't used to a man showing so much interest.

Although she rarely saw him, Dr Broad was always in the background. She learned from one of the nurses that he was doing a study of Pregnancy following Liver Transplant.

But Beri was feeling increasingly frightened as the date for her delivery approached. Her Obstetrician had decided to induce the child so as to control the uncertainty that was stressing her. But as the weeks dragged on Matt saw a change in her. The excitement of her impending birth was replaced by a quiet almost sullen demeanour. He tried to find the right moment to confront her.

She was sitting very quietly at dinner quite unlike her when he asked her.

'Beri you don't seem to be yourself, what's happened to cause this?'

She looked at him struggling to find an answer and then said,

'I'm scared.'

Without thinking he replied,

'Of course you are, all mothers to be are.'

Suddenly with her eyes glaring she turned on him.

'What do you know about having a baby?'

Matt was shaken by her vehemence. He didn't know what to say.

'Nothing, of course. How could I?'

'Exactly nothing, no man understands what it is to be a woman.'

'What's this all about Beri?'

She began to cry.

'I don't know, I feel awful. I was so excited at the beginning but now I don't think I'll be able to cope. You are away a lot of the time and I will be on my own. The future frightens me. I keep wanting a drink and can't have one. It's tormenting me. Every day is a struggle. Alcohol was such a relief and I'm frightened that after the baby is born I will start to drink again.'

Matt knew what he should do but didn't know how to tell her. He felt he was being a traitor to her going behind her back but it seemed the only thing to do

He rehearsed what he was going to say and then dialled Rebeka's number. David answered.

'Hi David this is Matt, is Rebeka there?' He tried to keep his voice as light as possible.

'I'll get her for you.'

'Rebeka it's Matt on the phone.'

'Matt, what does he want? We haven't spoken for ages. Hi Matt how can I help you?'

'Hi Rebeka, how are you?'

'Fine what's on your mind?'

'Rebeka it's Beri, she's pregnant and scared. She needs you.'

'Needs me? She knows my number.'

'I know but she's proud. Please will you ring her, ring her for me. I want our baby, your grandchild to be healthy. I'm frightened that she may start drinking again.'

David came into the bedroom.'

'What did Matt want?'

'He wants me to ring Beri. She's pregnant and scared. What should I do?'

'You know what you should do, she's your daughter.'

'But what if she rejects me again.'

'Rebeka you are a wonderful woman; you have shown it in so many ways.

Don't think about it any more ring her.'

'I'll do it later.'

'No ring her now,'

'OK you are so masterful,' she said kissing him. 'I'll do it in the lounge on my own.'

Beri was in the garden when the telephone rang.

'Answer it please Matt.'

'I think it's for you?'

'How do you know?'

'It's always for you.'

Beri picked up the phone.

'Hello.'

'Beri is that you?'

'Yes Mum, it's me.'

'How are you?'

'Fine.'

'Matt tells me you're expecting?'

'Yes in three month's time.'

'That's wonderful, is everything going all right, you know?'

'Yes fine.'

'I would love to see you.'

'I don't know, I'm not sure I'm ready to see you.'

'You would only need to stay for a short while.'

Rebeka turned to David and whispered,

'Beri doesn't want to see me, what do I do? I really don't have any time for this. I'm sick and tired of playing games. I'm going to say goodbye and leave it at that.'

She hesitated as she imagined David's words,

'Rebeka, be patient with her, she's still recovering from a serious illness.'

'Beri are you still there?'

'Yes Mum.'

'Could you come at the weekend, come on Saturday after lunch.'

'All right then.'

David could tell from the look on Rebeka's face that the phone call had gone well. She had come roaring through the balcony door like a lioness shouting,

'David, David!'

'Yes dear how did it go? He could see the excited look on her face.'

'It was amazing. You were right. We erased years of suspicion and hate, it was wonderful.'

'Where do we go from here?'

'I've invited them over for tea,'

'Tea? Yes, English tea, the way you like it.'

'I'll make it,' said David.

As the day for Matt and Beri's visit approached Rebeka became increasingly nervous.

'I think this visit could be a mistake David. Are you sure I should let them come? I would hate to make things worse between us.'

'Darling you won't. Beri's going to need all the support she can get especially after the baby is born and what about Matt? You don't want to put his nose out of joint.'

Beri and Matt were in danger of being late, they had had a heated discussion as to what to wear.

'Wear anything,' said Matt. 'It doesn't matter.'

'Yes it does, it matters a lot. I want us to look like a simple couple from the prairies, and cover your arms I don't want them to see your tattoos.'

'Not like the fast living drug-taking pair that we were what you mean?' He laughed.

'You know what I mean.'

Both had dressed down, she in a simple cotton dress with bare legs and low heels, he in a long sleeve shirt and Jeans, neither wore any jewellery. Matt was carrying a bunch of wild flowers hand-picked from their garden

Beri sat in her car thinking about the visit ahead. This could be a terrible mistake. Is Matt right? Will I be able to forgive mom for all the pain she has brought me over the years, all my hopes for her dashed? Will I be able to forgive myself for failing her? Was I too ambitious, too confident, too selfish? The questions tumbled over each other like waves on the shore.

She glanced at her watch. I'm going to be late, we must get going. Slowly the rhythm of driving took over and she calmed down. The route was unfamiliar as Beri had moved but eventually she found Park Heights, 33rd Street and nosed her car into the empty parking space and turned off the engine. She got out clutching the bunch of flowers and together they walked slowly towards the entrance. She saw a face peering down from a window. Could that be mum? she wondered.

The lift whisked them silently up to the third floor and they alighted. Now Beri's heart was thumping her palms moist. She searched for her mother's apartment. It felt as if she was walking to her doom. Standing outside, the door she impulsively pressed the bell.

Rebeka answered immediately. Her face was beaming as she took the flowers from her. Both were nervous, uncertain how to proceed. David had said be natural, be yourself but Rebeka knew that it would be some time before she could relax and be herself

'I'm so sorry,' they said in unison and then hugged.

Rebeka found it difficult. At first her words were stilted, polite, guarded but slowly confidence returned and soon mother and daughter were laughing and exchanging stories. They had so much to share so much time had passed.

Uncertain whether she should, Rebeka asked,

'How are you feeling?'

'I'm doing fine.'

'You look really well; it must have been very difficult.'

Beri looked down,

'It was but I had no choice, it was the operation or death. I had gone too far my body was failing me.'

Breaking the tension Rebeka said,

'I've made tea on the balcony. It's a lovely day and the view at this time of year is breath-taking.' Everyone was polite and on their best behaviour. The conversation was courteous until there was a pause, a long pause as Beri stared at her mother, her eyes piercing the space, questioning, searching.

Rebeka knew the question would come. She had rehearsed it with David. Just tell her the truth he had said but she was uncertain. She didn't want Beri to feel she owed her something. I did it because it was the only thing to do.

Then it came,

'Was it you?'

'What?'

'You know what? Was it?'

It was as if the whole world had gone silent waiting for her answer.

'Yes it was me.'

'Oh mum!' Her voice cracking. 'How can I ever thank you, ever make it up to you for all the pain I've caused? I owe you my life.' Tears tumbled down her cheeks.

'You owe me nothing. I brought you into this world and I was just doing what had to be done. You owe me nothing.'

The visit couldn't have been more enjoyable, that is until Matt took out a cigarette. Without asking he lit it. Rebeka looked at David who shook his head mouthing 'say nothing.'

She bit her lip until Matt started to go indoors.

'Please Matt we don't allow smoking indoors.'

Matt looked at Beri and shrugged his shoulders. She could see his features stiffen, his eyes glaring.

'That's it I'm leaving,' he muttered.

'Please Matt just for once act like a grown up.'

'You do what you want, I'm out of here. I shouldn't have come in the first place.'

Beri turned to her mother as the door slammed and pleaded with her eyes.

'He's been a bit touchy recently. He's worried about his job.'

As the front door closed behind Beri, Rebeka glared at David, she was furious.

'He's got to learn how to behave, he's not a child anymore.'

'Matt are you home?' Beri called out as she let herself into the apartment some hours later.

'I'm in the front room,' He replied.

'Why did you have to do that?'

'I just wanted a cigarette.'

'But did you have to smoke it indoors?'

'Yes why can't I if I want to?'

'You know my mother hates you smoking indoors, why couldn't you have just gone along with her?'

'I'm up to here in jumping to that woman's rules and you should be also. It's about time you stood up to her, you're a grown woman not a child.'

'You don't understand you never will. Just do it for me.'

'Shut up woman I'll do what I want.'

Beri saw red.

'Matt don't talk to me like that.'

'I'll talk to you like I want, I am not kowtowing to your mother anyone else,'

'In that case get out. Take your things and go. I've had enough.'

'Me too, I'm off.'

Beri heard him putting some things in a case and then she heard the front door slam. The house went quiet. Walking from room to room, she felt as if a heavy load had been taken off her shoulders. I don't need him; I can manage, she repeated.

Chapter 18

As it got dark she began to feel lonely. She hated the night it brought back dreadful memories, events she wanted to forget. The arguments with her mother over clothes and make up. Being grounded because she met a boy after school, so many things that seem so trivial today but then were so important. And when she was found drinking, her mother lost her temper and hit her across the face. She could still remember the stinging pain and the red wheal that she saw in the mirror the next day unable to hide it with makeup when she went to school.

Laying on her bed in the dark, she turned on the radio and then the TV. Restless and irritable, she was unable to settle. In desperation she walked into the kitchen and looked in the fridge. She took out an apple, bit into it and threw the rest away. She knew what she really wanted, just one small sip, that's all and she would be OK.

Matt must have hidden some somewhere, but where? She began to rummage through the cupboards and was about to give up when she heard the clink of glass behind some boxes. She stopped. No I'm not going to she said to herself. But the urge was too great. Feeling in the dark she found the bottle and put it on the kitchen table. She read the label, Vodka, a half full bottle. She sat staring at it lit up by the glare of the street lighting and watched the glint on the surface of the liquid. She slowly opened the cap and sniffed it. The familiar odour excited her. She licked her dry lips. Just one small one that's all I need, she thought. I know I mustn't but just one, it can't hurt. She again inhaled deeply wallowing in its familiarity. It recalled so many memories of friends and parties, happy times that were no more.

Just one that's all I need and I'll be OK. She reached forward and poured the clear liquid slowly into a glass watching the bubbles drift slowly to the surface. It was so beautiful. One glass can't do me any harm. She lifted it to her lips and hesitated. I shouldn't, I mustn't but the urge was too great. She poured the elixir into her mouth slowly rolling it around inside her cheeks before swallowing. Then the familiar burning as the liquid passed down into her stomach.

Once she had started she couldn't stop. The old urge came roaring back like hunger but worse. The urgency increased as she downed one glass after another of

the fiery liquid unable to stop it slopping onto the table. She wiped her face with the back of her hand. She was out of control, all thoughts of the danger forgotten. It was now a wild frenzy of drinking. Slowly her eyes glazed, her hand weakened and the glass slipped to the floor. She didn't hear it break as she slipped into unconsciousness, the alcohol numbing her brain as all vestiges of her being faded.

'David I've tried to ring Beri but there's no answer I've tried her number several times.'

'Rebeka she must be there, she said she was not going out. Are you sure you're ringing the correct number?'

'I'll try again. There's still no answer, I'm getting worried.'

'OK I'll go round to her apartment I'm sure she's fine.'

David pushed the front door, it slid open. David entered. There was no sound. He began to worry. He walked into the lounge and at first nothing seemed to be out of place and then he saw her. She was half lying, half sitting on the settee deeply asleep her mouth sagging open emitting a low snore. There was a broken glass and an empty bottle on the floor. Looking at her, he felt sick, why had she done this? What had got into her? She knew she mustn't drink. He knelt down and eased her gently back onto the couch. She groaned and opened her eyes. Focussing she whispered,

'I'm sorry. I tried so hard not to but I couldn't help it. Please help me. Please I need help. I can't do this on my own and for my child.'

'Your child? You're pregnant?' David sat holding Beri's hand as she continued to surface. His telephone rang.

'Are you all right David? How is Beri?'

'I'm afraid she's drunk. I found her unconscious on the couch. She's beginning to wake up.'

'Drunk I can't believe it. What are you going to do?'

'Ring 911. She needs to go to the hospital but I don't think she can walk; she'll need a stretcher.'

A knock on the door,

'Sorry we took so long but it's been very busy night, yours is the third call in the last hour,' said the paramedic as he entered Beri's apartment. 'What have we got here?'

'She's a friend's daughter. I found her unconscious,' said David. 'She's been drinking. She has had a liver transplant and she's pregnant. I'm very concerned. She's a patient of Doctor Broad at the Sinai Hospital.'

Beri was just waking up and heard the conversation.

'No, please I don't want to go there.'

But she was in no position to argue. Slowly she became aware of her surroundings and lay on the trolley in the ambulance trying to roll with its movement. Looking up

she studied the bottle hanging above her. Now fully awake she felt disgusted and appalled at what she had done, once again she had given way to alcohol. She hated the word and what it meant. She wished she had never had a drop of it but that was now wishful thinking.

She hated the familiarity with which the nurses greeted her as if they knew that it was only a matter of time before she would be back. She had been so determined not to let it happen. I am going to beat this thing she had said to herself time and again. What is Dr Broad going to say after all he has done for me?

He had a look of resignation on his face as she was wheeled into his unit. He hardly greeted her. She could see that he was angry, furious with her but was too polite and too much of a professional to show it.

'I'm sorry Dr Broad,' she managed to stammer. 'I tried I really tried.'

He shook his head.

'The usual, nurse; take her to ward 6 and I'll see her later.'

That evening Dr Broad came to see her.

'How are you feeling?'

'Better thanks. I've stopped feeling giddy and am hungry. Is it too late to have something to eat?'

On the way home Dr Broad stopped in a car park overlooking the Hudson River, he got out and walked towards the water. He often stopped there, the tranquillity of the open space calming him. He needed to clear his head, to get away from the hospital. Standing in the dark looking at the lights twinkling in the distance, he thought about Beri and the fight she was having.

He understood it only too well. Unknown to his colleagues, he was an alcoholic but hadn't touched a drop for thirty years. He knew the temptation. He remembered his student days and the binge drinking at the weekends. The others managed to control it but he took it home and drank himself to sleep. Years later it was his wife who made him give it up with the ultimatum - me or it. It was not easy and even now he would occasionally feel the desire to taste it and had to fight the urge not to drink. But the human craving to drink alcohol continued to fascinate him and as he learned more he was drawn to its causes and treatment.

After Medical School he followed the surgical path but never forgot his love affair with alcohol. He was excited by the first liver transplant performed in 1963, but it wasn't until the 1980's that the operation became mainstream, thanks to the parallel development of autoimmune suppressants drugs.

Dr Broad was challenged by the question 'What was it about alcohol that so fascinates man?' He learned that it began as a far cry from the liquid sold today in fancy bottles under exotic names. He read that it was widespread in nature, the product of fermentation of sugar by yeast the uni-cellular plant occurring naturally as the bloom on fruit. For centuries fermentation purified water and produced the only safe drink. Before water became palatable, beer and wine were the staple drinks of all members of the family in the West.

Scientists showed that 0.01-0.03mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood occurs naturally in the body and that there is a specific enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase produced by the liver to metabolise it.

So what makes an alcoholic? Why did he, Beri and so many others have an insatiable need to drink? What did they share in common? Was it just the amount they drank or was there a difference in the body of an alcoholic compared to a social drinker?

The more he read the more confusing it became. There was no simple answer. It wasn't just the amount they drank, even a little can be enough to start the downward journey for some. Others can drink to excess but never become out of control, never become alcoholics.

Beri was reluctant to go home from the hospital and be on her own. Although she was now feeling so much better, she was frightened that her drinking would all start again. When Rebeka and David arrived at the hospital, Dr Broad suggested and Beri agreed to go and stay with her mother for a short while until she was ready to be on her own. Both knew it wouldn't be easy. Rebeka had kept Beri's room as she had left it.

'David, I think you should go and stay in a hotel until Beri leaves,' suggested Rebeka. 'I would like to be with her just the two of us and see how things go. I may need to call on you if it doesn't work out.'

'Sure I understand; don't worry I'll be OK. I'll come and see you but won't stay over.'

The two women, mother and daughter settled down to live with each other. Later Rebeka would describe it as a wrestling match each circling the other eyeing up their strengths and weaknesses. Although they were so close biologically, circumstances had made them into enemies. Soon after she had arrived at her mother's home Beri made it clear that her stay was under sufferance and necessity not by choice. She was going to have as little to do with her mother as possible. As soon as she could she said, 'Good night' and went to her bedroom.

Rebeka sat alone thinking about the situation. She remembered David's words about her responsibility and the need to say she was sorry and to accept that the present situation was some of her own making. She struggled with that idea, it flew in the face of her view of the relationship between a mother and child. I carried her inside me and brought her into the world. Without me she wouldn't exist, doesn't she owe me something? Then she repeated to herself those damning words so often spoken by a child, *I didn't ask to be born.*

How to reconcile the two?

Beri found it strange back in her mother's house. She would never have chosen to return but realised it was the best decision. She didn't know where Matt was and was not ready to be on her own.

Their first breakfast together was strained. Each was trying to please the other that is until Rebeka took control. She wanted to tell Beri to sit and she would serve her breakfast but knew that would cause tension. So she came up with a plan.

'Beri how would you like to organise breakfast? Do you want me to make it or shall we make it together or take turns?'

Rebeka was getting used to having Beri around. She wanted so much to ask her about her pregnancy but was hesitant as Beri might think she was interfering so she said nothing but watched as Beri's figure began to fill out.

Later that day the two women were on the balcony tidying up the flowerpots.

'Mum what was it like when you were carrying me?'

Rebeka stopped surprised by the question.

'OK I suppose; Beri why do you ask?'

'Because you never ask me about mine.'

Rebeka froze. How could she tell Beri that she had almost lost her.

'I had a difficult time,' Rebeka began. 'I was much older than you when I became pregnant. We had tried for many years without success and I had given up and decided that I wasn't going to have children when it happened. I was very frightened. I had heard terrible stories about older women.'

'Was it as bad as you feared?'

Can I tell her the truth? that I had lost two pregnancies before being successful, that I was in labour for twenty-four hours and then had forceps, that I was badly cut and left scarred? - she doesn't need to know that.

'It was OK,' she lied. 'You'll be all right. It's a bit scary but once it starts, it takes over and you just go along with it. It decides not you.'

One morning at breakfast, Beri asked,

'Mum where was I born?'

'In the Sinai Hospital Obstetric Unit. In those days we didn't understand the importance of neonatal supervision so I went there when my waters burst.'

'I would like to have my baby there; do you think that's possible?'

'Why not let's go and see them.'

The Obstetric Unit was well sign posted. After a short walk they found the Unit and entered the waiting room. It was quite full when they arrived. On the way Beri had stopped in front of a wall plaque and read the inscription: -

In 1852, the Jews Hospital was founded by 9 men representing different Jewish Charities. Initially with 45 beds, by 1864 it became non-sectarian and in 1866 changed its name to The Mount Sinai Hospital. It is now a 1,171 bed hospital. I really don't think realistically Martin, that in Beri's frame of mind she would be reading inscriptions. You need to be mindful of your desire to tell the reader about facts that are not relevant or that offset the story by detracting from the gravity, drama of the moment.

Beri's name was called and she went into a small clinical room with a couch, a desk and two chairs.

'Good morning, Mrs Simons and you must be Beri?' I believe Beri you were born here? Things have changed a lot since then.'

The Obstetrician reached for a folder.

'I have received a letter from your doctor. How are you?'

'Fine.'

'Do you have any medical problems?'

Beri looked at Rebeka.

'I presume you know about me, my liver problem.'

'Yes you had a successful liver transplant. From the tests and your last period, I estimate that you are now in the thirtieth week. Do you have any thoughts about the choice of delivery?'

'I don't understand.'

'Let me explain. Unlike mothers in the past the modern mother has several choices as to how she would like her baby delivered. She can go to term and have a vaginal delivery which I would recommend. She can opt for surgery and have a Caesarean or she can select a date and have an induction.'

Without hesitation, Beri said,

'I would like a Caesarean.' Rebeka looked surprised and turned to her.

'Are you sure Beri? Have you thought about the risks, the scar and the longer period of recovery?'

'Yeah Mum, but I don't want my parts messed about.'

Rebeka looked at the doctor, hoping he would say something but he just closed the file.

'OK let's fix a date and we will arrange it.'

Rebeka said nothing as they travelled home. She was horrified at Beri's choice. It was as if her future child's health was less important than her anatomy.

That night she told David about the hospital visit.

'I couldn't believe it when Beri chose a Caesarean over a natural birth.'

David kept quiet.

'What do you think David?'

'It's her choice isn't it? I presume she knew the stats?'

'But it's wrong, surely the child's health comes first?'

'You and I think so but she lives in a different world.'

But she's making a mistake. To choose Surgery is to increase the risk to the child. I feel so helpless; I don't know what to do?'

'There is nothing to do apart from support her.'

'I can't leave it, I must try and persuade her to change her mind.'

Beri could feel the tension when she came down to breakfast the following morning. She said nothing concentrating on her cereal. She knew the question would soon come.

'Beri,' Rebeka began. 'I need to talk to you about something.'

'What about Mum?'

'Why did you decide to have a C Section?'

'Because.'

'Because what?'

'I don't want them to mess me up,'

'How do you mean?'

'Do you really want me to tell you?'

'Yes I do.'

'OK Mum here goes. You know my friend Cynthia? She opted for a normal delivery and had to have forceps. They split her and she was stitched. She showed me what a mess they made. She says she hates sex. I don't want that for me.'

It was a cold wintery afternoon when Rebeka and Beri set off for the hospital. Beri's pregnancy was now 39 weeks. Her operation was planned for the first thing the following morning. Having checked in at the desk they made their way to her room on the third floor. The floor nurse wished them a cheery welcome as Beri settled into the room. About six in the evening Beri began to yawn and pretend that she was tired.

'I think I'll have an early night mum,' she said and Rebeka left.

Sitting in a cafe a block away, Matt's phone rang.

'She's gone,' Beri whispered. You can come now.'

The receptionist saw the young man enter the elevator. She thought she heard a bottle clink but thought nothing of it. He stopped at the third floor and stepped out. Beri heard a faint knock on her door,

'Come in,' she called and Matt entered her room.

'Matt great to see you,' said Beri as they hugged and kissed. 'Have you got it?' She hissed.

'Yeah,'

'There's some glasses in the bathroom.'

Beri watched as the clear fluid was poured into her glass. She inhaled the familiar smell.

'Cheers,' she said taking a large gulp of the liquid and feeling the hot rush in her mouth and down her throat. She emptied the glass and he poured her another. After the third one her vision was blurring and her voice became gravelly.

'I think I'll sleep,' she stammered. Matt leaned over and kissed her. He tiptoed out of the room and did not hear Beri's whispered, 'thanks.'

Later the nurse on duty looked in on her and reported she was sleeping.

The following morning, Beri couldn't be roused and the alarm went out. The crash team arrived within minutes and she was intubated and an IV set up.

'We need to get the baby out,' shouted the surgeon as they rushed her to the OR. There was a strained tension in the room as Beri arrived and was lifted onto the Operating Table. All eyes were on her. With lightning speed, the surgeon draped her abdomen and made a single transverse incision. He split open the abdominal wall and exposed the bulging uterus. A further incision exposed a baby curled up like a comma. Immediately the cord was cut and the girl child entered the world, blue,

bloody but alive. Her hearty cries sent a cheer up in the small room and the surgeon relaxed.

Now the fight was on to save Beri. All attention was fixed on her as she struggled to breathe. Her short shallow gasps were followed by long periods of apnoea.

'Lets get her to IC,' said the anaesthetist intermittently compressing the bag of oxygen. Meanwhile the baby was crying, strong wails of noise as she was taken to the neonatal unit.

Beri's life was in the balance, the alcohol from the night before had depressed her vital organs and she was making no attempt to breathe.

Rebeka and David were impatiently waiting for news. They knew nothing about Beri's drinking the night before. Time seemed to drag and no one came to let them know. Then they heard a child cry and they both hugged. It was Beri's daughter the child that they had been waiting for.'

Unknown to them Beri was fighting for her life, as her new liver struggled to remove the harmful waste products that were accumulating in her bloodstream, interfering with her brain, heart and lung function. Her life was hanging on a thread. Suddenly the doctor appeared and walked towards David and Rebeka. They could see that his face was heavy with worry.

'How is she doctor?' His look said it all. 'Did they know that she had been drinking the night before?'

The news shocked Rebeka and David who couldn't believe what they were hearing. The seriousness of her condition slowly dawned on them. Both were silent as the doctor described how she was being kept alive on a life support machine, her new liver no longer functioning, her brain clogged with waste products.

Suddenly a nurse appeared.

'Come quickly doctor she has taken a turn for the worst. David and Rebeka followed the doctor to her bedside. Rebeka was shocked by what she saw. Beri had shrunk, her face drawn and her body small like a child's.

'David, she looks awful, what's happened?' Hysterically she shouted, 'do something, they must be able to do something?'

'Yes they are going to try to bypass her circulation and use an artificial liver to replace her own but unless her liver recovers...' his voice tailed off.

Rebeka and David remained with her throughout the night helplessly watching her losing battle with life. By the morning it was clear that she had gone. The surgeon turned off the machine and suddenly there was an unreal silence. Rebeka leaned forwards and closed Beri's eyelids. They sat holding hands in the awful silence.

'Rebeka,' a nurse whispered, 'when you are ready come and see your granddaughter she is in the neonatal suite. She turned to David and a smile slowly spread over her face.

'My granddaughter, let's go and meet Elizabeth that's, what shall we call her.'

'Follow me,' the nurse added. They walked along several darkened corridors until they reached a lit area. Through a large window they could see the new-born babies sleeping, their numbered cots arranged in rows. Rebeka counted twelve.

'Where is ours?' she whispered to the nurse.

'Follow me, she's at the end of this row.'

They stopped opposite cot four. Unaware of their attention baby Elizabeth was sleeping soundly her small face puckered, her eyes tightly closed beneath a head of black hair. Rebeka was captivated.

'Oh David she's so beautiful I want to cry.'

'She looks just like Beri,' said David squeezing Rebeka's hand.

'Mrs Simons I thought I would let you know that her father was here earlier,' said the nurse. 'He's coming back tomorrow to take her home.'

'David did you hear what the nurse said?'

'Nurse, how do you mean to take her home? He can't I won't let him. We can't let that happen, we must stop him. He's not fit to look after her he's a drug addict.'

'But he has parental rights,' said David, 'unless we can stop him. We must see a lawyer immediately and stop him from taking her away from the hospital.'

Chapter 19

Mr Lawrie was sitting behind his desk when they arrived. He was in his late fifties, tending to fatness with a mop of white hair above a plethoric complexion. He had bright blue eyes.

'Good afternoon, you must be Rebeka and this is?'

'My friend David.'

'How can I help you?'

'My daughter Beri, I don't know how to say this, gave birth to a baby girl earlier today at Sinai Hospital, David please I can't say it.'

'She sadly died. The father Matt is a drug addict. He is coming to the hospital today to take the baby. We don't think he is a suitable parent and want to stop him. How do we do that?'

'I'm so sorry to hear about the loss of your daughter.'

He paused and then said,

'The law is very clear about this situation. It determines what is in the best interests of the child. Let me read the statute:'

'A parent labouring under the effects of drug abuse or addiction is not deemed to be in a position to best ensure the protection and advancement of the best interests of the child.'

'Mr Lawrie I would like you to act on my behalf to ensure that.'

'OK then we need to act fast. I need to issue a restraining order preventing the father from taking the child from hospital. Then we need to obtain evidence of his drug abuse history and then you can apply to the Children's Court for custody.

'Does that mean we can't take her home?'

'Yes I'm afraid so. She will be termed a ward of the court and needs to remain in care until the case is settled. The hospital will transfer her when she is fit to leave.'

Mr Lawrie acted quickly and an hour later Rebeka was armed with a Restraining Order. She and David returned to the hospital and made their way to the Children's Unit. They arrived just in time to meet Matt. He was arguing with the nurse when they arrived.

'She's my daughter I want to take her home,' he demanded raising his voice. He was unshaven and smelled heavily of alcohol.

'I'm sorry sir but she has to remain here until we learn what her future is.'

'It's with me,' he insisted. 'With me, don't you understand I'm her father.'

'It's all right nurse,' said Rebeka handing her the note. 'We have a Restraining Order against him.'

The nurse read the order and pressed a bell on her desk.

'I need to call security.' Within a few minutes an officer in uniform arrived.

'Officer,' she said, handing him the note to read. 'Could you please escort this man out of the building.'

'Sir will you please come with me.' Struggling and swearing, Matt was manhandled out of the building shouting,

'This is not the end she's my daughter!'

Rebeka woke early and checked her watch. She nudged David who yawned and opened his eyes.

'They want us in court at 10 am we mustn't be late,' she said making her way to the shower.

'I'll start breakfast and call you when it's ready.'

By 9.30 they were ready to leave home.

'Have you got everything?' shouted David as he started the car. It was a ten-minute drive to the New York County (Manhattan) Family Court located at lower Manhattan. Despite the heavy traffic they arrived on time. He turned into the underground Car park and slid the car into a vacant space.

He turned to Rebeka,

'This is it; how do you feel?'

Rebeka smiled,

'Nervous, I will be pleased when it is all over. I already miss the little one. Visiting her once a day makes me want her home even more.'

They followed the signs and were soon seated in the small intimate courtroom.

As the clock chimed ten, the court Officer called out 'All Stand' as the judge a small compact middle-aged woman entered and walked slowly to the chair in the front and sat down.

'You may all sit,' boomed the Officer, Judge Elaine Booker presiding.'

The Court Officer continued.

'The first case is the application for custody of Elizabeth the daughter of the late Beri Simons by her grandmother Rebeka Simons. The custody is contested by her father Matt Brooks.

'Would Mr Brooks please stand,' asked Mrs Booker. No one stood up.

'Your Honour Mr Brooks does not appear to be here.'

'Has he been issued with the summons?'

'Yes your Honour you have his signed confirmation'.

'Very well we will proceed without him. Is Mrs Simons represented?'

'Yes Madam, my name is Lawrie I represent Mrs Simons.

'My Lawrie please proceed.'

'The child Elizabeth was born yesterday some hours before her mother sadly passed away as a result of Liver failure due to alcoholism. You have a copy of the death certificate in your bundle. During the last year Beri has been living with her mother Mrs Simons in her effort to cure her disorder. She is a widow in a stable relationship. The child's father, Mr Brooks who is not here, is a convicted drug addict and an alcoholic.'

Rebeka clutched David's hand.

At that moment there was a commotion at the back of the court and Matt appeared. He was wearing a stained T shirt and torn jeans. His tattooed were visible. He was shouting,

'Stop, I demand to be heard.'

'Who is that?' Asked the Judge.

'Your Honour it is Mr Brooks.'

'Please ask him to sit down and he will have his turn. Mr Lawrie please proceed.'

'Your Honour, we believe that the best interests of the child would be served if she lived with her grandmother Mrs Simons. Her father is not at present a suitable person to care for her. Should he recover and become a sober member of society my client would be happy for him to have visitation privileges.'

'Now Mr Brooks what would you like to say to the court?'

'Yes your Honour I'm the child's father. She is my flesh and blood. I have the right to, yes the right to my child don't you think your Honour, Madam.'

'Mr Brooks are you a sober and upright man?'

'A what ma'am I don't understand?'

At that moment Mr Lawrie stood up

'Yes Mr Lawrie?'

'Your Honour, I have a sworn affidavit of Mr Brook's Police Records.'

'May I see it please.'

He handed the document to the judge.

The judge stood up and banged her gavel.

'The court is adjourned till 2 pm to give me an opportunity to read this.'

'All Stand.' called out the Court Officer.

Mr Lawrie was waiting for Rebeka and David as they left the court.

'Let's go and get a drink.'

They found a small coffee bar and sat around the table. A waitress approached and took their order.

'Rebeka and David, I want to bring you up to date with the case.'

'I think I've been following it' said Rebeka. 'The judge is now reviewing Matt's police records.'

'Yes this is the critical evidence. If she concludes that Matt has a drug and alcohol problem, she will judge in our favour.'

'That's good I'm sure she will. Does that mean we will have custody of Elizabeth?' Asked Rebeka.

'Yes but there is a proviso. Matt is the child's biological father and therefore has rights.'

'How do you mean, rights?'

'Well if he agrees to go to rehab. and becomes clean he can apply for custody.'

'You mean we could lose her.'

'It depends on how old she is. As the years pass by she will look upon you more and more as her parents and Matt as a stranger. The court would not leave her in the hands of a stranger. Therefore, there would be a compromise. He would have visitation rights. But let's wait and see what the judge decides.'

Rebeka clutched David's hand.

'I'm so frightened I couldn't bear the thought of losing her to him.'

The courtroom quietened as Judge Elaine Booker entered and took her seat.

'Rebeka and Matt I have now reviewed all the evidence and have made my decision.'

Rebeka could hardly breathe as she tightened her grip on David's hand. She leaned forwards to be certain to hear every word. She could feel her chest thumping as she concentrated and waited. David was also caught up in the drama waiting for the verdict.

Matt was confused and couldn't understand what they were waiting for. I need a drink he said to himself. I wish she'd get on with it. I want to get out of here.

Judge Booker stood up and faced the court.

'It is my opinion based on the evidence presented today that the best interests of Baby Elizabeth would be served if she is looked after by Rebeka her grandmother. Matt Brooks can apply for visitation rights once and if he has shown the court that he is a fit and proper person to be her father.'

The judge banged her gavel.

Later that day Rebeka returned to the Children's ward with a crib. The nurses had heard the court's decision and were waiting for her. They all crowded around to congratulate her. Rebeka was in tears. Struggling to speak she thanked the nursing team.

'I have no words to thank you for your kindness to me and your care of my new granddaughter. I am heartbroken at the loss of my daughter at such a young age and thank the medical team for all they have done to try and save her'

At that moment Dr Broad appeared. He hugged Rebeka.

'I am so sorry that we were unable to save Beri. I was hopeful that once she became pregnant she would have a reason to avoid resuming her drinking, but circumstances beat us. Happily, you have a beautiful granddaughter who I know will bring you much happiness.'

Life with the new baby was chaotic. Rebeka was not prepared for the routine that a new-born child required. She had been given some nappies and some bottles by the hospital but they needed more. By the first day, Rebeka was exhausted, the baby didn't stop crying and she soon got warnings from the neighbours who complained about the noise.

'I think we need to get Elizabeth a nanny, neither you nor I are up to being a parent full time, I think it is beyond us,' said David.

'I agree it's much more difficult than I remember.'

'Come on Rebeka you were much younger then.'

'Please David don't remind me. I know exactly what you mean.'

'Leave it with me I'll phone an agency and we can get a temp for the time being.'

'Get someone older.'

The following morning there was knock on the door. A woman wearing a nurse's uniform was standing outside.

'Good morning my name is Isabel. I have come from the agency.' She spoke with a slight foreign accent.

'Please come in.'

Rebeka introduced herself and David.

'I guess the agency told you that we are looking after my grandchild her mother sadly died recently.'

'Yes I am so sorry; it must be very difficult.'

After a long discussion about Isabel's experience they asked Isabel to be their nanny.

New York's winter had set in with a vengeance. Snow dominated the view from every direction. The radio was full of incidents and the weather forecast expected more.

'We need to get away from this,' said Rebeka one morning. David turned over and said,

'I had the same idea. Isabel is doing fine. Let's take her with us, she can look after Elizabeth.

'Ask her,'

Isabel was very happy to travel with the baby.

'Where shall we go?'

'Somewhere warm, how about retracing our journey to the Galilee?'

