

TWINS
Martin Nelson

First Self Published 2014 Kenya
First Published as E-book in 2014
Copyright © Martin Nelson 2014
This book is copyright under the Berne Convention
No reproduction without permission
ISBN 978-0-9926668-X-X
Manuscribit Publishing
LONDON SW7

The right of Martin Nelson to be identified as author of this work has been Asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the UK Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988

The two families waiting in the hall to receive their boys, heard the cry, and knew that their waiting was almost over. Adam, Adele's firstborn was to go to Naomi and Simon and Joseph the second to Hassan and Zaira.

'It won't be long now,' whispered Simon, 'we'll see our baby for the first time.'

'I can't wait,' Naomi said with tears in her eyes. 'It's been so long.'

Naomi and Simon had been childhood sweethearts and had grown up in the same street and gone to the same school. Their parents had known each other from childhood and were both from devout Jewish families. The youngsters regularly met in each other's homes for celebrations and high holidays. At first they were like brother and sister but one night after Naomi's eighteenth birthday party, Simon kissed her. He had been dreaming about it for weeks, practicing in a mirror and plucking up courage. She responded immediately having known that he was the boy for her.

'I love you Simon,' she whispered breathlessly.

'I love you too,' he said.

Several weeks went by before they had felt brave enough to tell their parents. Meanwhile both sets of parents had seen what was going on and had already arrived at their decision. They are too young. Naomi's mother even suggested that they should cease seeing each other for a while to make sure that they were serious.

'That's really hard,' said Simon's father, 'don't you think that's going a bit too far.' So they compromised and waited.

It was at a family Chanukah celebration that Naomi and Simon decided to announce it. They were sitting next to each other when Naomi nudged Simon and whispered. 'Now.' He looked at her appealingly but she repeated 'now' more forcibly. He sat for a moment composing himself and then waited for a lull in the conversation. 'Mum and Dad,' he began. His parents turned to look at him.

'Yes Simon,' what is it?' Naomi nudged him again.

'Umm, Naomi and I, we love each other, we want to get married.'

'Married! Ridiculous, you are both too young to contemplate marriage,' their parents said in unison.

'But?' Naomi and Simon said together.

'There is no but. You are too young and that's the end of it.'

'Mum,' Naomi said, 'that's not fair. You can't stop us you know, you can't'.

'Well as it happens we can. You are not yet eighteen, you're minors.'

'We could elope,' Simon interrupted.

'Yes you could, but how would you live? And what would you live on, love?'

'Mum, don't make fun of us please. We love each other.' At this point Naomi's father intervened.

'Look, it's wonderful that you love each other. Mum and I are very happy for you but wouldn't it be wise if you both waited until you had at least completed your studies?'

Simon looked at Naomi,

'I don't want to wait but I think they are right.' Naomi reluctantly agreed. They promised that one day they would be together.

After leaving school Simon went into his father's business as a butcher while Naomi went to Pitman College to learn shorthand and typing. In time she became an accountant and worked with a printing firm and later in her father's business.

'We must keep in touch,' Naomi had said when they parted, both in tears. She promised to write to Simon. Her first letter began,

Dear Simon darling,

I miss you so much and wish you were still here. Life seems so empty without you. I go to work but everything seems meaningless. How are you? Do you miss me?

Darling Naomi,

I miss you too and think of you often. The job is OK but I don't think I will stay with it. I'm going to try and get a college place and study to be a lawyer.

After a flurry of letters, the correspondence dried up. Simon's career progressed and he was successful in getting a trainee solicitor post with a large London firm. His life was busy and he found little time to socialize. He made an exception however when his best friend got married. The wedding celebration was to be held in a smart restaurant in Golders Green, which he knew well. On the day, things didn't go to plan. A last minute brief delayed him so he arrived late hot and flustered. By that time, the dinner was almost over and people were beginning to dance to a noisy South American group with a lead singing the image of Jennifer Lopez. He stood listening and getting caught up in the rhythm began to tap his feet and move his hips. A glass of

champagne was thrust into his hand and he gulped it down. That's better he thought. He tried to go over to greet the happy couple but they were outside having photos taken so he stood watching the dancers. There was one girl, slim and beautiful that caught his eye. She reminded him of Naomi and then it clicked, it was Naomi, now a mature confident woman. His heart missed a beat. The memory of their last meeting flashed into his mind. She'll be married now, I'm sure he decided. Suddenly the music stopped and he watched as she was guided back to a table and he saw her dance partner thanking her. She was then alone talking to the woman opposite her. He saw all this in a flash and knew what he was going to do. He began to walk slowly towards her watching her face as all the old feelings came crowding back. As the band began to play she turned and saw him. There was a moment of doubt and then recognition, a huge smile spread across her face. 'Simon?' she called, 'is it you?' 'Yes Naomi, you look wonderful.' It was as if they had never parted. Naomi was now an accountant working in her father's business. She was unmarried. That night as he said goodnight to her at her doorstep, they kissed and each knew that their future was sealed.

Adele a bright perky sixteen year-old had never known her father. Sitting with her mother in front of the fire she would often ask about him.

'He was a soldier, a good man,' her mother would said, 'but he had a roving eye and didn't want children. When I became pregnant with my second child you, he told me,

'It's me or it.'

Adele saw her mother's face cloud over.

'I couldn't do it. As soon as I saw you I knew I couldn't...' said her mother touching Adele's face.

'But your father was unable to face his responsibilities and left before you were born.' Adele had seen a picture of him looking very smart in his army uniform.

'Where is he now?' She would ask her mother from time to time but the answer was always the same.

'I don't know and I don't care. Forget him. Now no longer at school, Adele was bored. She had nothing to do all day than mope about the house watching videos. That was until she heard a commotion next door and saw that new neighbours were moving in. Not wanting to be seen she watched behind the front lace curtain as a young man with dark hair and soulful eyes carried some heavy luggage into the house. Now she began to sit out on the porch in the evening apparently reading intently. Stefan, the young man, didn't notice her at first; he was studying to be a marine engineer at the local polytechnic. One evening he bumped into her on the way home and recognised her.

'Hi,' he said, 'we're neighbours aren't we?'

'Yeah,' she said. He saw her shiny brown hair and sparkling eyes and felt a thrill of excitement.

'Would you like to come for a walk sometime after class?' He asked. They began to meet down by the canal, a secluded and slightly scary place that gave her a strange thrill of the forbidden. One day, he took her hand and asked her to be his girl. She thought, at last I am not alone. He was gentle and kind and for the first

time in her life she felt cared for. So when he wanted to kiss her and more she didn't stop him.

It was several weeks later when Adele, not yet seventeen, became aware that something wasn't quite right. She felt swollen, sickly in the morning and generally unwell. She knew not to ask her mother because of the abuse she would get. Instead she had overheard other girls talking about the test. One day she bought one under the pretense of buying it for a friend. Waiting for her Mum to go out, she removed the cellophane covering and read the instructions. Dipping the strip of paper into her urine she waited. The home test confirmed her worst fears - she was pregnant. She knew she had carefully followed the instructions on the package, waited the required time and read the result. She had crossed her fingers hoping that it would be negative, but it wasn't. She repeated the test, now more confident of the procedure, but the result was the same. Staring at the blue strip, it felt like a death sentence. The thought of what it would mean terrified her so it was some days before she could tell her mother. There seemed no right time; her mother was in and out of the house shopping, visiting friends and always busy. Eventually the opportunity came one morning at breakfast.

'Mum,' she began.

'What?' Said her mum not looking up from her food.

'I've got something to tell you.'

'Oh yes, what is it?'

'I'm pregnant.' Her mother didn't move at first. It was as if she hadn't heard what Adele had said so she repeated it.

'Mum I'm pregnant.' Adele said louder, staring at her.

'I heard you the first time. It's the boy next door isn't it?' She didn't wait for an answer. 'You stupid girl how could you have been so..' the words failed her. 'I've warned you so many time to be careful!'

Adele was silent, aware of her mother's anger. She didn't know what to say. She knew she had been careless.

'But when I tell Stefan, he will support me I know he will.' She pleaded.

Then her mother said something, which shook her.

'Ok You tell him, I know what he will say.'

Adele waited until she heard Stefan's voice next door and went over to see him. They kissed and hugged and then as she began to tell him, she saw his eyes cloud over, and felt his body stiffen. This was not the Stefan she knew. Suddenly he felt like a stranger. He didn't answer at first and then,

'Are you sure its mine?'

'Yes of course I'm sure,'

'What do you want me to do about it?' He said not looking at her. Adele couldn't believe what he was saying.

'I want you to be with me.'

'I can't, I've too much to do I,' His voice faltered. 'No you must get rid of it.' Adele heard again the words her mother had shouted.

'You've got to get rid of it. I'm not going to play nursemaid to your bastard.' The words had slipped out before she could stop them.

Adele rushed to her room unable to believe what her mother had said. In the semi-darkness she struggled

against the inevitable, that her mother was right. Stefan, whom she had trusted had failed her and keeping the baby wasn't going to be possible. Without her mother's support, Adele knew she couldn't cope. She spoke to an imaginary Mum in her head,

'Mum please; I'm going to have a baby, your grandchild. Doesn't that excite you?'

'No because I know what it's like. To you it's exciting, a toy. Have you any idea what it involves? Sleepless nights and anxiety when the baby won't feed, no! I won't help you. If you have it, you're on your own.'

For days they didn't speak passing each other blindly as if the other didn't exist. Then one day Adele broke, she couldn't keep up the pretence.

'OK Mum you win I'll have an abortion.' Adele even made an appointment at the Abortion clinic. But as the time approached she couldn't go through with it.

'Mum I can't, I can't. It's wrong I can't kill my child.' She felt that there was something primeval and basic stopping her. She knew that her mother had regretted having had an abortion when she was younger and Adele decided that she wouldn't make the same mistake.

'I can't take a life,' she sobbed into her pillow.' She was desperate but there seemed no escape. Whichever way she turned she came up against an impenetrable barrier.

Adele was dreading the next visit to her doctor. Her mother had refused to come. She felt frightened and alone as she entered the surgery, hearing her mother's words ringing in her ears.

'You're on your own, it's your mistake and you'll have to decide. Don't count on me.'

The surgery was very full when she arrived and having reported to the receptionist, she went and sat down.

Watching patient after patient walk into the doctor's office, her problem seemed to loom bigger and bigger and whatever way she turned she seemed to come up against a brick wall. She knew that she had to decide, the doctor couldn't decide for her.

Suddenly her name was called. Her legs felt heavy and her throat dry as she entered the room.

'Well Adele how are you feeling?' The doctor made small talk asking her basic questions slowly building up to the big one,

'What have you decided? Adele I think you must make a decision very soon but there's something worrying me, you are a bit big for your dates. I think we should have a scan'

Straining her neck to see, she watched the screen as the shadows gradually cleared to show the smoky outlines of the baby. The examination seemed to go on forever when suddenly the technician spoke,

'Yes! I think there are two babies, I'm sure there are. I can see two heads and two bodies both healthy babies. Congratulations you are going to have twins,' he announced.

Adele heard the news with incredulity, twins how could that have happened? She had gone on her own for the test so she was surprised to see her mother was waiting for her as she came through the front door.

'Well what did the doctor have to say?'

‘He said the scan showed twins Mum, twins I was absolutely thrown.’

‘Twins? They’re unheard of in our family,’ shouted her exasperated mother. It’s a bad omen I know it.’

Adele eventually agreed to have the babies adopted. She had to accept that she was in no position to bring up one let alone two children on her own and her mother had made it clear that she still wouldn’t help. The lady at the adoption centre assured her that loving families would be found to care for the twins and the plan was that she would hand over the babies as soon as they were born.

‘They will have to be separated I’m afraid because we don’t have any families that want two children,’ she warned Adele.

Some months later, at the Maternity Hospital in Northern Manchester, the calm of the delivery room was shattered by loud screams as Adele’s contractions built up. She was giving birth to Adam, the first of her twin boys. He was fair-haired and light skinned the image of his mother.

Thirty minutes later Adele’s contractions began again and Joseph her second boy was born. Anxious, Adele called to the nurse,

‘Is he all right?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘he’s beautiful. He has dark hair and light brown skin but weighs a little less. Like his father Adele thought . She lay back exhausted but relieved that the ordeal was over. Now she had to come to terms with the handing over of her babies. As the realisation of what was to come struck her, her face

contorted and then tears, heavy wracking tears shook her. Now that the moment had arrived she could feel a deep sense of loss as if part of her body was being wrenched in half.

'I can't bear it,' she wailed, 'I can't take it, it's too much to bear.'

'Now then,' the nurse said holding her hand, 'Shush, you'll be all right. Your babies are going to loving families.'

The second couple, Hassan and Zaira were helping themselves to coffee from the dispenser when they heard the second cry. Zaira looked at Hassan and smiled.

'I can hardly believe it's really happening, I'm so excited. I can't wait to see him and hold him, my own baby, our baby,' Zaira said turning to Hassan.

'Our baby,' he repeated.

Married for over five years, they had met only a few months before their wedding. The two families had arranged it. Hassan was twenty-one when his father told him that it was time for him to get married. He knew this would happen sooner or later and dreaded the conversation; it made him sick to think that the woman with whom he would spend the rest of his life would be selected for him by his parents and not of his choice.

'But I'm not ready and in any case I haven't met the right girl yet,' he had pleaded.

'That's OK, your mother and I will select the right girl for you, from a good family. We have one in mind. She's eighteen and is finishing school. We know the family, they are the right sort of people.'

'But Dad, I don't want you and Mum to choose my wife; I want to choose her myself.'

'That's not how we do it, you know that.'

'But Dad, we're in England. They don't choose the wives for their sons here and they seem to be happy enough.'

'That's not the point, we have a tradition and you must follow it.' Some days later a parcel arrived from India.

'Hassan, come and have a look,' his mother said after breakfast Hassan was handed several photographs of a very pretty young woman with long shiny black hair swept across her face, deep brown eyes and perfect features.

'Wow! She's beautiful,' he said to himself.

'That's Zaira, the girl we want you to meet,' said his father. After thinking for a moment Hassan said,

'OK, as long as I can decide.' His parents said nothing.

'Once he sees her he will want her,' his father whispered.

A few days later a message from Zaira's parents said that they would be in England in a few weeks time. On the day they were due, Simon woke early. He hadn't slept well, the forthcoming meeting with Zaira and her parents had kept him awake. He tried to imagine it in his dreams. He was embarrassed and didn't want to meet them. Once awake he stood in front of his clothes' cupboard wondering what to wear. He wanted to wear Jeans and a T-shirt with a 'blow your mind' logo but settled for a long sleeved white shirt and a pair of dark slacks. He couldn't resist wearing his sneakers although he knew his Mum would hate them.

Breakfast was a very quiet affair. No one wanted to start a conversation. They all sat without speaking, picking at

their food as if the world was coming to an end. Finally Hassan, his heart beating furiously asked in a squeaky voice,

‘What time are they coming?’

‘Lunchtime, they are coming for lunch.’

announced his mother.

Hassan didn’t know what to do to fill the time. He went to his room and fiddled with his computer, then played with his I-Pad finally giving up and laying down on his bed staring at the ceiling as if waiting for his execution. He jumped when he heard the front door bell ring. This is it he said to himself, the moment he was dreading. He heard his parents greet the visitors and then they went into the sitting room and he could no longer hear any voices. Then he heard his mother call,

‘Hassan dear, we are in the sitting room. Come down and meet our guests.’ He walked slowly down the stairs and stood for a moment outside the sitting room collecting his thoughts. Then he entered and saw her. He gulped and blushed. She was gorgeous, tall and slim, and wearing a simple cotton dress with golden bangles on her wrists, which tinkled as she moved.

‘These are Zaira’s parents, they have just come from Damascus and this is Zaira.’ Hassan shook hands with the two adults and then extended his hand to Zaira. Her grip was firm and confident and his fears began to disappear.

‘Why don’t you young ones go into the garden and get to know each other?’ Suggested his mother. Once in the open air, Hassan was the first to speak.

‘Look Zaira, I’m really sorry that you’ve had to come all this way. I told Mum and Dad that I didn’t want

them to plan my life, I wanted to choose my own bride but they insisted.'

'How do you think I felt, like a lamb to the slaughter? I tried to get out of it but my parents insisted. At least meet him they said.

'OK, now we have met and we can say that it isn't going to work out, OK?' said Zaira and she began to walk back towards the house. Hassan was a bit taken aback at the speed she had dismissed him. Hey, at least get to know me before you chuck me out, he thought.

'Stop a minute Zaira, let's at least get to know each other a bit,'

'What for?' she asked.

'Because,'

'Because what?'

'I like you.'

'How can you? You don't know me, we have only just met,'

'I can tell.'

'Can you now, how?'

'Because you're gorgeous and sexy, that's how I know.' Zaira stopped walking and turned around being taken aback by his frankness. Suddenly she liked this young man. He spoke his mind and he had charm and good looks. Smiling she said,

'OK I'll go along with that.' She turned back and they began to walk among the flowerbeds. As they continued talking, Hassan realised that she was bright and intelligent and they had a lot in common. Suddenly he bent down and picked a small red hybrid rose that was just coming into bloom and handed it to her.

'This is for you,' he said blushing. Zaira held it in her hands for a moment overwhelmed by the gesture

and then leant forwards and kissed him gently on the cheek.

'Thank you Hassan, that was the most beautiful thing anyone has ever done for me.' They walked on in silence and accidentally their hands touched. He held onto hers and she his, saying nothing. At that moment Hassan's father was looking out of the window and saw it all. He was about to say something and then stopped. No, it's too personal to make public, he decided. Suddenly a bell rang from the house.

'What's that?' asked Zaira.

'Oh, that's mum's new toy. She rings it to tell us dinner when food is ready.' It was served in the large dining room, a typical Syrian meal with many starters, which the guests would eat with their fingers. Both Hassan and Zaira asked for utensils, as neither of them was comfortable with communal eating.

'Tuck in,' said Hassan's father to Zaira, 'we don't want any food left over.'

'You won't get Zaira to eat very much; she's a light eater. She watching her figure,' interrupted her mother a woman with a fulsome figure. Zaira glared at her, her look saying in so many words, I don't want to become like you Mum. Hassan noted the slight banter between mother and daughter and thought I wouldn't want to get between those two in a row.

As they were saying good-bye, Zaira handed Hassan a small screwed up piece of paper.

'Look at it later,' she whispered. Hassan surreptitiously pocketed it. Later he read it, *Call me and there was a number.*

Unknown to their parents Hassan and Zaira began to see each other so that when Zaira's parents announced

that they had decided to return to Damascus she was distraught.

'I've grown to like it here, Mum. Can I stay a bit longer please?' she implored them.

'I suppose you could stay with your aunt if she would have you.'

'Oh, mum could I? Please ask her. I won't be any trouble, please.'

After her parents returned home, Zaira began to see Hassan more frequently and even occasionally stayed over at Hassan's, ostensibly in separate rooms. Zaira's aunt could see that the young people were very much in love and broached the question of them getting married.

'We want a simple wedding not the traditional one that our people usually have,' they said in unison.

'Have you told your parents? They must be wondering what you are doing here.'

'No, I am in contact with them every few days but I haven't mentioned anything about Hassan,' said Zaira

'Don't you think it's about time?'

Zaira's parents were delighted when they heard the news. They had an inkling of what was going on when they heard so frequently from their daughter, it wasn't like her.

It was some days later that Zaira phoned her parents; she was brimming with excitement.

'Mum, I've got some wonderful news; Hassan and I want to get married. We love each other, I'm so happy.

The nurse left Adele's room closing the door behind her leaving Adele alone. She felt her tummy. It was flatter and the pain was easier. The twins were no longer there

and the realisation of what she had done hit her. How could have given away part of me, my babies, something so precious and irreplaceable and I have handed them to strangers as if they were objects. I am an outcast, what will people think of me? Why have I done it? What will the boys think of me when they are old enough to understand? Will they ever forgive me or forever hate me?

She lay staring at the ceiling, watching a fly buzzing around the light alone and confused. That's how I feel, alone and lost and then a heavy knot tightened in her stomach and it spilled over as tears began to wrack her body.

'I want to die! I want to die. Someone please listen to me,' She whimpered. Her cries were heard in the corridor outside and a nurse came in to investigate.

'What is it? What's happened?'

'I want to die,' Adele repeated thumping her pillow, 'I want to die.'

'No you don't, Adele, don't be silly. You have everything to live for. Your dear babies are in good hands; they will be loved and cherished.'

'But I will never see them again,' She moaned. The nurse went quiet. She realised that she was probably right and although some mothers are reunited with their children years later, there was no guarantee.

It was a few days later that Adele was fit enough to leave the hospital.

'Nurse, before I leave, I would like to spend a few minutes in the baby room?'

'Are you sure that's a good idea, it will upset you?'

'I know but I would like to nevertheless.'

‘OK, but don’t be too long, your mother’s outside waiting for you.’

Adele heard the babies crying before she got to the baby room and felt a wrenching in her stomach. She looked through the glass window and saw the little ones, some asleep, others wide-eyed viewing the world for the first time. Sick to her stomach, no longer able to watch, she turned away and walked towards the exit.

Her mother took her arm as she walked away from the hospital.

‘Adele I’m sure you’ve made the right decision.’

‘Mum, please let’s not discuss it. It’s done, whether it was right or wrong, it’s done and that’s that.’ Back home, she immediately went to her room. The surroundings were familiar and made her feel a little more at ease, a feeling she hadn’t had for a very long time.

It was several days later at breakfast that her mother asked her what her plans were. She didn’t answer immediately and then she said,

‘I don’t know Mum, I’m not ready to start my life again; it’s too soon.’

‘What about school? Your grades were poor but you could go back and improve them couldn’t you?’ Her mother seemed nicer all of a sudden?

Adele was physically and mentally drained and it was some time later before she felt ready to think about her future. The nightmares she’d been having since the birth, where the twins called to her and asked where she was, were fading and she was beginning to feel stronger. She felt desperately guilty and the experience had left her emotionally drained. It didn’t help when her mother reassured her that Adam and Joseph had gone

to good homes and had every chance of living full and happy lives.

'You must think about your future and not look back.' Her mother said. 'Mum how can I? I've given away the most precious things I had and you tell me to think of the future. I'll never forgive you, never, for as long as I live.' Her Mother walked away and busied herself in the kitchen unable to face that blistering accusation.

Adele was not ready to return to school, the idea didn't appeal to her, as she feared that some of her fellow pupils would make fun of her. She dreaded their accusations fearing that some would laugh because I got caught others will tell me I should have had an abortion.

'Mum I have been thinking, I'll just get a job for the time being. I don't want to go back to school.'

'OK do what you want.' But where to start Adele wondered.

One morning while glancing through the newspapers she saw an advert for a nursery nurse, no experience required.

'Mum,' she shouted, 'what do you think? There is an advert for a nursery nurse. I'd like to try for that.'

'Do you think that's a good idea? After all, won't it make you long for the twins? It could make you very sad.'

'I know but on the other hand I would be near babies and I think that would make me feel better.'

The nursery was only a one-stop bus ride away. Adele got off and walked the short distance to the nursery, which was in a two-storey townhouse. She knocked on

the front door, found it was open, pushed it and entered. She could hear music and children's voices.

'Hello,' she called out, 'is anyone there?' After a moment a woman voice replied,

'Hi, come in, we're in the playroom.' Adele entered a brightly lit room, the walls of which were decorated with nursery tales, Three Blind Mice, Jack and the Beanstalk and many others. About six children, some babies but one or two older were playing happily on the floor with a young woman who introduced herself as Penelope.

'Hello can I help you?'

'Yes, hello my name is Adele. I saw your advert in the paper. I'm interested in the job?'

'Good you're the first. Tell me about yourself, why do you want the job?' Adele fidgeted.

'I left school recently and need a job. I like children and thought it would be fun looking after them. I've brought some school reports for you to see.

'Do you have any brothers or sisters?' Asked Penelope glancing through the papers.

'No I'm an only child but I love children. I'm very keen but you would have to show me what to do.'

'I see. These reports are fine. I'm looking for someone to work three or four days a week. How would that suit you?'

'Perfect, when can I start?'

'What about today?'

Adele was very excited when she got home.

'Well, what happened?' Her mother asked as she came in.

'I got the job and have already started. A young woman called Penelope runs the nursery in her own

home. It's only ten minutes from here. We have about five to six toddlers. Mum they are such fun. I think I am going to love the job,' and she paused, 'it makes me feel closer to my own boys although I do occasionally cry when I think of them.'

Adele began to look forward to her job at the nursery. She and Penelope had a lot in common and soon began to confide in each other. One day Penelope returned from lunch but Adele was nowhere to be seen. Eventually she found her in the washroom in floods of tears.

'What's the matter Adele?' She asked anxiously.

'It's nothing, I'll be OK in a moment.'

'Come on, let it out; I can't have my staff crying.'

'I don't know where to begin,' Adele said. 'I was pregnant and had twin boys.' She struggled to continue. 'As soon as I saw them I loved them dearly but I couldn't keep them. I didn't have a job and my mother made it clear that she wouldn't help me so I had to have them adopted. It broke my heart. That's why I wanted to work here with children to help me get over my sadness. I was doing OK until today when Baby Thomas called me mum. The word just cut to my heart.'

Penelope listened not knowing what to say. She remembered her own tragedy but rarely spoke of it.

'Look Adele, why don't you take the rest of the day off, get some fresh air. I can cope here. It will do you good to get away for a few hours.'

'No I've got to deal with this. The boys went to good homes so I know they will be happy and grow up into fine young men. It's just that now and again I long for them. I can't help it; the sadness comes like a black cloud that envelops me.'

Penelope and Adele began to meet at lunchtime after the nursery had closed. They had a favourite coffee shop nearby where they went and gradually Penelope began to speak about her own past.

'I started the nursery because like you I needed to be with small children. My husband and my little girl were killed in a traffic accident. It was such a shock. I was at home when the police arrived at the front door. I can remember it as if it was yesterday. At first I couldn't take it in. They had left the house less than half an hour before. In those thirty minutes my life fell apart. Even as I tell you about it, it seems unbelievable. I still expect them to walk through the door.' The two women sat in silence each trying to imagine the misery of the other. Then Penelope broke the silence.

'It's no good looking back we have to look to the future. Let's prepare the room for tomorrow.' Although in was primarily a nursery, some of the children attending were as old as three and four and needed more than just toys. Adele decided to encourage them to draw and set out pencils and paper and for the older children, paints and brushes. A book on art that she found on the bookshelf helped her. While the children were busy drawing and painting she sat with her notebook and made quick sketches. Some of the children asked if they could take them home for their parents to see. Slowly she became quite well known for her drawings - some parents even offered to pay for a picture of their child. Adele had been working at the nursery for about six months when something unexpected occurred. Penelope had met someone and wanted to get married; her husband to be lived in Devon so she planned to close the nursery and sell the house.

'I'm sorry Adele,' she said after explaining her plans. 'I know you have been happy here and I have really valued your help. I shall miss our talks very much.' It all seemed too good to be true Adele thought as she said goodbye to Penelope, promising to keep in touch. Nothing seems to last very long she lamented to herself, I must be jinxed. But unknown to her one of the parents, a professional photographer, had seen her drawings and had the idea of combining children's photos with drawings. One morning just as they were finishing breakfast, the telephone rang.

'It's for you,' said her mother.

'Who is it?' asked Adele.

'He didn't say.'

'Hello this is Adele speaking, can I help you?'

'Yes, are you the young lady who did the drawings at the Nursery that closed recently?'

'Yes.'

'I think they're very good. Recently you did one of my three-year old son. I was very impressed and I wondered if you would be interested in doing some drawings of other children for me, while I am photographing them? I am a child photographer.' Adele didn't answer.

'Let me give you my telephone number. I'll wait to hear from you. My name is Jonathan Brand.'

Adele was really excited by his invitation. She needed a job and she liked and was good at drawing but she was cautious. She couldn't remember meeting him at the nursery and knew nothing about him. Maybe it was a trap. She had heard about men contacting young women and luring them to their homes. She decided to tell her mother.

'Mum, you know that phone call I got this morning?'

'Yes.'

'It was from one of the parents who had a child at the nursery. He said he was a child photographer and he wanted me to do drawings of the children while he was photographing them. His name is Jonathan Brand.'

'Why don't you look him up on the Internet? If he is what he says, you should be able to find out something about him.'

A few minutes later Adele called out,

'Mum, I've found him! Jonathan Brand, Child Photographer and there's a list of clients he has worked with, some well known. I recognised a film actor's name.'

'He sounds genuine enough,' her mother said, 'why don't you ring him. I could come with you when you go.'

'Would you Mum, I would feel more comfortable?'

Adele phoned him back and arranged an appointment at his Studio.

They found the studio easily and stood outside admiring the large beautiful photographs in the window. Adele rang the bell and waited.

'Come in,' was the reply on the intercom. The glass door slid open and they entered a modern studio decorated minimally in white and black. A man in his mid forties whom Adele now recognised as one of the fathers, greeted them.

'I'm Jonathan. Thank you for coming Adele, is this your mother?'

'Yes?'

'I am delighted to meet you. I think your daughter is a very talented artist and I would like her to work with me. Come into the office. Let me show you what I have in mind.' They followed him into a smaller room the walls of which were adorned with photographs of children in various poses and colours. He moved to a large brightly lit display table.

'I have taken some drawings from the Internet and placed them next to some of my photographs. What do you think?'

Adele stood over the table slowly scanning the composite pictures. Jonathan had combined photographs with line drawings. She was amazed how the two different images complemented each other.

'These are wonderful,' she said turning to Jonathan, 'what a great idea.'

'Thank you; this is what I want you do. While I am taking photographs I want you to draw the child using whatever medium you prefer. You could use a range such as pencil, charcoal, pastel or anything else. What do you think?'

'It sounds very exciting I would love to try.'

'Good, what I suggest is that you come on a trial basis. Let me know what materials you need and I will get them. I have a session tomorrow, could you come at about 9 am and get started?'

Adele was conscious of butterflies in her stomach as she entered the studio the following morning. Would she be able to produce the drawings he wanted? She had never before drawn to order so to speak. It had always been when she was inspired. She could hear voices as she entered the studio. A small boy with blond hair was sitting on a stool with his mother standing by his side

holding his hand. Jonathan was already set up with his camera and lights.

‘Hello Adele,’ he said, ‘this is Tommy and his mother Caroline. I have explained that you would be coming; she is very interested in what you will produce.’

‘Hello Tommy how are you?’ The boy smiled. ‘I’m going to sit over there and draw a picture. I will show it to you when it’s done.’

Adele selected a piece of A3 size cartridge paper and a 3B pencil. Pinning it to a board she propped it up on her lap; working fast she made a number of small sketches as Jonathan changed Tommy’s position. The boy was very good and only fidgeted a little. By the end of the session Adele had about twenty small drawings capturing the boy’s features and different expressions. When the family had gone Jonathan and Adele settled down and examined her drawings. He said nothing at first staring closely at the images. After a few minutes, he selected four that he particularly liked.

‘These are very good,’ he said. ‘Could you enlarge these to A4 and complete them before you go this afternoon?’ Adele’s mother was waiting for her when she got home.

‘Well how did it go? He seemed genuine.’

‘Fine, we had one client a little boy. I drew while Jonathan took photos. Tomorrow he is going to show me the combination of his photos and my drawings.’ After supper Adele went to bed early but couldn’t sleep. She couldn’t wait to get to the studio to see the composite pictures.

Jonathan was already at the studio when Adele arrived.

'Close your eyes,' he said. 'I'll tell you when to open them.' She could hear rustling of paper and movement of something.

'Ok you can look.' Adele was speechless. On the wall was a picture consisting of a photograph of Tommy in the middle and her drawings on either side showing a different aspect of the child's face.

'It's like a triptych, three pictures in one' Jonathan said. 'I think it works very well, don't you? I hope Tommy's mother likes it.'

The pictures were a great success and more and more parents liked the combination of photograph and drawings. Adele quickly settled into a routine working three days a week at the studio and on the other days helping her mother in the house. She became conscious of a change coming over her. She was becoming more outgoing and confident. She stared at her face in the bathroom mirror noticing that the tension lines around her eyes were softening and she was able to smile at herself. She could feel a bounce returning, life was good and she felt that she now had a purpose, a direction to aim for.

It was about six months later when returning home and letting herself in through the front door, she realised that something didn't seem quite right. The house was in complete darkness; there were no hall lights on. She felt a sudden fear and called out to her mother. She heard a muffled sound from upstairs. It seemed to be coming from the bathroom. She bounded up the stairs following the sound. Her mother was lying twisted on the shower floor, her left leg grotesquely bent beneath her.

'It's my leg. I can't move, I slipped,' she said trying to smile. 'I'll be OK, can you help me to get up?'

'Mum I'm going to call an ambulance'.

The ambulance arrived about fifteen minutes later. Adele met the two paramedics at the front door.

'It's my mother she fell in the shower. Her leg is all twisted.'

'OK show us where she is.' The Paramedics took one look at her. One went and got a stretcher from the ambulance while the other gave her gas and air and then tried to straighten the leg but it caused too much pain. With difficulty they got her onto the stretcher and into the ambulance.

Adele accompanied her mother to the North Manchester Hospital a journey of about twenty minutes. Throughout she held her hand and reassured her. The A&E department was buzzing when they arrived. It seemed as if everyone in Manchester was there. Adele watched as her mother was wheeled into x-ray and waited.

'I'm afraid your mother has a nasty break. We will have to operate.' the surgeon said after looking at the x-rays. Adele couldn't speak, it had all happened so quickly. She hadn't had time to absorb what he had said.

'You want to operate?' She repeated.

'Yes, the fracture is widely displaced and we need to fix it.' Adele nodded. She felt numb, this is not happening she said to herself but as they wheeled her mother into the OR the reality struck her. She hurriedly ran forwards and kissed her.

'You'll be fine mum, see you later.'

'Adele there something I must say to you. I'm sorry, so sorry that I sent your babies away. I shall never forgive myself for my selfishness. Will you ever forgive me? Adele wanted to say no. I can never forgive you

but this was not the time for confrontation so she simply said,

‘Of course Mum, I think I understand why you wouldn’t help me. Of course I forgive you. Now just relax and I will see you later.’ Adele watched as the trolley bearing her mother was wheeled into the OR.

Time seemed to stand still. An hour passed and nothing. A second hour and a nurse came out of the OR. Adele looked expectantly at her but the nurse walked passed and said nothing. She watched the clock, three hours had passes and Adele was beginning to feel desperate.

No news, what on earth are they doing all this time? Then the doors opened and a tired dejected surgeon, the one who had spoken to her earlier, came over to her.

‘I’m sorry, so sorry, your mother, we did everything we could. The operation was going well when we think she had a heart attack. Is there any past history?’

‘What are you saying? A heart attack, her heart was fine. No, no history. Is she all right?’ The surgeon realised that she hadn’t understood anything he had said.

‘Adele it is Adele? Come and sit down. No, she is not all right. She... her heart stopped beating and we couldn’t get it started again.’ Suddenly Adele realised what he was saying.

‘No, no she can’t be, she was so healthy, so active. It can’t be true. No you are mistaken. I must see her. Please I must see her.’ Adele didn’t wait for the answer. She ran forwards and pushed open the OR doors. On the table in the middle of the room was a human form covered by a sheet. The only sound was the hum of the AC. Several nurses were standing in a

group. Adele rushed forwards and pulled back the sheet. She saw her mother's bloodless face; her eyes closed as if asleep.

'Mum,' she shouted, 'mum wake up.' She reached forwards and shook her. The dead weight surprised her and she stopped.

'Oh my God, mum!' She wailed, 'mum!' A nurse stepped forwards and gently escorted her out of the room and sat her on a chair. The nurse held her hand and stroked her back.

'I'm so sorry,' she said, 'I'm so sorry.' Adele looked up into her face through her tears.'

The following few weeks passed in a blur. She vaguely remembered the funeral, the service in the church, the burial and the fog of faces all hugging her and giving their condolences. Then it was all over and she was alone. She put off returning home for as long as possible but eventually the time came. She had said all her farewells and made promises to keep in touch. There was an eerie silence when she let herself into the house. She choked back the reflex to shout out to her mother that she was home; instead she stood in the hall wondering what to do. It was as if that part of her brain that made decisions had been switched off. Ahead the stairs beckoned but she couldn't bring herself to climb them although it was late and she was tired. Instead she went into the lounge and lay down on the couch. The sense of loneliness was like a heavy stone on her heart. She was awoken several times during the night by sudden spasms of her body as if it had a life of its own and was out of her control. She would lie still until they had eased. Unable to settle down she got up and made herself a cup of tea. As the kettle boiled she fought back

the desire to ask her mum whether she would like one. Shouting against the silence she repeated, 'Mums dead, mums dead.' and then collapsed into tears. She lay back on the sofa staring at the ceiling. She lost track of time. Gradually the morning light began to fill the room. There was a sudden knock at the back door. Who could that be? She wondered opening the door. It was the Milkman,

'I was so sorry to hear about your mum, Adele. What a lovely lady she was. You didn't put out your empties do you want the usual?' Adele nodded. She closed the door the words, *what a lovely lady she was*, still ringing in her ears. Mum was... yes she is no more. Adele's brain struggled with the words; she's no more. It's not true, maybe her body is gone but she is still here with me and will always be, she shouted. It was later that day that her telephone rang, it was Jonathan.

'I heard the news Adele. I'm so sorry, are you OK?' Adele tried hard to find the right words.

'Yes I guess so, it's been a terrible shock,' she managed to mumble.

'Look about the job; I have a lot of work to catch up. Take as much time as you want. I'll ring you next week.'

For Adele at home alone, the hours seemed to drag, as if time had stopped. She desperately searched for some purpose in her life now her mother had died but everything seemed meaningless. Like a robot she did the things that needed to be done. Some friends rang, others visited but it was as if she wasn't there. She heard their words and replied mechanically and then couldn't remember what had been said or who said it. As

promised Jonathan rang the following week. For a moment Adele was confused and at first didn't recognise his voice.

'Hi Adele,' he paused, 'do you feel up to coming back? I have a number of parents waiting and they all want their children to be drawn. It would do you good for you to have a change.' Adele, still in a fog heard his invitation.

'I think I would like to try,' she replied. Sitting in the studio sketching a small girl in a party dress, she found herself able to concentrate and for a while forget her sadness. Day by day, being with other people helped, life goes on she realised. Nevertheless she could not think beyond each day. Until one day some weeks later when Jonathan asked her to stay behind when the days work was done.

'My wife and I have been talking about your work. We think you have a real talent and would like to help you. We think that you could get a grant to attend a foundation course at college with a view to doing a degree. How does that appeal to you?' Adele was at first confused.

'Do you mean I could go to college?'

'Yes, we would like to help you.'

A few days later Adele made her way to the Enrolment Office. She had been told to ask for a man called Christopher who was an enrollment officer. The room was brightly lit with a number of desks where people were being interviewed. She sat in one of the chairs at the back waiting her turn and looking around she noticed a pile of forms on a table. A notice on the wall above said,

Please complete an application form before seeing one of our advisors.

She picked one up and began filling it in but she had difficulty in answering some of the questions particularly the ones that asked her to list her skills. She couldn't think of any as she didn't think that drawing was a skill and that having had twins wouldn't qualify. Eventually her turn came and she found herself sitting in front of a middle-aged man with unkempt white hair and a small mustache.

'Good morning, my name is Christopher,' he said checking her name from the form.

'It's Adele isn't it? How can I help you?'

'I'm looking for something to do with my life. I'm no good at learning and have no skills apart from drawing. I want to go to college and study art.'

'I see, well let's have a look. I see you left school a year ago with 3-O levels, English Art and Geography. Art?' Christopher said with surprise. 'Tell me about that.'

'I love drawing and painting.'

'What do you draw?'

'Anything really, mainly from nature, flowers, trees, birds; recently I have been drawing children.'

'Have you brought anything with you?'

'No I didn't think..'

'It's OK. I notice you have left the section **SKILLS** blank. Do you think you have no skills?'

'Yes, I can't do anything,' she said.

'You know that's not true.'

'What do you live on?'

'My job pays me together with welfare. What I really want to do is to study Art, is that possible?'

‘Yes it is. I think we could get you a grant to pay for the fees. You would have to go for an interview at the college but if they liked your work, you would be accepted. Have you any work to show them?’

‘Yes lots at home, but I can do more.’

‘Good, I’ll find out what courses are available. Can you come back in say two weeks time with some work to show me?’

Adele was walking on air as she rushed home to tell her mother and then she remembered with a pang that she wasn’t there any more. All her hopes for the future seemed to collapse. What am I doing? Am I crazy they won’t accept me it’s a pipe dream. She let herself in to the empty house her footsteps echoing on the tiled floor. She fought back her tears as that ache in her heart returned and she collapsed wailing. Somewhere in her confusion she heard the telephone ringing.

‘It’s Jonathan, how did you get on?’ Adele struggled to collect her thoughts.

‘I went to the Office and saw Christopher as you suggested and he thinks I can go to college, and then I came home to tell mum but she’s not here. I had forgotten. How could I forget? My mum, I don’t know what’s happening? I think I’m going out of my mind. I don’t want to live anymore.’

‘Adele listen, I’m coming over to see you now. Don’t do anything silly.’

The front door was open when Jonathan arrived. He could hear whimpering from the far room and found Adele slumped on the floor cuddling her teddy bear. He leaned over and gently lifted her up. Her face was tear-stained with her mascara smeared around her eyes.

‘Come and wash your face. It’s going to be OK. You’re strong you’ll get through this.’H

Over the next two weeks Adele continued her drawings at home. She was able to lose herself in the act of drawing, looking intently at the object and trying to decide exactly what she was seeing so as to draw it. She slowly realized that it was only through drawing things that she really saw them) She used pencil, charcoal and pastels and drew from nature, going out every day with her pad and board. Very quickly she was producing well-executed drawings that were improving every day. By the end of the two weeks she had over twenty in her portfolio.

Two weeks later, armed with her portfolio of drawings and paintings she returned to the office, she was very nervous. Christopher was with another client but saw her come in and smiled. After about ten minutes he beckoned to her and she sat down at his desk.

‘How’s it been going?’

‘Good, I have brought my drawings.’

‘Let me see them.’ She opened the folder and brought out about twenty drawings and paintings. He studied them carefully moving from detail to detail.

‘These are excellent,’ he said, ‘although I am not an expert, I think you have a real talent. The work is really original and exciting. I will forward your details to a local art college and see what they say. You will have to go for an interview but it will only require you to talk about your work.’

Adele was upstairs when she heard the postman push something through the letterbox. It fell with a thud on the hall floor. She rushed down to the hall and picked it up. It was addressed to her from the North London Art College.

Feeling her heart thumping in her chest, she tore open the envelope. Inside was a bundle of papers. She sat down and began to sort through them. She found a covering letter together with an application form. There was also a newsletter containing a short account of the college and its facilities. Adele read the covering letter.

Dear Adele, the college would like you to attend an interview for a place on our two-year foundation course. Please come prepared to discuss some of your work.

The day of the interview dawned. It was cold and wet as Adele pulled open the curtains of her bedroom and peered out. She felt a thrill of excitement mingled with a sense of the fear. She had never been to an interview before and was uncertain how it would be conducted. The fact that she had been asked to bring her work meant that she would be expected to discuss it. With that in mind, she had gone to the local library where she was introduced to one of the librarians who had been to art school. He was very helpful and gave her a list of questions she needed to ask herself about each work.

'They will ask you to talk about your drawings and paintings, just be relaxed, it's usually quite informal. Try to enjoy it.' He had said.

She arrived early and was shown into a waiting room, there was one other person there, a man in his forties. They looked at each other; he was shy and didn't say anything so she took the plunge.

'Hi, are you also waiting for an interview?' she asked tentatively.

'Yes, you?'

'Yes, it's my first ever interview.'

'Are you nervous?'

'Very, what about you?'

'I tried last year but wasn't successful,'

'What's your name? I'm Adele.'

'I'm John, nice to meet you?' They shook hands, his were moist and a bit shaky she noticed. They sat in silence. Each desperately trying to think of what to say. After about ten minutes the door opened and he was called in. She got up and walked around, anything to pass the time. She was beginning to wonder whether the whole thing was a waste of time when the door again opened and John came out. Her name was then called. Suddenly her heart was pounding and her hands felt clammy.

'Come in Adele and please sit down,' the chairman said pointing to a chair opposite the panel of four very young looking people sitting across a long table. They were introduced as final year students. He was their tutor.

'Thank you for attending, I see you have brought your portfolio, please talk to us about your work.' Adele began to take out her paintings and drawings one by one and to talk about them describing them and saying what was the idea behind them and then saying what she thought worked and what didn't. She paused periodically to allow for questions but none were forthcoming. When she had finished the tutor asked if anyone had a question. One student pointing to some numbers on one of her photographs asked what they were?

'The date,' she replied causing him to blush. Then it was all over and she was back in the waiting room feeling confused and disappointed. John was standing by the window and turned as she entered.

'How was it?'

'I dunno, confusing, you?'

'The same I guess. Have you time to have a cup of something?'

‘Yes why not, it would be good to get back to sanity. It felt like a madhouse in there, no one speaking, no questions, it was odd.’

She learned that John was an orphan both his parents having died when he was a young man. He seemed a nice chap, gentle and kind. She took to him and they sat for some while talking. Slowly his shyness disappeared and he began to talk about his life. How he was adopted when eight years old but didn’t like his new dad who was always at him. He then fell silent. Then Adele stood up.

‘I must go,’ she said shaking his hand. They parted each wishing the other good luck not knowing whether they would ever meet again, each hoping that they had been successful. They knew that they would not hear from the college for several weeks.

As the weeks passed and Adele still had not heard the result of her interview, she became increasingly sure that she had failed. So it was a big surprise when a fat envelope landed in the hall one morning. She hadn’t heard the postman arrive and found it when she came down for breakfast. She grabbed the parcel and rushed to her bedroom, sat on her bed and with shaking hands tore it open. It was from the college. There was a letter separate from the other papers She knew what it was and carefully opened the envelope and read,

We are pleased to offer you a place on our Foundation Course in Fine Art. Included in the package were details of the materials she would need all of which could be obtained at the college. As she read and understood the significance of the letter she let out a loud whoop of joy.

‘Mum,’ she whispered, ‘you would have been so proud of me. They’ve accepted me. I’ve got a place starting in two weeks time I’m so excited.’

Ever since she agreed to the adoption of her twins soon after they were born so many years ago Adele had become more convinced that she needed to find her children although she had been searching for them for years that had lead nowhere, she felt she could never give up, Adele had nursed a deep sense of guilt ever since she had agreed to the adoption of her twins soon after they were born so many years ago, At the time, it seemed the right thing to do but with the passing of the years and with hindsight she had realised that she could have persuaded her mother to help her. The fact that her mother had refused to even look at the boys should have made her more convinced than ever that she should have kept them. That thought continually haunted her. Seeing photos of happy families in the newspapers often reduced her to tears. As the years went by she learned that there were more and more mothers searching for their adopted children. Private and public organizations were advertising to help them and there were some heart-rending stories of reunions. She had once thought that the boys now young men would reject her after all she had let them go to strangers as if she didn't want them, but then she realised that time and again it was the adopted child who was looking for his parents. With that in mind she began a systematic search. To find the boys she would have to provide details of their birth date and place, the name of the organisation that arranged the adoption and the names of the families that took them. That left the question of where the families now live and whether the boys still lived with them. It was to be a herculean task but she set her mind to it and began.

She met the first hurdle early on in her search. The Maternity Hospital in Manchester where the boys were born had closed and was now a residential home. No one knew where the records were or if they still existed. After several fruitless phone calls she almost gave up. No one seemed willing or able to help her. But a chance meeting with Monica a friend from school, in a supermarket gave her hope.

‘Have you tried the local libraries? They often keep archives of records which no one else wants,’ she suggested. ‘There is the North Manchester Library in North Market Street, why don’t you try there. If you like I’ll come with you? I like a wild goose chase.’

‘Is that what you think it will be?’ asked Adele.

‘I hope not but be prepared.’

It was a grey windy day when the two friends mounted the white marble steps of the library. They stood for a moment reading the plaque just inside the building. The main reading room was almost deserted just a few readers sitting at the tables and a few others at the computers. She approached the desk and caught the eye of the librarian.

‘I wonder if you can help me, I’m looking for my hospital records. I was a patient at the North Manchester Maternity hospital where I had my twins 20 years ago,’ she said.

‘Let me have a look.’ Adele waited as the assistant scrolled through the library records.

‘Yes, we have a photographic archive in the basement but they are not here. I think they are kept at the Town Hall.’

‘You mean you know they exist?’

‘Yes, there is a note saying that they were transferred from here two years ago when we needed more space.’

‘That’s amazing,’ said Adele, ‘Monica, have you got time to come with me to the Town Hall?’

‘Yes, wouldn’t miss it, I’m intrigued, it’s like a murder mystery with a happy ending, no murder.’ They both laughed and arm in arm crossed the road and walked towards the Town Hall, an impressive white building in Portland stone with an entrance guarded by two Marble columns. Their footsteps echoed on the mosaic-tiled floor of the vast reception area as they entered. Beams of sunlight shining down from several skylights illuminated the hall.

‘May I help you?’ boomed a voice from a desk to their right, concealed by the gloom.

‘Yes thank you, we are looking for your Archive department, where you keep old city records.’ The Assistant checked his watch.

‘It’s closed for lunch, could you come back after 2 o’clock?’

‘Yes thanks, we’ll be back.’

‘Are you OK for time Monica?’

‘Yes fine, I’ve got all day. I’m dying to find out if you get what you want.’

‘There’s a coffee bar opposite we could wait there,’ suggested Adele.

Just after 2 pm the two women made their way back to the hall. Another attendant was at the desk.

‘Can you direct us to your archival department please?’

‘Take the stairs to your right; it’s on the floor below. You can’t miss it.’

‘Thank you.’

They descended the stairs, found the Archive office and entered.

‘Good afternoon, my name is Adele. I am looking for my hospital records from the North Manchester Maternity Hospital where I had my babies. I believe you may have them?’

‘When was that Madam?’

‘Twenty years ago.’

‘Do you have the exact date?’

‘Yes it was the 20th August

‘What is your full name, date of birth and the address you were staying at?’

While waiting, Adele looked around the room. It was small and poorly lit. The windows were high up on the walls and she could see pedestrians walking by on the pavement outside.

‘It’s a bit dismal down here isn’t it, said Adele?’

‘Yes I agree, we are getting a new room, which is bigger and brighter. Ah! Here it is. I have your records. They are on a fiche. Do you have any ID as I can’t just let anyone see it.’

‘Yes here’s my driving licence.’

‘Thank you, that’s fine. You can see it on that machine over there.’

‘If we find it would it be possible to get a copy?’

‘No I’m sorry, but you can write down anything from the record.’

It was a bit fiddly using the fiche but after a few false attempts, Adele got the knack. She was able to find the exact time of the births, the names of the midwife and doctor, her room number, the dates of her admission

and discharge also the name and address of the adopting Agency.

Outside the two girls congratulated each other.

‘That was fantastic, easier than I thought,’ said Adele hugging Monica.

‘I don’t know how to thank you Monica you were a great support, now that we have met, we must keep in touch.’

Adele was late for her lecture at the College. She apologised as she entered. The lecture on Cubism had already started and she tried to take notes but her mind was elsewhere. The information that she had got from the Archive had fired her with a new determination to continue the search although she didn’t know where to go next. All she knew was that there were two teen-aged boys, her twin sons living somewhere unknown to her whom she was desperate to find. She looked across and saw John. He smiled. He had been successful also on his second attempt and she felt a kinship with him.

‘See you for coffee after the lecture,’ he mouthed and she nodded.

‘How’s it going?’ he asked as he brought two cups of coffee back to the table.

‘OK I suppose, but you know I can’t stop thinking about the past. It’s becoming an obsession and interrupting my work.’

‘I don’t agree I thought your presentation on Surrealism was excellent.’

‘If only we could stop time, rewind it and have a second chance,’ she whispered, ‘but we can’t.’ John reached out and touched her hand, she didn’t move. He listened as Adele poured out her life story. She didn’t

look at him as she spoke. It was if she was hearing herself for the first time.

‘I was stupid, so stupid,’ she began. ‘It all seemed so romantic. I was at the age when I was looking for love and then I found him in the boy next door. I thought he loved me but he only wanted one thing and I confused sex for love. I’ve learned better since but what a price I have paid.’

John watched her as she spoke, her hazel eyes watering over as she recalled the past.

‘Tell me what happened then’ he asked. For a moment she appeared not to hear and then she said, struggling with the words,

‘I wanted to keep them. We’ve never had twins in the family, perhaps he did, I never found out.’

John waited. He didn’t want to break this moment for her.

‘But Mum wouldn’t let me, she simply walked away and would have nothing to do with my problem.’

‘Problem?’

‘That’s what she called it.’

‘So what did you do?’

‘What could I do? I had no choice. I decided to get rid of them. But I didn’t. At the last moment I couldn’t. We had a flaming row. We didn’t talk for weeks and all the while I was getting bigger parading it in her face so to speak.’ Her voice faltered.

‘They were lovely bright bonny children, Adam with blue eyes and Joseph with brown eyes. I loved them the moment I saw them,’ She said.

‘What happened then?’ He asked.

‘I had to let them go didn’t I? Had to let them go.’ Her face clouded over. ‘Even now so many years later I

hate myself for what I did, and what will they think of me? What will they think of the mother who gave them away? I must find them and explain that I loved them and wanted to keep them and nurture them but I couldn't,' her voice drifted into a whisper.

Adam heard the front door open and his father talking to someone. He knew who it was and dreaded the next hour. The visitor was his Hebrew teacher who had come to give him his Hebrew lesson preparing him for his Bar Mitzvah. He was 13 in two months time and the family was excited about the forthcoming celebration.

'Dad I don't want to have a Bar Mitzvah, I am not Jewish and in any case I don't believe in all that religion stuff.' Ever since he had learned that he had been adopted, he wondered about his parents, the real ones from whom he had come. He loved his adopted parents but they were not the same, how could they be?

'Adam you are Jewish. Mum and I brought you up as Jewish.'

'I suppose so, I really appreciate what you have done for me but it makes no sense always remembering the past. I want to think about the future, the past is over it's dead. It's different now from those early days. We need to think differently.'

Simon pondered what Adam had said. His immediate feeling was to get angry and tell the boy to do as he was told, that's what his own father would have done, never listen just bully. But Simon knew there was a better way. It was to try and understand why Adam felt what he did and to show him that to know the past was important, no more than that, essential. It was the only comparison we had of our success as human beings, he wanted to say. Have

we learned anything from our mistakes was a question he was always trying to answer?’

‘Look Adam do me a favour, have your lesson and then come and talk to me, I’ll be in my office.’

The lesson wasn’t easy. Adam struggled to remember and recite words that he could hardly read, words in Hebrew a language not his own. He did his best and for the time being, put aside his rejection of the whole exercise. The teacher was very patient as the hour dragged on.

Later in his father’s office he expressed his frustration.

‘Dad it’s crazy what you are asking me to do, to be a parrot for what?’ I’m not going to do it, I’m sorry.’

Simon had some time to think. He usually listened to reason and generally gave in but this time he was not going to.

‘No Adam, I’m not prepared to accept your attitude. You are going to learn your piece. Let’s have no more of your nonsense please.’ Adam stood up and without speaking marched out of the room.

Later that day, Simon told Naomi what had happened. She smiled at him patiently and then said,

‘Simon, you sound just like your father, harsh and intolerant. Is that what you want?’

‘Sometimes it is necessary to be firm with Adam otherwise he will walk all over us,’ insisted Simon.

‘I agree but there is firmness and there is obstinacy.’

At breakfast the following day Simon said,

‘Adam, I have had time to think about what you said. I had an idea and spoke to Mum and she agreed. We will have your Bar mitzvah in the Reform Synagogue and you can choose the piece you would like to read in English. What do you think of that?’

Adam came over and hugged him.

‘Thanks Dad, I knew you would understand.’

Adam began a hunt through his father’s extensive library. What am I looking for? He wondered. Something that challenges me to ask who am I and perhaps gives an answer. He came upon the work of Arthur A. Cohen, an American Theologian. A writing that appealed to him was:

‘Given the freedom to choose I have decided to embrace Judaism. I have not done this out of loyalty to the Jewish people or the Jewish State. My choice was religious. I chose to believe in the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob, to acknowledge the law of Moses as the Word of God; to accept the people of Israel as the holy instrument of divine fulfillment: to await the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of history,’

Simon still wasn’t really happy with the compromise he had agreed with Adam. He recalled his own orthodox Barmitzvah. How for six months he had struggled through the Hebrew lessons until he was word perfect, trying to master this strange language written backwards in peculiar letters and vowels. At last he was prepared for that day, the day when he would be thirteen, the day of his Bar mitzvah, the day when he would become a man.

The day didn’t seem different from any other. The sun rose, the birds sang and the world continued. But for him it was different, He was nervous just like he would have been before a school examination. All he knew was that he had to recite a portion of the law in the synagogue and that all eyes would be on him. The thought of it scared him, made him almost sick with fear.

‘We have all done it,’ said his father, ‘you’ll be OK son we are all batting for you.’ He remembered the walk to the bima, mounting the two steps to the raised dais in the centre of

the synagogue standing, waiting, as the Torah scroll was unbound then unrolled until the page of his portion of the law was open. Then he took a big breath and pointing to the first word began to sing in his breaking falsetto voice. The next ten minutes passed in a dream and looking back he couldn't remember if he had read it at all. But it was over and the congregation was shouting out their congratulations.

Now it was Adam's turn but his was going to be different and Simon felt ill at ease about it. But when the day came and as he sat next to Naomi in the Reform Synagogue watching Adam, he felt a glow of pride. He reached out and pressed Naomi's hand. She turned and smiled at him. Each was wondering where the years had gone since they first accepted Adam into their home. Adam stood proudly in front of the open ark and with great solemnity recited his chosen piece. Then he paused and looking at his parents seated in the front row said,

'Mum and Dad, this is the first real opportunity I have had to thank you for all the love and care you have given me. You accepted me as your own, showering me with everything I needed, never questioning your decision for me to be a member of your family, my family, and today as I become a man you are there for me. I love you both. About two hundred miles north on the outskirts of Manchester, Joseph now renamed Hussein and his family were celebrating his thirteenth birthday. It had no specific significance in the Muslim tradition other than an occasion to have a party. Hassan and Zaira had invited a number of his school friends as well as some of their English neighbours. It was a lovely day so they had the party in their small walled garden. They had made a variety of Arabic dishes including hummus with pitta, stuffed

zucchini, samosas and many more which were accompanied by a variety of fruit juices.

That evening before he went to bed, Hussein surprised his mother.

‘Mum I overheard you telling a neighbour that you had adopted me soon after I was born and that I was a twin. Is that true?’

‘Yes, your mother had twin boys but wasn’t able to look after them and as Dad and I hadn’t been able to have a baby you came to us and your twin went to another family. I think they live in the south, in London.’

‘I don’t understand, why didn’t you tell me before?’

‘Dad and I thought about telling you many times but we were a bit scared and decided to wait until you were older and would understand.’

‘Understand what?’

‘That we love you even though we are not your birth parents. We should have told you sooner, please believe that we only wanted the best for you.’

That night Hussain woke in a sweat. He had dreamt that he was being sold in an auction and that he had gone to the highest bidder. In the dream he was standing next to a boy the same age as him who was bought by another family. Could he have been his twin brother he wondered? He lay awake until the dawn light entered his room.

‘Hussain, wake up breakfast is on the table,’ he heard his mother calling from the kitchen. ‘Dad has gone to work he couldn’t wait for you to appear.’

Hussain bounded down stairs,

‘Mum I’m starving what’s for breakfast?’

‘The usual hummus, beans, yoghurt and bread.’

‘Mum I’ve been thinking, could I try and contact him?’

‘Contact who dear?’ She replied, hardly listening.’

‘My twin, I would like to meet him.’

‘Why would you want to do that?’

‘I would like to see whether we have anything in common.’

A few days later at breakfast Zaire raised the subject.

‘Hussein tell your dad what you would like to do.’

‘Dad I’m really confused I have only just learned that I was a twin. Why didn’t you and Mum tell me? It’s not fair.’

Zaire interrupted,

‘I told him we were going to but just waited too long. He wants to meet his twin. I told him that I didn’t think it was a good idea.’

Hassan thought for a moment. How was he going to explain to his son that he didn’t want him to meet Adam because he went to a Jewish family? He had nothing against Jews but didn’t think they needed to go out of their way to be friendly with them.

Hussein could see his father struggling to answer and anticipated his answer.

‘Is there something about him you don’t like? I don’t understand.’ Hassan decided to be honest.

‘Look Hussain, when you were adopted we met the other family. Their name was Cohen, that’s a Jewish name. Your twin has probably been brought up as a Jew.’

‘A Jew, so what dad?’

'Hassan they're different to us. You've been to lessons on the Koran you know what it says about infidels. People who don't believe in Islam.'

'Yeah, but the Imam said that was all out of date. We no longer believe in all that.'

'Is that what the Imam said?'

'Yes why?'

'Oh nothing.'

A few days later, Hassan stayed behind after morning prayers to speak to the Imam. He caught up with him, as he was about to go into his Room.

'Imam greetings, Allah be with you. Could you spare me a moment?'

'Hassan, Allah be with you. Of course, come into my room while I am changing.'

'What's on your mind?'

'Imam I hope you don't think this question is inappropriate but my son who you know is a twin wants to meet his brother.'

'What's wrong with that?'

'Nothing except that we think he has been brought up as a Jew. We don't want our son to meet a Jew. They might become friends. When we told him this he said that you told him in one of your lessons that a Jew is Ok. Mohammed loved the Jews. Is that correct because it's not what I was taught?'

'Yes I did.'

'I don't understand why would you say that?'

'My dear Hassan, we are living in a modern world and in a foreign country. It is true that the Koran says what you said but it also says that the Jews are a chosen people and must be protected. It's conflicting as

many religious tracts are so you are invited to decide for yourself. Have you any reason to dislike Jews?’

‘Well, no.’

‘Well then it’s not a problem is it?’

Hassan left very confused by the Imam’s answer.

Zaire remembered the day vividly. It had changed their lives and brought them Hussein. She tried to explain it to him.

‘Your mother was having twins but couldn’t look after them. The other boy was called Adam I think, it’s a long time ago. A family who lived in London adopted him.

‘So he is my twin?’ Hussain whispered almost too excited to say it aloud.

‘Yes, what do you want to do?’

‘I don’t know I’m scared.’

‘Scared, why are you scared?’

‘I don’t know, I think it’s because I don’t know what to expect.’

‘Hussain you don’t have to do anything right away think about it, talk to your friends, give it time.’

Hussein couldn’t get the idea of meeting his twin out of his mind. He imagined that they had met and he began to ask him questions, not the usual ones but ones about being a twin. How similar are we? He wondered. Do we have any telepathy, think the same thing at the same time?

Hussein had woken early and had some time before breakfast so he switched on his computer and opened his Facebook page. His eye caught a message that had just been posted by a friend.

Hussein there's someone called Adam living in the south who is looking for his twin, he says he has the same birth date as you!

He read it several times before switching off and preparing to get for school. Throughout the day he kept on coming back to the message. Is it possible he wondered? Could Adam be his twin? The idea excited him but at the same time scared him. It seems so sudden? It had come out of the blue? Why now? When he got home that evening he was impatient to tell his father but he wasn't home yet so he called his mother who was in the kitchen making tea.

'Mum I've had an unusual message on my Facebook wall.'

'Oh yes,' she said hardly hearing him. 'Why are you telling me?'

'Because I need your advice.'

Zaire was a bit puzzled; it wasn't like Hussain to ask her for advice. He usually went to his father.

'Mum I've had this message,' he paused uncertain how to explain.

'What message?'

'It's from a boy called Adam who is asking whether I am his twin.'

Hussein he couldn't resist finding out for certain if Adam was his twin brother. Without telling his parents he posted a letter and managed to find a boy named Adam Cohen's email address in London.

'Hi, I have been told that you are my twin brother?'

'Hi yes I am a twin and we share the same birthday but do you know anymore about your early life,' Adam asked.

'Yes I was adopted at birth and have lived with my adopted parents since. What about you?'

'The same, do you know where you were born?'

After a few days a reply came,

'I spoke to my mum and she said I was born in a hospital in Manchester,' said Hussain.

'Do you know which one?'

'Yes, a Maternity Hospital in Northern Manchester,' replied Hussain.

'Why don't we exchange photos and see if we look alike?' Suggested Adam. A few days later Adam saw a message from Hussein with an attachment. He opened it to see a photo of boy with dark brown hair, brown eyes and a dark skin.

'He looks nothing like me,' he told his mother, 'come and see.'

I see what you mean,' she said after studying the photo. 'He could still be your twin but not an identical one. They are the only ones that look alike.'

'How do you mean?'

'If you and your twin came from the same egg and sperm you would be identical but if you came from the egg after it had divided and then was fertilized you would be not be identical d'you see?'

Several weeks passed and Adam had almost given up his search when he had a message on his Facebook.

Adam, there is a boy called Hussain living in Manchester who says he is a twin and has your birth date. He goes to the Avicenna Grammar School. It could be him?'

Adam read the message slowly, hardly able to believe what he is seeing.'

'Mum,' he shouted, 'look at this, come.'

Naomi stood behind him resting her hand on his shoulder and read the message,

'Adam you could have found him. He goes to the Avicenna Grammar School, that's a Muslim school and his name is Hussein, he must be a Muslim?'

Another message from Hussein came two days later.

'Hi Adam let's meet?'

'OK I'll speak to my parents and see what they say,' replied Adam.

As soon as he could he spoke to Naomi.

'Mum I want to meet Hussein. Can I invite him here?'

Naomi knew the question would arise and didn't know what to say

'Adam it could be a bit tricky. I think he is a Muslim.'

'So does that make any difference?'

'I don't know, let me ask your Dad when he comes home.'

A few hours later Simon's key could be heard in the front door as he let himself in. Naomi was waiting in the hall. As they kissed she couldn't conceal the concern on her face.'

'What is it dear?'

'I need your help Simon, something has come up and I don't know how to deal with it. Adam wants to invite Hussein here.'

'I see let me speak to him and see what it is all about.'

At dinner that evening Simon asked Adam.

'Mum tells me that you want to invite Hussein here.'

'Dad I think he is my brother, my twin I want to meet him. Please I want to. Please dad it's important to me.'

'Have you asked him if he wants to meet you?'

'No, but I know he will I know it.'

In the Manchester home, Hussein was struggling to convince his parents especially his father that meeting Adam was a good idea. The fact that he could be Jewish was a significant factor, a fact that Hussein struggled with. Zaire was less adamant about the idea of the two boys meeting but she needed to support Hassan so she tacitly agreed that the meeting was unwise

'Why don't you leave it until you have finished school, you would both have more free time.' Reluctantly Hussein agreed and as the weeks and months passed and he got more involved with football and his studies, meeting Adam slipped further from his memory.

Waiting on the concourse at Heathrow for his flight to Ben Gurion Airport Israel, Adam thought about the events that had brought him to this point in his life. If someone had asked him when he entered a London Medical school that he would eventually consider working in Israel he would have laughed but now he was on the way. A series of events beginning with his adoption by a Jewish family and his Jewish education taught him about the history of his adopted religion tracing its origins back to its forebearers in the Pale in Poland in the 18th C and earlier. Those pioneers had sought a new life in England at the turn of the Twentieth Century to escape religious persecution and the Pogroms.

One of those was his adopted grandfather who at the age of sixteen left his family and sought freedom in

another country. Thinking he was going to America, the land of the free he found himself in the East end of London. There he began a new lineage in a country and a culture far away from his own. In a way Adam felt he was perhaps doing the same but in a much safer and tolerant world. Although he knew little about them, Adam felt a strong bond with those founding fathers. He began to identify with their struggle and the many wars that Israel had fought since her independence in 1948.

A message lit up on the display board calling his flight and he made his way to the gate and the departure lounge. Looking around his fellow passengers he saw people of all ages and cultures from the young jean generation with their mobiles and earphones to the older religious families including the devout wearing the traditional fur hat and black gown from the 18th C in Russia. As his passport and boarding card were checked he felt a mixed sense of excitement and sadness. Excitement for the unknown that lay ahead and sadness for the people and things he was leaving behind. Somehow he knew in his heart that he was making an irreversible decision to live and work in a country, very different from his own.

He had been allocated an aisle seat which accommodated his almost 2 metres of height, allowing him to stretch out his legs. As soon as the flight began, he tried to sleep. He napped for a while and then was awakened by the low repetitive droning of prayers being intoned by the religious group at the rear of the plane. Turning round he saw a group of men of different ages dressed in traditional black coats and fur hats praying together. They seemed a millions miles away from his lifestyle. Not religious himself he had found it

increasingly difficult to reconcile the modern world with a caring God.

During his earlier years in Medicine, he had been drawn to Trauma the acute side of Surgery and had completed two post registration years with a view to train as a Trauma surgeon. While waiting for the plane to depart, he began to read about the hospital in which he would continue his training. He learned that the Sheba Hospital established in 1948 was named after Chaim Sheba and was also called Tel Hashomer Hospital in Tel Aviv. It was the first military hospital to treat casualties from the Israeli War of Independence. It had been enlarged and was now situated in a 150-acre campus and had 1700 beds, 1400 physicians and 2500 nurses. The hospital saw up to 1.5 million patients a year.

The part that interested him most was the surgical Department. It housed the Division of Surgery one of the pre-eminent surgical training facilities in Israel. Sixth and seventh year Israeli medical students, as well as American medical students in their final year did their clinical clerkships in the departments. He couldn't believe how large it was. It boasted 18 surgical departments with 362 beds and a surgical staff including 280 surgeons and 500 nurses working on 32 operating tables.

In the small print he found out that 12 were situated in the main operating block (to be expanded soon to 16), 9 in Day Surgery, 3 in Ophthalmology, 5 in Maxillo-facial Surgery, and 3 at the Center of Advanced Technologies. He knew it was going to be an exciting experience but as he read he felt a slight twinge of doubt. Would he be able to live up to their expectations? He wondered.

On arrival at Ben Gurion Airport, Adam made his way to the taxi rank where one of the hospital staff had arranged to meet him and take him to the hospital. The bright sun glared in his face as he walked into the open from the shaded airport. The heat hit him and his shirt was soon sticking to his back and he could feel sweat in his armpits. I'm going to have to get used to this he thought, not familiar with how hot an Israeli summer could be. A dark skinned man waved at him and pointed to the car.

'Welcome to Israel, it's going to be a lovely day. My name is Mohamed and I will show you around.'

'Thank you, are you a doctor?'

'No I'm a paramedic. Let me have your bag.' Soon Adam was seated in the passenger seat of a small Peugeot and they set off. Like all Israeli drivers Mohamed behaved as if he owned the road weaving in and out of the other vehicles, occasionally shouting and gesticulating. Adam was almost breathless as the car screeched to a halt in the proximity of the hospital a large modern building with several offshoots. They passed through the guarded entrance and the vehicle slithered to a halt outside the trauma Unit. Adam sat for a moment catching his breath; it felt like he had been on a roller coaster.

'We're here,' announced Mohamed with a flourish. 'The finest Trauma centre in Israel; no, in the Middle east, perhaps in the world!' he said proudly. Adam followed him through a large rotating glass door into a modern air-conditioned reception area housed in a high ceilinged atrium. Adam was struck by its grandeur. Wow! This is an impressive space he thought. Patients were seated in rows waiting to be seen. He could just hear

low music coming from the speakers in the corner of the room.

‘Follow me;’ called Mohamed, ‘I think we should meet the Nurse in charge first and then I’ll take you to the Medical Director.’

Nursing Officer Jacob was a small compact lady with short curly hair, round cheeks and sparkling blue eyes.

‘Welcome Dr Adam, I’m Ruth Jacobs. Please call me Ruth. We have been expecting you. You come with glowing reports. I hope you can live up to them.’

Adam was flustered.

‘Whom have you been talking to?’

‘We have our sources,’ she said tapping the side of her nose. ‘I’m going to like this woman Adam thought.’

‘Settle in and I’ll see you tomorrow at 7 sharp.’

The Medical Director’s office was on the first floor. He was expecting Adam.

‘Please be seated,’ he said pointing to a chair in front of his large desk. ‘I hope the journey wasn’t too tiring. He spoke with an American accent.’

‘No it was fine and thank you for arranging for Mohammed to meet me, it made things much easier.’

‘That was nothing,’ he said waving his hand. ‘Let me see now,’ he continued looking at some papers on his desk. ‘You have completed two years trauma post registration. Is that right?’

‘Yes I qualified in 2009, completed a one year registration and then went into trauma at St Justine’s Hospital in the city of London.’

‘Is there much trauma work in London?’

‘More than you would think; apart from road accidents mainly involving motorcycles and bicycles, we

have had a number of terrorist attacks. People tend to overlook these.'

'Yes I remember, Israel is not the only target.' He paused, 'I believe you have met Senior Nurse Ruth. She will be your main contact. I think that is all, do you have any questions?'

'No, you have explained everything.'

'Thank you Doctor Adam, Mohamed will show you to your quarters. Good day,' he said extending his hand. Adam joined Mohammed outside the office and followed him to the Doctor's quarters a separate building, a short walk from the Trauma Unit.

'You're in room 8, it's just along the corridor, follow me I have the key.' The room was small but bright and functional. Adam had his own bathroom. It was like a basic Holiday Inn room with light brown furniture comprising a desk with six drawers and a wardrobe. The bed was queens size, just enough for two at a squeeze, he thought. After a light lunch of hummus, salad and pitta bread, he returned to the Trauma Unit to begin his initiation. He arrived in time to see the afternoon triage session in action. That's great he thought, it's very much like the system we had back home. At that moment Senior Nurse Ruth appeared and suggested Adam sat in with the Triage Nurse. The first few cases were straight forward none were urgent and could wait their turn. Then a middle-aged man came and sat at the desk.

'What's been the trouble?' The nurse asked.

'I've had this gnawing pain in my stomach for two days. It's not getting better and I have never had it before. Otherwise I feel well.' The nurse looked at Adam,

"What do you think?"

'I don't know; let me have a look at him.' The man was asked to undress in a cubicle near by. Adam put his hand on the man's abdomen and could feel a pulsatile swelling. He immediately knew what it was.

'Get dressed and follow me,' he ordered. At the Triage desk he said to the nurse,

'I think this man is an emergency, where do I take him?' The nurse surprised, picked up a phone and in a few moments an assistant arrived,

'Take this man to the surgical OP please.'

The surgical OP was held on the first floor ' It was a large department with six offices. Adam and the patient were asked to wait outside Room one. Within a few minutes, they were then called in to see the General surgeon a man called Joseph, a little older than Adam, Adam introduced himself and then proceeded to present the patient's condition. Joseph made a quick examination and confirmed the diagnosis of an aortic aneurysm- a bulging of the main vessel, which could rupture at any moment, a potentially fatal condition.

'Good work Adam,' he said, 'I'll arrange a scan and scheduled him for the OR.' Adam returned to the Triage desk and continued seeing patients for another hour when he received a text:

Your patient is in the OR, come and join us. Adam excused himself from the Triage clinic and made his way to the OR which was on the top floor. It occupied almost the whole space comprising six sets of twin Rooms. He was directed to Suite 3, which was allocated to General Surgery. Entering the room he recognised the surgeon Joseph who was already at the table.

'Scrub and join us,' he said before returning to the patient. When Adam was scrubbed and gowned he moved

to the opposite side of the table and greeted Joseph. By this time the operation was well under way. The abdomen had been opened and the bowel tucked away to expose the distended diseased Aorta, which had a pronounced bulge to one side. Pointing to it, Joseph said,

‘That was about to burst and it would have been the end for the poor guy. But thanks to you he should make a full recovery.’ Now the operation proper could begin. Joseph defined the upper and lower extent of the distended diseased vessel and carefully clamped them. Then he slit open the section in between and sucked out the blood and clot. The distended artery would form the bed for the new artery made from an artificial Dacron mesh tube. This would be laid in the bed and stitched to the top and bottom. When the suture lines were complete he gently released the clamps to allow the new artery to fill with blood. At first there was a little oozing but then it stopped and the new vessel was watertight. The packs were then removed to allow the bowel to return to its normal position in the abdomen.

‘Close up please,’ Joseph said to his assistant. ‘Adam, come and join me for a cup of English tea. They make an excellent cup in the office.’

‘That was a very neat job you did Joseph,’ said Adam.

‘Thanks I’ve done a few. We’ll have to keep a close eye on him over the next few days but if all goes well he should be home in a week’s time.’

Making rounds that evening. Adam stopped at the bed of the man with the aneurysm. He was sitting up and talking to his visitors. He saw Adam approaching.

‘Doctor,’ he said, ‘I would like you to meet my daughter Ramona, she is a nurse here.’ Adam was

introduced to a beautiful young woman with a lovely open smile. They shook hands; hers was warm and firm.

'Thank you for looking after my father,' she said.

'I did nothing; I only assisted at the operation.'

'Yes but wasn't it you who realised how ill he was?'

'I suppose so,' Adam said blushing.

Adam had completed his third year in Tel Aviv when one morning he was called to the Director's office. Now much more at ease than when he first met the Director, he noted that it was a simple room with an old desk, two chairs and a table on which a coffee maker stood steaming gently.

'Thanks for coming, coffee?'

'Thanks.'

'Help yourself.' Adam put a small teaspoon of powdered coffee in a cup and filled it with boiling water. He didn't take milk or sugar.

'Umm, I've asked to see you because there is a vacancy at the Trauma Unit in Safed and they need a replacement. Your name has been suggested. The chief of surgery has recommended you. If you want a change we think you're ready.' Adam had heard about the trauma unit. It was the most northerly unit and covered the whole of the northern territories up to the border with Syria at the Golan Heights. It was a prestigious offer and he jumped at it.

'I would be delighted to accept that position, when could I start?' It was agreed that he would take up the post the following Monday in one week's time. Adam left the room in high spirits relishing the new challenges ahead.

He had some spare time in the afternoon and as he was keen to find out about the hospital, he went to the library

and spoke to the Librarian. She searched her index and found an article about the Unit at Safed.

He read:

The Zif Hospital is the most northerly hospital in Israel. The present hospital was opened in 1973, built at the southern end of the city. It replaced the old 1910 hospital building donated by the Rothschild family. It rapidly became a Trauma hospital serving the Moshavim and Kibbutzim together with the people of the Arab, Druze and immigrant population. It had opened its door to the sick and wounded from Syria who cross the Golan Heights border on a daily basis.

After completing his school, Hussein, nee Joseph, decided to leave his home in the north of England for Damascus. He wanted to understand more about his adopted religion, Islam. The conversations he had had with his father made him want to know more, to understand the inconsistencies and to get an idea of what the modern Muslim believed. He had been looking forward to it for some months but as the day drew nearer he felt an unaccustomed fear. He tried to rationalize it by convincing himself that it was normal to be fearful, but deep down he knew that the forthcoming trip was an irreversible step. There was no going back. His life would change; his loving parents would no longer protect him, he would be on his own. Despite their protestations that he was too young and too unworldly he would not change his mind. His mother and father Zaira and Hassan had nevertheless insisted on coming to see him off although he didn't want them to.

'I'm a man now,' he had said when they told him they wanted to accompany him. But in his heart of

hearts he was pleased that they wanted to come with him to the airport.

'You may be a man to the world but to us you are still our son and we love you.' The farewell was sad, his mother cried and he tried not to but in the end tearfully they held each other. Hassan looked on, so proud of his son. Hussein had an introduction to a family from the Imam in England. It was the first time he had travelled on an airplane. So many new things were happening to him. It's enormous he thought as he sat in the lounge waiting for his flight to be called. He could see it waiting on the tarmac like an enormous bird being prepared for flight. At the rear he could see the refueling truck with the thick hawser loading the fuel. At the far side, food containers for several hundred people were being loaded from a ramp.

Once on board he sat with his arms crossed counting the minutes until take off. An air hostess saw how nervous he was and tried to calm him.

'Hello,' she said, 'is this your first flight?'

'Yeah. I'm really nervous.'

'There is no need to be, I do this journey three times a week and I don't have any concern. Why don't you read something while we are waiting to take off?' Hussein found a magazine in the pocket in front and began thumbing through it. There was a section on Damascus and its nightlife. He found it very interesting and very different from what he had expected. There were so many restaurants and nightclubs. It did not seem to be the serious God fearing city that he had been led to believe. Once in the air, the roar of the engines reduced, the shuddering disappeared and he

began to enjoy the flight almost forgetting that the plane was flying at a height of over seven thousand metres. As he slowly got used to his surroundings, Hussein became aware of a rather pleasant smell, a flowery perfume and realised that the person next to him was wearing it. He glanced furtively and saw an attractive young woman about his age who seemed to be traveling on her own. Plucking up courage, he turned to her and casually asked if she was traveling to Damascus.

'I think we all are,' she said smiling and then added, 'are you going for a holiday?'

'No I am going to study there.'

'What are you studying?' She asked.

'I am going to study the Koran,' he replied earnestly.

'Do you want to be an Imam?' She said joking. Ignoring her question Hussein asked her what she was doing?

'I'm going home. I have been in the UK for five years and have completed my studies.'

'What were you studying?'

'Law,' she replied, 'I'm a lawyer.' After a short silence he asked her,

'What's your name?'

'Lilith and yours?'

'Hussein.'

At the airport in Damascus Hussein was met by Sargon a young man roughly his own age. He was wearing a long loose white gown with a decorated cap on his head, the garb of a religious man. Once outside, the light a warm bright glowing light that enhanced the colours of the houses and plants, struck Hussein. It made him feel alive in a way that he hadn't in the dull

grey of his town back home. Everyone wore bright clothes and smiled at each other.

The journey from the airport took him through crowded streets, chaotic with noise, dust and rubbish; rubbish everywhere. Doesn't anyone care that they are walking amongst it, he asked himself. They eventually came to a small dwelling on the outskirts of the city. A man who spoke good English greeted him.

'My name is Imam Feisal. Welcome to my home. Please treat it as your own, you are one of us.' Hussein was introduced to his wife and their son Nabil.

'You must be tired,' said Mrs Feisal, 'let me show you to your room.' It was a small room with white stone walls, a single bed in the corner and a small desk.

'The shower and toilet are out in the yard,' she added as he put his small bag on the bed.

'When you are ready, come and have something to eat.' Hussein stood looking through the small window. He could see the small yard and some clothes drying on a line. He felt very alone and a bit scared.

Having washed, he felt better and made his way nervously to the main room. A meal had been laid out on the rough wooden table. He recognised some of the dishes from home, Feta, Hummus, Kebabs and many others. The family was already seated and had left an empty chair for him.

'Come and eat, you must be hungry,' Imam Feisal said his mouth full of food. Hussain noticed that everyone ate with their hands reaching into bowls of food. At home his parents didn't eat like that but used utensils and put food onto a side plate before eating it. Hussein felt uncomfortable at first until he got used to it. Later when he was relaxing, the Imam said that he

would like to take him to the Great Mosque of Damascus, the Umayyad Mosque. It's a place I think you should see. The following morning just after dawn they left the house on foot and after about twenty minutes arrived at the Mosque. Hussein felt the excitement building as they came closer and then there it was, the great dome shining in the early morning sun.

'It has a long and checkered history,' Imam Feisal said. 'It dates back to the first century when the Armenians built a temple here. They were a Semitic-nomadic and pastoralists people who lived in Syria. After the Roman conquest, a Temple to Jupiter was built on the site. By the 4th Century it had become a Christian shrine, the temple having been destroyed and replaced by a church in the name of John the Baptist. After the Islamic conquest in the 7th C, both Christians and Muslims used it. However In the 8th C the church was destroyed and the present Mosque was built.

'You mean that building,' Hussein said pointing to the huge structure coming into view, 'is over 1,000 years old.'

'Yes, the design was based on the Mosque of the Prophet, at Medina. 'Come let's go inside.' They entered the prayer hall that was over 150 metres long with columns taken from a nearby Roman temple supporting the tile covered wooden ceiling. Hussein stood in the hall amazed at the sheer size and beauty of the space.

'At prayer time, more than a thousand men can pray here,' said the Imam, himself overwhelmed by the size and grandeur before him. 'The temple where we will pray is much smaller but I think you will like it.'

The two men returned home without saying a word.

Hussain was trying to come to terms with what he had

seen perhaps the greatest building in the world. Imam Feisal was thinking about the future and how he would tutor this young man to become a devout Muslim. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that Hussein would go to the Mosque every day and pray. He had told the Imam that he knew what to do but had been a bit slack back home in England. He vowed that he would try to do better here in Damascus. The Imam gave him a small book of instruction, which he said he must learn by heart. Hussein found it hard work and it really taxed his memory. At the same time he was reading the local newspapers, which were all about the various attacks of violence by Islamist groups. One day while they were walking home after prayers, Hussein asked the Imam, 'Who are the Islamists?' Surprised by the question, the Imam asked

'Why do you want to know?'

'Because I read in the newspaper about the violence around the world and so often the Islamists are involved, aren't they Muslims really?' The Imam struggled for an answer.

'Strictly speaking they are Muslims but they have moved away from the teaching of Mohammed and are evil men.' Not satisfied with the answer Hussein continued,

'Why don't you condemn them in your teachings? You often refer to the Infidel, the non-Muslims but never the Islamists surely they are more evil?'

'It's not easy Hussein; you were brought up in a country where you were free to speak your mind. No one objected if you criticized the government but here it's different. We have to be careful what we say

especially if it can be seen to be anti-government. You see we have our own sort of Democracy; it's not the West's form. Do you understand?' Hussein mumbled yes but in his heart he was disturbed.

What he was beginning to realise was that Islam was a set of rules, which helped people to live together, but it was based on total agreement. It had little place for difference, for the individual, for the unusual; they interfered with the smooth running of society.

Furthermore he learned that the role of women was subordinate to men. This he found the most difficult. Looking back he remembered how his mother never disagreed with his father even if he was wrong. She would just go quiet. It used to make him very angry. Mum he would say, Dad's wrong, tell him but she would smile and say nothing. Now he was beginning to understand why.

It was some weeks later that his mobile beeped and he saw the name Lilith appear. At first he didn't recognise it.

'Hello,' he said.

'Hi, how are you? Came a female voice with an American accent, 'you don't remember me?'

'No? Eh yes, I remember we met on the plane. Are you that very pretty girl who sat next to me?'

'Yes, how are you?' Lilith smiled to herself and continued, 'I'm having a few friends over next Saturday and wondered if you would like to join us? It will be informal.'

'Yes I would like to, thank you.'

'Good, I'll text you my address and how to get there, say 8 pm, there'll be food.' and the phone went dead. That evening over dinner, Hussein mentioned that

a girl whom he had met on the plane had invited him to a party.

‘Do you know anything about her?’ Imam asked. ‘You need to be careful where you go and who you meet. Did she give you her family name?’

‘No, does it matter?’

‘Yes, it matters,’ said the Imam raising his voice, ‘because I would probably know the family and...’

‘And,’ Hussein interrupted, ‘you would vet them for me?’

Imam angrily raised his voice,

‘I don’t think you understand life around here yet. There are some people you need to avoid and some places are dangerous.’ Hussein nodded. ‘Yes Imam, I understand.’ Imam left the room muttering to himself how young people were so obstinate.’

That Saturday at breakfast Imam again raised the subject,

‘Have you decided about the party Hussein?’

‘Yes I’m going to go. I would like to find out what life is like in other homes.’

‘OK, have your own way but I’m going to take you and collect you.’

The house was a small single storey building on the outskirts of the city overlooking scrubland beyond, which lay the desert. It was dark when they arrived. There were no streetlights but the bright moonlight guided them. Hussein could hear some music coming from the house and there were some old cars parked outside.

‘This is it,’ announced Imam pointing to it.

‘OK, see you later and thanks for bringing me,’ said Hussein as he got out of the car.

He had taken Lilith's informal dress advice literally and was wearing a T-shirt and jeans. The front door was open and he could hear voices from within. He felt a jog of nerves as he entered an open tiled courtyard with a central fountain cooling the air. There were a number of people already seated on cushions around the cascading water. A slim young woman wearing bright loose trousers and a long sleeve top that he recognised as Lilith came towards him and extended her hand.

'Hello Hussein I'm so glad you could come. Let me introduce you to some of my friends.'

They were of mixed ages, some as old as the Imam but most were Hussein's age; mainly men but he noticed at least three young women. They shook hands and welcomed him. The table was laid with a wide range of meze. As if a whistle had been blown they all began to help themselves to the ample dishes. There were few chairs so most sat on the floor on cushions. The conversation fizzled out as everyone tucked in to the spread. Hussein watched as the men in particular piled their plates high. He preferred not too much food on his plate but to come back for more. A variety of cold juices were then handed round.

Hussein found himself sitting next to a slim very swarthy young man. He was a bit shy to start the conversation so he waited. Then the young man spoke.

'Hi I'm Bilal',

'I'm Hussein.'

'From your accent you must have lived in the UK?'

'Yes I was born there and you?'

'I was born in Lebanon but came here when I was very young. I'm attending The University of

Damascus studying politics. Initially they talked about everyday things, the latest Bond film they had seen, books they had enjoyed and music they listened to. As the evening wore on the conversation became more serious. Then suddenly everyone stopped talking as a man dressed in a simple white thobe and a coloured ghutra entered. He was tall and heavily bearded. Liliith saw him, stood up and went over to greet him. She kissed his hand, and said,

'Welcome Brother Ashraf, I am so glad you could come to our small meeting. I think you know everyone. No wait, we have a visitor from England, Hussein studying the Koran'. Hussein heard the word 'meeting' and was puzzled. He thought this was a party, and who was this man?

Everyone crowded round to hear what the newcomer had to say.

'My friends, Syria is facing a crossroads, perhaps the most important time in its history. We must decide whether we are going to remain in the past or to embrace the new freedoms that are on offer, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, free democratic elections and perhaps the most important of all, equality of gender. The room erupted in loud cheers and big smiles appeared on the faces of the three women present. Hussein caught Liliith's eye and smiled at her. On the way home, the Imam asked him how the party was?'

'Fine I met a lot of really interesting people.'

'What did you talk about?'

'Nothing important just chatted about day to day things.'

‘Did the political situation here come up?’

Hussein paused.

‘No it was all non-political.’ Hussein was hesitant to tell the truth because he wasn’t certain what the Imam’s views were and he had learned that it was better to keep his mouth shut.

A few days later Hussein’s mobile rang, it was Lilith.

‘Hi,’ he said, ‘how are you?’

‘Fine, how are you? She replied, ‘I was just ringing to ask you how you enjoyed the party.’

‘I had a great time; some very interesting people particularly the man who talked about freedom.

‘What did you think of him?’

‘He was fascinating, so committed, so positive. He knew where he was going.’

‘Yes, he is very impressive. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. Would you like to meet him again for a more serious discussion?’

‘I don’t know, I’m a visitor here and I don’t want to get into trouble.’

‘It would only be a meeting, nothing else, no pressure.’ Hussein paused and then said,

‘OK, when and where?’

‘My house next Saturday.’

Hussein didn’t mention the phone call to the Imam until Friday lunch. Until then he had been studying hard and was finding it very difficult, so many rules and requirements to learn and his Arabic wasn’t that good. Waiting for a pause in the conversation at lunch one day, he said in a matter of fact way, ‘Imam, I’ve been invited to another party by Lilith on Saturday.’

‘She must like you,’ one of the younger boys said causing Hussein to blush.

‘It’s nothing like that,’ he stammered, ‘we are just good friends. Imam I think I can find my own way, you wouldn’t need to take me or bring me back.’ The Imam looked at his wife and she nodded,

‘OK, but don’t be too late, we’ll wait up for you.’ It felt very different this time when Hussein arrived at Lilith’s house. There was no music, no light chatter instead a mood of seriousness. He entered to find a handful of people seated around a table with Ashraf at the head. He was no longer wearing traditional clothes but was in a T-shirt and jeans.

‘Welcome Hussein we have just started so I will recap. We are meeting today to discuss how we can best assist the opposition oust the President and the government. We believe the government no longer represents the people. We have no contact with the politicians so we have to do what we can. One way is to join a freedom brigade and help the fight. I realise that most of you are committed to your work and don’t have the time but others may.’

What is he talking about Hussein wondered, join the fight, does he mean be a soldier and be prepared to kill. That’s not what I want to do no way. Hussein listened on.

‘The first thing you need to do is to attend a training camp where you will be taught about warfare, guns, mines rockets etc. So when the time comes you will be ready.’

Hussein looked around the table they were all listening intently. Then Ashraf called for a show of hands, all went up except his. Hussein could not believe what he was seeing. Then he spoke,

'You are all prepared to learn to kill? Is that what you're saying? Don't you know it is forbidden in the Koran to kill, what are you thinking about? A titter of laughter went around the table then there was silence. Ashraf put up his hand to silence the ridicule.

'Hussein I don't think you understand what I am saying. I am not advocating that you should kill anyone. You are right the Koran says that but it also says you must be prepared to defend your beliefs isn't that so?'

'I suppose so.' Hussein agreed.

'So are you with us?' Hussein felt trapped. He didn't want to say yes and he didn't want to say no. He was the last to leave and as he said goodbye to Lilith she leaned forwards and kissed him on the cheek.

'I admire you Hussein, for the way you stood up for what you believe but maybe on this occasion necessity over-rides wisdom, think about it.'

That night Hussein couldn't sleep. He turned over time and again unable to settle. In his dream, he saw Ashraf pointing a finger at him and saying,

'You're a coward; you're using the Koran as an excuse. You're a disgrace to the Syrian people.'

By the following morning he had made up his mind, but what to tell Imam? He decided to tell him that I have been invited to spend two weeks at a holiday camp. At breakfast he broached the subject,

'Imam I feel I need a break from my studies. Some friends have invited me to join them at a holiday camp run by the University. I'd like to go. Is it OK?'

'How much will it cost?'

'Nothing, it's free.' Hussein left two days later and joined the group. After he had left, Imam made some enquiries at the University. To his surprise the

office told him that the University did not sponsor any holiday camps. They told him that it must be a joke. Puzzled, he decided to wait until Hussein returned to confront him.

The camp was situated about two hundred kilometres south of Damascus in a deserted area of woodland. It comprised a series of single storey huts with basic facilities each housing thirty men. A convoy of three trucks each carrying about twenty young men made its way slowly south. Leaving the city, the tarmac road soon deteriorated into a rutted path gradually being replaced by a mud track. As they crossed the wide-open scrubland the city gradually dwindled into the distance. Hussein felt a strange exhilaration as they travelled deeper into the unknown. He had forgotten his doubts and was now beginning to enjoy the experience. His companions were relaxed chatting amiably to each other and he began to feel a camaraderie with them. As the hours dragged on, the jarring and shaking on the bumpy road became almost forgotten. Suddenly there was a cheer from the men in the leading truck as it entered a clearing and reached the first of the five huts. Once all the trucks have stopped, the men jumped out and lined up in a loose group carrying their belongings.

Ashraf called them to attention and dispatched them to their huts, which would be their home for the next two weeks. Hussein followed the others into hut three and selected a bunk. He unloaded his things into the locker and then checked out the toilets and shower facilities. It was better than he had thought, clean and neat and spacious enough. I'm going to enjoy this, he decided. A shout from outside called them all to assemble in the

clearing in their groups according to huts. Ashraf now in camouflaged military uniform waited for them to line up.

'Settle down please. Welcome to Camp B14, one of the many training camps here in the south. You are here to receive training in modern guerilla warfare. You will become familiar with the local terrain and how to use it to your advantage both as a protection and an offensive weapon. You will learn to live in the open. You will learn about modern weapons such as the AK 47 and the light machine gun. Finally you will find the daily programme on your notice boards so read it carefully. Dinner will be served in hut 5 at 18.00 hours.

The next two weeks flew by. Hussein had never felt so tired in his life. He and the others were on the go from dawn to dusk without a moment to think. No time or energy to evaluate what they were learning or question what they were doing. I guess this is what brainwashing was like, he decided one night as he fell exhausted into bed, so tired and so busy that he had no time to question or think of questioning. He had wanted to keep a diary describing what happened but this was forbidden. When he asked why, he was told in no uncertain terms that he was there to learn not to keep records.

On the last day something happened that he would never forget. One of the older men had kept back a revolver and put it in his pocket. When the count showed a gun was missing the men were lined up on the clearing and confronted with the fact.

'Someone has stolen a gun. Please step forwards and return it.' said Ashraf. There was no response. He repeated the statement. No one moved.

‘OK,’ his voice getting shriller. ‘We will stay here until the gun is found.

The sun rose slower into the sky as the air blistered with heat. Men began to sway one or two fainted and were taken away. But no one spoke up. The men began to talk to each other.

‘Come on, whoever has got the gun, give it up! This has gone on too long.’ Finally one man spoke up, ‘I’ve took the gun; it’s in my bag.’

‘OK, the rest of you fall out. Get into the shade and get a drink.’

‘You!’ Ashraf said pointing to the man, ‘come with me.’

The two men disappeared behind the huts and for a while there was silence. Then a single shot rang out. The men stopped talking, they looked at each other. Hussein was about to speak when the man next to him grabbed his sleeve and whispered,

‘Shut up, don’t say a word.’

Ashraf returned alone. He called the men together and in a very solemn voice said,

‘I’m afraid that your colleague shot himself. When I asked him to hand me the gun he turned it on himself. I couldn’t stop him.’ The men went quiet. There were cries of ‘Oh my God what a tragedy.’ Several rushed to the back of the hut to find the man lying dead on the ground with the gun still in his right hand.

The journey back to Damascus was very different from the one two weeks earlier. Then, they were excited and talkative, now they were sullen and silent, each in their own thoughts. Hussein was trying to come to terms with what had happened. He was still shocked by the sudden turn of events. No one looked at each other; they

avoided eye contact. There was a sense of confusion and uncertainty. Why did he kill himself? Once at their destination they lined up for a final parade. Ashraf addressed them.

‘Men you have shown yourself to be strong and resolute in your pursuit of skills. The unfortunate incident should not be allowed to minimize your individual achievements. The man did the honorable thing and we can all put it behind us. Thank you for all your hard work.’

Hussein was troubled. It all seemed too tidy. He had a sinking feeling that all was not as it appeared.

It was late when Hussein came into the house. A light was burning in the sitting room and he could see the form of Imam sleeping in a chair. Hussain tiptoed in but the sound must have disturbed the sleeping man who awoke and greeted Hussein.

‘Welcome back, I hope you had a successful and enjoyable break.’ There was a slight cynicism in his voice. Hussain was about to reply when Imam continued,

‘By the way I checked with the University after you had gone and they said that they had no Holiday camps so where did you go? For two weeks where? And don’t lie to me because I think I know.’

‘I went to a training camp in southern Syria.’

‘Why? What for? You’re a student of the Koran not a fighter.’

‘It was a mistake. I realised it as soon as I got there but it was a long way back and I just had to see it through.’ Then he paused and struggled to find the words.

'Something happened that I still find it difficult to believe.' Then he told the whole story of the missing gun, the admission and the suicide. Imam listened without interrupting and then said something that surprised Hussein.

'Did you see the man shoot himself?'

'No! He was taken behind the hut, we only heard the shot.' Imam went on.

'What did they do with the body?'

'It was bought back and handed to his family and then buried I assume.'

'Were the police informed?'

'I don't know,'

'I suppose not,' murmured Imam, 'they would want to get the whole thing over as quickly as possible.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because?'

'Because what?' asked Hussein.

'How do you know he killed himself?'

'I don't?'

'Perhaps he was killed by the Commander?'

Hussein forgot about the week and returned to his studies. He thought about ringing Lilith when she beat him to it.

'Hi, long time no hear. How are you? Have you recovered from the trip?' She asked.

'Hi Lilith, good to hear from you. Yes, it was a difficult time which I have tried to put behind me.'

'Look I'm having some friends over on this weekend. Come and join us, it should be fun. No politics I promise.' Hussein's initial response was to say no. He had already had his life thrown upside down and he didn't want it to happen again.

'I'll think about it,' he replied. By the time Saturday had come, his curiosity got the better of him and he decided to go. A number of young people were there when he arrived. Hussein recognized many of them from the camp. They greeted him like a long lost friend and he began to relax and enjoy himself. It was a far cry from the rigours of the camp, which now seemed a long time ago. The evening was progressing well until a few of the camp members grouped themselves in one corner and seemed to be examining something. They beckoned Hussein over and asked him to look. Puzzled he went over to them. One of the young men had an Iphone and he was showing some pictures. '

'Have a look at these Hussein.'

'Do you recognise anyone?' Hussein carefully examined the photos one by one. Immediately he recognized the two people. One was Ashraf and the other was, he peered more closely, the guy who had stolen the gun. There was a photo showing him handing over the weapon to Ashraf and then the next picture showed Ashraf pointing the gun at him and the next showed him shot, lying on the ground and the next, with the gun in his right hand. Hussein turned to the group speechless.

'Do you realise what this means?' he asked. 'I can't believe what I am seeing. Ashraf killed the man and planted the gun on him to make it look like suicide. It's inconceivable, how could he?'

Lilith had seen Hussein examining the photos and had peered over his shoulder and heard him cry out in dismay. Then the room went silent. Everyone realised the dilemma they were in. If they said nothing they would be accessories after the crime but if they spoke

up they may face the same fate. It was an impossible situation. Lilith spoke first.

'I have an uncle who is a judge. I will tell him what happened and let you know what he advises. Meanwhile we must keep the photos safe as they are the only evidence we have'

Imam was waiting up for Hussein when he got home.

'How was the party?

'Fine I had a good time I met some of the men who were at the camp.'

'Did you discuss the suicide?'

'Yes I don't know how to tell you this, but one of the men had some photographs.'

'Photographs of what?'

'Of the shooting, it wasn't suicide the commander killed him and made it look like suicide.'

'I see,' said the Imam, 'it is what I feared.'

'We must do something,' insisted Hussein.

'What do you want to do?'

'Tell the police of course.'

'I don't think that's a good idea. They wouldn't be interested. A death on a military manoeuvre is quite common, I think it is best if we forget about the whole incident.'

Hussein couldn't sleep. He kept on going over in his mind the incident at the camp and the Imam willingness to forget the whole matter. He realised that he could no longer stay in a country that valued life so cheaply and began to plan his departure. He had discussed his plan with Abdul one of the men he met at the camp who had the same idea. The two men planned to go south and sneak through the border into Israel. They knew it was dangerous to go into Israel an enemy but they had no

other choice, it was the nearest border and by now they were desperate and could see no alternative. Hussein couldn't tell Imam his plan but decided to leave him a note.

It was almost dark when Hussein left the safety of the house to continue his escape to the south. He had arranged to meet Abdul and together they would make their way to the border. Hussein was leading and as he rounded a building and moved into the light from a nearby lamp, he felt a sudden sharp pain in his chest immediately followed by the sound of two rifle shots. He was thrown to the ground struggling to breathe. He looked down to see blood oozing from a jagged tear in his tunic. Suddenly he realised that he had been shot. He tried to get up but the pain was so severe that couldn't and lay helpless on the ground.

At that moment he thought his life had come to an end. He could hear his father's voice, I warned you not to go there its too dangerous and then his mother crying. So this was how a man gets killed one moment alive and the next dead. It had happened so quickly and without warning.

'Help,' Hussein called out, help.' Initially nothing happened and then he heard Abdul shouting,

'I'm coming.' Abdul saw Hussein struggling on the ground. At first he didn't realise what had happened, but knew he needed help and was about to rush to him.

'Keep your head down,' shouted Hussein, 'there's a sniper out there.' Abdul dropped to the ground and slowly crept over to the injured man. Together they crawled back to the safety of the building. Once inside it was possible to see Hussein's injuries. The pain had

become more severe with every movement. Hussein bit his lip to stop from crying out. He was breathing with more difficulty and coughing up blood.

‘Let me see your chest.’ As Abdul tore his shirt away, two bullet holes could be seen in his upper chest but there was no exit hole.

‘I’m afraid the bullets are still inside you,’ Abdul said, ‘we need to get you to hospital fast.’

‘The nearest medical help is several hundred miles away but we have no transport, Abdul said.

‘Aren’t we very near the border post?’ Hussein asked in a whisper.

‘Yes but you can’t go there, they’ll shoot you,’

‘I’ve no choice, I can’t stay here and I can’t get to the hospital. Help me to get to the border, please?’

The journey was over rough scrubland with the occasional tree. Abdul a big man carried Hussein easily on his back hardly aware of the weight. After about an hour they saw the flickering lights of the border post. Reaching the gate they were challenged by a guard. Abdul explained that he had a wounded man who needed medical attention.

‘There is no one here to help,’ he said. ‘Don’t move,’ and then he walked towards the barbed wire and flashed his torch into the dark in the direction of the Israeli border.

‘Wait.’ hissed the guard and then they saw a light flashing from the other side. ‘They’ll send someone in a minute.’

Hussein was now almost unconscious. He could hear the gate creaking open and felt himself being lifted onto a stretcher. The movement increased the pain in his chest and he cried out. Then he felt a pin prick in his

arm and everything went quiet and dark. Colours floated before his eyes and then there was no sound just movement.

The two paramedics on duty at the Israeli border had seen the flashing light and knew what it meant. It was a signal that they had established with the Syrian side to tell them when a sick or wounded person needed medical help. Immediately they had grabbed a rolled up stretcher and their first aid kit and made their way in the dark towards the border. It was a dangerous journey requiring them to cross a deep ravine but they knew it well. Within a short while they were at the border. They nodded to the guards but no one spoke.

The Syrian guards opened the gate to allow the wounded man to be transferred onto the Israeli stretcher; it was an arrangement that they had evolved silently each respecting the other, no longer enemies but allies in a fight against death and disease. Hussein seemed to be floating, swaying backwards and forwards as if in a hammock. Occasionally they stopped and the swaying lessened then the movement continued. Hussein slowly sank into oblivion.

Adam woke with a start. His bedside telephone was ringing.

‘Hello, yes OK, I’ll be there.’ Another emergency had arrived in the Trauma centre and although he was off duty, they were short staffed and he was needed. Pulling on his greens he left his room and sprinted across the lawn brightly lit by the full moon. It was already teeming with staff. A young man in military gear was lying on a stretcher. His face was ashen, his eyes closed. His jacket was soaked with blood coming from

two small bullet holes. A drip had been set up to replace his lost fluid while awaiting blood.

‘Adam, sorry to call you, I know you’re off duty but we are really stretched this evening,’ said Alon the senior nurse.

‘What’s the situation?’ asked Adam now fully awake and alert.

‘He’s another Syrian soldier, his name tag says he’s called Hussein; we have just picked him up from the Golan Heights border. He was seen by one of our paramedics and rushed here. He’s got a through and through chest wound but his heart’s OK and the rest of him is unharmed.

X-rays show a pleural effusion and a two bullets in the lung.’

‘Is the OR free?’

‘No! We’ve got a severe pelvic injury being repaired at the moment, shouldn’t be more than 20 minutes.’

‘OK, get him as fit as possible and I’ll alert the OR to prepare for a thoracotomy. Adam went to the OR and caught the eye of Ramona now the senior nurse. She knew his appearance meant another case.

‘Hi prepare for a thoracotomy,’ he mouthed. She nodded and replied,

‘About twenty minutes.’

‘OK see you then.’.

Adam was back in the Trauma room when his bleep sounded, there was a brief message,

‘Need you in OR now!’

As he entered the room he could feel the tension. There was a general sense of unease. No one was talking.

The nurses were standing straining to see what was happening. Adam moved to the table.

'He's bleeding heavily and I can't control it,' was the terse whisper from the surgeon, a newcomer.

'I'll scrub,' Adam replied. In minutes he was at the table. He peered into the wound, into the open chest cavity and he could see that the two bullets had shredded the lung. Blood was welling from the depths of the wound. Adam didn't hesitate. He leant forwards, grabbed a swab and plunged his hand into the depths of the wound feeling for the source of the bleeding. He pressed the swab against it and immediately the bleeding stopped.

'OK, now suck out the wound. I'll keep the pressure on until we can see the bleeder clearly.' Adam didn't move as the blood was slowly removed. Now he could see that one of the main vessels had been torn. Carefully he moved the swab until he could reach the vessel and safely apply a clip. His mind had gone into automatic, no thoughts other than the need for care and the importance of speed. Finally he checked the bleeding. It had stopped. The vessel was secured. A voice, the anaesthetist from the top of the table said,

'That's better his blood pressure is rising, now over 100. Well-done team. Everyone can relax.'

Adam turned to the surgeon,

'You can close up now, don't forget the drain.'

He left the OR suddenly feeling drained his legs unsteady and went into the restroom. A cup of coffee was handed to him and he sat not speaking, sipping the scalding liquid. Slowly he began to relax.

Later that day Adam went to see the patient. He was conscious and his condition stable.

'How are you feeling,' he said slowly so that the man could understand? To his surprise he spoke perfect English. He noticed that although he had a beard, his skin was pale like that of a European.

'Much better thank you. Were you the surgeon who saved my life?' Adam smiled, 'one of them, we work as a team.'

'I am very grateful; when the bullets hit me I thought I was a goner. Where am I?' Adam always enjoyed the question.

'You're in Israel at the Trauma hospital in Safed.'

'Israel It can't be possible; I was on the Syrian border when I was hit. How did I get here?' Adam patted him on the arm.

'Get some sleep, you're very weak and perhaps later I'll try and explain.'

Ramona was already seated in the canteen when he arrived. She always took his breath away with her sultry beauty, olive brown skin, deep brown eyes and long silky black hair. She smiled and shewed a perfect white teeth. He leant over and kissed her, smelling her sweat.

'You did well tonight,' she said, 'the new surgeon was in trouble but thanks to you...' he interrupted her,

'It's all about experience I had faced that problem before, he hadn't.' They sat their shoulders touching, holding their hot coffee in both hands.

They had met some years earlier when he first came to the Tel Hashomer Hospital in Tel Aviv to finish his medical training. He was in his third year post-qualification and was attached to the trauma ward. She was on duty one night when he was called back to the ward to deal with a drip that had stopped. In the dim light of the ward she looked like an angel. He found her

name from a colleague and then wrote her a short note saying he would like to take her out. He heard nothing and had almost given up when he bumped into her on the corridor. Stopping in front of her he asked,

‘Hello it’s you? I had given you up. Why didn’t you at least answer my letter? You could have said no.’

She looked flustered,

‘You don’t remember me do you?’

‘Have we met?’

‘Yes.’ she said, ‘you looked after my father.’ He looked again at her and suddenly he remembered, his daughter!

‘Oh I’m so sorry I didn’t, you’re called Ramona, aren’t you? Yes, now I remember.’

I couldn’t have made much of an impression on you?’ She said teasing him. Then she asked,

‘Letter what letter, I don’t understand?’

‘I wrote you a letter.’

‘I’m sorry I didn’t get it. What did it say?’

‘I wanted to meet you.’

‘Oh! I see. Yes of course I would have loved to but you know.... It’s not allowed, hospital rules, no fraternization.’

Some days later they bumped into each other in the corridor.

‘I can’t stop thinking about you,’ he whispered.

‘I have a room in the nurse’s home on the ground floor. I’ll leave my window open with my light on, you’ll see it. Come tonight.’ And she was gone. Adam had a lot of admin to do writing up operation notes and checking on the day’s patients so it was quite late when he left the main building. It was a clear night with the full moon lighting up the flower beds and paths. He made

his way towards the nurse's home when he heard footsteps behind him. It was Jonathan the recently arrived surgeon from the states.

'Hi Adam, I missed seeing you the other night when you helped me out with that thoracotomy. He's doing well thanks to you.'

'No Jonathan thank to you. Don't get hung up because you needed help. We all need help at some time. What you did was to ask for it and that was a great lesson, to know when we don't know. You're a good surgeon and I know will become a great one.'

'Thanks Adam, I needed that. I was beginning to lose my nerve. Good night.'

Jonathan stood for a moment, watching Adam walk away. I thought that I was being a wimp when I called him for help? It's so easy to become arrogant and to forget that a patient puts his complete trust in us. The cold air and the meeting with Jonathan had rather deflated his anticipated excitement at meeting Ramona. It was a rather serious and thoughtful Adam who struggled into Ramona's room through her open window. She was seated on the bed her face outlined in the light from the bedside lamp. He sat on the bed beside her and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

'Are you alright?' She asked seeing his serious face.

'Yes I'm fine. I've just had a meeting with Jonathan and we talked about the thoracotomy the other day.'

'What did he say?'

'Oh nothing really. He just wanted to thank me for helping him out.'

'What did you say?'

'I thanked him for asking me. It takes a big man to ask for help and I congratulated him.'

'You're amazing Adam, the more I know you the more I admire and like you,' she said cupping his face in her hands.

'Life is so strange,' he murmured, 'I came here tonight to seduce you.'

'You still can,' she said, coquettishly.

'But now all I want to do is be with you and enjoy your company. You seem to be in a place of calm in this otherwise chaotic world.'

They sat together each in their own thoughts. Ramona was thinking about her family she hadn't heard from them for some days. They lived in a moshav on the northern border with Lebanon and were frequently under attack. The rockets would come at any time of day and night and although many didn't explode they were a never-ending threat and created a constant fear. As if reading her thoughts Adam asked,

'How is your family?' Ramona smiled.

'I have a great family there are six of us, Mum and Dad; you've met them; two sisters and my baby brother. My Mum and Dad are still working on the Moshav farming, keeping cattle and sheep and now have a smallholding where they grow vegetables. Dad is doing amazing well. He seems to have made a full recovery thanks to you and the medical team in Tel Aviv. Adam thought for a moment. They had never discussed the political situation in Israel. It was a subject that they always skated around but it was one that troubled Adam. He decided to ask Ramona.

'How do your family think about the situation with the Palestinians?'

'They feel very angry. They just want to get on with their lives and can't because of what they are doing, sending over rockets that frighten our children and disturb our lives.

'Is it as simple as that?'

'I don't understand how do you mean?'

'Well what must it be like to be a Palestinian imprisoned in their own country unable to travel to visit family outside their boundary?'

'It's their own fault, they could stop the rockets.'

'But it's the only way they have of indicating how they feel.'

Ramona could feel herself getting angry. What does he know about living here? He's only been here a short time and lives a very protected life. He's got no idea of the fear, the uncertainty about the future that we feel. Israel has only got to let up and her enemies would destroy her. We are surrounded by enemies.

Then she stopped.

'I don't want to talk about it anymore.' Adam could feel that he had gone a step too far.

'I don't want to have an argument, I just want to understand why this terrible conflict affecting so many lives can't be resolved.'

Sometime later while they were sitting having a coffee together, Ramona asked

'Adam something strange happened that I don't understand. You know I was on the ward where the Syrian soldier is being nursed. Well I had been doing night duty and as you know things quieten down after midnight. The other night he called me to help turn him over as he was having difficulty. We spoke a few words together. The lights had been turned low so I couldn't

see his face but as I listened to him I had a strange feeling that I was talking to you. His voice was so similar it gave me a fright. I knew you were one of twins so it was all the more peculiar, it sounds ridiculous I know.'

'It's just a coincidence I'm sure,' said Adam, 'just a coincidence. After all we are both roughly the same age. I'm sure that's all there is to it.'

Adam returned to his room and thought about what Ramona had said. It had triggered off something that had lain undisturbed since his teens. It was then that he had been told that he was adopted, and was one of twin boys who were separated from their biological mother at birth. He had come to accept his adopted mother as his real mother so it came as something of a surprise when she had told him that. He vaguely remembered asking about his twin and that he had contacted a boy on Facebook called Hussein and that they had wanted to meet but his parents didn't want them too. He couldn't remember whether he did anything about it, it was along time ago. Now the issue had resurfaced and was nagging him. Ramona's comments really shook him. He lay awake turning them over in his mind. Should he mention it to Hussein? Hussein is such a very common name and it could all be a coincidence and he would feel such an idiot so he decided not to.

It was as the sun rose that he nodded off only to be awoken two hours later by his alarm. He had had a crazy night. His thoughts jumbled and confused. His mind kept returning to the young Syrian man. There was something about him that didn't make sense. He had looked after a number of injured Syrian soldiers since he first came to Safed Hospital but this one puzzled him. His English was too good to have been learned at a

Syrian School, perhaps his parents were born in England, he wondered. He had eventually fallen asleep with the questions still unanswered. Over the next few days he had the occasion to visit the Syrian and gradually they began to talk. Primarily he was there to check his progress but he had developed an interest in him beyond his injuries. As he spent more time by the bedside the two men got to know each other better.

'I was born in England but never knew my real parents,' Hussein said. When I was 13, I learned that I was adopted soon after I was born. My adopted parents were the offspring of Syrian families that had settled in England after King Feisal was deposed in 1920. They told me that my mother who was unmarried had had twins but they didn't know anything about my other twin, not even whether it was a boy or a girl. I grew up like any other boy, attended a local school and played cricket.'

While he was talking Adam watched his face closely. It seemed so familiar as if he had seen him before.

'Is it possible that we have met before say in England?' Adam asked casually. Hussain thought for a moment.

'I doubt it, I lived in the North and rarely visited London.'

Gradually Adam learned more about Hussein, how when he was sixteen he had gone to a Mosque for the first time and how it was a very moving experience, the men so devout, so certain that Islam was the truth, the way' the light.

'I was searching for a meaning to my life. Up to then I had felt that I was valueless I had been thrown away by my birth mother and although my new parents

were very kind I never felt I belonged. I met a young Imam who really impressed me. He was very intelligent and we talked about the meaning of life. He gave me some books to read about Islam that seemed to make sense.’ Adam listened as Hussein’s face seemed to brighten, his eyes shine and he became more animated. He could see that whatever the Imam had said, had struck a chord with him.

Life at the hospital was hectic as more and more casualties were admitted from across the Syrian border. Most were young men with gun shot wounds but occasionally a young woman was admitted in terminal labour or with another obstetric problem. One such patient was Ishtar. Adam was on duty when she arrived. She had found her way to the border and had been seen by a Paramedic. She had been rushed across the border into an ambulance and brought to the hospital. A drip had been set up. He was appalled at her state, ragged clothes; dehydrated almost unconscious. In a trembling voice, she explained what had happened.

‘My parents rejected me when they learned that I was pregnant. They threw me out of the house. I have been living rough since, begging and doing the occasional work. When the pains began I became desperate and didn’t know what to do. The local hospital refused to treat me, as I had no money. Someone mentioned that I could get help at the border, it was my only chance.’

As she spoke her voice became fainter and she lapsed into unconsciousness. By this time the Obstetric team had arrived. Ishtar was too weak to give birth naturally so they arranged for her to have a Caesarean. An hour later she delivered a healthy boy weighing 2.9 KGs.

Adam went to see her two days later and was delighted to see her sitting up in bed smiling and nursing her little boy whom she had named Safed after the hospital.

‘What are your plans now? He asked in his basic Arabic. She replied in broken English,

‘Me not know. No go back, dangerous.’

Adam had heard that there was a program that could help her to resettle in Israel if that was what she wanted. Later he learned that she had been sent to an Ulpan to learn Hebrew and was living with a Syrian family in Israel.

Adam had completely forgotten about Hussain but Hussain hadn't forgotten about him. He was still puzzled by the whole experience of being taken to an Israeli hospital and then becoming friendly with an Israeli Surgeon. Their background was so different and yet they had such a strong affinity. How was that possible? He wondered. Before the transport took him back across the border he left a note for Adam.

Sorry I didn't get a chance to say Good-bye. Thanks for all your help. Am now fully recovered, am having second thoughts about going back to my unit.

Hussein had a few days in Safed before reluctantly returning to Damascus. He had hoped to return to England but this wasn't possible. Back home the Imam Feisal received him with open arms. They had had no news about his wounds and had assumed that he was still fighting with the army. When Hussein explained what had happened and how he had been taken to an Israeli hospital, Feisal wouldn't believe him.

‘You must have been confused, it isn't possible, they're our enemy. They wouldn't help you a Syrian, they would kill you.’

'But they didn't that's what I am trying to say, they cared for me and I am now recovered thanks to their skill. There was a Jewish surgeon called Adam. We became very friendly and...

'Stop this talk Hussein,' interrupted Imam Feisal, it's not possible. You are mistaken, you were confused, let's have no more of it.' Hussein realised that there was no way of convincing him and that it was better if he kept quiet.

Lilith was overjoyed when he returned fully recovered and as soon as possible invited him for a meal, this time there were just the two of them. She served a meze of Syrian delicacies finishing with Baklava. She had bought a bottle of sweet wine, which she poured out into two glasses.

'I know we shouldn't but I do like a drink sometimes especially as a celebration.' she whispered. Hussein felt very relaxed; he smiled at her through an alcoholic haze and for the first time felt a romantic inclination towards her. Previously she had been one of the boys so to speak but tonight she looked and sounded different. They were sitting close together on large cushions on the floor when he leaned over and kissed her. At first she was a little hesitant but then as she relaxed she returned his kisses passionately allowing him to caress her shoulders, breasts and thighs.

'I was so frightened when I heard you were wounded I thought I would never see you again,' she whispered between kisses.

It was an amazing experience I have tried to tell Imam what happened but he wouldn't believe me,'

'How do you mean?'

'He insisted that I must have been wrong, it couldn't have been an Israeli hospital and Israeli doctors and nurses who looked after me.'

'Well it was a bit of a surprise. I must admit I was also doubtful but you know life is strange and there are good people in every country and community.'

'I would love to meet the doctor again we found a strange camaraderie in the midst of a war, It gives me hope.' Lilith sat pondering what he had said and then with a smile on her lips said,

'Why don't you write to him and tell him how you feel?'

Hussein thought about the suggestion for some while before putting pen to paper. What shall I write he wondered? Then he began:

Dear Dr Adam,

I have had several weeks now to think about my experience in the hospital in Safed. I have told it to many of my friends but none would believe me, they said that I must have been concussed and therefore confused but I know that I wasn't, I was as lucid then as I am now. I am writing to thank you and your team for the care and attention you gave me, an enemy. I shall continue to tell people of my experience at the hands of the Israelis hoping that some may share my belief that despite our differences we all share the same aspirations. Finally I felt a strange closeness to you as if we had met before. I hope that we may meet some day.
Yours

Adele continued to see John at college. She felt very close to him having shared her secret about her adopted twins with him. He wanted to help her find them and it began to dwell on his mind. One night he awoke with a

start. He had had a vivid dream in which he was searching for the twins but they had eluded him the nearer he got to them. He switched on his bedside lamp and wrote a short note to himself, three short words, *must find twins*. He woke in the morning no longer able to remember the dream but the note by his bedside reminded him. He had now gleaned enough information from Adele to begin the search but had decided not to tell her what he was doing. He realised that that could be a mistake but somehow he knew that seeing her babies would make Adele happy and that was what he wanted.

The 30 bus stopped at Golders Green station and he alighted. He was making his way to the address where he was told Naomi and Simon Cohen lived. It was a brick faced detached house with small well-tended garden in front. He stood for a moment staring at the house before plucking up courage to walk up the path and ring the bell. A young woman answered. She spoke with broken English.

'I would like to speak to Mr or Mrs Cohen please.' A voice from within shouted,

'Who is it Larne?'

'It's someone wanting Mr and Mrs Cohen.'

'There's no one by that name living here, no wait, weren't they the people who were here before us? Just a moment John heard a drawer open and the rustle of some papers. Let me come and speak to him.

'Hello! Can I help you?'

'Yes please, I am a friend of Adele who is the mother of the boy who was adopted by Mr and Mrs Cohen twenty years ago. She is now looking for him. Do they still live here?'

'No, I don't know anything about that. We bought the house from them some years ago. I think they went abroad to Israel to live but I don't have an address I'm sorry.'

'It's OK thank you, you have been very helpful.'

John walked away deep in thought. I wonder, if she's correct, I should be able to find their names at the Israeli Embassy. The following day he went onto the Internet and found the address and phone number of the Israeli Embassy. They were at 2 Palace Green. A call to the Embassy suggested he phone Directory Enquires in Israel.

Directory Enquiries in Israel came up with the addresses of two families one living in Caesarea and the other in Netanya. John sent off a letter to the Caesarea address, it came back *not known at this address*.

He then sent the letter to the address in Netanya- Eliezer ben Yehuda, near Sarah Aaronsohn Garden. He wrote,

Dear friends,

I hope you will excuse me writing to you but I am acting on behalf of Adele. She is the biological mother of Adam, the son you may have adopted over twenty years ago. She has yearned to know how he is and what he is doing. She would like to contact her son and explain to him why she did what she did. She appreciates that this might upset you but her intentions are the genuine wishes of a mother to find her son. I hope you can find it in your heart to help her.

Thank you,

John - friend of Adele.

In Caesarea, Simon rose early for his morning run and usually picked up the post on his return. That day there

were a number of obvious bills and one handwritten letter, which he didn't recognise. He wanted to open it but waited until he had got into the house.

'Naomi, there's a letter from England. I don't recognise the writing.' he shouted, as he went upstairs to have a shower. Naomi came into the hall and picked up the letter.

She had developed a habit of studying letters before opening them. She moved it about in her hands weighing it and examining every aspect of it, the stamp and the type of franking used, the writing and the address itself, how had it been displayed.

'Do you mind if I open it?' She finally called out to.'

'No not at all, go ahead.'

Naomi carefully slit the envelope down one side and slipped the note out. It was A5 in size, plain white in colour. She read it slowly,

Dear Mr and Mrs Cohen,

Naomi carefully folded the letter and replaced it in the envelope. She waited until Simon had finished his shower before handing to him.

'Read it and tell me what you think Simon? Should we help her meet her son?' Simon read the letter slowly weighing up each word and then he said,

'My initial reply is, I don't know, I'll have to think about it.'

'I know what I think,' Naomi said. 'I don't want to let Adam know that his birth mother is looking for him. He seems to be very happy as he is, why spoil things. He might get very upset.'

'I'm not sure that is the fair thing to do,' said Simon.

'It might not be the fair thing but sometimes the fair thing is not the thing you want, replied Ruth.

'How do you mean?'

'Well my head says that I should welcome her, she is after all Adam's mother and without her we would never have had the pleasure of having him, to love as our own and to see him grow into the fine young man of whom we are very proud. On the other hand my heart says no, why should she just turn up and claim him after all the love and guidance we have given him.'

'It feels like a Solomon judgement. If you ask me the one person who should decide is Adam. I think we have to tell him that his birth mother wants to contact him and let him decide,' concluded Simon. He could see the confusion on Naomi's face and put out his arms to hug her.

'Darling, I know its not easy but I'm sure it's the right thing to do.'

John continued his search for information about Joseph while waiting to hear a reply to his letter, from Israel. He didn't know that the boy's name had been changed to Hussein. But he did find out that the family had also moved and were now living somewhere in the north. The only clues he had were their names, that they were of Syrian origin and that Joseph's father was a solicitor. He decided to seek help from The British Library. He wasn't a member but he had visited the old circular Library room at the British Museum on many occasions. Now he made plans to visit it at its new address at Kings Cross. The bright sunlight dazzled him for a moment as he left the huge King's Cross concourse. The organic curving roof supported by concrete plant stems climbing into the sky again overawed him. Turning right he struggled

through the crowds in the direction of the Library. It was his first visit. He stopped for a moment to admire the grandeur of Paolozzi's sculpture of Sir Isaac Newton based on a painting by Blake. Then he crossed the open esplanade and entered through the swing doors. He spied the reception desk where luckily no one was waiting when he approached.

'Can I help you?' Asked the young assistant.

'Yes please, I am trying to contact a solicitor in Bradford. His name is Hassan Dadera.'

'There is an information desk on the first floor to your right. Ask the assistant there I think she will be able to help you.'

'Thank you.' John made his way to the desk.

'I have a database of all legal companies in the North. Let me see if I can find the one you are looking for,' said the assistant.

'Yes, there is a company called Khan Lawyers Inc. There is a Mr Dadera working for them.'

After a moment, she said,

'Yes here he is.' John wrote down their details thanked the assistant and left the building excited by his success. Now I'll send them a letter similar to the one I sent to the Cohen's and see what happens, he decided. Hassan Dadera thumbed through the pile of letters delivered to his office that morning. He stopped at the hand written one addressed to him personally and turned it over in his hands. He didn't recognize the writing and decided it could wait so he dropped it into his brief case. That evening at home, he was emptying the case when he saw the letter. Opening it he read its contents.

'Zaira!' He called, 'come, I've something to show you.' A voice from the kitchen replied.

'What is it darling? I'm very busy. I've got something on the boil, won't be a moment.'

'Read this, it came to the office this morning.'

Zaira read it slowly, at first she was confused by what she was reading and then its significance hit her.

'She wants to meet Hussein does she? After all these years, what a liberty. How dare she intrude into our lives? I can't believe she would do this, what does she want?' Hassan was listening to her and waited patiently until she stopped.

'She only wants to see him. You remember when we adopted the boy she was doing it for his good. I understand how you feel Zaira but Hussein is now a man. Mustn't he be given the choice?'

'I suppose so but I don't like it. I hope she doesn't want us to become friends.'

-

It was some weeks later when John had almost forgotten the letters he had sent that two letters landed in his hall, both hand written, one from the Simons now living in Israel and the other from the Daderas living in Bradford. Each thanked him for writing, and confirmed that they had spoken to their sons who were in agreement to meet their birth mother. He should hear from them in a short while.

John was so excited by his success. He was due to meet Adele after college that evening and couldn't wait to tell her what he hoped would be good news. He arrived early at the college café and waited for her. He saw her come in looking a bit downhearted.

'Hi are you OK?'

‘Not really, I had a bad crit at college this morning. They don’t like my paintings; they think they are too derivative. I said all art is derivative but that didn’t wash so I’ve got to rethink by whole project.’

‘Adele, forget that for a moment. I’ve a confession to make. You remember you were moaning about the fact that you wanted to find your children, well I’ve found them.’

‘You’ve what?’

‘ I’ve found them.’

‘How? Where? I don’t understand,’ said Adele her face suddenly alive.

‘Well, you remember you gave me those details. I wrote to each family and they’ve replied.’

‘I don’t believe it; you’re joking. Please it’s not a joking matter.’

‘No I’m not, it’s true and here are the letters.’

Adele poured over the letters as if devouring them reading them several times as her tears began to smudge the ink. Then she looked up and said,

‘John I don’t know how...?’ Her words were silenced as he leaned forwards and kissed her.

‘I love you Adele, I couldn’t bear seeing you suffering when I could do something to help.’

Standing on the bridge watching the enormous icebergs silently passing by, Captain Stefan viewed his ship the RV Akademik Loffe, once part of the Russian scientific fleet. Built in Finland with an ice-strengthened hull and designed to be exceptionally stable, manoeuvrable and quiet, it was now a popular tour ship steaming south towards the Antarctic shelf. It had a full complement of Zodiac crafts aboard and a medical room. With its complement of staff and lecturers, its ample deck space

and public areas, including lounge, bar, library, gym and sauna, it offered a comfortable but not luxurious environment for the multi-national guests who were seeking new experiences. International chefs provided a varied menu served in the window-lined dining room. A small family of seals playing at the ice's edge caught his eye. He saw the pups playfully chasing each other and felt an unexpected pang of guilt. In that moment he was reminded of Adele, his first girlfriend, pregnant with his child and how he had abandoned her. He hadn't wanted to become a father so young and when it happened he had panicked. Now he was able to think more clearly about his actions. His own upbringing hadn't prepared him for responsibility, he never knew his father. Over the years he had learned that no man is an island and that what we do cannot be ignored particularly when it involves other human beings. Turning to look at the stern, his eye was caught by the widening wake left behind as the ship cleaved through the glass-like water. In his mind's eye, he saw it as a metaphor for the actions we take in our lives and the ripple effect they have, spreading ever more widely. What happened to that child, did she keep it? He wondered. Counting on his fingers he realized that the child would now be in its twenties, a grown up never having had a father. Was it too late, he wondered as he handed over to the first mate and made his way to his cabin on the top deck? He sat at his desk idly looking at the charts. He tried to remember exactly how it had happened. He recalled that he had just returned from a trip to the Far East with the P & O steamship company and was due a month's shore leave. He wanted to give her a surprise but no

sooner had he stepped inside the door than he was presented with the news.

'I'm pregnant,' she shouted at him, 'I'm pregnant and it's yours.'

He remembered the shock he had felt, the sudden unexpected feeling of being trapped, as if his whole life was about to shut down.

'I'm not ready,' he shouted at her, 'I'm too young, get rid of it.'

He recalled the look she gave him, as if he was a murderer.

'No I won't,' she said defiantly.

'Then you're on your own,' he had said and walked out.

Now many years later, he tried to relive that moment, to understand her situation, to put himself in her position. But at that time, all he wanted to do was run away. Now he wanted to change the past but he knew he couldn't. A knock on his door roused him.

'Are you OK Captain, you left the bridge in a hurry, is everything all right?'

'Fine, I just had some thinking to do. I'm fine.' But he wasn't and over the next few days he wrestled with the problem. It would be another two weeks before he was back on land. Idly he switched on his computer and opened up Google. Sitting with a blank sheet of paper he began to write the things he could remember, his home address at the time and the date. He checked his telephone and found Adele's telephone number, slowly he was formulating a plan. He could phone from the ship but as it was a private matter, he didn't think that would be appropriate. He decided to wait until he got back to the UK. The weeks seemed to drag but then they were

docking at Ushuaia in Argentina. Two weeks later he was back in London. He found a post office and dialled Adele's old home phone number. A woman's voice answered,

'Is that you Adele?' He asked. Adele immediately recognised his voice.

'Yes, what do you want, Stefan?'

'How are you? I've been thinking about you. Can I see you.'

'What for, after all this time, you're nothing to me?'

'I want to know what you did about the pregnancy?'

'It 's really none of your business is it? But if you must know, I had the babies?'

'Babies what babies?'

'I had twins, two boys.' Stefan was speechless.

'I never knew?'

'Of course you didn't. You walked out on me and left me to cope. Well I couldn't.'

'What do you mean?'

'I gave them up, gave them up for adoption.'

'To who?'

'I found two good families who couldn't have children and they were happy to adopt them. I haven't seen them since.' There was a pause as Stefan absorbed what she had said.

'I still want to see you. Are you at the same address?'

Adele thought for a moment. Why should I see him? The thought of what he did still angered her. No I won't she decided and impulsively slammed the receiver down. Stefan heard the click followed by the dialing

tone. He sat listening to the sound. It's what I deserve I guess. I'm sure she's at the same address, I'll go and see her and she'll forgive me I know.

He hadn't changed, the same rugged good looks, the slight greying at the temples, she thought as she opened her front door. Adele was conscious that she hadn't aged as well but she might pass with a hair do and some make up. He was polite and complimented her on how young she looked.

'The years have been kind to you ' was the best he could do as she let him into the house. He leaned forward to kiss her but she stepped back.

'It is good to see you. I have thought a lot about you recently, and the boys, I wondered where they were and what they were doing.'

Adele didn't know whether to tell him that she had been looking for them. She decided not to. She followed him into the sitting room and invited him to sit down. She thought she would hate him but now that he was there, she had no feelings for him, he felt like a stranger.

'What have you been doing? She asked, trying to make conversation.

'I'm now in the merchant navy. I'm captain of a cruise ship taking tourists to explore the Antarctic.'

'Look Stefan, I still don't understand, what do you want of me?' Asked Adele.

'I don't really know, I just had to see you and find out what happened.' 'Now you know, you can go.'

'Please, have you thought of trying to find them?' He asked.

'What for?' Adele wasn't ready to share her thoughts with him.

'Don't you wonder what they are doing, what they have turned out to be, our flesh and blood?' Adele could no longer maintain the pretence. She exploded into a flood of tears.

'I've been counting the days until I could legally look for them.'

'Have you had any success?'

'Not yet, I have a friend who has been helping me. He has traced them and been in contact with their adopted families. He has been waiting to hear from the boys themselves. I'm on tenterhooks with impatience I can't tell you how excited I feel and now you turning up, it's all unreal like a film not real life.'

'Adele I want to ask you for a favour and I'll understand if you refuse but here goes. I would like to meet the boys with you?'

Adele was shocked by his request.

'How dare you ask such a thing, after all these years? As far as I was concerned you were dead and now you have turned up as big as life and want to continue where we left off. Well it won't happen. You walked out of my life when I needed you most. You turned your back on me at my most vulnerable time and you didn't care. You didn't even try to understand. Now that the boys are grown up you want to come back, as their father. You're not their proper father and can never be. Don't for one minute believe that being a father is just providing a teaspoon of sperm. No! No! It's a lifetime of devotion, of commitment, of love. Yes! Love, that selfless commodity that you don't have an ounce of in your whole body.'

By this time Adele was shouting, reliving the years of pent up anger, of hate for this man whom she had loved

so much and who had failed her so miserably. She couldn't find the words to describe her disgust at him and his behaviour.

He stood powerless as she poured out her hate for him; her whole body rebelled in her recollection of his rejection of her.

'I can never forgive you for the way you treated me. You made me feel less than human: and the two lives growing in my body who would become unique human beings, you rejected.'

'Adele,' he begged, I didn't know, I didn't understand. I was too young. How was I then to know what I know now, to be able to imagine what I did to you, how could I? Please, forgive me.'

Adele felt the years of hate slowly dissolving and what she saw before her was a man, a frail imperfect human being begging for forgiveness. Gone was the arrogant ego; gone was his conceit, his belief in his ability to overcome every obstacle;. Instead he was now a fragile man groveling at her feet. For a moment she exalted in his downfall, seeing him brought to this state, but it didn't last.

Instead she felt a new feeling begin to emerge, a feeling of compassion knowing only too well what he was going through and knowing she had the power to lift him up, to help him regain his composure. Lightly touching his shoulder she whispered,

'It's all right, Stefan, I forgive you, please get up.'

Wiping his eyes Stefan slowly got to his feet, his face still flushed and swollen. She could see that he wanted to hold her, to hug and kiss her but she wasn't ready for that yet. Instead she helped him up and together they walked to the settee.

'I'll get us a cup of tea,' she rasped struggling to find the words. He slumped back in the chair emotionally drained. Returning with the tea tray she poured him a cup. He felt the hot liquid revive him and his voice return to normal. Both sat in silence aware of the sound of the clock ticking on the mantle piece. Stefan spoke first,

'I still want to come with you. I know I don't deserve to be there but I want to. I want to meet the boys.' Adele looked at him,

'What are you going to say when they learn that you walked out on me? Don't you think you should think about that before you confront them?'

'I've had a lot of time to think about my life, standing on the bridge through the wee small hours alone with my thoughts, I've had a lot of time to question how I have lived it and the decisions I have made, many of them with no example to guide me, nothing to model my life on. It's not been easy and I have made many mistakes. But what I've learnt is that people, relationships are more important than anything else and that's why I'm here and that's why I want to see the boys.

Unknown to her he had seen the details of their meeting date, time and place on her notepad in the hall as she had let into the house. Adele could see that she was not going to dissuade him.

'OK I can't stop you.' She said finally, 'I'm sure the boys will be puzzled but you'll have to sort that out. I'm not going to help you out of the hole you have dug for yourself.'

Leeds Bradford airport was a twenty-minute drive from Adele's home. John had arranged for the taxi to arrive a

good two hours before departure so as to give her plenty of time. But it arrived a bit early causing her to get flustered. She hated to be rushed and deliberately slowed as she carefully checked the items on her list, ticket, money, keys and her handbag. She checked the doors, the lights, the taps and the TV and locking the front door, got into the taxi. John had wanted to accompany her but she decided it was something she had to do on her own.

Twenty minutes later the taxi slowed down as it entered the airport precinct and followed the signs to the Set Down Passenger area. Adele made her way to the Check-in desk with her hand luggage. It was all unfamiliar to her and she felt small and alone amongst the crowds of people milling about. The flight was confirmed and she was directed to the departure lounge where she found a seat and sat down. Looking absentmindedly at her fellow travellers, she could feel the tension beginning to build up inside her. Her hands felt clammy and her mouth dry. Suddenly there was an announcement on the tannoy,

‘Flight BA 213 for London is now departing, please have your documents ready’. Her fellow passengers suddenly stood up and made their way to a small desk where the flight attendant was checking their documents. For a moment Adele couldn’t find hers and panicked. She eventually spotted it in her bag and breathed a sign of relief. The document was checked and she followed the other passengers along an enclosed corridor to the plane.

She was planning to settle down in a window seat, watch the activities

on the tarmac until they were airborne and then sleep, but her brain wouldn't allow her to relax. Question after question went round and round in her head. She had relived this moment a thousand times, arriving at the meeting place and seeing the boys walking towards her. Then the image would blur and no matter how hard she tried she would be unable to see their faces. It was fast becoming a recurring dream almost a nightmare. Finally she lapsed into sleep, lulled by the swaying motion of the plane.

'Ten minutes to landing,' the announcement woke her with a jolt. I must use the toilet before we land she realised, but there was a woman already waiting when she reached it. She stood looking through the porthole watching the clouds billowing as the plane descended. Suddenly the woman spoke,

'You're on holiday?' Adele didn't hear the question clearly and muttered, 'Yes,' thinking that was the safest reply.

'Me to,' the woman said, 'where are you staying?'

Adele really didn't want this; her head was full up

already. Fortunately at that moment the toilet became vacant and the woman went in. Once back in her seat, she watched through her window, seeing the tarmac coming up fast as the plane began to land. There was a slight jolt, a screech of wheels, then bumps and sways as the great plane slowly came to a halt. A final hiss and it stopped. At first there was a silence in the cabin and then people began to move, opening up overhead lockers and collecting their belongings.

Once in the concourse, she stopped an Official who told she was in Terminal one. She now had to find Café Rouge.

Adam had just got back to his room when the phone rang. He didn't recognise the voice.

'Is that Dr Adam Simons?'

'Yes, speaking, how can I help you?'

'Is it convenient to speak?'

'Yes, fine.'

'Adam, I'm John, a friend of Adele your birth mother.

'A friend of whom?'

'Adele your birth mother, she would like to meet you.' Adam froze, the call had come out of the blue and he wasn't ready for it. His adopted mother had told him that Adele wanted to meet him and he had agreed but it was all happening too quickly.

The voice continued,

'I'm speaking on her behalf. You and I haven't met.'

'I don't understand, how did you find me?'

John, not answering continued,

'She often thinks of you and wonders what you are doing. She would like to meet you but only if you feel the same. She's too nervous to talk to you so she has asked me to do it for her.'

'You say you're a friend of hers, are you married?'

'No, we are just friends.'

'What about my twin, has she seen him?'

'No she hasn't seen him. She's looking for him. Are you and your twin, I think his name is Joseph, in contact?'

'No, we were planning to meet but somehow it didn't happened. It's come as a bit of a shock, I need to think.' Adam had known since he was thirteen that he was a twin and had been adopted. He knew that one day this moment would come. He had thought about trying to find his birth mother himself but his preoccupation with his job meant that he had kept putting it off, time and again until he had finally given up the idea. His mother's move to meet him came as a complete surprise. John was speaking,

'How do you feel about meeting her?'

'I don't know. Your call has rather caught me off guard. I need some time to think. How is she?'

'She's fine.' John replied. Finally Adam suggested,

'Why don't you give me your number and I'll call you in a few days.'

The telephone went dead. Adam looked around his room nothing had changed but everything had changed. Somehow he knew that nothing would be the same again with the sudden realisation that he could meet his real biological mother after all these years, years in which he had put it off time and time again. He struggled with indecision, one side of him wanted to meet her, to fill in a part of his life, which remained a mystery. The other wanted to forget her, to carry on as if she didn't exist. She had given him away. But he had so many questions to ask her. He had no image of her, no memory of her, so he had conjured one up. If I agree to meet her, am I in danger of destroying that memory, incomplete as it is? It was while he was lying on his bed wondering what to do that his phone rang. It was Ramona.

'Hi darling, I'm off early this evening, are you free?'

'Ramona, you must be psychic. I need to talk to you about something that's just happened. Let's meet at the café just outside the hospital.'

'OK I'll see you in half an hour.'

Adam arrived first and selected a table on the verandah with a view across the valley where lights could be seen flickering in the distance. A cool breeze was blowing off the hills. He saw her as she entered and waved to her, she seemed to become more beautiful every day.

'What do want to drink?' He asked as she sat down.

'Something soft and cold please. What's happened? I'm curious.'

'Well you know I told you that I was adopted soon after I was born, well my birth mother wants to

meet me.' Ramona watched his eyes as he explained what had happened. She saw them momentarily cloud over as if the pain of being reminded was still so raw.

'I don't know what to do? I have no idea what she's like. I'm curious to meet her but frightened that she may disappoint me. I thought of asking for a photo but realised that it wouldn't really be her. Help me Ramona, please help me.' Ramona took his hand struggling to know what to say. She couldn't imagine what he was going through, not knowing whom your mother was, being given away at birth: it was so alien to her with her secure and loving upbringing.

'Adam I love you and want you to be happy but I don't know how to advise you. Let me ask you a few questions. If your mother hadn't asked to see you, would you have wanted to see her?' Adam stared into the distance thinking about the question.

'I have thought about her over the years but lately with work etc. she has disappeared from my thoughts.'

'Would it matter if you never met her, never knew her, would that matter?'

Adam turned to face her,

'That's a good question. I think it would. I would feel that something was missing out of my life.' Ramona smiled,

'Adam, I think you've answered the question.'

Adam learned that the meeting was to be in London as Adele lived in Leeds. His journey from Israel took longer than he had expected particularly the long delay at the EI AI security check.

'What is the purpose of your visit? He was asked, he hesitated, too shy to tell the truth.

‘To visit a family friend,’ he decided finally.
‘Have you known them for long? The officer
asked,
‘It’s a she, yes all my life.’
‘When did you last see her?’ It was a question
Adam hesitated to answer,
‘A long time ago,’ he finally said.
‘So it will be a happy meeting?’
‘I hope so.’ he muttered wanting the questioning
to stop.

Hussein had settled back into his life in Damascus. The episode at the camp and his gunshot wound had melted into the past. He now had to complete a further two months study in the Mosque before deciding what to do. Meanwhile he and Lilith had become lovers and were talking about getting married but the question where they would live was causing some tension. He wanted to return to England but she wanted to live near her parents in Damascus.

An unexpected phone from his adopted mother call about his birth mother put this on hold.

‘Hello Hussein, how are you? We are all fine here. Something surprising has occurred; we have had a letter from a friend of Adele your birth mother asking for your address. She is looking for you and wants to meet you. How do you feel about meeting her? What do you want us to do?’

Hussein was for a moment utterly confused. It was as if a muffled voice from his past wanted to intrude into the present. He thought he had buried that part of his life completely but this request from his birth mother was now dredging it up.

'I don't know Mum,' he stuttered. 'It's so unexpected. I haven't thought about my birth mother for so long. I foolishly perhaps, thought that that part of my life was over. I don't know what to say. I need time, let me think about it and I'll ring you back.'

Hussein sat back in his chair staring at the fan moving slowly in the ceiling. Something that he thought he would never have to consider had suddenly come into his life. His first reaction was to say no, my life is good I love a beautiful woman and am happy. Why risk stirring up unhappy memories? I may not like her and I would be sorry that I agreed to meet her.

But what about her, the fact that she wants to see me must mean that she needs to sort out her life, to correct something that she may have regretted otherwise she wouldn't be wanting to meet me. She must still have feelings for me after all these years, wondering what sort of man I am, what I have become, what I am doing? So many questions, but what about me, aren't I curious about her, why she gave me away? I must speak to Lilith and tell her what has happened.

They were meeting that evening for dinner at a small café. He arrived early and waited impatiently for her. As she sat down, she knew immediately that there was something on his mind, something troubling him.

'What is it Hussein, what's happened?'

'My mother called me.'

'Is everything all right?'

'Yes yes, they're fine.'

'What is it then?'

'She's had a letter from a friend of my birth mother saying she wants to meet me.'

'Your birth mother wants to meet you?'

'Yes and I don't know what to do.'

'What was your first reaction?' Asked Lilith reaching for his hands.

'Anger, anger that she has suddenly disturbed my life. I'm happy and this has come as a dark cloud and I don't like it.'

'What don't you like?'

'The uncertainty? The confusion in my mind. I don't seem to have any guidelines to help me decide.'

'I don't think it's about guidelines darling it's about feelings. What do you feel about meeting her?' Hussein sat hunched over his drink.

'I feel fearful, frightened like I was a small boy again.'

'Why do you think that is?'

'Because I need to know that she loved me but I'm frightened to find out that she didn't.'

'If you don't meet her you'll never know,' said Lilith.

Hussein interrupted,

'And if I do, I may be sorry for the rest of my life.'

'That doesn't make sense, she wouldn't want to meet you if she hated you, would she?'

'I guess not.'

'Well then, you have decided. That wasn't so hard was it?' She leaned forward and kissed him. The flight from Damascus to London arrived early. Hussain and Lilith had several hours to wait before their meeting with Adele so they decided to enjoy a full English breakfast. During the meal Hussein was unusually quiet but Lilith decided not to question him. All she could do was to support him to, to show him her

love and trust in him. She sat holding his hand as he struggled with the task ahead.

Despite Adele's cold reception to him when Stefan presented himself at her home, he had learned that she had arranged to meet her sons at Heathrow airport at 10 am, in Café Nero at Terminal one. He knew that Adele was flying down from Leeds. He arranged to be at the café early. He had selected a corner table behind a column where he wouldn't be seen and planned to watch as the family was reunited.

As Adele was walking towards the café, she glanced at her watch it was a quarter to ten. They had arranged to meet at ten o'clock. It was now only a five-minute walk to Café Nero in Terminal one at Heathrow Airport. It was almost deserted when she arrived, only one or two couples were seated. Looking around Adele realised that she was too early. She chose a table against the far wall, sat facing inwards and tried to analyse her feelings. The earlier fear that she would not recognise them had been replaced by a calm acceptance of what would be. She was no longer trying to guess what would happen. Even so she glanced around nervously uncertain whether she would recognise them. A waitress approach Adele with a menu and she waved her away saying she was waiting for someone. All my life she realised she had been waiting for this moment with a mixture of sadness and excitement. Now that it was here, she tried to relax, toying with her handkerchief and waiting. Adam was next to arrive. As Ramona and he approached the café, she had held back and left him to walk the short distance on his own. Feeling decidedly unsure, he was conscious of the echo of his footsteps on the tiled floor and then he saw her, a small figure

sitting alone. He immediately recognised her features; it was as if he was looking into his own face. At that moment she saw him and her face was transformed, a big smile spreading across it, lighting up her eyes. She stood up and ran towards him. He hesitated and then they were in each other's arms hugging and crying,

'Mama is it really you?'

'Adam you're so handsome.' Ramona from a distance saw them hug and felt a tug in her heart, she knew it was going to be all right.

Joseph, now called Hussein, and Lilith were approaching the café from the other direction when they saw the two people hugging.

'That must be her,' whispered Lilith to Hussein, 'you go ahead I'll wait.' Hussein hesitated and then approached them. He stood confused by what he saw, a young man, the surgeon whom he recognised from Safed hospital and a woman whom he realised was his mother. He momentarily wondered what the doctor was doing here?

Adele heard him approach and turned to look at him.

She recognised Joseph immediately, he was so like his brother. Adam looking on recognised his patient and was about to ask why he was there when he realised that he was looking at his twin brother Joseph.

Wordlessly the three hugged erasing in that moment the gulf of years that had separated them.

Stefan watching from behind the column wanted to join them but something stopped him. Too much time had elapsed he realised; he had no right to intrude. He got up and walked away knowing that he would regret the decision all his life.

Martin Nelson