

Conquest of Death

By Clement Leibovitz

Preface

Melanie is the daughter I dreamed to have. As such she is a fictional character. I did not *construct* her in the likeness of any person I know. I have been blessed with three sons, and I would give none away for Melanie. I do miss a daughter like Melanie, and my three sons would certainly not have minded having her as a sister.

I put a lot of myself into Stanley. Still, his life is different from mine. In particular, his wife Marnie has not been drawn in the image of any woman I know.

The story deals with three generations. It has enough elements taken from life to give it a testimonial value. There is no real bad person in the story. Lisa who seemed to be a negative character, later in the story becomes quite a nice person. Likewise, Nelly who seemed to be so egocentric and egotistic was in reality a wonderful person in need of help.

This does not mean the story is unreal. You do not have to bring in mean characters to cause difficulties and problems. Good people can do that too.

Part 1: Prehistory.
Chapter 1
Alfred

In Cairo in 1942. The city had a large foreign population whose working language was French. A foreigner could live in Egypt's main cities, without knowing Arabic. If he knew French, he could find a job in the foreign business community. Alfred was such a foreigner.

He rang the bell. He could hear through the door the voices of two quarreling teen-agers. An adult shouted on the children and noises stopped. The door opened.

"Is it Soleve's apartment?", asked Alfred

"Yes it is", answered a man with blond hair, a large smile and inquisitive eyes. "I am Bernard Soleve". He added: "whom do you want to see?"

"I came to see you", answered Alfred.

Alfred was a shy young man barely nineteen years old. He was not at ease with strangers. Somehow, Bernard's friendly face and attitude were reassuring. He followed the invitation to come in which Bernard extended to him with a gesture of the hand.

Crossing the door, he found himself in the lobby. It was furnished like a modest living room. The apartment was designed with a living room and a dining room having their doors on the lobby. However, the intended living room was used as a bedroom for the two teen-agers and the lobby had become the formal living room.

They sat in front of each other. Bernard did not say a word. Alfred looked into his face. Once more he felt the relaxing effect of Bernard's expression. Bernard was smiling and clearly waiting for Alfred to state his case. He was holding his hands together, like if applauding.

"I am a radio-repair man", started Alfred. "I am indeed very good at it. But, without mathematics, I cannot understand the books teaching the principles and the workings of radio transmission. I was given your name and address. I was told you are a good private teacher of Mathematics. I also know the rate you charge for an hour's lesson. I think my salary can cover one hour's lesson a week."

Bernard listened to Alfred in amazement. Never before had he met a person ready to spend his whole monthly salary for a few hours of lessons. Alfred resumed talking.

"After I was taken out of school in 1935, and to help my parents who had been hit by the depression, I took whatever menial jobs were available. I then read a few books from Alexandria's municipal library and studied how radios were made and how they would work. They were popular books written for the general public. I had no difficulty understanding them. I then let the neighborhood know I could repair radios. I was lucky with my first clients. It helped me acquire some practice. Later I became quite an expert in the trade.

"Recently, in an attempt to better understand, I bought books on radio engineering. I had to stop reading after the first pages. The books were full of mathematical equations. It was beyond me. That is why I came to you."

Bernard was still quiet. Alfred went on:

"Since I have to work in order to be able to pay for the lessons, I can come only at 8:00 in the evening, after work hours, and after I have some supper."

"That's a deal" said Bernard. "Come tomorrow at 8:00". Alfred did not understand why Bernard's face seemed to be glowing, and why he talked so little.

A few minutes after Alfred left, Bernard's wife, Mimi, returned from work. They had married a couple of months ago and were deeply in love. Mimi was working all day till eight in the evening, with a break of three hours at noon.

Bernard hugged her tenderly. She let her bag slip and fall to the floor so as to better respond to Bernard's hug. They kissed passionately. Then came the usual questions such as "how was your day".

This time Bernard had a lot to say.

"Mimi", he started, "I had this evening a very special visitor." And he told her about Alfred's visit. Mimi was as amazed as Bernard.

"Bernard", she told him, "you love to teach pupils who would love to learn. Till now you only had students coming from rich families. They are not interested in studying

Bernard interrupted her. "Why would they want to study? They know they would never have to work. They do not need to learn. Their parents provide them with private teachers as a matter of status."

"That is why" said Mimi, resuming from where she had been interrupted, "teaching such students is for you more of a drudgery than a pleasure. You now have the possibility to give lessons to a young man eager to learn. This would be a welcomed change. Would it not?"

"Of course," replied Bernard, "but the matter is not that easy. On the one hand, I do not know how to tell him, without hurting him, that I would teach him for free. I am touched by Alfred's willingness to spend his whole salary on studying. He certainly is not my usual student. But he seems to be quite proud. He needs more than one hour a day and since he cannot afford it, I must find a way to tell him not to worry about the rates. Then there is something else."

And, while an expression of wonder could be seen on Mimi's face, Bernard came closer to her put an arm over her shoulders and resumed talking.

"Alfred", he said, "can come only after work, at eight in the evening. This is precisely the time at which you are coming back from work. Giving to Alfred a few hours after eight, is that much time taken away from us. We would not have much remaining time to enjoy ourselves. I will miss that time and, in all fairness, I cannot take that time away from you."

Bernard knew Mimi well. He therefore knew how she would react.

"This is indeed very inconvenient", she said. Then, turning towards him she put her head over his chest. Bernard remained quiet expecting her to resume talking. She was mulling over what Bernard just told her. She slowly took some distance from him and then said:

"Bernard, neither you nor I would be able to live with ourselves if we would not be there for Alfred. I assume he will not need so much help all the time. After the first few months, may be he will be able to study alone with some guidance from you."

"Then, that's a deal" said Bernard using one of his favorite expressions.

They were newly wed and Mimi grabbed the occasion to explore the nature of Bernard's feelings towards her.

"Tell me," started Mimi again, "why did you not give Alfred his first lesson today?"

"I would have done that," replied Bernard, "but it was not a decision I could have taken alone. Had I decided, without asking you, to take our time away from us for the benefit of Alfred, would you not have felt hurt?"

"Nonsense", exclaimed Mimi, "you know me well. Can you have a doubt that I would have been pleased?"

"The truth," said Bernard, "I had no doubt at all. But nobody likes to be taken for granted. Do you?"

"No!", said Mimi, and she almost jumped at Bernard to give him once more a warm and tight embrace.

Next day, Alfred arrived at the apartment building. He took the elevator. A young woman was already in, and got out with him at the fourth floor. She directed her steps towards Bernard's apartment. Once there, she drew a key from her wallet and opened the door. She was Mimi Soleve, Bernard's wife.

Bernard gave Alfred a three hours lesson after which he told him: "Come tomorrow". For a month Alfred got daily a three-hours long lesson, from eight o'clock in the evening till eleven o'clock. At the end of the month, Alfred apprehensively asked Bernard how much he owed him.

"We have become friends," said Bernard, "and I do not take money from friends."

And indeed Bernard and Mimi had become his friends. Alfred felt indebted to Mimi as much as to Bernard. Had she not encouraged her husband to give him lessons, at the expense of the time she had the right to expect from Bernard, the latter would have refused to sacrifice the evening hours.

With Bernard's help, Alfred made giant steps and got his matriculation. He then moved to Alexandria where the "College St. Marc" was providing a course in "Mathematiques Speciales". To proceed with his studies, he would have had to go to France. It was an impossible dream. He could not go there in time of war. Besides he could not afford the cost of the trip and that of living in a Foreign country.

He soon got involved with a group of young people caring for social justice. At the time, spurred by the Soviet victory over the German army at Stalingrad, the view had spread that there had to be something remarkable in the Soviet regime making that country capable to stand up to the Germans, while all other continental countries had failed to do so. Was it not due to the virtues of the communist regime? Alfred was urged to enroll in one of those groups.

Alfred thought the capitalist regime was immoral. Still he had some doubts about the Soviet Union. He could not accept the view that so many past communist leaders ended up betraying their ideals and helping the enemies of the regime. He told his friends that he is ready to become a member provided he could put on record his belief that most of those accused of treason in the Soviet Union, were innocents.

His friends found him arrogant. How could he contest the conclusions of the socialist country when he knew that his own means of information were so infinitesimally small compared to those of the Socialist state?

For Alfred it was a matter of choice. Either he chooses to believe in the culpability of so many leaders then, by the law of great numbers, such a predisposition of a great proportion of leaders to betray their country, should be considered a law of nature. In his own group, a similar proportion will betray, and he himself could not know if he will be among the betrayers, or which of his friends will be among them. Such prospects were so discouraging that he would prefer not to be a member at all. However, if the Soviet Union was wrong, and most of the accused were innocent, then his views of human nature could be more optimistic. And that was his choice.

He was accepted as a member.

It was the start of a new emotional and intellectual existence. He felt as if, all his life, he had been in a state of hibernation from which he was just getting out to discover what the world really was. He thought he could now give a meaning to the words understanding, hope and love, a meaning quite different than the usual one.

He was taught that the concept of class struggle, could throw a bright light on political and historical events. He could now see and perceive the ropes and springs behind the daily important events. Politics stopped to be an enigma, stopped to face him with surprises. He could understand politics.

He could also understand economics through the concepts of value and added value. Those were Marxist concepts which seemed to illuminate the obscure background behind the political and economic scene. So much for understanding.

Hope came from a new vision. He could dream of a social system devoid of exploitation which would eliminate wars and starvation, and ensure to the individual the conditions most favourable to the development of his personality and his creativity. It was a vision of heaven on earth.

As to love, it took a totally new meaning. Through internationalism, a person was to transcend the national prejudices, and love all nations as much as his own. Cooperation was to displace competition. But above all, there was the love feeling of having committed one's self to the good of humanity, of discovering in the feelings of comradeship, a world of self-denial, altruism and identifying.

All in all, it produced what was supposed to be a new human being made of tolerance, love, understanding and combativeness for a better world. It made Alfred drunk with happiness. He had no longer doubts about his role on earth. He knew where he was going, he knew the risks, and was more than willing to take them.

It is that emotional state of mind which enabled Alfred to withstand the five hours of torture which followed his arrest, and then the ensuing ten years of jail.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Reconnecting with family

As he arrived in Haifa on July 1959, Alfred was reminiscing his studying days with Bernard. At 35, he felt young and enjoyed a good health not affected by his jail term. Before 1949, he had mastered his trade and had an uncanny ability for finding what was wrong with a radio in need of repair. At the time, radios were using tubes. Resistors and capacitors were visible to the naked eye. The connections between them were electric wires of different colors, so it could be easily found from where to where "they were going". In the new world he was facing in 1959, transistors would soon displace the tubes, and printed circuits would eliminate most of the connecting wires. Now he had better find a newer trade.

To find a job was not the only challenge he was facing. Alfred had always dreamed of marrying a woman he would love and make happy, and with whom he would found a family. It is a common dream harbored in their heart by many young men. An age of thirty-five was certainly not a great obstacle. Still, that dream seemed to Alfred unattainable.

For ten years Alfred had not seen the face of a woman. He had not even seen a picture of a woman. His appreciation of womanly beauty had frozen to what it had been ten years earlier when he was in love with a 16 years old girl of the neighborhood. He was now a thirty-six year old man with twenty-five year old eyes. He still was attracted to women in the range sixteen to twenty years of age.

Alfred knew that, in many countries, elderly men with enough wealth or power would marry young girls. He had been struggling for a world in which, among other things, a woman would be the equal of a man. In such a world, no woman would marry a much older man except in rare cases of blind love.

Alfred had a cousin Shushana, younger than him by over eightenn years. She was married to Moshe, a Maroccan Jew. Moshe suggested that Alfred marry his 15 years old sister. He told Alfred that otherwise, his sister would marry a Maroccan who might beat her and treat her without respect. He, Alfred, would treat that girl as a princess.

It was a very tempting proposition. Still, Alfred thought the girl deserved a younger husband. She might even get married to a man who treats her well. Alfred would rather never marry than marry a much younger girl. The trouble was that he was attracted only to these.

One of his first visits was to his aunt Marianella. She was living in Sfat with her four children and her mother (Alfred's grandmother) up on the hills at three hours bus distance from Haifa. Marianella, though his aunt, was younger than he was by three years. Her children, his cousins, were between four and eight years old. Later he would perceive them more as his children than his cousins.

Marianella was divorced. The father of the children did not care for them and was not visiting them. Added to that, Marianella was not a functional mother. Whatever her income, she would spend it in the first days of the month buying nonessential objects. She had no patience with the

kids. They were looked after by their grandmother but they yearned for a male presence and the affection of a male person. Alfred had never seen them.

Marianella recognized him immediately. "Children, children," she shouted "come all here, come meet your cousin Alfred". But Alfred first went to hug his grandma. He could not remain long with her. The children's eyes were glued on him. Rony, the youngest, was very shy. The three others came close to Alfred. He took them in his arms one by one and gave them no end of kisses. Rony also got his share. Even then, the children still could not take their eyes away from him. They seemed fascinated. In fact nobody had till then expressed so much warmth and affection to them. It was for them a totally new experience, which filled their heart with awe and joy.

Alfred talked with them a few hours till bedtime. He was offered a very narrow bed. Part of his body was "overflowing" left and right. No sooner had a minute passed after every one had gone to sleep, that the four children came on tiptoes and laid themselves over him. His body was covered with the four children.

Alfred was so tired that he managed to fall asleep. When he woke up in the morning, he could not guess who of the four children had peed on him during the night.

The grandmother had a collapsed lung. The weather in Sfat was too cold for her. The houses did not have good insulation, and the inside temperature was close to the outside one. The family doctor had strongly recommended they move to a warmer city. Alfred's decision was made. He would not marry. He would take care of the four children. He would start by moving them to a better place.

This resolve lasted just a year or two. Mariella found a good job and enrolled her four children in a boarding school. Alfred would visit them regularly. Moreover, was it because he was getting adapted to society, or was it because he met Nelly and found her so much younger than her age, Alfred married her after a very short courting period. He no longer could carry as much responsibility for his young cousins.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Grandma

Marianella's children were growing up in poor surroundings. It could have been expected that they would not do well at school and would end up in bad company.

In fact nothing of the sort occurred. Amalia, the oldest, finished high school with good grades, took a course in accounting and got a good job. Her sister Rachel became a school teacher. Rony, the youngest became an engineer.

It was not due to a miracle. Marianella's mother, the grandmother of the children and of Alfred, took care of the children and instilled in them strong moral values.

Alfred's grandfather was thirty-five when he married Anna, then fourteen, later to be known as "Grandma". He could read and write. He was not a believer and had socialist views. He took great interest in the news.

Alfred's grandmother was a grandma, and nothing else. She was the first to wake up, the last to go to bed. She did not have a single moment of rest. She had either to cook or to wash the floor or to go to the market for groceries or to worry about how to stretch her few coins until the end of the month. She had to raise her seven children and, later, all the grandchildren.

She never went to the movies. Whenever she was invited she could not find the time. There was too much to do. The children were working and earned ridiculously low salaries, and Grandma had to remain home to take care of the babies, of the house and the cooking.

At the time, cooking was a complicated business. There were no pizzas to order by phone. They had no phone, and there was nothing like a pizza business.

Cooking was done on *primus* burners which were always tormenting Grandma. The pump would not work, or the small pipe would be blocked. As to the wick burner, it would be either too low and of no use, or it would constantly emit smoke. In addition, cooking was not a matter of boiling some vegetables or just making a chicken soup. It was the art of transforming inexpensive ingredients into meals fit for a king. Grandma was an expert, and her culinary feats demanded time, a lot of time. In fact, cooking was taking all the morning and part of the afternoon.

Grandma was too busy to take notice of what was going on in the world. She was in her own world of caring for the extended family, cooking, pickling, baking, and so on. Bread had to be always fresh. She would buy it just before breakfast, lunch and supper. Baking was not a simple matter. You had to prepare what was to be baked, bring it to the bakery, beg the baker to make some place for it in the oven, leave it there for a few hours and then go back to pick it up. Pieces of bread would dry up and would then end up recycled as a raisin bread cake covered with a thin layer of homemade chocolate.

And then grandma became deaf.

Her eyes remained very sharp, much sharper than Alfred's. But she could not hear, even the loudest noise. Since she could not read, one could communicate with her only by gestures. In her state, it became dangerous for her to cook, to clean and to take care of the family. Besides, she was getting too old, and her children insisted that the time had come for them to take care of her.

On Alfred's visits to her, she always overwhelmed him with questions of politics and philosophy. How did she managed, without being able to hear, without being able to read, to always be up-to-date concerning political events?

Possibly, she had always taken an interest in world events. She would absorb some knowledge from segments of conversations in which she would not participate. She would have formed some opinions which she kept for herself, too busy as she was to give time to asking and arguing.

This woman who, all her life, had time only for her children and grandchildren, proved to have a superior intelligence. Alfred was happy to listen to her opinions, on everything. He had to agree that, often, her understanding was better than his, revealing unsuspected wisdom. She only had to stop to be Grandma and to have time for herself, to uncover to her family the richness of her spiritual life. She died, and was so missed by all who knew her.

That was Grandma, the person who save Marianella's children's souls. And when Grandma became unable to take care of them, Amalia replaced her and became a surrogate mother to her siblings. Grandma fell and broke her hips. She died a few days later. Her children and grand children do remember her, almost daily.

Coming back to Alfred's prehistory, he divorced from Nelly, married Lynda and was still happily married to her in 1976, the year when Melanie's and Robert's story starts. Alfred had emigrated to Canada. He became a professor in sociology and was teaching at The University of Alberta. It is there that he met Robert at the library. Somehow they had numerous long talks. Alfred appreciated Robert's intellectual qualities while Robert appreciated Alfred's knowledge and his readiness to help. They soon became friends in spite of the age difference.

One day, in 1974, Alfred was perusing the Paris phone directory at the Edmonton Centennial Library. He could hardly believe his eyes when they locked on the name Bernard Selve and his phone number.

Back home, he dialed the number and said the single word "Allo!", and Bernard's clear voice answered back to him; "Yes Alfred!" Twenty five years had passed since they had last met, and still, Bernard could recognize Alfred's voice from a single uttered word.

The phone call was followed by exchanges of visits. They remained in touch. Bernard was quite ill and died a few years later. Mimi was struggling against a pernicious tumor. When Alfred learned she too was about to die, he took the plane to remain a week with her. Alfred still remembers the good-bye they said to each other when the time came for Alfred to leave and return to Edmonton. People not knowing them could think they were lovers feeling very

romantically one for the other. In reality, Alfred, with immense affection, was looking intensely at his friend Mimi, knowing so well he will never see her again.

Indeed, he soon got a phone-call from Philip, Mimi's and Bernard's youngest son. Mimi had died the night before.

A few months later Alfred went to Paris and visited with Philip, his wife Françoise and their two boys. Alfred was astounded noticing the strong resemblance between the eldest of the two boys with Mimi, and that between the youngest with Bernard.

Part 2, Melanie
Chapter 1
Love at Seventeen

Melanie left the table and went up to her room while her parents exchanged anxious looks. She had eaten little. Her mind had seemed to be hovering far away, and she had had difficulty noticing what was being said to her. She had asked to be excused and, as usual, she ended her sentence with a smile.

Melanie smiled as naturally as she breathed and her smile was always expressive. It was like a mirror reflecting her emotions. You had only to see her smile and you could tell how happy or sad she was, how serious or playful was her disposition. You even could notice from it if she was in pain. Her smile told it all.

A malicious friend once said that the smile came so easily to Melanie, even when not called for, that one could say it was more in the nature of a tic. To which someone replied that, if it was so, then Melanie must be affected by a thousand tics to reflect such a variety of emotions.

For her parents, an absence of a smile would justify taking Melanie to the hospital's emergency ward with the obvious complaint: "Melanie did not smile! What is wrong with her? What can we do?"

But she did smile, and though her parents could read in that smile more pain than could be visible to Melanie's friends, there also was so much tenderness and, surprisingly, strength in her smile that they decided not to bother her with questions. In time Melanie would tell them why she seemed unhappy.

Now, in her room, Melanie did not throw herself sobbing in bed. She did not indulge in feelings of hate or self-pity. She did not punch her pillow with rage. She paced her room trying to make sense of her feelings and to come to some decisions as to what her behavior should be in the circumstances.

A few hours ago, in a glimpse, she had seen Robert and Lisa engaged in kissing. In a glimpse because Melanie, rightly or wrongly, thought they would have preferred not to be seen. And so, Melanie, just after the first revealing moments, avoided looking at them.

Does one need more than a glimpse? Does witnessing a kiss for five seconds tell much more than seeing it for a fraction of that time? Five seconds or a single instant and the knowledge is identical: Lisa and Robert are in a kissing relation.

Two days earlier, Melanie observed, also in a glimpse, that Lisa and Fred could kiss each other. At the time the event seemed unimportant. Boys and girls do that almost all the time. But then it was Fred and not Robert. When it came to Robert with Lisa, it did hurt.

It would have hurt too had Sara, instead of Lisa, been Robert's kissing partner. Somehow, though, it would have been more bearable.

And then, an evident aspect of the reality hit Melanie: she was in love with Robert. She had been, of course, aware how much she liked and admired him. She knew that she enjoyed his company. She even had a hand in having him assigned with her on a project. She had been impressed by the originality of his thought and the strength and depth of his analysis. She considered him handsome but would not admit to herself it had anything to do with the pleasure she felt when being with him.

But to like and admire a guy does not mean that one is in love with him. To suffer from a kiss given by him to another girl is a different story. Only now, and suddenly, did Melanie realize its significance.

Melanie had been the object of jokes for never having *fallen* in love. All her high-school classmates were in love and have been in love more than once. Girls had asked her: "What is with you? don't you have glands? Don't they produce hormones? You may have to see a doctor!"

Melanie had small breasts. Was it a matter of proper hormone balance? But then why was Helen, with still smaller breasts, at the top of the class in the number of yearly love affairs?

The school love relations she knew of, had not the kind of glamour that could impress her. Love at school was more a matter of fashion than of true feelings. There were some exceptions but, anyway, the boys were too pretentious, too immature. True, Robert was different. But she would not fall in love with Robert for fashion's sake.

That was the situation till the day before. Today, a new element forced Melanie to face the fact of her being in love with Robert, and it hurts. It hurts when he kisses another girl and it hurts much more when the girl he is kissing is Lisa.

Robert deserves a better girl, not one which is going around kissing other boys. Should not someone put him wise?

Another problem to consider: how to face Robert tomorrow, after tomorrow and the day after? She must hide her feelings. She would hate to embarrass Robert and to find herself rebuked. There had been plenty of occasions for Robert to have noticed her, to have become more friendly or to have asked her, if only once, to be his date.

He was friendly with her. This could not be denied. But he would never tease her, compliment her, joke with her or just look at her. If he had any interest in her it obviously was not motivated by physical attraction.

Was she ugly? Obviously not. Girls, in moments of anger, had sometimes insulted her but never called her ugly. She went to the mirror, looked at herself and then, suddenly, took off her blouse and uncovered her breasts. Here they were, small but decidedly noticeable.

Melanie felt uncomfortable at having examined her breasts. Would Robert have told her for instance that her breasts had visibly grown, she would have slapped his face and refused to speak with him any more. She thought that her breasts were to be of the right size to signal her age. They were not to attract Robert's attention in any other way.

Confused at her feelings, not knowing what to do and what to think, she finally threw herself on the bed, took a pillow's corner between her teeth and let herself go sobbing

Part 2, Chapter 2

Melanie's parents

Stanley, Melanie's father, was not yet 53. He was a likable and outgoing person. His cheeks were always red, wrongly suggesting he had been out in the cold or, in summer, he had drunk a few drops too much. Flakes of white hairs decorating his temples did not prevent him from looking his age. In 1958, at 39, he had married Marnie, a 29 years old girl. In 1976, as our story starts, Stanley was diagnosed with Cancer of the prostate. It was hoped the tumor would disappear under radiation treatment.

Stanley had been marked by his childhood. He was not then the outgoing person he would later become. Since he was five, he tried to make sense of his father's constant shouting at his mother. The shouting messages were obscure to him, but the mere fact his father was shouting, required elucidation.

His father was regularly reading newspapers, and therefore knew what was going on in all corners of the world. His mother could not even comment on the few political remarks his father would make. This established his father's superiority in Stanley's eyes. He concluded that a man who knows so well what goes on at 10,000 miles from his country must understand still better how his own home should be run. He resolved his concern with the conviction that his mother was obviously in the wrong in displeasing such a knowledgeable person as his father.

It took Stanley time to understand that his mother had long ago learned that it is better to keep quiet to his father's shouts. The father was the typical male chauvinist who would not allow his wife to argue or to have an independent opinion.

Not all children are equally affected by the quarrels at home. Sometimes children develop a kind of immunity. Shouts and anger become familiar. Their occurrence is expected and do not cause any surprise. It was not so in Stanley's case.

He would spend hours remembering the outbursts of the day and trying to understand why they had to occur. He never thought on ways to prevent them; that was far beyond him. It always seemed to him that there were elements of the problem which escaped him and which he could, may be, grasp by thinking. He remembers having early taken the decision that he will be a good and caring husband who would treat his wife as an equal partner. Obviously he was not thinking in these modern terms.

Reading saved him. He developed a craving for it. He read whatever was available at home, including the newspapers. With the latter, he had to be very careful. Nobody was allowed to touch them when his father was at home. Very wisely, Stanley abstained from asking permission to read them when his father would be away. He could therefore access them with a clean conscience since nobody had forbidden him to do so. He thus learned early in life that it is sometimes better not to ask, and rely on one's own opinion on what is good and what is bad.

For some years, he had been jobless, and it was Stanley's mother who was feeding the family. One would think that Stanley's father would realize how much his patriarchal beliefs were

prejudiced. She succeeded where he failed. His patriarchal behavior was so strongly anchored that his attitude did not change a bit. He could still shout at Stanley's mother with no reason at all; he did not need reasons.

Stanley had remained without friends till the age of ten. At school, during breaks, he would stay alone, away from groups of children, not participating in their games. He would be immersed in thoughts related to his parents' morning quarrel. The students' manners were alien to him. They used foul language, were noisy, made jokes which appeared tasteless to Stanley.

His schoolmates did not like him. He was too serious. He disliked dirty jokes. He believed that teachers were nice people, deserving respect. Moreover, he was absorbed in thoughts concerning the quarrels between his parents and, during the break periods, he was not in a mood to participate in the usual games.

With time he came to notice Ezra, a well-behaved student of his age. In fact Ezra was an outstanding boy. Stanley fell in love with Ezra. The word *love* is appropriate in view of the intensity of the feelings it implies. Later Stanley would define a new word *frove* to describe the decent and strong feelings of friendship of love devoid of physical retribution.

Stanley did not yet know the facts of life. His love for Ezra was akin to the Christian love for a neighbor. However, noticing these feelings of pure, intense and decent love for a boy of his own age, was for Stanley a new experience. He did not know how to proceed from there.

He took a photo of himself, wrote on the back "from your friend Stanley who loves you and who will be waiting for you at the school door by the end of the schoolday." During a break, Stanley went to Ezra, gave him the picture and ran away without saying a word. At the end of the day, Ezra did not come to meet Stanley. Stanley cried.

Next day, Stanley went to Ezra, asked and got the picture back. Two days later, a Saturday, the weekly day off, Stanley decided to go and visit Ezra at his home. Stanley knew the part of the city Ezra was living in, but he did not know in what street nor in what house. Nevertheless he walked the four kilometers separating him from that part of the city, and started looking for signs. Soon he noticed Huguette, one of Ezra's younger sisters. Stanley knew how she looked for having observed her when Ezra with his sisters were arriving at school.

He remained observing Huguette as she was playing hopscotch on the street. Then, she stopped playing and walked steadily away as a child knowing exactly where to go. Stanley followed her till she entered a large one-family house. This was the place where Ezra was living.

For more than an hour Stanley waited in vain for Ezra to come out. He then went to the door. It was not closed, He pushed it, entered and found himself in a waiting room. In that house lived a large extended family. Stanley, terrified at his own audacity, remained quiet in a corner while people were going and coming without noticing him. Suddenly, Susan, a seventeen years old cousin of Ezra, saw him and asked him who he was and what did he want. He said he came to visit Ezra.

"Ezra! Ezra!" called Susan in her loudest voice: "a friend came to see you". Ezra came down from his room and extended his right hand to Stanley. They shook hands but, otherwise, Stanley acted mute. Ezra did all the talking and Stanley hardly said a few words. For months, Stanley would come every Sunday to visit Ezra. At first he would still remain in the same corner till someone would take notice and call down Ezra. One day Ezra showed Stanley the way to his own room and asked him to come next time directly to that room upstairs, instead of waiting in the corner.

With time, Stanley became a fixture of the house where he would be each Saturday morning and would depart at about twelve. One day, Ezra's mother invited Stanley to remain for lunch. Though very scared, he accepted the invitation. At noon he went with Ezra to the dining room where he was given a seat besides Ezra along a table for twelve people. The grandfather headed the table. The dishes were passed around and Stanley's dish got filled with meat and vegetables. At a signal, after a blessing by the grandfather, the conversation started and everyone went speaking and eating.

Stanley took a spoonful of beans, raised it to the mouth level, but could not proceed further. He laid down the spoon and then tried again. Once more he raised the spoon to his mouth and became as if paralyzed. One by one the people at the table noticed what was going on. They stopped talking, and all of them stared at Stanley. The grandfather murmured a few words to those seated by his sides and everyone stopped to pay attention to Stanley and ignored him totally.

The grandfather had been wise. Stanley felt relieved. Again he took the spoon to his mouth, and again the spoon stopped a centimeter away from his mouth. Stanley then threw the spoon on the table, escaped from his chair, run around the table to reach the dining-room's door and sobbing went to his corner. On instructions from the mother, a small table was set for Ezra and him in a small room where they would be alone, and Stanley could then eat without any further difficulty. What had been Stanley's problem? He never knew. May be it was just a matter of shyness.

A few months later, He had no difficulty speaking with all members of the family. He still felt shy, but not to an obnoxious degree. He knew he would do anything to help his friend Ezra, literally anything.

Never again did he feel so strongly for a friend. He would be prepared to do anything and everything for any of his later friends. However, his feelings towards Ezra in the domain of friendship, corresponded to what a first love is for an adolescent. There is a great number of literary works dealing with a first love. Very few deal with a first friendship.

Marnie was not beautiful. She had an elongated head compared by some to that of a horse. People would deny it. It took time to see her face and to notice its ugliness. Looking at her, one would first see her eyes. They were like no others. They had so much charm, were so lively, conveyed so much empathy and understanding that, suddenly, her face stopped to seem elongated and, instead, radiated a captivating beauty. She was a living demonstration that beauty

could be active as well as passive. In her case, her passive appearance, that which could be noticed, rarely, when she would close her eyes and abstain from smiling, was not engaging. Her active appearance was overwhelming.

Since early teenagehood, Marnie volunteered whenever and wherever she could be helpful. She would provide assistance in hospitals, she would clean park trails, she would help elderly people in all possible ways. Later she would work on help lines providing information and advise to needing and desperate people.

Her dedication was not popular with young men. She could refuse to go to a dancing party because of her volunteer obligations. Besides, not every young man would be able to discover her active beauty.

Stanley saw in her a beautiful angel. They fell in love, married and enjoyed a loving relation which could make the envy of so many couples.

Melanie was born to Marnie and Stanley one year after their wedding, Complications at birth resulted in Marnie becoming unable to bear another child. The love Stanley and Marnie were prepared to bestow on a larger family was given, in generous measures, to their only child.

Melanie could have become spoiled. Her parents were eager to please her. They bought her all kinds of dolls and toys. They were prepared to do whatever it would take to keep her happy.

There were, however, a number of factors that prevented Melanie from becoming self-centered. She was kept aware by her parents of the poverty in which so many other children were living. She could sense that her parents were insensitive to the status of a visitor. They would treat equally well a worker, a physician or a rich man. More than her toys she came to appreciate the time and attention the parents gave her. She responded to her parents' love and, not having met hate in her childhood, attributed kindness to every being.

Melanie was so content with her parents that she did not feel the need for friends. A brother would have received his friends at home and it might have awakened in Melanie some interest in boys. As matters stood, Melanie had no friends and seemed not to suffer from it.

Stanley and Marnie had a long discussion on this subject. They concluded that, by satisfying Melanie's need for love and company, they had prevented Melanie from developing her natural interest for children her own age.

They therefore decided to gradually reduce the time they would give to Melanie. Their daughter, so they thought, would then try to compensate for the lesser attention by looking for friends. It did not work that way.

Melanie was secure in her parent's love, no matter what. Moreover, having become an avid reader, she would compensate for the lesser attention of her parents by more readings.

Here also the influence of her parents contributed in isolating Melanie from her school-fellows. Under their guidance, she restricted her reading to rather *substantial* books. The living room was also a library. Shelves along the walls were full of books ordered according to subjects. There Melanie could find translations of masterpieces of Russian, German and French literature. She devoured them, one after the other. These books could not be a proper subject of conversation at school. No one else was reading them or knew something about them. Moreover, her enthusiasm for that kind of reading prevented Melanie from being up-to-date with respect to the popular mystery and love books topping the list of best-sellers.

It was therefore natural that her readings would provide Melanie endless hours of discussions with her parents. Anatole France's *Penguin's Island*, for instance, not only was discussed for its own literary merits but was an occasion to digress on the teaching of world history in schools.

Melanie had noticed that her father kept one book out of the library. Once in a while, he would bring it with him in the living room, would read some pages, and then bring it back to his own room. Answering her question, Stanley told her the time had not yet come for her to read that kind of documentation. Melanie concluded that the book may have to do with sexual education. She wondered why her father would still go back to it.

One day, Melanie found the book laying on the living-room's table. She took it as an indication she was now allowed to look into it. Look into it she did. After reading the introduction she took the book to her room and did not put it down until she finished reading its last page. The title of the book was "Labor's untold story".

She was not prepared for the effect the book would have upon her. She knew, perhaps better than many of her schoolmates, that *a long time ago*, the workers had it hard. She heard or read about their long working-days and the difficulties in the way of organizing themselves to struggle for better working conditions.

Now she faced specifics of that old reality. The murdered trade-union leaders had names, they had wives and children whose lives were resuscitated in front of her eyes with an amount of moving details. She felt she was among the public witnessing the trial of Parsons and Spies condemned to be hanged in spite of the evidence proving their innocence. She read extracts of the articles published in the press at the time. She could not withhold her dismay and her rage at the barbarity with which the *respectable* papers of the day were claiming the blood of whoever would ask for the workers an eight-hours working day and urging "a diet of lead for the hungry strikers".

She hardly could believe it when she read an article inciting the people to mobilize 'judge Lynch' to put the 'carcasses' of the trade-union leaders to hang from all the lamp-posts. The pain became unbearable when she recognized contemporary names of great bankers and industrialists who own their fabulous wealth to criminal commercial manipulations committed by their forefathers during the American Civil War, at the expense of the soldiers giving their lives for the country. To find out that, from their holiday in Italy, such corrupted people congratulated their managers for having put an end to a strike by hiring bands of ruffians to shoot on the strikers and, for good measure, adding that the weather in Italy is wonderful, aroused in Melanie such a disgust that,

for a moment, she was about to rip the book into pieces as if it did represent the filthiness it was describing. She slammed shut the book. She could not go on just now.

And then she reopened the book and went on reading.

She kept the book in her room. She intended to reread particular passages. Her father, apparently, did not mind the disappearance of his book. Obviously, he had thought that the time had come for her to read it. He would not press the matter on her. From the title, she could decide by herself if she was interested in it.

He may have underestimated Melanie's maturity of mind. She would already have been prepared to read that kind of books some years ago. May be he wanted to spare her the knowledge which could impart on her mind a great dose of sadness and pessimism.

Melanie did not question her father's behavior. She however thought it important to discuss the book with him. The best time would be during the coming weekend for which she had scheduled nothing else.

She was in this disposition of mind when next day at school she caught a glimpse of a kiss exchanged between Robert and Lisa. Later she would reflect how she did for a while forget the workers' miseries, taken as she had been by witnessing Robert and Lisa. kissing each other.

For a while, she even forgot that her father had been diagnosed with cancer of the prostate. There was hope that, under radiation, the tumor would disappear.

Part 2, Chapter 3 A conversation with dad

Melanie's change of mood had been noticed by all her schoolmates, except Robert. The latter seemed euphoric and engrossed with his love for Lisa. There was no longer any secret about it. They would hold hands at intermissions and exchange kisses now and then.

For a short while, Robert's performance at school suffered and then he again became one of the best students, be it with his homework or his interventions during classes. Melanie, as the rational girl she was, knew she had to come to terms with the situation. It would have been easier, had Robert, somehow, demonstrated he was unworthy of her love. But how could she forget him when not only he was with her in the same class, but was also, and obviously so, an intelligent and sympathetic person. She had to recognize that on most points he was scoring far ahead of the other boys.

She tried to concentrate on her studies and on her home readings. With time her pain leveled. It was still hurting very much but it was the same hurt whether she had just noticed kisses between Robert and Lisa, or whether she had not seen them together. She was no longer hurt as much by the idea that Robert belonged or would belong to someone else, as by the fact that he would not belong to her. If she can't have Robert, he might as well be happy with someone else. And if that someone would be worthy of him she would be less unhappy.

"Daddy", she said one day to Stanley, "I would like to ask you a few questions concerning the book *Labor's Untold Story*."

"I am glad", replied Stanley, "you are back to your usual talkative mood. I too wanted to speak with you about a different matter".

"What is it about", inquired Melanie?

"About Robert", said Stanley while looking straight at her to watch her reaction.

Melanie was taken aback and could not find a word. She remained silent. She looked at her father, met his eyes and then let herself fall in a chair.

"Do you love Robert", asked her father?

"Yes", replied Melanie. She then added:

"How do you know? I told nobody."

"It was easy to guess", said Stanley. "His name was often on your lips. And now, you have stopped for two weeks to mention his name and have remained very sad for just as long a time."

She remained silent for a few seconds and then slowly and in a low voice said:

"He does not love me. He loves Lisa, a bad girl who teases all the boys."

Stanley stood up, went to Melanie, patted her head and then bent to apply a kiss on her hair.

"You must feel very hurt!" he said sadly.

"You cannot possibly know how it does feel",

"Do not be so sure, Melanie," replied Stanley, "I too, in my younger years, experienced loving without being loved. Mom was not my first love."

"Oh Daddy" she exclaimed! She rose from her seat, went to Stanley and hugged him. When they left each other they both had tears in their eyes.

"I am not crying for my first love", said Stanley.

"I know", said Melanie. "As to me, I do not know how much I am shedding tears for myself or for your past pains."

"Crying once in a while", said Stanley meekly, "can be helpful. Though, one should not do it too often. My past pains have long been forgotten, and you know how much I love your mom and how happy we are together."

"Daddy," asked Melanie, "did the girl you loved know you loved her?"

"Yes," replied Stanley, "Mimi Nelka knew it, and she was very sorry for me. To spare my feelings, she, at first, thought we should stop seeing each other. Then, she asked me once if it was possible for us to remain close friends, in the firm knowledge that nothing romantic would ever develop between us. I assured her it was quite possible. Later she married, got two daughters and, two decades later, the eldest daughter became a dear friend to me. Life has separated us. We seldom meet, but I appreciate the two of them very much. Your mother knows them and has for them respect and affection.

"As you see, I was somewhat luckier than you. Keeping Mimi as a close friend made me feel I had not lost everything. Mimi remains precious to me as a good friend."

He stopped for a few seconds. Then, after regaining his composure, he added in a firmer tone:

"Do not think about my past pains. Just take them as a sign that I can understand what you are going through. I know it is far from easy but I have so much confidence in your strength, and your wisdom, that I am certain you will manage your pain and remain in control of yourself. You will concentrate, I know, on what is in your realm to do, and not on what does not depend on you."

"Thank you Daddy", said Melanie, "I treasure your trust."

"If you feel uncomfortable with our discussion", said Stanley, "we could instead discuss the book you took from the living room."

"Let us first finish our talk", said Melanie. "I would like to hear all you have to tell me"

"Nothing much", said Stanley. Apparently he did have much to tell and resumed:

"It is not possible to know exactly why a person falls in love with someone and not with someone else. It is not a matter of preferring the character or the personality of the one over that of the other. It is not even necessarily an indication that in the eye of that beholder the one is more beautiful than the other. I doubt the matter will ever be resolved. What is certain is that loving without being loved is hurting. It can hurt more if it leads to a feeling of inadequacy, of lack of self-esteem. As is often said, love is blind and Robert's love for Lisa does not prevent you from being a most lovely girl."

"Daddy", said Melanie, "right now, being lovely does not help me much. I would have preferred to be ugly and loved by Robert, than lovely and not loved by him."

"What you have just said, tells a lot about you" exclaimed Stanley! "Few girls would value the love of their beloved above the desire to be beautiful. Feeling the way you do, is half what is needed for recovery."

"And what is the other half" asked Melanie in a smile?

"It is", said Stanley, "to try to love Robert for himself more than for yourself; to be able, deep within yourself, to wish him happiness with Lisa. To be able to suffer for him if he ever is unhappy with Lisa. You see, you could both have been unhappy. You should be able to find some comfort in your knowledge that the one you love is happy. Can you do that?"

"I don't know", replied Melanie, "I just don't know. You may be right except for Lisa. I wish he leaves her, even if to fall in love with someone else, not with me. Lisa is not what Robert needs."

"Melanie" said Stanley! "be generous to Lisa. People do change. She might seem bad and may not be as bad as you perceive her to be. The less you hate or despise people, the less you suffer."

Stanley did not expect an answer. He therefore added: "Let us postpone the discussion of the book".

Melanie was about to leave the room when she turned towards Stanley and asked: "Does mom know she was not your first love?"

"Of course", said Stanley, "by the time I met mom and fell in love with her, in my heart nothing but friendship had remained for Mimi. It did not interfere in any way with my love for mom. I am not sure I am her first love either. It matters so little!"

"Daddy," asked Melanie, "what about your tumor?"

"You know," answered Stanley, "it had been treated with radiation. There are reasonable chances it will not bother me anymore. I have to survive five years so that we may better know where I stand."

She went to hug him again. "I love you," she said simply and earnestly.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Melanie replaces Robert in the debate

Melanie knew she had to manage her pain. Her discussion with her dad did help. Reading *Labor's untold Story* helped too. She had a compassionate nature and, realizing that so many had suffered so much more, somewhat diverted her pain, from herself to those many others. She also found out that reading whatever absorbing book could for a while calm her down. She finally realized she had to keep herself active and busy.

It was not an easy thing to do. However, it was always the first twenty minutes in an activity that were particularly hard. It took that much for her to shift gears from her pains to the involvement in her activity. With time, she more and more learned how to do it better and faster.

The most difficult part was to become insensitive to Robert's voice. She found out that the key was to concentrate on the meaning of the words he was uttering. This also was far from easy, and she was not always successful. However, with time, she came to terms with her pain. She acknowledged it was there, it would remain there for a long time but she now could live with it.

She was keeping score of her progress in her diary. She noted how more and more she could see Robert without being too much disturbed. She recorded with satisfaction that she had once a good discussion with him and enjoyed it, though it was not pure enjoyment.

Three months after she realized she loved Robert, and he would not be hers, she had done enough progress in managing her pain. She carried it as a heavy burden to which her body and soul adapted themselves. It was now part of ordinary life.

She now neither tried to avoid Robert nor did she particularly look for his company. She had created in her mind a number of Roberts. There was the Robert who was going with her in the same school. That Robert was a brilliant student who should be listened to, and from whom one could learn. There was the Robert who loved Lisa and who could be seen holding her hands and kissing her. This was a blind Robert unlucky enough not to understand he deserved better. And there was the Robert she loved, who would one day love her. That Robert, she knew, did not exist except in her mind. But she kept him there because from this figment of her imagination she was deriving the strength to lead a normal life without him.

The social studies teacher had organized a debate about "Fighting the deficit". It soon became apparent that the students had quite definite opinions on the subject. The class was polarized between two opposite views. A small group, Melanie and Robert among them, believed in the need to increase taxes on corporations and on the well-to-do. This, they believed, would be the fairest and most efficient way to fight the deficit. They were considered to be *on the left*. The majority of the students, to whom Lisa belonged, believed that taxes should be reduced. The deficit would be eliminated by leaner government. They thought there was too much waste in the operation of the government's services. They were considered to be *on the right*.

The two groups met separately to choose their representatives and to discuss the strategy they would follow during the debate. Robert was the obvious choice for the left. On the right it was

difficult to predict who would be chosen. Robert was known to be so capable, rational and incisive, that there was no strong desire from any member of the right group to be his opponent. So, when Lisa volunteered, she was immediately accepted. The name of the two debaters was announced and people were amused at the thought that Lisa and Robert, who were *together*, would face each other in the debate.

It was not to be. A few days before the debate, Robert approached Melanie. He stood in front of her, clumsily holding his cap with his hands while turning it with his fingers. Melanie prodded him with:

"You seem to have something to tell me."

"Yes," he replied, "but this is not a convenient place. Would you meet me at *Victoria* coffee house just after school? Or should we go there together"

Melanie was surprised. She was certain it did not represent a change of attitude of Robert towards her. She thought he may want to discuss with her some fine points concerning the debate. They were the two best elements in their group and it was natural they would exchange opinions.

"Yes Robert" she replied, of course with a smile. "We will go there together directly from school".

She phoned to inform her parents she would come an hour late. Her father picked up the phone and did not ask with whom and where she will be. He just said: "Have a good time Melanie."

She felt better for having heard his voice. It was not only that of a father who loves his daughter unconditionally. It was also that of a reliable friend.

Robert and Melanie walked side by side without holding hands. He did not try to take her arm when crossing the street. The coffeehouse was near by.

They were lucky. They found an isolated corner where they could speak without being troubled with the noise. Robert did not lose his time and directly told Melanie what he wanted from her.

"Melanie!, I do not want to debate with Lisa. You know we are in love and I find it awkward to have her as an opponent in a debate." He seemed to hesitate for a while then resumed his talk. "I wonder if you would be willing to replace me as the representative of the left group." Then, noticing how quite Melanie had remained, he added: "You will have no difficulty debating with Lisa. I wish you to succeed and to give credibility to our opinions. I know you can do it."

Melanie raised her head to look into Robert's eyes. She could do it for a very short moment. Robert had lowered his eyelids. There seemed to be something else on his mind.

Melanie's heart was beating at a wild rate, but she remained able to think clearly. She took her time before answering:

"Robert, we all think the debate is important. Our group would like to have its best chances to win. We chose you because you are the best of us in terms of knowing the subject and ability to present arguments and reply to those of the opponents. That should be our only consideration. I am sorry, Robert, but I feel it would not be right for me to accept your suggestion. Possibly it is not right for you to ask me to replace you."

Robert was cornered. He wanted to be considered a person of principles, always doing what is right. That was what Melanie liked best in him. To shake her in her stand he would have to tell her more.

"Melanie," he started again "you are right in principle, and wrong in fact. It is precisely because I want our group to win the debate that I am asking you to replace me."

"I don't buy it," said Melanie, "you know quite well you are better than me, and it is with you as our representative debater that we have the best chances to win."

"Please Melanie," replied Robert "listen to me carefully and do not interrupt me till I finish." Melanie acquiesced with a nod.

"First of all," resumed Robert, "I am not certain that you are less able than me to lead the debate. But that is not really the matter. The problem is that I will have to debate with Lisa. Though I love her very much, and will remain to do so, I have noticed she is somewhat immature. She does not take defeat easily. I know she will feel very bad if I make a better impression on the audience than she does. She will take it against me. I know it for sure. Still this is no reason for me to hesitate going to the debate and doing my very best. But I am afraid. I am scared I might not be my own self. I am afraid my mind may wonder away from the best arguments, and I do not want to take that risk. Moreover you are yourself so knowledgeable that, all things considered, it is still better it be you, rather than I, who should be our group's representative in the debate."

"Poor Robert!" thought Melanie. She felt hurt for what she suspected he was going through. He had realized Lisa was immature. He might have realized that she would not mind flirting with other guys while being *his* girl. Still he knew he could not but love her. His love was so strong that the fear of losing her would paralyze his mind during the debate. Melanie did not realize she had moved her hand and put it over Robert's hand and patted it for a few seconds before withdrawing it. She then told him:

"Robert, I cannot have an opinion as to your fear of not being up to par in the debate, when facing a Lisa who could later be reproachful for a long time. I agree to replace you in the debate, not so much because it will give us a better winning chance, but because I do not want you to be pulled between your love to Lisa and your loyalty to our group. So, it is a deal. I will replace you."

The relief on Robert's face was instantaneous. Still he felt no great joy. He told Melanie:

"I feel embarrassed at discovering, and uncovering to you, how weak I can be when facing the fear of losing Lisa. I would also like to assure you that Lisa is not a bad person. She just is somewhat immature, and it is a matter of time and she will be able to take defeat in a sportive spirit. Please, try to like her." He hesitated somewhat and then implored: "Please do not be harsher than needed on her during the debate."

Melanie smiled, but Robert did not know the code for her smiles. He could not know how much love, respect and empathy there was in that smile. Her father would have understood without difficulty. She told Robert:

"I bear no grudge against Lisa. I wish her well. I intend to defeat her opinions and not inflict on her a personal defeat. While disagreeing with her arguments, I will show respect for them. I hope you can trust me in that"

Melanie had made a mistake. To bear no grudge means to forgive. What did Melanie have to forgive Lisa? Will not Robert understand now that Melanie was in love with him? She wanted to look at Robert's face to find the effect her words had made. She should not have worried. He was too busy with his own worries to be able to analyze each word Melanie would utter. At that moment, Melanie's acquiesal was the only thing that mattered to him.

"Thank you so much, Melanie. I will try to make it up to you some day".

"You are welcome" answered Melanie. Both were embarrassed.

"How will you announce the change of left representative. I mean, what reason will you give?", asked Melanie. Robert answered: "I will just say the truth without details. Personal matters are interfering with my ability to be a good debater. Let anyone understand whatever he wants"

He suddenly added: "Can I walk you home?" "No," answered Melanie, "it is not necessary. See you tomorrow at school"

Part 2, Chapter 5 Preparations to the Debate

"I will need your help to prepare myself for the debate." said Melanie to Robert. She immediately added: "One or two meetings would do." Robert agreed.

They both behaved *professionally* during the meetings. Melanie exposed her ideas as to the kind of arguments she would present, the order in which they would come and the importance she would give to each one. Robert discussed her strategy thoroughly. And though he was critical, he was perceived as friendly and helpful.

One particular discussion clarified the main line Melanie would follow during the debate. She explained to Robert:

"I am motivated by a sense of justice. The people at society's lowest economic levels are those who need the greatest help. The people on the higher levels have to be taxed in a proportion increasing with their income, and at a rate ensuring the possibility of budgeting for the care of those in greatest need."

Robert had his doubts. He replied:

"We are not considering what are our personal motivations. If we were, I would not differ with you. We must focus on winning the debate. We must therefore defend the correctness of the policies we propose *not because they are just*, but because in the long range, they are better for the whole of society". Our understanding of justice is too controversial. We do not want to help the Right to make of it the main issue. It would be for us a useless diversion .

"I agree with you" replied Melanie. Our aim in the debate is indeed to convince the audience that our policies are best. Yes, we must therefore take into consideration the way our audience think and react. For them the unemployed are often lazy bums who do not like to work and prefer to draw benefits from social services. To reduce these services will force these bums to work. I know also how much they are attracted to the prospect of paying less taxes. However, I do not want to totally give up on their feelings and their Christian values. I think we must find a way to present our solution as being at the same time for their best interests and quite in line with their moral values."

"How do you intend to do that" asked Robert? Melanie replied in a somewhat excited voice as if she already was speaking to her audience:

"I will tell them that not so long ago the workers were commonly on their job for fourteen hours a day. When they organized themselves and asked for an eight hour workday, most of the economist and politicians of the day said and wrote that the economy could not afford such extravagances. However, the workers fought hard and won their eight hours workday. And what is relevant to our debate is that the spreading of the eight hours workday was followed by a boom in the economy. The shortening of the workday was a blessing in disguise for the bosses. The fact is that the employees and the workers constitute an important fraction of the pool of

consumers. The more they are well-off, the more they can and will buy. I will then describe how much the population's health improved and how much education could spread and how much the worker's standard of living did rise." She was being inspired by *The Workers' Untold Story* she had recently read.

She stopped, waiting for Robert's comment. He remained pensive. Melanie resumed: "I could add that to help the disadvantaged workers, a measure called for by our moral values, benefited the whole economy."

Robert took his time but finally commented: "I am afraid you are confusing the issues. Either you can show that the measures we propose will benefit the whole economy – and in this case you do not need mentioning the moral values – or you cannot prove it, and then mentioning the moral values will be of no help." Melanie was about to speak but Robert made a sign with his hands indicating he had not yet finished talking. He went on: "It seems to be that your belief in the virtue of mentioning moral values is rather hypocritical since its effect can only be felt if it can be shown that the economic benefits are greater than the costs."

Melanie disagreed: "I may not have made myself clear. I do know that the eight hour workday was not won by the workers fighting in isolation. They were helped by a public opinion which sided with them when their horrible working conditions became better known and offended the moral values of a good section of the population other than the workers!" She added: "I agree we should not speak of social justice in the abstract. We must be factual and demonstrate how inhumane would be the results of additional cuts in social services. And only then we should speak of the fact that cuts, while producing savings in the short-range would be much more costly in the long-range. We must also demonstrate that society can afford the social assistance given to people in need."

This last sentence from Melanie inspired Robert. He entered in the spirit:

"You could say", he started, "that you do not advocate spending on social welfare more than what society can readily afford. The problem is to determine what society can indeed afford. Unless seen in an historic perspective, the debate on this subject could be sterile. The main consideration is that progress in technology could be reflected in higher production and higher gross national product. Therefore, what society can afford in the field of social welfare goes on increasing with the progress of technology. There is therefore no doubt that we should be able to afford today much more than twenty years ago. Any cuts which would result in a level of social welfare inferior to what was at that time is totally unjustified. One could justly argue that the level should be tied with the gross national product per habitant."

Their last meeting was on the eve of the debate. They parted with a hug. Robert was visibly grateful to Melanie for getting him off the hook while Melanie appreciated the valuable help she received from him. No greater meaning was given to the hug by Melanie. Still, she had to work on herself not to slip into a depressed mood.

Part 2, Chapter 6

Lisa dumps Robert

The debate was lively. It consisted in three parts. Two minutes for an introduction, fifteen minutes to expose the theme, three minutes for a conclusion. Finally, for twenty minutes per candidate, they were to answer questions from a panel.

A group of observers had to fill an evaluation form. The mark given to a candidate was supposed to reflect how well he/she defended his/her theme regardless of the evaluator's own opinion about the theme. The debate was public and any student could attend.

Both introductions were clear and to the point. The debaters followed a different style in exposing their themes. Melanie was to talk first. She gave evidence as to the fact that while the productive capacity of society had increased as a result of technological progress, the gap between poor and rich had increased. The benefits of progress did not trickle down but benefited mostly the better off sections of the population. She then presented statistics to support the contention that society could afford to better take care of the needy in terms of salaries, education, Medicare and social welfare. She then gave precise details on miseries suffered by poor families. She said that a society richer than ever cannot care for the needy less than in the past. The cases she presented made it clear that the suffering people were not lazy bums. Finally, she used historic precedents to indicate that a better income distribution and better social care, would result in long-range economic benefits for the whole of society.

The audience, panel members, observers and public, were expected to remain quiet and give no indication about how they felt. Melanie went back to her seat not knowing how well she delivered her arguments. She looked at the public and gave a glance at Robert. He seemed pleased.

Lisa wondered how can we expect the business people to create new jobs without a retrieve from the taxes they were paying. She gave a number of examples of abuses in the social services. She gave instances of the possibility to make government leaner without too much reducing services. She then said that social liberalism had had its days and failed. It is time to recognize it and not allow its comeback through the backdoor.

Both Melanie's and Lisa's delivery had been smooth. While Melanie's tone alternated from passionate when mentioning specific cases of sufferings to enthusiastic when predicting a generalized well-being resulting from the application of the policies she defended, Lisa indulged in an ironic tone when speaking of social liberalism.

The time for conclusions was too short. Lisa and Melanie managed to counter some arguments of each other. Melanie for instance mentioned that tax evasion and fraud is harming society quite more than fraud in social welfare.

Lisa and Melanie made a good show in answering the questions. Finally there was to be a break after which the observers would announce their result.

Melanie directed her steps to meet Robert. But he was trying to reach Lisa. He put a hand around her shoulders. Lisa turned around and took his hand away, not so gently. Robert did not know what to make of it. He retreated and joined Melanie.

"You have done a very good job." he told her. He then added: "Lisa seems to be angry with me"

"Lisa has no grounds for complain," she answered, "she knew your opinions are different from hers and you could not possibly have helped her"

"You do not know Lisa," replied Robert, "she expects from me to stand by her side no matter what. I am afraid she takes everything personally. If, as seems quite possible, she gets lower marks than you, she will hold it against me."

"Robert," asked Melanie, "do you think you have anything to reproach yourself?"

It took time for Robert till he said: "I wish I had done something wrong. I could then make it up to her. As things stand, I may well lose her." He was so sad that Melanie very sincerely told him she hoped that, in the end, all will be well between them.

One of the observers asked for silence and then announced the results. Melanie had done better than Lisa. All eyes turned towards Melanie while Lisa herself advanced towards her with an extended hand. They shook hands. Lisa then congratulated Melanie, for having done so well and for having succeeded in getting the best possible help and advice. She then said: "I have been betrayed by someone I considered my friend." Then turning towards Robert she told him: "You and Melanie make a good team. You can keep her for life."

Robert seemed paralyzed. He could not, as he wished, run after Lisa. Besides, he knew it would be useless. He remained motionless not knowing what to do. Melanie was doubly hurt. She shared Robert's pain and humiliation. She was also hurt by the suggestion that Robert "could keep her for life." It was in such contrast with reality!

Part 2, Chapter 7

Life goes on

The schoolyear ended a week after the debate. For Robert, Melanie and Lisa, it was the end of their secondary studies. They all attended the graduation. The hurt was visible on Robert's face. Lisa had a coterie of young men around her. She seemed happy and vivacious. Robert was observing her, most of the time.

Just before the debate, Melanie had come to term with Lisa being Robert's girlfriend. She had regained her calm and was managing her hurt. Her pains kept diminishing with time. After the debate she felt very ambiguous about her situation. She empathized with Robert's pains but, otherwise, was happy he was separated from Lisa. Now he would be able to have a better girlfriend.

Naturally enough, she started again to feel the same hurt she had felt many months ago when she got a glance at Lisa and Robert exchanging kisses. She was scared that Robert's indifference towards her would be harder to bear now that he had become unattached. Still her heart was aching for Robert's pain.

She went to talk with Robert. She wanted to express her sympathy for his hurt. He was icy. Melanie could not understand his attitude. After all, they had been good friends even before Lisa became his girlfriend, and they had remained somewhat good friends after that. She had willingly accepted to help him by replacing him in leading the debate from the left group's point of view. He seemed to bear a grudge against her.

"Are you angry at me?" asked Melanie.

"No!" answered Robert. "I just feel the need to be left alone."

Melanie did not insist. It was a rude answer. But Melanie forgave him. She knew what it felt to love without hope. She went in a corner and wrote on a piece of paper:

Dear Robert,

I wish pain and hurt could be divided, and I could take away from you the share which is rightfully mine as a true friend.

Love,
Melanie.

She again went to Robert, gave him the folded piece of paper and went away.

Melanie registered in the nursing school of Edmonton. At first, she doubted whether it was wise for her to follow that carrier. She was a caring person always willing and ready to help. That trait of character is needed for a nurse. But she also partook in the suffering of others, and a nurse has

to witness a lot of sufferings without weakening. She has to find the strength to be supportive while patients would go through torturing pains.

She said to her dad that what she was going through with her unfulfilled love, would give her the strength to be helpful with the patients. She was right. She never flinched whatever the miseries her patients had to face. She always concentrated on what would give relief to the patients. She learned to bypass her own feelings while doing her work as a nurse.

She graduated from the nursing school and started working at the Misericordia hospital. She rented a flat in West Edmonton close to her place of work.

A few years before graduating from school, Robert had decided he would become a teacher. He followed up on his plans, entered the faculty of education at the University of Alberta and, after graduation, became a teacher at Jasper High School.

He had almost no social life except for visits with his friend Alfred and his second wife, Lynda. Robert knew little about Alfred's first marriage with Nelly. Alfred did not volunteer information, and Robert never prodded him to speak on that subject.

The couple were the only people with whom Robert felt comfortable. Still, he was not seeing them too often.

Part 3, Chapter 1

Five years later

The bell rang. Robert was absorbed in the preparation of the lessons he would teach next day. He did not respond immediately. After the second ring he hurried to the door.

"Come in," he said to his good friend Alfred, "let me hug you. It is a long time since your last visit."

"You cannot complain," answered Alfred, "at least I do visit you from time to time. You never reciprocate." Robert could not deny it. He preferred not to comment.

Alfred was led to the living room. He took a look at the furniture, the walls and the floor. Nothing much had changed since his last visit almost a year ago. He noticed there were no flowers, no bibelots nothing denoting a feminine touch or presence. On the chimney's mantle a photo of Lisa stayed there alone in the middle. There was no other picture of girls except for those in a group photo of the graduating class. Then he saw a picture of Melanie in a window's corner. He recognized her from the school group photo Robert had shown him and had pointed there to Melanie. The photo was small and he was not sure whether it was there at his previous visit a year ago. He wanted to ask him about the photo but preferred to delay his comment.

Robert went to the kitchen to prepare tea. Alfred followed him and went on:

"From what I hear you are living like an hermit, without friends and, more to the point, without girlfriends. It seems it has been like that since you broke with Lisa five years ago."

Robert laughed as if he just heard a joke. Alfred was startled and complained: "It is not funny. Here I am, caring for you, mentioning you live like an hermit, and you think it is a laughing matter!"

"No!" replied Robert. "I just noticed you spoke of girlfriends in the plural. I cannot conceive life with more than one girlfriend"

"You are acting silly" said Alfred. "Within five years and with a single girlfriend at a time, you could have had a few girlfriends"

"You may be right" admitted Robert, "but it sounded wrong, and funny to me." It was clear he had something more to say but he took his time busy as he was preparing tea. Still, he stopped in the middle of pouring the hot water and said: "Besides, I did not break with Lisa. She dumped me"

Alfred noticed that Robert, who had remained quite for a minute, apparently was turning and returning in his mind the painful incident.

Alfred was the only person who would pronounce the name Lisa in front of Robert. A relation of trust and friendship had long developed between them. In spite of the age difference, they grew

enough fond of each other and enough secure in each other that Robert could confide to Alfred his sorrows concerning the failed relation with Lisa. Albert had often expressed his concern about Robert's obsession with her which, Alfred was saying, should have faded after she dropped him.

"I heard," said Alfred, "there will be a five-year-after reunion of your school. I hope you will attend."

When Robert received an invitation for the after-five-years school reunion he thought at first he would not go. He was in this state of mind when Alfred had knocked at his door.

"I have not yet made up my mind." said Robert. "Besides," he added, "I risk there to meet Lisa."

"A time should come" replied Alfred "when you will stop being obsessed. Forget Lisa! She is not to rule your life for ever. She may not come, but then she may. It might be a good exercise for you to be there and work at ignoring her."

Robert remained silent obviously absorbed by his thoughts. Alfred asked: "What has been Lisa doing in the last five years?"

Robert hesitated. He seemed in pain. Still, Alfred had always been a loyal friend and he knew the question was not meant to hurt him.

"She married" replied Robert, "gave birth to a son and then divorced."

"Is that all" prompted Alfred?.

After some more hesitation Robert confessed: "I had sent her a letter. I told her I still loved her and hoped she will remember she once loved me too. She phoned and told me she never loved me. She just had some fun with me for a short time. She wished I would not write again."

Alfred remained speechless for a while. Robert resumed his previous line of thought:

"Indeed you are right. It should not matter whether I will meet Lisa or not. I have indeed come to terms with not having her. Still, it seems to me that I will for ever remain loving her."

"I do not think so" said Alfred in a slower and lower tone, He then went to Robert and put his hand on his shoulder before resuming his talk. "The problem with you is that you have been hurt too much. To be told publicly to go to hell is already very hard. You had grounds to believe there was a commitment between the two of you. And to be told it was not true, it never was true, is still harder."

Alfred pursued: "What you need is to be able yourself to dump Lisa. In order to do so you must first get her, and you can't. Only thus could you lessen your hurt. You might not be aware of what goes on in your subconscious mind. Personally I am certain that if the two of you were ever to come together again, the relation would not last, and it will be you who would put an end to it.

You would do that not in an unconscious act of revenge. But, having lost your obsession, you will discover you do not love her in reality.

Robert dismissed Alfred's opinion with an ironic smile. "I am amazed to see", he replied "that my subconscious, to which I myself have no access, is for you an open book."

Alfred smiled too and then said: "You would be amazed how much a person can be ignorant of his own self, while being able to see into the soul of others. It has to do with the duality of objectivity versus subjectivity. Subjectivity concerns your own self, and is misleading"

He added: "I must say that, since those days, you have become a different person, no longer jovial, never in company of women or girls."

"It is not easy to forget a girl like Lisa." said Robert."

"You are idealizing her," said Alfred, "were she that good, she would not have dumped you publicly. It was not a decent behavior."

"She thought," said Robert again, "I had not been loyal to her. She rightly was certain I had contributed to her defeat in the debate. She took it personally. Had it been someone else than me, it would not have mattered to her so much. She did not expect it from me."

"You must still blindly be in love with her," observed Albert, "otherwise, you would have seen what everyone is seeing in Lisa: a capricious girl who could not withstand a scar to her vanity."

"Yes," admitted Robert, "I still love her. I know her better than you do. She is indeed a nice person."

"I beg to differ," said Alfred, "and it is time to move forward. Life is short and you cannot afford to stop living it as you should. There is somewhere a girl you could make happy and whom you could love much more than you ever loved Lisa."

Robert retorted: "Just now, I do not feel the need to *live* as you call it."

Alfred starred at Robert as if he could not believe what he was hearing.

"You know what?" said Alfred provocatively, "I think I am wrong. You no longer love Lisa. You are just scared to again fall in love and again be hurt."

"That is nonsense, protested Robert, "I am satisfied with the life I lead. I try to be a good teacher. It seems to me I am indeed good at it, and the students do love me. It is a very demanding job and I put in it all my energy. I do not have time just now for anything else. I barely have time to help the students. And when I say helping them, I do not mean just with their studies. I have gained their trust and they confide in me. They expect me to advise them. I am taking night courses in psychology to make sure I am on the good track with respect to them.

"I want the students to feel friendly towards me, and this takes time and efforts. I do not want to lecture them when I give them advises. What I know better than them, I must bring it down to their ability to grasp and their will to follow."

"Tell me," said Alfred changing the subject, "has no woman teacher tried to flirt with you?"

"Yes," replied Robert, "it occurred a number of times. I discouraged them by pretending I have no ability to get a hint."

The conversation seemed to have come to an end. They were both silently sipping drinking their tea. After a while Alfred asked in a casual tone:

"Have you heard of Melanie?" Alfred had never met Melanie. He had been impressed by what he learned about her from Robert.

"Nothing recently," replied Robert, "I know she has finished her studies as a nurse. She works at one of the city hospitals. She regularly sends me greeting cards at Christmas time and at my birthday."

"Do you reply?" asked Alfred

"Yes," said Robert, "I am afraid my replies are no more than correct. Sometimes I feel that, were it not for Melanie, Lisa would have remained with me."

Alfred remarked: "You should not reproach Melanie for having done her best at the debate."

"No," said Robert, "It is not that. Lisa sensed there was a kind of closeness between Melanie and me. She could not understand that I could respect and like a girl just for her decency and her opinions. I am afraid she was jealous of Melanie. I still remember how strongly she reacted the few times in which I said that Melanie was quite a nice person."

"Yes" interjected Alfred, "she is a nice and attractive woman. From what I hear, she never had a boyfriend. She also lives as an hermit. May be she too, mourns an unfulfilled love."

Having drunk his tea he left the table and slowly paced the floor. He then turned abruptly towards Robert and told him: "that is the girl you should have tried to get. She is smart, beautiful and has a golden heart".

"I would like to change the subject", said Robert, "we have spoken too much about me. We should talk more about you."

"There is nothing much to say about me", protested Robert".

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Robert. "And what about your years in jail? You never told me how they went"

"But that was so long ago", protested Alfred, "we are now speaking of today's problems"

"I had my fill of today's problem", commented Robert, "for a change let us speak of your years-ago problems. Besides, I had always wanted to ask you about that."

"There is nothing much to tell", said Alfred who then went on. "I have been caught with what they call incriminating documents". I was judged by a military court, condemned to ten years, remained in Jail for that period and finally came out."

"You will not get rid of me that easily", said Robert, "ten years is a long period. You must have passed through a lot. There must have been special moments. I am certain you have interesting stories to say."

Part 3, Chapter 2

Stories from Jail

Alfred smiled. He then sat on a chair with the back of the chair in front of him. He put his elbows on the back of the chair and supported his head with his hands. He remained in this position for a while. He was apparently absorbed in reviving memories. Robert respected his silence for a time and then asked:

"When do you intend to come back to Earth?"

Alfred smiled again and then said:

"I have indeed a lot to tell. So much so, that I might write a book on my memories from jail. Yes, a lot happened but what I will do now is to tell you a number of events of an anecdotal character. I will not tell them in chronological order but as they come to my mind."

"I am all ears" said Robert encouraging him.

"The day of my arrest will remain incrustated in my memory. I knew I would be condemned to jail for a number of years. I knew I will be cut for a long time from all my beloved ones.

"Still, it did not bother me. I was prepared to be jailed. It was part of the 'package' of being idealist and dedicated to the cause of independence of Egypt and to social justice for its people. I knew it had to come sooner and later.

I cannot say I was surprised, and indeed I was not. It was clear I had been betrayed. I was at an appointed meeting at a coffehouse. Two comrades were to meet me. One came, the second did not. Instead, the police came. The one who came saw the police coming. He escaped from a back door. He could run very fast. I was held in the coffe house while soldiers were searching everywhere in the blocks around for my companion. They did not find him.

"I was then transferred to the closest police station and was there tortured for five hours. The nature of the torture is not important. What matters is that nothing in my life had prepared me to face such an experience. I felt an irresistible urge to give the police people all the information they were expecting from me, be it names of comrades and addresses, places of meetings and the like. I new that, were I to submit to that urge, I would remain ashamed of myself for the rest of my life. I needed a way to boost my ability to ressit the torture, and I found it. I told myself that, maybe, the torture would end in one minute. I just had to have the courage and the will ro resist a single minute, and I would save my life from feeling miserable till my death. A minute passed. I then told myself that, maybe, it would be a minute starting from now. And so, I renewed each minuts, for one single minute more, my will to ressit torture. I had to renew that will for over three hundred time, but it did work. The police got nothing out of me.

Later, I was taken to the office of the chief of the police. There, I could see on a coal fire, instruments of torture heated to almost a white-red colour. The police officer who lead me in, told the chief that I was unwilling to talk. The chief answered, telling his subordinate he did not

know what to do. He then took in his hand one of the tools from the coal fire, and asked me to take off my jacket. Had I hesitated, had I supplicated him not to hurt me, and he would have known that I would speak under the harsher form of torture. However, with great simplicity, I took off my jacket and my shirt. I behaved as if my worry were to prevent the shirt from being burned. The chief, in a rage threw the torturing tool back in the fire and ordered me to put back my shirt and my jacket.

I have thus resisted the torture. The question that haunts me, is that I cannot know if I would have resisted it, had the torture lasted longer, or had they resorted to more sophisticated means of torture. No one can know in advance the limit of his resistance to torture."

Alfred stopped for a while, and then resumed talking:

"We were a few hundred political prisoners", started Alfred. "We had maintained connections with our organization. In fact, the communications were so good that we could participate in some of our committees' activities. The authorities became aware that we were maintaining contacts. They searched us many times a day, searched the cells, and still could not discover how we were maintaining contact with the outside world. They even changed the guards just in case some of them were helping us. Still, they had proofs that, whatever they were doing, they were not preventing us from remaining in contact with our organization.

"Finally, they decided to move us from jail to a place far away from cities. Till they would build there a prison, we would remain in tents. The guards would be in tents too. In fact the guards felt as much in jail as we, the prisoners did feel. Like us they were in tents, like us they could not see their relatives or their friends, like us they could not have the pleasure of roaming in a city or going to a movie. The officers were particularly affected by being so isolated from their normal life.

"One of them had a radio which operated both on batteries and on the main power. There was a generator providing electricity. This was necessary to power the numerous lamps, and light up the whole tent area so that it could be observed by the guards who made sure nobody was getting away through the barbed wires.

One day the guards asked if one of us, prisoners, knew how to repair a radio. I said I could. I was brought before one of the officers who told me that his radio stopped to work. He asked me how long it would take me to repair it. I said I must examine the radio before giving him an answer.

"Go ahead", he said, "proceed with the examination."

"I am sorry", I told him, but I have to take the radio in my tent and examine it while I feel relaxed, and I can feel relaxed only in my tent away from the surveillance of the guards or of yourself."

"The officer had no choice. He had to accept my terms which, eventually allowed me to keep his radio for three days, during which my friends and me could hear the news from all over the

world. You should know that, in order to isolate us from any possible political activity, we were forbidden to receive newspapers.

"I had no difficulty repairing the radio. It was a seven tubes radio. That was before the time when transistors replaced the tubes. Some of the tubes were essential to the operation of the radio. Some were not essential and were there just to improve the stability of the reception and the quality of the sound. The officer was exceedingly happy when he got back his radio, not noticing that it now had only five tubes, many less resistors and capacitors. With the two tubes I kept, and the other spare parts, I built a small radio. I can tell you how I also built a small headphone. What matters is that we were now able to receive the daily news.

"One day, after I gave back the radio in working condition, a guard came to me and asked me to repair his watch. I told him I was sorry but I had no experience in watch repair. He told me that whoever can repair a radio, can certainly repair something so much simpler such as a watch. I insisted that my knowledge of radio repair was of no help when it came to repair watches.

"He would not believe me. He finally complained: "When it comes to an officer you are prepared to help, but you do not want to help a simple guard".

"I did not want to leave him under this impression. I took his watch, had a look at it and found that one of the hands was preventing the other from moving. That was a very easy case. I just opened the watch and manipulated one of the handles till no one of them was in the way of the other. The guard was overjoyed. However. An hour later a dozen of guards were queuing at my tent, each one asking me to repair his watch. They had a proof that I was indeed a watch repair man. And this I had to become indeed. How I could create the tools for repairing the watches is a whole additional story."

"It is amazing" commented Robert, "the talents one can discover in one's self when forced to do so". And as Alfred was not answering, Robert went on: "I suppose you had also bad moments"

"Yes", answered Robert, there were bad moments. Often these bad moments had also an inspirational value. Here is the story of Samir. It was some years before we were transferred to tents.

"The jail administration had been admonished by superior authorities for its failure at preventing contacts between the political prisoners and their outside organization.

"The officer heading the jail, wanted to have his revenge. So, he ordered that all the political prisoners be beaten. We were eight prisoners in each small cell. Inside the cell the natural light was coming through a large opening, high up in the wall, protected by solid bars. Outside the cell, in the jail corridors, the light was very dim. The officers ordered to open the doors of the cells, one at a time. Coming out we were like blind.

"We needed time for our eyes to adapt to the dim light. Once out, soldiers would beat us, mostly with their bare hands, hitting us on the face and the body.

"The first slap on my face, threw my glasses away on the floor. Were I to lose these glasses, I would remain in jail handicapped in my vision for long more years.

"Samir was a prisoner 18 years old, and was in the same cell as I. He tried to find out my glasses. It was not simple because the glasses had separated from the frame, and because the soldiers would not let him search for my glasses. He therefore went aggressively towards the guards and started to beat them.

"The guards retreated, and this gave him the possibility to retrieve one of the glasses. But the guards were coming back. So, once more he went to beat them and got the opportunity to find the second glass. He had to do the same for a third time to retrieve the frame. Finally, having retrieved everything, he gave to me frame and glasses and stopped to oppose any resistance.

"We were allowed to come back to our cell. We were now there only 7 prisoners. Samir was missing. We waited in silence till the door opened and Samir, held by two guards, was laid on the ground. He could hardly move. All his body was covered with marks of blows and wounds. He had difficulty to speak, but it was clear he had something to say. I leaned on him so that he did not had to talk loud."

"Alfred", he said, "are your glasses usable, is the frame in good shape?" I assured him all was ok with the glasses. I was not wearing them because I had to place back the glasses in the frame, and this would take some doing. When Samir heard that my glasses were safe, he smiled, and all his face was illuminated with joy. His pains were unbearable. He could not move, he could not turn his body to rest on a side. But he was happy.

"What is worthwhile stressing is that Samir was Muslim, and I was a stranger in his country. Obviously what linked us together was more important than what divided us. It is therefore not so extraordinary that an Arab would help, in an heroic way, a foreign comrade."

Alfred went back to a contemplating attitude. He seemed to be reminiscing, and once more far away from his surroundings.

"It seems to me", said Robert, bringing Alfred back to reality, "that you keep from jail memories helping you to remain optimist as to the human nature".

"Yes" replied Alfred, "and I did not tell you all in this respect." He stopped talking for a few seconds and resumed.

"But the next story IS extraordinary. All the prisoners in a given cell had been transported to the tribunal to hear their sentence. Among them was a foreigner, Simon, who had nothing to do with politics. His only crime was to have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"The tribunal acquitted him. He was returning to jail for the formalities of his liberation. However, during his absence, a search had been conducted in his cell and compromising documents had been found. It could not be asserted that the documents belonged to the

occupants of the cell. They had been well hidden, and may have been in their hidden place for years.

"However, a prosecutor decided that all the occupants of the cell were suspects till the owner of the documents could be found or till the end of the new inquiry. Simon who was coming back, overjoyed with the prospect of his liberation was in a state of shock. So close to get out free, and suddenly once more to be a suspect. He was sitting on the floor, dejected unable to make any movement, emptied of any will.

"Badr who was in the same room, could not withstand Simon's pain. He knocked as strong as he could on the cell's door to attract the attention of a guard and, when the guard came, he asked him to contact the prosecutor to tell him that he was the owner of the compromising documents. It was a lie. But Badr knew that, by doing this, he would become the only suspect, and Simon could be freed. He Badr would have his judicial case worsened. But he was optimist and hoped a change of government would liberate him before term.

"Here, we not only see an Arab helping a foreigner, but helping one to whom he owed no political obligation, no comradeship obligation, only humane obligation."

Alfred stood up and paced the room up and down. He then went back to his seat.

"Thank you" said Robert, "for sharing with me these extraordinary stories." Robert remained quiet for a while than resumed: "You have seen a lot in your life. Do you still carry some emotional scares."

"I think that every one carries with him some emotional wounds," answered Alfred. "I do not think my luggage is heavier than that which others do carry. May be your own emotional luggage is heavier. It is difficult to say. I know I am not obsessed by that part of my past. I would say the wounds I still carry from my marriage with Nelly are greater than those caused by my stay in Jail."

"Do you want to speak about that" asked Robert.

"No!" replied Alfred, "maybe another time."

"You should write down your memories of that period," said Robert, "it would certainly be interesting and educational. You could possibly publish them."

"I am thinking about it," said Alfred, "and I might eventually do that."

Part 3, Chapter 3

A chat about death

Melanie was seldom visiting with her parents. Her work was demanding. In addition Melanie was not content to just do her job. She was always ready to help other nurses and give some of her own time to the patients. She was loved by every one.

She had gently rejected advances from some young physicians. She was not going out on dates even when, occasionally, she would have had the time.

But now her dad was ill, seriously ill. He had been sent to the University Hospital, a different hospital from the one where Melanie was working.

Five years earlier he had been treated with radiation in the hope of eliminating a cancerous prostate tumor. Now, the tumor had come back and had metastasized to other organs. The prospects were not good. He had just been told he still could count on one year to live, provided he takes a given medicine.

Before entering her father's room, Melanie went to see George, his physician. They knew and respected each other. George would not beat around the bush. He said to Melanie what her father's situation was and how close he was to dying.

Melanie asked: "Is this one year the average expectation for patients in my dad's situation, or is it an implacable rule from which there is no escape?"

George took his time. He would have loved to give more hopeful news to Melanie. Still, he did not want to give her false hopes. Melanie knew she could count on George to give her a honest opinion without coating the pill with sugar. George was trying to gather in his mind all possible relevant information and then finding a way to a clear and truthful answer. He was pacing the floor, and Melanie was not hurrying him. He then asked Melanie to sit down and he sat on a chair next to hers.

"Melanie", he said, "not all prostate tumors are the same. Not all patients afflicted with the tumor are the same. Moreover we, physicians, do not know everything."

He stopped for a short while and then resumed: "Out of a thousand patients in the same case as your dad, the great majority will not live more than a year. A few may live two years and even three. One may live four years."

Melanie remained silent but as George seemed to try to stand up, she very timidly asked him: "Is there no case of cure?"

George did not need time to answer. He immediately replied: "I wish I could say I knew of such cases. Still, I cannot say it is impossible."

She stood up from her chair and thanked him. She was almost out of his room when he called her back to tell her:

"Melanie, I did tell the truth to your dad. He is a most remarkable man. It is the first time I meet a man who, when told he will soon die, worries for the difficult time the physician is having when he has to convey such news to a patient."

"That is my dad indeed" she said while a tear was rolling down her cheek.

She went to the bathroom to look at herself in a mirror and make sure she could present to her father a smiling face.

She slowly approached her father's bed and sat on a chair from which she could hold his hands. He smiled with so much grace and joy that she hardly could prevent herself from sobbing. She managed to give him a smile.

"Melanie," he said, "your smile has no secrets for me. I see you are hurt, very hurt. I want you to listen to me very attentively. So for the next few moments, forget I am a dying man and concentrate on the meaning of my words."

Melanie was astonished, though it was not the first time her dad had surprised her in this way. She answered: "I will do my best."

"Melanie", he said with a clear voice, "Yesterday, I read an article in the newspaper reporting on a symphony performance." He paused for a moment and Melanie worried whether her dad was not going crazy.

"Daddy, I try as you asked me to concentrate on the meaning of your words, but I fail to grasp their importance."

"That is the point", exclaimed Stanley. "I will die and not everything in me, in my feelings or my memory, is worthy saving from oblivion. The memory I have now of that article will die with me, and nobody will be poorer for that."

Melanie was puzzled but Stanley did not give her time. He went on: "There are literally millions of memories the disappearance of which does not bother me. So, I asked myself what is it in me that I consider worthy preserving? What is it in me which I wish it should not die. I have written an essay on that subject. I will give it to you before you go. Now I will just summarize an essential point. What I like in me most is my honesty, my decency, my caring for truth and for social justice. And then it became clear to me that this cannot die. There are a lot of people who are decent and care for truth and social justice. I can identify myself with them. And if what I like best in me goes on motivating other persons like me, then I feel that I live in them. I am them, and they are me. Specially if they are much younger, they carry with them my eternity."

Melanie started to cry while saying: "Dad, no abstract idea living in others can replace you. It is you whom I love, you whom I need. I promise to be brave while still hoping you will live much longer. I cannot look for you in others!"

"Melanie", replied Stanley, "with time and reflection you might discover how much I am right. Besides, I have to die sooner or later. Yourself and your memory of me will die one day, The only thing which will remain of me is what is best in me, and exists in others. You must learn to love me through seeing me in others. Love is the way to eternity."

He then wiped a tear from the corner of his eye. He noticed that Melanie seemed astonished and embarrassed. He told her:

"Melanie, it is not what you think. I just got the news that my cousin Gemma from Australia died from a cancerous brain tumor. I loved her dearly. She was thirteen years younger than me, and quite an exceptional person."

"I am sorry she died at a young age," said Melanie, "I remember how she looked in pictures you had shown me. She was pretty."

"In those pictures," said Stanley, " she was eleven years old. At that age most girls look pretty. She was dear to me not for being so pretty but for being very special."

He then looked at Melanie and realized she was waiting he would tell more about Gemma. He resumed his talk.

"At the age of eight, Gemma was a very spoiled child. Anytime something would be refused to her, she would enter into a tantrum throwing things, hitting repeatedly the floor with her feet, shouting with as much strength as she could muster.

"In fact she had good reasons to behave like this. It worked and always resulted in matters going her way.

"One day, she came back from school and found her mother Sarine weeping silently. Gemma's father had been mobilised to go to war and might never come back, Gemma stayed speechless for some moments. She then told her mother not to cry because, from that day on, she, Gemma, would take care of her. Since then, she never got a tantrum. She turned into the most loving, helpful and obedient daughter. I had witnessed this instant transformation and remained admiring her all my life.

"Now, she is dead, but I do recognize in you, Melanie, her sweetness, her intelligence, her caring and her wisdom. I recognize it not because you are biologically related. I do recognize her in other young people not related to me."

He stopped, looked so affectionately in Melanie's face and said: "I would like now to speak about you."

Melanie asked defensively: "What is there to speak about me?"

"Tell me", said Stanley, "why you don't date"

"Daddy", replied Melanie, "I could tell you I do not have the time for dating. And there is some truth to that. But it is not the real reason. I kind of hoped, and still do, that Robert would become interested in me. We have so much in common, and he is such a great guy."

"How long", retorted Stanley, "are you willing to wait till he expresses interest in you?"

"I will not wait for ever", said Melanie, "If he will one day have a girlfriend. I will then have to give up. It will then be easier on me."

Stanley was silent and visibly sad. Melanie guessed what he had in his mind, and would not say. She so much would have wanted to please him, specially in his condition.

They were looking into each other's eyes. She thought he had a silent request, the last wish of a dying man. She turned away her face from him and resumed speaking.

"Daddy, I know you would have liked to see me going out with a decent man. Though I do hope the physicians are mistaken and you will live much more than the single year they are giving you, I do wish that within the coming year I would indeed be dating. I did think about that. It seems to me I cannot overcome some blocking feelings without coming again face to face with Robert. Let me see him ignoring me, let me see him taking notice of me but in a way which discourages any hope, and then I will be able to free myself. I know there must be other decent and attractive men. I may be seeing them daily without noticing them. I am decided to try to notice them, but after I meet Robert face to face."

"Does this mean" said Stanley, "you will ask Robert to meet you?"

"No," retorted Melanie, "in three weeks we are celebrating five years after graduation. There will be a party at the school gym. I will be there. It is likely Robert will be there too. I do not entertain great hopes but I need to see an unattached Robert not interested in me to have the strength to renounce any hope."

She added: "Mom will come to visit you in an hour. Please, tell her I feel that in less than a month, I will have the strength to break the ties which keep me from looking at other men."

She raised her head and turned her face towards her dad. Once more Stanley looked into her eyes and said: "It is your life Melanie. You do not owe me to date someone before I die. Yes, I do wish you do it, not for me but for yourself."

Melanie tried to deflect the conversation away from her emotional life.

"Daddy," she said, "I want to believe you will have long years with us. Be it true or not, what do you intend to do during the coming year?"

"I discussed the matter with your mom," replied Stanley, "she suggested that I should try to fulfill my dearest wishes and satisfy my strongest desires. This will do no harm if I ever leave longer than one year."

"And do you now know what are those dearest wishes and strong desires?" Asked Melanie again.

"Yes, replied Stanley, " I intend to make a trip to visit friends and relatives in Europe. I want to tell them in person what the prognostic is. If I do it face to face with them, I will convince them that, since I do not take the matter tragically, there is then no reason why they should do so. And then, when I will be back, maybe I will try to write a book for which I have some ready ideas. Marnie supports me in those projects. She offered to accompany me in my trip. I refused. I told her I want to reduce my expenses to a strict minimum. If I die within a year, I want to leave to mom as much money as I can. You know we are not rich, and the mortgage is not yet fully paid. I can also tell you that some coworkers, sensing I would have liked to make a trip to Europe, have offered to contribute to the expenses. Mom was very touched."

She bent over him, kissed him on the cheek and then asked him: "Daddy, when are you leaving the hospital?"

"In two days I am going back home", he replied. She then bid him good-bye.

"Wait a minute," recalled her Stanley. He then handed her a few handwritten pages.

"What is it?" asked Melanie.

"Thoughts about death," replied Stanley, "I would like you to read it."

She reached her car, took her seat and did not start the engine. She was thinking. She felt torn between various contradictory emotion. The pain for her dad's condition was the overwhelming one. She had to agree that she could not remain for ever waiting for Robert. One day she will give up indeed. One day she will date another man. If so, should it not occur while her dad is still alive?

For the first time she felt determined to make of the after-5-year gathering the *make or break* meeting after which she would take a stand on the issue. She calmed down and turn the motor on. Back home, after a light snack, she started to read her father's manuscript. It was titled *Conquest of Death*.

Part 3, Chapter 4

Conquest of Death

I knew I would come out of the operation room with two extensions to my body: two bottles which would be the equivalent of an ambulatory W.C. I woke up from anesthesia and started feeling my sides with my hands. I had undergone an operation aright, but there was no sign of bottles.

The meaning was clear. The surgeon must have seen no point in proceeding with the operation as first scheduled. Finding out that I was doomed he must have decided to extract no organ and to "close me up" over my tumor.

My guess was correct. When the doctor came for the daily visit, I smiled and reminded him that I wanted him to be frank, even blunt. I then asked how much longer I was expected to live.

"One year", he said.

I looked at him with some uneasiness and replied:

"Poor doctor! Is it not hard on you to have to bring such news to your patients?"

"I thought", said he, "that it was the other way around."

What my thoughts were at the time is not relevant. The important thing is that, for the first time in years, I slept well and went on enjoying life, keeping my sense of humor and ready to make and accept jokes about the fact that I was a dying man.

"When will I start eating", I asked my doctor.

"It is dangerous", he replied, "to eat before a sure sign that your bowels can handle food. You may not eat or drink before you have some gas exhaust."

Three days passed and my nourishment was still intravenous. The doctor noticed my gloomy face.

"What is the problem", he asked

"To fart or not to fart, that is the problem", said I.

The doctor pretended to lose his temper:

"You are told you have one year to live, and all you worry about is to fart *à la Shakespeare!*"

My wife and my daughter were surely concerned. However, they could not but take it easier since I, myself, was in no way behaving like a dying man.

I remember one day, I choose to play a particular cassette and asked my wife for a dance. While dancing she asked the name of the tune.

"It is 'The Merry Widow'", said I. And we both burst into a healthy laughter.

No, it is not as simple as that. Inside me there was an animal who was afraid to die, who was causing a pain in my throat and making it hard for me to swallow. As for me, I was observing the animal, astonished at his existence, and well decided to keep him under leash. While the animal remained anxious, I was blooming, feeling the full strength of my being and determined to use my time in the best way, according to a criterion of my own. More about this later. As time went on, it became clear that this one year, *my dying year*, would be the most enjoyable, the most productive year of my life.

My happiness was communicative and, instead of feeling sad at seeing me, people were happy at being able to be proud of me.

Comparisons were made between me and others in the same condition. Friends and acquaintances said that my attitude was somewhat special, but nobody knew why.

I knew.

What made me special was that, a long time ago, at a time when I was still healthy, when my death seemed so remote, I decided for some reason to think about the meaning of death. In doing so, I reached an understanding of death, and it so happened that it was the kind I could come to terms with. In a sense, I had conquered death.

THE NATURE OF THE FEAR OF DEATH

More than once in the course of my life I have found myself in dangerous situations which could have had a regretful ending. I know that my nature is such that I 'perform' best under such circumstances. Reason, wisdom and memory are then mobilized. A sudden strength and calm descends upon me and, in most cases, I do the very thing that most efficiently would take me safely out of the difficulty.

I remember that once, on a rainy cold day, I picked up what seemed to be a desperate hitchhiker. I asked him where he was going and then suggested I drop him off at a bus station. He insisted I should bring him to his destination.

"I am in a hurry", I said, "and cannot afford to bring you there. The bus station is a heated one. From there you have a direct connection."

"Do you know, said he, "that I have a knife with me?"

"Do you know", I replied very calmly, "that I graduated from a course to handle people like you?"

He looked intensely at me. He must have been impressed with my calm and seriousness.

"I was joking", he said.

"I was not", I retorted.

A few moments later I dropped him at the closest bus station.

This calm and courageous man I seem to be, is struck with panic in much less dangerous circumstances. On a ladder thrown horizontally on the floor, I have no difficulty walking, running, jumping; always hitting the proper step without ever failing. The likelihood that I will miss a step is virtually nil. But raise the horizontal ladder one meter high, and not only do I start to shake, I also lose my hold on reason, wisdom and memory and the only thing left is to fall shamefully on the floor. My ability to move like a virtuoso, easily, elegantly along the ladder, disappears totally.

This cannot be due to fear for myself. I am ready to jump a meter high, and I do it sometimes while descending stairs. But then, the height is on an incline and not seen vertically. I am not afraid in much more dangerous situations but I am afflicted with the 'fear of heights'. It is an instinctive fear that would remain with me even if I were given wings. I have no fear traveling by air and I enjoy the window view; but then, my head is recessed in the cabin and cannot look straight down at the ground.

I refuse to get out on a balcony in a high rise building. Even if there is a protecting wall as high as my shoulder, I would never dare to lean down over the wall. I would then feel that my head is heavier than the rest of my body and will pull me down to the ground below.

Not everyone is afflicted with this fear. People could be less courageous than me in other circumstances and still not be afflicted with it. It is my particular genetic makeup that forces this fear on me. No bird can evolve from my genetic stock unless somehow there is a drastic change in this respect.

I do realize that my fear of heights is irrational. I know of cases where such a fear was overcome with gradual exposure. I can imagine myself practicing on a horizontal ladder which would be raised daily by a millimeter. In a matter of three years I would no longer be afraid of walking and running on a one meter high horizontal ladder. A combination of acquired reactions would have overcome my instinctive fear. Practicing is the way by which people overcome the fear of parachuting.

The problem with death, is that you cannot practice it, though it is as much a genetic rooted fear as is the fear of heights.

In 'The Restaurant at the End of the Universe' by Douglas Adams (Pan books 1980), there is on pages 92 to 94, a passage which is as funny in its dark humor, as it is profound. It concerns a very peculiar cow with the ability to speak English and to argue with as much logic as a human being. This in itself is remarkable enough. However, there is something much more unique about this cow. She works as a waitress in a restaurant and goes from table to table recommending parts of her body and accepting orders for these parts, to be cooked as the customer requests. The cow is filled with joy at the idea of providing so much culinary delight to so many people, and she is overwhelmed with happiness at the thought of her being eaten. She looks forward to being killed and cooked.

The variety of animal behaviors reflects the variety of genetic makeups of the species. D. Adams forces us to consider the possible existence of a particular makeup that would result in an intelligent being who delights at the idea of death. Though it can be conceptualized, it is very unlikely, for obvious reasons, that evolution would ever bring about such a species. However, the mere fact that such a genetic composition is conceptually possible illustrates the fact that the fear of death and the unwillingness to think about it before being forced to, is not due to death being in itself an abject and fearful concept. It has to do with the fact that evolution has developed in us a fear of death as a tool for survival. It would have been better if our fear of death would have been restricted to 'avoidable death' and would not include 'ineluctable death'. Evolution was not so subtle. The realization that death is not bad in the absolute and that its *badness* had to be felt instinctively for the sake of species preservation, allows us to look into it and raise the instinctive veil lowered on it by evolution.

THE FEAR OF DEATH AND FAITH IN HEREAFTER

To loose consciousness every night while sleeping, and wake up in the morning, is no wonder. We do not fear it. Why then should a believer dread the end of life on this earth if he has no doubt that it would be followed by awaking in the next world? Why should he dread it if he is certain that life in the next world is much better and more enjoyable than life in this world?

There is no logic in the fear of death felt by a believer in a better next world. If feelings were ruled by logic, a believer would be exceedingly happy to learn that his child is about to die. What can be dearer to a good father or a good mother than to be sure that the son or daughter is dying at an innocent age and is about to go directly to Heaven! Such a parent should consider him/herself very lucky and blessed. S/He should then throw a party to which the fellow-believers would come, not to console but to congratulate the lucky parents. But were I to come with a bottle of champagne to the house of a dying child and shout: "let us dance, your child is dying!", I would likely be beaten, thrown out of the house, or at least considered mad. Are not the really mad those believers who are desperately sad over their child moving to a better world?

Religion may help to dismiss death until it is about to hit. Then it is of little help. No one, believer or not, feels about death like Adam's cow. No one looks at it with anticipation. No one complains that with his good health and bad luck, death is not about to come!

To wake up in a better world is, no doubt, preferable to waking up in the same earthy world. However, evolution has developed the fear of dying and not the fear of sleeping and waking. Therefore the believer fears death - i.e. awaking in the better world - and does not fear falling asleep. We may day dream of waking up in a bigger and nicer house; no scary feeling about it. But we do not daydream the joy of passing away.

I do not say that religion is of no help or concern when it comes to dying; I am just saying that it does not tear away from death its dreadful character.

A non-believer would argue that the fact that a believer is saddened by the death of his child, proves that, in a way he would not admit, a believer has strong doubts. He feels guilty about it. He tries to manifest an absolute faith. He is deceiving himself since, at the moment of truth, he remains as afraid of death as the non-believer, as attached to life as the non-believer.

There may be some validity in that argument. However, instincts are not rational, and the belief in a better hereafter is powerless against the instincts developed by eons of evolution.

A LOOK AT THE INDIVIDUAL

I was told that Jim died recently. I never met him and knew very little about him.

"What was his age", I asked.

"He was seventy-eight", came the reply.

"It is a good age", I commented.

This conversation displays the way I feel about the death of a person with whom I am not related. Just before dying, Jim was aware that he was seventy-eight. It is likely that he did not consider his own death in this casual way. When it comes to our own death, it is difficult to be objective. My death would not mean much to Jim. His death did not mean much to me.

Having a good heart, I wish to everyone a long and happy life ending with a painless death. What can I wish more for my neighbor? Why should I feel grieved when he dies at seventy-eight? He had what I wish for myself. Five minutes later, I may forget Jim.

Had he died in his teens or in terrible pain, the news would have haunted me a day or two. But he died at seventy-eight and it almost sounded like good news.

My mother died at eighty. It is also a good age. I miss her very much. I do not miss Jim. My mother, at eighty, wanted very much to live longer, a lot longer. I could not tell her that eighty was a good age.

Jim dying at seventy-eight sounds like good news. My mother dying at eighty is for me a tragedy. It is difficult to be objective when it comes to death. It seems that I cannot love my neighbor quite as myself.

In the measure in which the survival of the fittest affected evolution, the person who loved himself more than his neighbor, cared more for his own life and increased his chances at having a larger progeny. Likewise, the groups in which altruism was more of a characteristic, had more chances for survival as a group, compared to other groups. As a result, I am capable of both altruism and egoism. As a member of the human species I am altruist. As a fit survivor, as an individual, I am egoist and I care more about my death than for Jim's. I cannot understand death without understanding what is an individual.

According to dictionaries, an individual is a complete and separate entity, strikingly different from any other. But when a dog is compared to a cat, differences are established between the two species. When one dog is compared to another, differences are discovered between the two *individual* dogs. In order to speak meaningfully about individuals, it must be established or implicitly meant, that the two individuals pertain to the same species. In other words, they can be different as individuals *only* if they are similar enough to belong to the same species. *Individuals are different in particulars because they are similar in fundamentals.*

Even fundamental features can be shared between species. The existence of laws forbidding cruelty to animals reflects our belief that animals, like humans, do experience pain. Many vegetarians have adopted their particular style of life motivated by the belief in the closeness of animals to humans. The love people feel towards pets is often rooted in the belief that it is reciprocated by the animals. In many ways we are similar to animals, more so to some than to others.

Since individuals of different species can share some fundamental attributes, how much closer must then be the attributes of two individuals belonging to the same species?

Nevertheless, there is no denying that within the same species, differences between individuals may be striking. What makes an individual strikingly different from another? Is it the uniqueness of an individual genetic makeup? Is it the uniqueness of an individual life-experience? Does the combination of an unique genetic makeup with an unique life-experience lead to an unique 'package' of memories, feelings and patterns of behavior?

THE GENETIC UNIQUENESS

It could be said that the individual is a complete, separate entity strikingly different from any other because each individual has a unique genetic make-up.

Then, what about true twins? Their genetic make-up is absolutely identical but, at a given age, they have different memories and different behaviors produced by different environments and learning processes. If by chance, one of the two goes to jail and is beaten, he becomes a different

individual, different from what he was, and different from his twin brother. To witness an act of aggression will not mean the same thing to both, will not provoke the same feelings.

One of the twins could be raised in a conservative Japanese family, the other by an Iranian supporter of Khomeini. The two children with identical genetic makeups would then have very different traditions and beliefs which would contribute to the display of different personalities. The tendency to be pleasant or aggressive can be affected by different life-experiences, and the two children may grow up into two persons of almost opposed individualities. The twins would be, no doubt, no less different individuals as persons with different genetic makeup. The uniqueness of the individual is not the consequence of the genetic makeup.

More striking than the genetic identity in the case of twins, is the genetic identity of a man kept unchanged during the whole of his lifetime. A man at one time may be quite different from himself at another time. It could even occur that a given man at forty may differ more from what he was at twenty than from his contemporary friend. How can I therefore say that the man at twenty and forty is the same individual, strikingly different from any other? Why should the time continuity for any given person be more important than that of the community of species?

Let us consider the following fictional story illustrating the difficulty of grasping the concept of individuality based on genetic makeup.

John has just died at the age of 80 and appears before God. He is senile and the Lord is reluctant to save him in a state of senility. It is not the best state for enjoying life in Heaven.

"John", says the Lord, "I could save you as the individual you now are, or I could save you as the individual you were at any time in your life. The choice is yours. Speak up!"

"My Lord", replies John, "I cannot remember well enough all the aspects of my life and find out the one which is closer to my heart. How can I choose between my different selves at different ages?"

"It must be admitted", replied the Lord, "that, coming from a senile person, your answer makes a lot of sense. I will therefore bring to life some of your selves at different ages. In a moment there will be four of you sitting around the table."

And so it was.

Around the table one could distinguish John20, John40, John60 and John80. The Lord said to them:

"Only one of you can be saved to represent the individual John in the hereafter. I would like to hear the opinion of each one concerning the choice of the saved one."

John20 looked at his elders. He seemed bewildered:

"It is hard", he said, "to believe that John80 is me. He is senile, worries only about taking his medicine in time and the difficulty of remembering which one to take and when. He has already forgotten he died and what this meeting is about.

"As to John60, I hate him. I am convinced of the truth of the theology of liberation, while John60 is a born again Christian who does not care about poverty and exploitation of the people. John60 has betrayed the poor of the world. As to John40 he has married Nelly who is physically repugnant to me. He finds her beautiful. How could he forget my love for Mary? I can't bear his self-righteousness knowing he most cares for making money and avoiding taxes. I wish I had died at twenty. There would then be no question as to who is to be saved."

John40 was next to speak.

"At twenty my heart was faster than my reason. With time I understood that it is not possible to find fast solutions to the problems of this world. Money can do a lot of good, and the more I have the more I can help the poor. Mary did not see it this way. Nelly was more mature and more reasonable. A middle of the road position is a sign of maturity. While helping myself I still had at heart the good of the poor. I contributed to many good charities and took consolation in the knowledge that God wanted it the way it was. As for John60, he went a bit too far. I don't think that God wanted us to concentrate all our efforts towards our own salvation and to threaten with hell all the people who think differently than we do. All things considered, I think that I should be the individual John to be saved".

John60 was quick to follow.

"I look in horror at the sinner I was at the age of 20 and 40. Then Jesus was not the master of my heart. Be it with Nelly or Mary, I reckon that a marriage not based on Jesus' rule is based on lust. I have no doubt that John20 and John40 would have ended up in Hell. Even the care for the poor can be a temptation taking us away from the love of Jesus. Poverty can be a test, and since it also comes from God, it must be accepted thankfully without a sense of revolt. Helping the poor understand this, is more important than relieving them from the state of poverty. Is it not more important that the poor be saved than that they cease to be poor? John80 is a good man. The measure in which he is less dedicated to Jesus is only the result of senility. I do not doubt that John80 himself would agree that I am the best representative of the individual John."

It was now John80's turn to speak but he was soundly asleep.

This story is not so far fetched. I remember quite well the person I was at the age of 20 and 40. Those two persons are dead. My taste is today different from theirs. My understanding of life is different from theirs. I have many friends whom I consider much closer to me than the person I was at 20.

As to the choice God made, I leave it up to you, Melanie, to have your own pick.

The individuality of a person evolves with time. The change is generally slow but, at times, can be quite abrupt. This is recognized in the common saying: "He is no longer the same!"

Churchill once said that a person who is not a radical at twenty, has no heart. But if he is still a radical at forty, he has no brain. Churchill relates radicalism at 40 to 'lack of brain'; he thus reveals his prejudice in favor of conservatism. However, his observation has some truth in the sense that, in many cases, a man is a strikingly different individual at 40 than he was at 20.

THE UNIQUENESS OF A LIFETIME-EXPERIENCE

The fact remains that, at any given moment of his own life a person feels himself as distinct from any other. If he is beaten, he alone feels the pain, and no one else. This feeling of being distinct, a unit separated from others, makes him feel that he is an individual. When his finger touches a red hot iron, signals will move from HIS finger to HIS brain. He will feel an excruciating pain, and this pain remains within himself. He could communicate to someone "the idea of his pain" but not the pain itself. The fact that descriptions of feelings can be communicated, but not the feelings themselves, may be taken as a proof of the uniqueness of the individual endowed with a separate and unique set of feelings.

But this is not true. If John burned his finger last year, there are so many Peters, Edwards and Johns who, at one time or another, burned theirs. And when Peter and Edward hear John describing what he felt a year ago, they feel it too, not through the description but through recollections of their own experience. They do feel what John feels.

When George is in love, I don't need his description. I too am in love and I know what that means. When Bob is starving, I may not be able to feel it through similar recollections of starvation. But I once was told that I was about to die. I was also very very hungry at times. I combine those recollections to give some vividness supplementing the description of starvation.

No doubt that a person who has actually experienced starvation, can complement such descriptions with more vivid reminiscences. The fact remains that starving, unhappily, is not a unique individual experience.

I can safely say that the life-experience of any one individual, has been experienced by others. It may not be possible to find a single person who has experienced it all, but some of the pains may have been experienced by one individual, other pains by other individuals. The same can be said for the pleasures, the hopes, the expectations, the fears, the aesthetic enjoyments etc... The life-experience of any one individual is duplicated thousands of times, each duplication being distributed among a number of different people.

Alfred has known the frustration of interrupting his school education for lack of money. So did Bob. He has known the exhilaration of a comeback to school after years of interruption. So did Henry. I have known the anxiety resulting from the Nazi victories all over Europe and North-Africa and the advance of their armies towards Alexandria where I had some relatives at the time (before the Germans were stopped at El- Alamein). So did hundreds of thousands who did not have to abandon school against their wish. So did millions when the Nazis were approaching their cities.

Each one of my feelings has been felt by someone I know or by a stranger. No one has felt exactly, and in the same way, the whole collection of my experiences. But I can hardly point to one experience which could not possibly have been felt, in a very similar way, by someone, somewhere, sometime.

True individuality is a myth. The individual I am, cannot be separated from the effect society has and had on me, cannot be isolated from the history of the species which has modeled my opinions, my tastes, my reactions to events and my behavior with relatives, friends and strangers.

BUILDING YOUR OWN ETERNITY

Self-preservation is an illusion. It is good for as long as it lasts, and then a person has to die after having contributed, in some smaller or greater way, to the life of the species which goes on. The individual is ephemeral, the species is long lasting. In the measure in which a person forgets that his belonging to the species is more important than his own individuality, in this same measure the individual is absolutely mortal. He has all the reasons to fear death which, in his case, represents a total annihilation of what matters most for him: his individuality as distinct from the species.

But there is an alternative.

One way of defining an individual is to list his heroes, the kind of people he respects most and loves most and, last but not least, his preoccupations. As the individuality of a person evolves with time, so evolves the realm of his affections and his preoccupations. The individual who was me 40 years ago had a quite different realm of affections and preoccupations. This individual, as far as I am concerned is as good as fiction: he does not exist any longer, he died a long time ago.

Why then should I fear my possible death today, when I did not shed a tear over the repeated death of my individuality, which took a number of strikingly different shapes over the years?

It could be said that passing away very gradually, during the decades it takes for a striking change of individuality, is different from physical death and the dramatic change which occurs at one very definite moment: just a second before, the man now dead, was still alive. Is that not so?

It depends.

At a given period of my life, my heroes were my parents and my previous teachers. My preferred occupations were: studying on my own, playing chess, walking along the river, improving my understanding of the motivations behind the policies of the political leaders. My main worry was my inability to overcome my shyness with girls.

That was not much, but that was me, and as such, there was nothing more important for me. To die was the end of that me.

I knew there were other young chess players, but I was not interested in them. I knew that other people liked to walk along the river, but I did not care for them. Death would be the end of me.

In time, I evolved and have become like a tuning fork that resonates at specific frequencies, the spectrum of which covers the full range of my preoccupations.

The search for truth, for example, has become for me very important. I don't pretend to be closer to truth than others. What matters to me is that I care enough for truth not to accept a convenient substitute, not to ignore how much personal prejudices, social influences, traditions, can prevent me from reaching it. I know that I am not alone. I care not only for truth, but also for those who care for it. They are me. I am them. Galilee is one of my heroes.

I love honesty, and I love honest people. They are plentiful. I am them they are me.

I love sincerity, courage and altruism. I do not know how much I myself can be courageous and altruist. If someone is more courageous more sincere and more altruist than I, I would like to love him more than myself; at any rate, I do love him much. I want to be him. I wish he were I. Such people are plentiful.

Peter has been tortured by the Nazis. He was thrown in a cell after a terrible session. His outlook is bleak. He can not stop feeling his pain and fears the tortures he will be submitted to next session. He is feeling very down, alone, cut from the world, totally helpless. While moving along the walls in the cell, he discovers a message engraved in the chalk layers covering the walls. It says: "Do not despair, my friend, our cause will win. Be strong". Peter then feels differently. He is no longer alone.

Who wrote this message, a message of love, of courage and wisdom? I wish it were I and, because I wish it so, it becomes me indeed. By identifying myself with Peter reading the message and with the unknown writer, I become one of them, I am carrying their spirit. I become them and they are in me not less than myself of twenty years ago is still somewhat in me.

By loving what is honest, courageous and wise, a person reaches out of his individuality and 'trespasses' into the individuality of all similar people.

The bond between my present and the present, past and future of all that is lovable, is much stronger than the bond between me and my past. This is possible only when love is strong, unselfish and goes beyond the individual. In this way I ensure my eternity. My eternity resides in the people past present and future whom I love more than myself. My eternity is in the children who risked their lives to save that of an unknown girl who fell in the river through thin ice. My eternity is with people who struggle for peace, freedom, justice and tolerance.

I was told that I had one year to live. I remembered a movie in which a girl who was about to die, made a list of all that she had not yet experienced but would have liked to. She passed the

remainder of her short life trying to fulfill these many dreams. I was advised to do the same, to spare no effort to enjoy what I love best of music, theater, travel and such.

But what would remain of my enjoyment? It would matter little, after my death, how much I enjoyed my last year. I had to become the others so as to remain alive in spite of death. By following the news, by reading, by writing, I have identified myself with the millions of my choice. Eternity becomes possible.

That is why I am more afraid of a nuclear war occurring in the future, which would obliterate those millions, my eternity, than of my own death, be it next year, earlier or later.

Love is the road to eternity.

Melanie read the manuscript while having her supper. She was taking a bite off her meal, and then reading some more of the manuscript. She would then stop, to think. She would then remember to take a bite more and then go back to the manuscript.

When she reached the end, she had not yet finished her supper. She put down the manuscript and remained thinking about its content, interrupting herself, time and again, to take a bite more.

She went to bed leaving half the supper on the plates. It took her time to fall asleep. She finally got tired of thinking and fell asleep with the lights on.

In the morning, she remembered the manuscript. She had to concede that it made her feel better about death, about her father's death. After all, death is unavoidable. If her dad can find a way to feel and think he is not really dying, he should be encouraged.

Part 3, Chapter 5

After 5 years; the fateful reunion

The party reunion was held on a Friday. Robert arrived at about 8:00 pm., an hour after it had started. He did not follow up on his decision to ignore Lisa, The moment he saw her, he directed his steps towards her. He felt embarrassed noticing how heavy was her makeup. It seemed more designed to attract men's attention than to discreetly enhance her natural beauty.

"It is good to see you again," said Robert, "How are you doing?"

"Fine" replied Lisa.

"And your son?" asked Robert.

"Fine" she replied.

He was about to go on speaking with her but she cut him short adding "You will excuse me I would like to go around and meet other people." And as if this was not enough, she went on saying: "I see Melanie has just come in. You better hold her company."

"That is quite a good idea, Lisa" replied Robert pretending he did not sense her ironic tone. Obviously Lisa did not want to have any more conversation with him. He was astonished he felt less hurt than he thought he would be. "That is quite a good idea," he repeated to himself, this time in earnest and with a smile.

And indeed he went to greet Melanie. She was elated that Robert was the first person to come to her. She smiled warmly saying: "I am glad to see you. I still miss the interesting time we had collaborating on projects."

Melanie did not mention the debate. They had collaborated in class on various assignments and had found their interaction helped develop their creativity and the credibility of their work. She added: "It has been a long time since we last saw each other."

"Yes," replied Robert, "it is all my fault. I hardly met anyone since then. I concentrated too much on becoming a good teacher. I now realize that part of being a good teacher and a good person consists in being social and not neglecting one's friends."

This was a loaded answer the significance of which did not escape Melanie. However, she did not have time to reflect on it. Robert went on asking:

"And you Melanie, what have you been doing?"

"I guess," answered Melanie, "you know I am a nurse at the Misericordia hospital. It is quite a demanding job with irregular hours varying with shifts. I myself have not been very social and I hardly see any of my former schoolmates."

"Let us chose a table," interrupted Robert, "and help ourselves to the buffet."

Moments later they were sitting face to face at a small table, eating sandwiches and engaging in long discussions about the policies of the government and about Argentine's intention to *repossess* the Falkland Island. They found out they both shared the same opinion about Margaret Thatcher and entertained the same fear that she would try to boost her public approval by going to war "for the freedom of the British subjects living in Falkland". Their discussion was spirited in spite of the concordance of their views.

"You know," he suddenly said "I feel as if our last meeting had just been yesterday. There is such a continuity between our views and our discussions today and those we held five years ago. It is a pity we did not meet all that time."

He was sincere. He enjoyed discussing with Melanie. He even enjoyed just looking at her. He did not say it but he thought to himself: "She is really nice and beautiful." He felt as if a curse on him had suddenly been lifted.

They remained talking for some time. Then the loud music made it impossible for them to go on. Robert told Melanie:

"What about going out and escaping from all that noise?"

"My own thought!" she replied. "Where would we go?"

"We could walk around the block," suggested Robert."

The weather was warm. A few clouds could be seen close to the horizon. A full moon was shining but did not prevent the stars from twinkling. Somewhere a dog was barking at a cattish shadow.

Melanie was about to say that the night seemed magical. But before she could utter a word, her heart started to beat wildly and fast as Robert took her hand in his. They both felt a warmth invading their bodies. He played with her fingers. She slowly took away her hand to put her arm around his waist. He did the same.

They were overpowered with the realization that, without words, they had declared their love to each other. They walked slowly side by side enjoying the physical contact and its meaning.

Robert suddenly interrupted the charm saying: "We could go back where my car is parked. We would then go home. He then added innocently:

"Do you mind coming to my place and see how I live?"

Indeed he did not at first realize what Melanie was justified to understand. She felt she was blushing as he added:

"It is not what it seems to be. I am indeed proposing my place because we could go on discussing and reminiscing which I am really enjoying."

"I agree." she said simply.

The moment they arrived at Robert's house, Melanie asked where the bathroom was. She went there and, after a very short while, came out, went to Robert, put her arms around his neck and kissed his lips. He pressed her against him and they remained for a few long moment enjoying the warm feeling of closeness. He notice she looked differently. She had left her bra in the wash room. In fact she now was naked under her thin summer dress. He took a few steps back to better see her. She then let her dress slip. She was totally naked.

Robert could not take his eyes away from her. As he was again coming closer to her she said: "I love you Robert." "I love you too" was his reply.

He kissed her again, first on the lips and then on the neck. He then gently cupped her breasts. Then his hands extended to reach in between her thighs. She left him do whatever he tried. She caressed his back, then his face. Still, she had a worry. When Robert, naked too, tried to come over her she implored in a low voice: "Be careful Robert, I am virgin." "I will go very slowly" replied Robert.

Melanie felt a strong pain and tried not to shout. Robert realized he had just deflowered her. He stopped and said: "we will make love tomorrow, when you will no longer be in pain."

She was grateful and appreciative. She put her arms around him and said: "I have waited years for this day with you." Somehow Robert felt he knew it. They fell asleep while tightly hugging each other.

In the morning Robert woke up first and found himself back to back with Melanie. He made a slight movement and she woke up too. They turned towards each other and started their day with a warm kiss. Robert then moved his hands all over her body touching and caressing. He then went to kiss her breasts, her stomach and her forest. She was caressing his back, his arms and his face. It seemed his foreplay would never end. She was enjoying it and when she felt very aroused she told him: "Robert! Come into me!" They reach climax at the same time. And they made love again and again.

Only at noon did they discover they were hungry. Robert went to the phone and ordered a Pizza.

Melanie was sitting on the bed. She visibly was preoccupied. "What is the trouble" asked Robert.

"It is not really a trouble", she said. "To make love with you was for me the natural and honest thing to do. I fell in love with you years ago but, as you were with Lisa, I could not let you know. Besides, then you paid no attention to me. You never asked me for a date So, when I realized yesterday you were with me in a romantic mood, I did not want to play the hard-to-get girl."

She stopped and then added: "Your situation is different. Had you been in love with me, nothing prevented you to approach me these years. You had nothing to fear. Your being now romantic with me is something new, something new to you. May be I hurried you in a situation you were not well prepared for it."

Robert went to sit on the bed besides her. He put a hand around her shoulders, kissed her hairs and said:

"The truth is that you are the girl I should have fallen in love with, years ago. You are no less beautiful than Lisa. You are much more honest, caring and intelligent. What occurred is that one day Lisa pressed her body against mine and offered me her lips. I had not kissed a girl before. I thought it was love. I believed it was a commitment. In my honesty, I then did not allow myself to look at any other girl. I had dreamed of one single girl for my whole life. I believed that girl was Lisa."

He stopped, kissed again Melanie and resumed: "Lisa is beautiful. She is cute. Nobody can deny it. The more I went with her, the more she teased me and the more she became important to me. When she dumped me publicly, I thought my whole world came apart." I always had for you a lot of affection and appreciation. Had it not been for Lisa's first kiss, this affection would have blossomed into love. Maybe I loved you already but lost my senses after Lisa's kiss. Now, I am happy Lisa did dump me. I feel I am now on the right course with the girl I love so much more than I ever loved Lisa"

Melanie had no reason to doubt that Robert was saying what he really felt at the moment. She put her arms around him. he bent back towards the bed and they fell into an embrace which topped in warmth and enjoyment what they felt during the preceding times in lovemaking. Happily for them, the pizza delivery did not interrupt them.

After they felt food-satiated, Robert said to Melanie: "One of us should move with the other. We could flip a coin".

Melanie remarked: "Are we not going too fast?"

"Not at all," answered Robert, "we must make up for the time we lost."

Melanie was not sure whether she was dreaming or it was reality. Just one morning before, she was prepared to see Robert for one last time before coming to terms with dating other men.

For Robert, as Melanie sensed it quite well, the situation was different. His feelings for Melanie were for him a revelation. Alfred had hammered in his mind the idea to court Melanie. Lisa herself *guided* him to Melanie. So, how strong was his love for Melanie? How long would it last? Melanie knew nothing about Alfred's role and Lisa's provocation. Still she was worried. She decided to bet on optimism. She ignored her worries and said:

"Yes, we could flip a coin but it would not make much sense. Each of us lives close to his job. Moving is bound to inconvenience one of us. Why not chose the larger one of our two places?"

Robert agreed. A comparison of the two squarefootages resulted in Robert having to move over to Melanie's house. This did not have to be done immediately. It was examinations time in Robert's school. He did not want to be distracted from his teaching preparations. It would have to wait for slightly more than a month.

Part 3, Chapter 6

The wedding

They were both tolerant and caring. This made living together, at each other's place, an easy and agreeable experience. They were all the time romantic. Caresses, kisses, holding hands, putting hands around the waist or over the shoulder was for them like breathing. They never had enough of it. They could not stop it.

Three weeks before the stipulated date for the move, Robert told Melanie: "I understand we are committed to each other. So, instead of me moving to your place, why don't we get married and move both to a new place. With our two salaries, we can afford a better place than yours."

Melanie did not answer immediately. Robert waited two minutes, went to her, kissed her and asked: "Do you need time before answering me?"

"No!" said Melanie, "I already sorted it out. When you say that you feel committed to me, it is for me enough, and I do not need anything more. This was what I wanted to tell you. Then, I remembered my dad whose life could end soon. I think it would make his death easier on him if he could be at our wedding. Yes, Robert, it is a good idea."

Melanie feared that the marriage might not be a happy one. She was not certain. She thought it wiser not to hurry into it. Two to three years of living together would test the nature of Robert's love.

When she remembered her dad, it took her two minutes to find the solution. They would marry soon and will not have children for a period of two or three years. So if her fears would materialize, a divorce would not be a bigger tragedy than separating after living three years together. And her daddy would give her away, and maybe Robert's love will honorably pass the test.

Melanie and Robert went to convey the news to her parents. Such news are better told in person and not over the phone. Her dad had come back from the hospital. Marnie had told her daughter he was not in pain though the illness had metastasized. Stanley would not live much longer.

Melanie had announced to her parents that Robert had become her boyfriend and was supposed to soon move to her place. They both, Stanley and Marnie, were very happy of the turn of events. They knew it was for Melanie a dream come true, a promise of happiness. They knew how much Melanie loved Robert and how long she had remained in love with him.

They had known Robert from Melanie's school years and considered him a decent person. Robert and Melanie had already paid a visit to her parents. There was no single embarrassing moment. Robert had been in their house years before and had always been received with warmth.

They were invited to the table. Marnie served tea with biscuits. Melanie conspicuously displayed the ring she had on her hand. Marnie and Stanley looked at it with some surprise. Melanie said:

"Robert bought me this ring today. We are going to be married in a few weeks."

Marnie rose from her chair and went to hug Robert and then Melanie. Robert went to Stanley and told him:

"Stanley, I am a happy man. What hurts me is that you are not in the best state of health. Speaking of which, it might be better for you to lay in bed. It seems to me you came to the table so that Melanie would feel better. Please, don't do that. Melanie is a nurse. She knows what you are going through, and she would be happier if you would take the best care of yourself."

"You are right," said Stanley, "I am going back to bed. Maybe you can help me to my room. Besides, I would like to have some talk with you away from Marnie and Melanie."

They both took leave.

"Can I help supporting your body up to your bedroom? You could lean on me" said Robert.

"No," replied Stanley, "it is not necessary."

In fact Stanley's gate was surprisingly normal for a sick man. They entered his bedroom. In one of the corner was a table with a few chairs. Stanley went and sat on one of the chairs and invited Robert to do likewise.

"The doctors say I am very sick," started Stanley, "they must be right, but for the moment I do not have any physical symptom of weakness or pain or disability. I do not need to lie down. Acting as a healthy person is no burden on me. Your suggesting that I should lie in bed suited me because I wanted to talk with you. The women in the living room know I will only go to bed at bedtime. They must suspect I want to have a chat with you away from their ears."

"I am glad," answered a surprised Robert, "that you do feel good. Maybe it is an indication that the doctors are mistaken and you still have many years to live."

"It is not very likely," said Stanley adding: "I do not give much thought to the matter. It would be a loss of time. I better do what in my opinion is most useful and necessary. Speaking with you is just one of the necessary things."

"I do enjoy conversing with you" said Robert, "but when you say it is a necessary thing, it scares me a little. For me the situation is simple. Melanie and me are two mature people able to take their future in their own hands. We love each other very much. We are engaged and are going to be married in a few weeks. We have already lived together, days at my place and days at hers. Then, I could have expected from you 'a necessary talk'. I am a bit nervous at the 'necessary talk' you want to have with me, now that we are going to get married."

"I have not expressed myself well," said Stanley "our talk is necessary only to me. Nothing much depends on it, neither the coming wedding nor the fact that I am very happy that Melanie and you have finally found each other. In normal times, I should have kept some worries to myself. Any decisions concerning both of you is so much more in Melanie's domain to consider or be concerned about. It is her life. Besides, she is wise and strong. Had I been in normal health I would not have asked for this talk. There are questions which bother me and which I do not even have the right to ask. But I might have less than a year to live and I can't tell myself I should just wait and see. You can at any time stop our conversation. I too might not have appreciated Marnie's father giving me the fifth degree just as Marnie and I announced to them we were getting married."

Stanley kept silent for a little while. Robert was very moved. "Before commenting on that," he said "I would first like to hug you." And this they did. It was a hug who lasted more than it does usually." After they sat down, Robert said: "I welcome this talk from you for more than one reason. I know your health is problematic and, in my eyes, this gives you rights, you would not have otherwise. And then, I know how close Melanie and you are. I know you talk freely with each other. I know also that she is like you in many respect. Hearing you, could be for me an easy way to find out what goes in Melanie's mind. Please, do speak freely to me. I myself might need to hear those concerns which, I am sure, are known to me and for which I would like myself to find answers, possibly with your help."

Stanley was weighing his words. He spoke slowly:

"I very much appreciate your hug and your comments. So, I will now proceed. The last five years were difficult ones for Melanie. I am not here concerned with her having a demanding job with erratic time schedules. She fell in love with you more than five years ago. She suffered silently and wished you happiness with Lisa. No one can blame you for not having responded to her love. It is a matter which follows no rational laws. She deserved your love and could not have it. Life is often like that. The point I want to make is that you can trust her love for you. It is not new, it withstood long difficult days."

Stanley went to a cabinet and took out a bottle and two glasses. "Will you," he said to Robert, "drink with me a few drops of Port?".

"Gladly" said Robert. Stanley poured the wine and then went back to his seat.

"What can be said," resumed Stanley "of your love for Melanie. How much can it be trusted? Why did it start at the school reunion? What would have occurred had Lisa been nicer to you that day? Why did you have to wait five years to discover you love Melanie?"

Robert wanted to speak but Stanley interrupted him with a gesture of his hand and said: "Not yet Robert! You will speak soon. Just now I want you to listen a few more moments."

At that he stopped speaking and started to pace the floor as would do a lawyer interrogating a witness and thinking how best to formulate his questions.

"I know it was Melanie who in her own way suggested you should become lovers. Coming from her it was the right thing to do. Her love for you is long-standing, she was not taking you away from someone, you held her hands, played with her fingers, things you never did before with her. You were thus expressing a new kind of feelings towards her. You were acting romantically. From her side everything was clear, she loves you, you are not attached, you desire her, all that justifies her letting you know she is ready to make love to you."

Stanley made a pause during which Robert interjected: "I did not realize Melanie would tell you how we became lovers."

Stanley smiled and said: "I know Melanie so well that she had only to tell me very little and I could figure all the rest."

He went back to sit at the table. Then he said: "I am glad you became lovers. Melanie made love to the man she loves very much, and which at that moment believed he loves her too. She deserved the happy moments she since had with you. What worries me is the future."

"I confess, I do not understand you," said Robert. He went on: "Indeed, only recently has my love for Melanie become apparent to me. I always had good feelings for her. It might have been love but I never deceived her as to my feelings. I had never been romantic with her. Going with Lisa was in no way some kind of betrayal. I agree, I had been blind. Now I see. Now I love Melanie and very much so. What is there to be worried for?"

Robert looked at Stanley and was surprised to find how friendly was the expression on his face.

"Calm down," said Stanley to him, "I am not faulting you. In fact, I do like you. Indeed, five years ago, I did wish you would date Melanie. You often came at our house, you both seemed to enjoy the company of each other, you are a handsome young man and she is a beautiful girl. Asking Melanie for a date would have been the most natural thing to do. Then came Lisa and you became less and less friendly to Melanie."

"I will tell you why", said Robert, "though I do not see the necessity to go over that past. It should be enough that today I love Melanie and have no romantic feeling towards Lisa. I want to live the rest of my life with your daughter. It matters to me that she be happy. I will stop at nothing to make her so."

He resumed after a short pause: "I did not understand it myself at the time. Now I see clearly why I behaved so coldly with Melanie. On the one hand I wanted to be a honest guy. Once committed to Lisa, I was scared of my strong friendly feelings for Melanie. I thought I owed it to Lisa to cool my relations with Melanie. I wanted Lisa to be my best friend, and it might have not been possible had I remained friendly to Melanie. I do remember I had a sense of having betrayed Melanie. I was told she loves me. I did not want her to suffer. I thought that a cooling of our friendship would make it easier for both of us. Besides, I think that, already then, I was confusedly aware that I preferred Melanie to Lisa. I had kissed Lisa, and for the naive, honest and inexperienced guy I was it meant I had no right to look at any other girl."

Stanley was tempted to let it go at that. Still, and in spite of his sympathy for Robert, he asked the hard question:

"It all makes sense except for one thing. Why, after the break with Lisa, did you still wait five years?"

Robert remained silent for some while. He then replied:

"It is a question I often ask myself since Melanie and me started to be together. At first, I gave to myself satisfactory answers. I could tell you any of them, and you could possibly find them reasonable. But I knew there was something else, and I want to be honest with myself and honest with you. Discussing the matter with a friend, a few weeks before the reunion party, I came to understand that I had been hurt by the manner Lisa had dumped me. I felt the need of dealing with it. I needed to again become friendly with Lisa. I was also ashamed to come to Melanie and tell her she was second best. It would indeed have looked like that, had I tried to meet her because Lisa dumped me."

"When I met Melanie at the reunion party, she so friendly smiled to me that all my hesitations dissipated."

Stanley stood up and said: "Robert, I will be happy to give Melanie away to you at the wedding. Come, give me one more hug!"

Robert did not convince Stanley that his love for Melanie would pass the test of time. When five years ago all pointed towards the development of a romantic relation between Robert and Melanie, then Lisa's kiss to Robert was enough to deflect him from Melanie to Lisa. Five years during he did not care for Melanie. Then her friendly smile brought him back towards her. This man, thought Stanley, may have a personality problem. He can easily be moved from one side to another. How wise from Melanie to delay having children for some years.

Robert and Melanie had gone "shopping" for a house. It had been some experience. Robert's interest was mostly in the basement. Melanie was more interested in the way the living room, the family room and the kitchen were interconnected.

On one occasion Melanie reminded Robert: "We are not living in the basement,"

"That is true," replied Robert, "but since the basement has no impact upon the price of the house, we may as well have the nicest possible basement. It comes for free."

One day, they visited a house which had the best basement Robert had seen thus far. When they were through with their examination, they went out to compare their impressions.

"I love this house," said Robert "the basement has large windows. This is quite exceptional."

"I am sorry Robert," said Melanie, "I do not like it at all".

"Could you tell me," argued Robert, "what is wrong with the house?"

That was the wrong question. The fact that Melanie did not like the house was the important matter. The reason why she did not like it was not so important. However, for Robert this was a dream house with the best possible basement. Melanie, challenged to give a reason, gave in.

She did not know how to formulate her general impression. So many factors are implied in the likes and dislikes for a house that it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to give a precise reason.

"Not enough natural light enters the house," answered Melanie. She was right, and wrong. There may be a lot of light in the house and the house may produce in her a feeling of darkness for obscure reasons.

"Let us go back and check," said Robert, "I was impressed by the brightness of light in the house."

They went back and, sure enough, it could not be denied that the house was flooded with natural light coming from numerous large windows. Melanie could not but agree. The real-estate man drew official papers and asked Melanie to sign first. She was about to do so when Robert interrupted saying:

"I do not want that house. I do not want a house on the contract of which Melanie signs without a smile." Melanie was grateful to Robert. She kissed him warmly. She then hold his hands and told his fingers what could not be said as eloquently with words. As to Robert he was very happy to have caught himself in time before making a major mistake.

The search for a house ended when they both agreed that a given house in Riverbend was a great place where to live.

Then came the matter of furniture. They had twice the needed furniture in some cases, and not enough in others. They had to make choices of what to keep, what to give away, what to sell, and what to buy. In spite of the burden, it was somewhat fun. A week before the wedding, the house was ready.

Tears rolled from Marnie's eyes as Stanley was taking Melanie through the aisle. Mothers of the brides often do so, but in Marnie's case the tears were expressing a mixture of joy and pain, joy that Stanley could be at his daughter's wedding before his predicted death, and pain for his being so seriously sick.

"You may kiss the bride" said the officiating civil official. They were married.

Robert repelled from his mind a vision of a smiling Lisa. Melanie had the smile of a most happy angel.

Part 4, Bumps on the road
Chapter 1
The shadows of the past

In spite of her reservations, Melanie was heavenly happy. She was glad she had waited five years without dating. It was Robert she had always wanted, and it was Robert she finally got.

Robert was happy too. He had in Melanie a beautiful wife, very caring and quite a match when it came to discuss matters of common interest, particularly in political and social issues. They were often discussing the daily news. They were both concerned about the famine in some African countries, about ecology. They were discussing also what could be the meaning of some conflicts and the motivations behind the interventions of the West.

They each appreciated the increased clarity and understanding which would generally result from their discussions.

Stanley's health was improving. At no moment had he been in pain. The tumor seemed to be checked by the medicine he was taking. Nothing seemed to shed a shadow on the happiness of the couple.

Robert insisted on a fair division of the house chores. Melanie told him she was more used to them than he was. She should therefore carry a greater burden. Robert said he had lived a few years as a bachelor and got used to take care of himself. Besides, he cannot feel he is a man of principles if he does not apply them at home. And indeed he was trying his best. Without letting him notice, Melanie was often redoing what Robert was not doing well enough.

After months, they could not remember having had a serious quarrel. Nevertheless, Melanie sensed something was wrong. She realized it very slowly. The signs were not so obvious. So much so that, when it became clear there was trouble, Melanie had a hard time remembering when and how it began.

The day after the wedding, they opened the gifts. They started with the smallest of them. Melanie unwrapped it. It was a beautiful Chinese jade sculpture.

"It is lovely," she said, "let me see who sent it. She opened the card and, without a word, gave it to Robert. The present was from Lisa and addressed to both Robert and Melanie. The card had the traditional best wishes for the newlywed couple.

Robert commented: "That is a surprise. I did not expect a present from Lisa."

Melanie thought the same: "I am equally surprised. I must say it is to her credit. It seems Lisa is maturing into a nicer person."

Melanie put the card on the chimney's mantle where she intended to put all the other cards.

A month later, when Melanie wanted to take away the cards off the chimney, she noticed Lisa's card was missing. Another card would have been missing and she might not have noticed it. She asked Robert:

"Did you remove Lisa's card?"

"Yes," he replied, "I put it away in a file where I hold other papers having to do with her"

He said it in such a natural way that Melanie did not give too much thought to it. She assumed the card had been put in a kind of archive where it will stay for years.

It was a month later when he told Melanie:

"I was having lunch at McDonald when Lisa suddenly took a seat at my table."

"How nice," commented Melanie. Then, unexpectedly, she said:

"There is a question I never intended to ask you. For some reason I now need an answer. Did you ever make love to Lisa?"

Robert was surprised. In a low voice he replied: "I have never made love to Lisa."

He stopped for a very short while and then said: "Now that I answered you, can you tell me why did you ask, just now?"

Melanie smiled to Robert then went to him and kissed him warmly. She then said: "Lisa seems to have become nice. If you would have told me you had made love to her, I would have left it at that. But since you did not, I want you to know that I do not object to befriend her. I can invite her sometime for coffee. I would do it the first time without you being present and then she could come and meet us both. After all, we were classmates"

Robert looked at Melanie with admiration. He then remained thinking for a while and in a decided voice said:

"I am grateful to you. You must love me in a special way to suggest the possibility of becoming Lisa's friend, maybe just for my sake. Still, I think it is not a good idea. Though I did not make love to Lisa, I did come quite close to it. The kisses we exchanged were passionate, and we indulged in an amount of touching. I prefer not to tempt the devil."

Unwittingly, Robert had revealed his vulnerability. Melanie bit her lip and said nothing.

Since that day she became restless. She did not discuss the matter with Robert. She still trusted he would not allow himself to do anything indecent. He would certainly not be unfaithful. What worried Melanie was what was going on inside Robert, inside his mind and his heart.

They both discovered they had changed. There was less warmth between them, less spontaneity, less lovemaking. It occurred gradually but speedily enough.

Came a time when Melanie thought it was best to separate from Robert. They talked about it and then decided they needed some time to reflect.

And then came the news which threw a totally new light on the situation: Melanie was pregnant.

"Would you like to have an abortion?" asked Robert.

"No!" Said Melanie aggressively, "I am against having abortions"

"That is news to me," commented Robert, "you always were on the side of *free choice*."

"You are right," replied Melanie, "I am for *free choice* but I always knew that my choice would be not to have an abortion."

She stopped for a short while than said: "Maybe I should state my position differently. I am as much against abortions as I am against making abortions illegal. I want everything be done to prevent abortions except making them illegal. I want better education, better contraception, better social welfare which would encourage prospective mothers to go on with their pregnancy. Making abortions illegal does not prevent abortions."

"This means," said Robert, "that within seven months we will become the parents of a child."

"Yes!" said Melanie, first in the most ordinary tone, and then added with a cryptic smile, "the proud parents!"

Melanie had been shocked that Robert would suggest an abortion. One thing is to consider it when the prospective mother has been abandoned by the prospective father, or when the parents do not have the means to raise one more child.

True, they were thinking of separation. However, she thought the separation would be temporary, just enough time for Robert to find out what is in him.

Next day, they had finished supper. Just before taking the dishes away, they looked into each other's eyes.

"Melanie," said Robert with an unusual affectionate voice, "I am ridden with guilt feeling. I have observed our relation getting less and less warm. I know it is my fault. I will tell you right away that I am not at all in love with Lisa. I have no desire to make love to her. I still love you very much and desire you very much. Still, somehow Lisa is often in my thoughts. I do not think of her with lust. I think I need counseling or maybe psychiatric help. Would you be supportive of me?"

These last words were uttered with visible anxiety. Melanie went to Robert, hugged him, kissed him passionately on his lips. They then moved slowly towards their bedroom. They had not made love for the last month.

Part 4, Chapter 2

Psychiatric help

Robert went to see Dr. Sally Stadler. He had to wait a month till he got his first appointment followed by weekly sessions.

The first session consisted in stating what he considered to be his problem: an inexplicable obsession with Lisa. Dr. Stadler asked a number of questions about his feelings towards Lisa. Does he dream about her. How often does he think about her. Is he aroused when he sees her or when he has her in mind.

She then asked him to tell the history of his relations with Lisa and with Melanie. She was not interrupting him but every time Robert would stop she would ask for details on some point. This would force Robert to come back on his track and give a better portrayal of the events.

It took three sessions. The next session, Dr. Stadler asked Robert to try to remember his worst childhood memory. "Take your time," said Dr. Stadler, "and try to go in your visualization of the past as far back as you can."

xxx

Robert remembered a number of disagreeable events. Suddenly, one of these events, and not the most back in time, seemed to acquire an importance he never suspected it had. He had forgotten it and the event had almost completely disappeared from his memory. Remembering it was hurting him. He told Dr. Stadler:

"I do not know why I remember that event just now. I do not know why it did not obsessed me before, though it was quite a traumatic event."

"Go on," Dr. Stadler encouraged him.

"I was five years old," resumed Robert, "and, for no reason I can recall, my father undressed me and put me totally naked outside the door of our apartment. We were living at the third floor of a four floors apartment building. I can see myself totally terrified at the idea that a stranger could see me naked. Somehow I had developed an unusual shyness. So, I was looking alternatively downstairs and upstairs thinking I would soon die of shame."

"After a few minutes, my father reopened the door, let me in and told me that I will now certainly know that without him I am a nothing."

Robert stopped for a few moments then went on: "I so much adored my father that I tried to rationalize his action. I soon forgot the incident and did not keep grudge against him. Now, I feel my hair raising over my body, and my body shaking."

For the next session Dr. Stadler had moved the chairs. Hers and Robert's were closer, opposite to each other but somewhat aside one from the other. When Robert looked straight ahead, Dr. Stadler's chair was somewhat to his right.

Robert was prepared for what was coming. Dr. Stadler had given him a paper to read. It was describing a method used in psychology and called EMDR. It stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. The method had been developed by Francine Shapiro, a psychologist from California.

Robert was instructed to follow the regular movements of Dr. Stadler's right hand from left to right and back. He had to do that by moving his eyes without moving his head. While he was thus following the moving hand, Dr. Stadler was describing what she thought had been his feelings when his dad had put him naked out of the apartment. She described his powerlessness, his feeling unloved etc.. She then stopped and asked

"Tell me Robert, what do you now see?"

Robert answered: "I see very clearly myself standing on the stair-head and terrified by the possibility of someone appearing and seeing me naked."

"We will repeat the procedure," said Dr. Stadler.

This time she entered in more details concerning his feelings of despair and fear. Once more she asked Robert what does he now see. This time Robert had a different answer:

"I see the same scenery. But I don't feel I am there. I see extraneously the boy which is me, as if I am just a witness and not a participant."

"That is good," commented Dr. Stadler. "Let us try once more."

She went through the procedure with not much of a variation but she was suddenly interrupted by Robert who was shaking, sobbing and running abundant tears. One handkerchief had not been enough to dry his face.

Dr. Stadler was scared. She gave Robert her private phone number and told him:

"This could be dangerous. Do not hesitate to call me at whatever time of the day or of the night if you undergo again such strong emotions." She waited till Robert blew his nose and gained back some normal composure. She then asked him what did he see this time. He replied:

"It was not me who stood naked outside the apartment. It was Lisa. I wanted to shout Help! Help! do not let my father hurt Lisa. And, like it often occurs in dreams, the words I wanted to utter could not get out of my throat."

"Did you," asked Stadler, "have any knowledge of great hurt having been inflicted on Lisa in her younger years?"

"Yes," said Robert, "I now remember she told me having been molested by an uncle. The way she told it to me it had been nothing serious. She did not seem very affected."

"That is an important information, Robert," said Stadler reproachfully, "you should have mentioned the matter before"

"Somehow," replied Robert, "it went totally out of my mind"

He then added: "Dr. Stadler, can you make any sense of what has now occurred?"

The doctor replied: "There are a number of things to be considered" she said. "There is the fact you had forgotten the abuse you suffered at the hands of your dad. Is it possible that, somehow, the two cases of abuse became one in your mind. So much so that when under the EMDR influence, and trying to see yourself at the time of YOUR being abused, you ended up seeing Lisa instead."

"We need to have some more sessions to uncover your true feelings towards Lisa and why you are obsessed with her. However, instead of next week let us fix your appointment to four weeks from now. The results will be best, and least harmful, if we put some distance between today's session and next."

Robert did not go to his appointment. In fact he never met Dr. Stadler again. Instead, three months later, he went to see his friend Alfred and his wife Lynda.

Lynda was a nurse at the Psychiatric ward of The Alberta Hospital. She had taken courses in counseling. She was a friend and she had a good insight in what could be hidden in the many folds of a person's unconscious mind.

They knew from Robert's phone call he would be coming in the evening. Lynda, opened the door and welcomed him:

"It is a rare treat when you come to visit us," she said, "I wish Melanie could have come with you."

"Melanie has difficult work schedules," said Robert, "besides, I wanted to talk with both of you in Melanie's absence. She knows I am coming to see you."

"Maybe," said Lynda while guiding Robert to the living room, "you would prefer to speak with Alfred alone."

"No," said Robert, "I need all the help I can get, and you may understand things which would escape me, and Alfred too".

Alfred came in the living room. He went to Robert and gave him a warm hug.

Lynda said: "you may start without me while I prepare coffee. I will join you soon"

Alfred and Robert inquired about each other's health and work. They had barely finished when they were joined by Lynda. She said to Robert:

"Something seems to bother you Robert."

"Yes" said Robert, "and I am not sure I really know what it is. You do know that matters are not at best between Melanie and me. I feel exceedingly guilty. Melanie is a wonderful person. She has been nice to me and gave me a lot of happiness. Indeed I cannot complain. She is becoming cooler with me by the day, and I can only blame myself."

He then told them about Melanie's pregnancy, his sessions with Dr. Stadler and his decision to interrupt his treatment with her.

"You have some explanation to do," said Alfred, "Dr. Stadler is an able psychologist. She succeeded in uncovering some tie between you and Lisa. Why should you not go on with her?"

"I am afraid of her next questions," said Robert. "I now know things I am ashamed of and do not want to tell her. I would rather tell you and ask your help. You are both so wise, and such good friends. You gave me in the past excellent advise. I want first to try what you can do for me!"

"This is madness" commented Alfred. "It is the first time I hear a person is prepared to say to a friend what he would hide from his treating psychologist. I would rather reveal my intimate life to a stranger than to a close friend."

"I am not shy with Dr. Stadler. I am scared of the powerful EMDR method. It already put me once under tremendous stress. She, herself, was scared of the effect. I am afraid to go again through such an experience with a much more delicate subject."

"Robert," said Lynda, "you are putting us in a delicate position relatively to Melanie. She is as much our friend as you are. Are we entitled to know what you would rather hide from her? and are we supposed to hide from her what you will tell us?"

"Lynda," answered Robert, "I did tell Melanie there are matters I would like to discuss with you first. She knows I am somewhat in an emotional mess. She knows I am trying to get out of the mess. She supports everything I do in this respect. I hope you can help me. She knows that the time to tell her everything will come later. She wished me luck. She is not disturbed that I will confide in you, not at all. It is my general attitude to her which worries her, and worries me. Besides, you remain free to tell her everything you want of what I will confide in you."

"So," said Alfred, "let us begin. What is the problem."

Robert took a deep breath before starting:

"I thought that EMDR revealed a sort of identity between me and Lisa. I could not at the time understand otherwise the strength of my reaction. It could explain why, thanks god, I am not feeling romantic in Lisa's presence. But it does not explain why I remained five years without

dating, why during that time I made no effort at coming closer to Melanie whom I liked so much from the school years."

He stopped for a while and would have resumed speaking had he not been interrupted by Lynda.

"There must be," said Lynda, more than that. Otherwise, why should your relation with Melanie have been so negatively affected?"

"Yes," said Robert in a very sad tone of voice, "there is something else." And he stopped at that.

Alfred asked him: "Are you willing to talk about it?"

Robert hesitated for a while and then said: "Lisa used to tease me to an extreme limit. She would encourage me to touch her everywhere. Once I did masturbate her. It was maddening. I was very ambiguous about her. On the one hand I still considered her a nice and sweet girl. On the other hand I could feel she had in her a vicious streak. I began to think about raping her. I planned to go camping with her and I was decided that her teasing will end her up being raped. I was convinced that it would not be a real rape. A man pushed to the edge is justified to go to the end, so I thought. This was to be a few weeks before the famous debate. The day before we were to go out camping, it started to rain and she asked we delay our outing".

"I therefore cannot know what would have occurred had the weather been better. Would I have tried to rape her? I knew for certain I would not have tried unless she again would have teased me to the limit of my endurance. I would have done it if she would have asked me to masturbate her. The occasion did not occur. A part of myself remains to me unknown."

"Somehow, her extreme teasing and her dumping me publicly affected me so much that I doubted I was fit to become a boyfriend to any girl. I was afraid I would be violent with my next girlfriend. I wanted to make sure that the kind of fire which was consuming me would be extinguished. I thought that time would help, and it did. I could think of Lisa in terms of her sweetness and not in terms of her teasing. I even was saddened when she divorced and remained alone with a child. I was prepared to marry her. I do not know if it would have been a good idea. I wanted to make due for having had violent impulses against her. The fear I had of that possible violent aspect of my nature, might have played a role in preventing me from contacting Melanie earlier.

"After Melanie became my girlfriend, I was certain I had got rid of any obsession concerning Lisa. However, Lisa had changed with time and became friendly with me. She did not try to tease me in any way. She was behaving like a good friend. And I started to like her, just as a friend."

"One evening I laid down Melanie on the bed with her hands behind her back. We made love and I fantasized I was raping Lisa. I was ashamed of myself. I was ashamed of having put Melanie's hand behind her back. I was ashamed of having used her. I was also ashamed that I would still entertain the idea of raping Lisa even after I found out that, after all, she had become a nice girl."

He stopped for some moments and then added:

"It is then that I fully understood the meaning of the strong reaction I had when subjected to the EMDR method. The child I was seeing was Lisa indeed but it was not my father who was prepared to hurt Lisa, it was me! Lisa had taken my place, and I had taken my father's place!

Robert went on with a trembling and sobbing voice:

"Every time I now try to come close to Melanie, I feel embarrassed and have difficulty going with her further than a warm hug."

Lynda interrupted the silence by asking Robert if he wanted a drink of orange juice or ginger-ale. "Orange juice will be fine," replied Robert.

Lynda brought glasses and a jug filled with orange juice. Robert emptied his glass almost in one gulp.

"Well," said Alfred, "It seems to me that your ego has been hurt very much by Lisa teasing you to the edge, and then dumping you. Your happiness with Melanie has not erased this past hurt from your unconscious mind. It felt that nothing less than raping Lisa could heal your wounds. This seems to indicate what is going on inside you. It does not point to a solution."

"Yes it does," said Lynda in a secure voice. "I would suggest two things for Robert to try. Since he is now in good terms with Lisa, and she appears to have matured into a nice person, why should he not tell her how much he suffered from her teasing and her dumping him publicly. I expect Lisa to feel sorry and to apologise. This would bring some closure to his hurt. It would do him a lot of good. I also suggest he repeat to Melanie all he told us. Melanie is a very understanding girl. She will do everything she can to help Robert."

"Remains the question," said Alfred of the order in which Robert should implement the two suggestions. I would prefer to reverse the order. I mean that Robert should first speak with Melanie, and only then with Lisa."

Robert had remained quite for all that time. Now he seemed to come out of a lethargy. He said in a plaintive voice: "How can I tell Melanie, I was afraid to be a violent man. How could I confess to her that when I put her hands behind her back I wanted to satisfy the fantasy of raping Lisa. How would she react when she will discover I used her in such a filthy way? And what if, after I confess to Melanie, Lisa turns out not to be so nice?"

"I do not know what is best," said Alfred to Robert, "if you feel it easier to start with Lisa, may be you should give it a shot. The important thing though is that whatever be Lisa's reaction, you have to tell everything to Melanie."

"I disagree," said Lynda, "I would suggest that if Lisa is not acting nice, or if she is but it does not help, Robert should then go back to D. Stadler"

It did not take a week and, once more, Lisa and Robert were having lunch together.

"What is new with you" asked Robert.

"I should have told you some weeks ago," replied Lisa, "I have a man in my life. His name is David. I have been dating him for some time. My son loves him. David is a very caring and considerate person. I am happy with him"

"That is wonderful," commented Robert. "You know I always wished you what is best in life"

Then, as if Lisa had witnessed Robert's conversation with Alfred and Lynda, she commented:

"What is best for me in life" said Lisa, "could have been you. I am glad you ended up with Melanie. She is better than I am. Besides, our relation started on the wrong leg. I then did not love you. I played with you, provoked you, made fun of you, even dumped you publicly without thinking how cruel I was, how much you deserved being decently treated, and how much I did lose in the process. I am glad I have the opportunity to tell you how sorry I am to have been so inconsiderate, so vicious. I realize it must have hurt you very much. It is hard on me to realize today how evil I had been with you."

She stopped a minute then not hearing a response from Robert she went on: "Robert, I was already a better girl at the five year reunion. I was already remorseful. Somehow I could not escape the routine of our past attitude. That day, as soon as I talked rudely to you I regretted it. I want you to know it. Will you ever forgive me?"

Robert took both Lisa's hands in his and kissed them. He then told her how much he had suffered from the way she had treated him. He even told her how much his obsession with his hurt had damaged his relation with Melanie.

Lisa was shaken: "I now realize what it must have been for you, and for Melanie. If there is anything I could now do to be of help in any way, I would not hesitate to do it."

"You have today done much good," told her Robert, "I do feel much better. I also hope Melanie and I have gained a friend, and maybe two. I am sure Melanie will contact you and invite you to come with David some day."

Robert felt indeed much better. Still, he did not know whether he was safe from sudden violent urges. He had decided that, at the first recurrence of such a tendency he would look for medical help.

He now had to tell Melanie why, feeling himself filthy, he had kept some distance from her, Will their relation ever become again what it had been?

He started telling Melanie how the visit with Alfred and Lynda went. He then reported his last meeting with Lisa. When he finished, Melanie was pale. "I am not feeling well," she said, "I have to lie down". She retired to the bedroom without any comment. Robert could hear her trying to silence her sobbing. He felt guilty and desperate.

Next evening, Robert was preparing supper. He called Melanie to the table and they ate together. When they finished, Melanie said:

"I had time to think about Lisa and you. At first, all I could see was your using me in a fantasy to rape Lisa. I felt you do not really love me. I thought I do not know you any more. Are you the kind and caring Robert I believed you were or a violent one that I am now discovering?. Then I remembered how much you suffered from Lisa's teasing and from her dumping you publicly. The truth is, I was not the only one to be used, not the only one to suffer. And then I thought of today's Lisa. If she could feel remorse, if she could ask for forgiveness, and if you could indeed forgive her, why should I not be able to forgive you?" She stopped for a while and then resumed: "I do forgive you Robert. Just remember, I did not stop a moment to love you. I want to go back to our happier days before the child was conceived."

It had indeed been difficult for Melanie to forgive Robert. It was still harder for Robert to forgive himself. He was still a tortured soul. He did not know who he was, he did not know whether he will ever again be subject to a violent urge. They did "go back to their happier days".

"I would like," said Melanie a few days later, "to invite Alfred and Lynda for supper. They seem to have a happy marriage. We should befriend them and see them oftener."

Part 4, Chapter 3

Four friends

The supper went well. The conversation had been flowing and approached different interesting subjects. The two couples had a lot in common, and visibly enjoyed being together.

"Tea or coffee?" asked Melanie. They all settled for coffee. They moved to the living room. Melanie sat on Robert's lap. Maybe she was thus conveying a message to the guests: "all is well between us."

At one point, the four were sipping their coffee and nobody was uttering a word. Melanie broke the silence. Addressing herself to Robert and Lynda she said:

"You seem to form an ideal couple. Have you never had a serious quarrel?" And before the guests could reply she added: "I do not want to pry on you. But you know an awful lot about Robert and me. I think we could be better friends if we know something about your life as a couple."

Robert and Lynda exchanged glances. Then Robert said to Lynda: "you go first." To which Lynda answered: "I do not mind but you will soon have to come in; it is you who knows most of the details."

"I am not sure," said Melanie, "I did the correct thing. Please do not feel obligated to bring out to us any of your personal matters."

"I feel at ease speaking with both of you," said Lynda. "It reestablishes a sort of balance. Why should we know about you more than you know about us? Besides you both have good heads on your shoulders and you possibly could help us."

"I feel awkward," said Melanie. "I did not suspect you could need help. I was thinking of some trivial quarrel without any serious significance. Once more, please, do not tell us a thing unless you feel comfortable with it."

"I am glad," said Lynda, "at the opportunity of opening the subject in front of dear friends. I will state the problem and will then let Alfred tell you the whole story. In short, it seems to me that Alfred is still obsessed with his first wife Nelly. At every opportunity he inquires about her well-being. Would you believe he would have sent her flowers at their wedding anniversary had I let him do so? Mind you, there is no crisis in our relation. Just an unnecessary irritation."

Lynda had spoken in a calm tone of voice. She seemed more puzzled than angry at Alfred's behavior. While speaking she was throwing glances at Alfred which clearly expressed her deep love for him.

"Details can matter," said Alfred. "I intended to send flowers to Nelly on her birthday, and not on the wedding anniversary. I might have used the French word *anniversaire* which is mostly used

for birthdays. Lynda might have confused it with anniversary as used in English with respect to a wedding anniversary. Nelly and I are divorced, and the wedding anniversary is no longer to be celebrated.. Indeed it would be outrageous, and Lynda would be justified in feeling offended. But a birthday is a different story."

"I had the impression," said Robert addressing his words to Alfred, "that your marriage with Nelly had been very rocky and made you both miserable. Why, Alfred, do you still keep an umbilical cord with Nelly?"

"Maybe," started Alfred, "I should tell you more about Nelly and me."

Part 4, Chapter 4

Nelly

All eyes were directed at Alfred. He kept quiet for a while. He then rose from his chair and asked Lynda if he could be allowed to speak while pacing the floor. She nodded a yes.

Alfred walked slowly, his hands behind his back. He seemed not to know how to start. Again, Melanie broke the silence saying to him: "Maybe you would prefer to put it off for another time."

"No," replied Alfred, "the difficulty has nothing to do with my mood today. Nelly is a complicated person, and I would like to do her justice. I do not want to let you have a false impression, specially if it reflects negatively on her."

He stopped just for a few seconds and then resumed talking slowly in a rather low voice:

"Before being arrested in Egypt, I had been in love with a girl sixteen years old. At the time I was 24. One year later I was sentenced to jail for ten years.

"During that time, I did not see the face of a woman, I did not see a photo or picture of a woman. It resulted in an inability to be attracted to girls or woman older than 20, and I was thirty-five."

Melanie interrupted him saying: "It is not an unsurmountable obstacle. It is common enough to have a man older than his wife by fifteen years."

"Yes", risposted Albert, "but in Egypt, I was very critical of arranged marriages in which young girls could be *sold* to powerful or rich old man.

"So, being the feminist I was, I would not consider marrying a young girl. I thought I would never marry and will never have the family life I dreamed of.

"Three years later, I met Nelly. She was thirty, and I did feel attracted to her. She was divorced and the mother of two children, two boys aged 5 and 7. Ten minutes after meeting her, we went for a walk and I proposed to her. She agreed on condition that her two children will accept me.

"To make it short, we got engaged and fixed the date of the wedding. I believed our marriage would be an easy one. My father had patriarchal attitudes which made my mother miserable. I thought if only my father had been a better husband, my parents would have had a marriage without troubles. I believed I will be so good with Nelly that our marriage would be bound to succeed. I had only to find out the best way to make Nelly happy, and then everything would be ok.

"However, to find out what makes her happy was not an easy matter. I thought that being the best possible father for my two stepsons would make her happy. She later told me I deserve no credit from her for having been a good stepfather, though I might, she said, deserve credit from her two sons.

"She would refuse to specify what I could do to make her happy. She told me that I had to discover it by myself.

"It took me years to find out that I could make her happy only by being a bad son, a bad friend and a citizen disrespectful of the laws of the country and committing felonies for material benefits, such as false tax declarations, false customs declarations, trespassing on neighbors' gardens to pick up fruits without being seen.

"She spoke of divorce when, while she was in Toronto on a pleasure trip, I dared invite my nephews for dinner *behind her back*. She never changed her mind and remained thinking I had thus acted very improperly.

"However, anytime I would be sick, Nelly would become a totally different person. She would give me the best care and would spoil me with attention and gifts. She would stay hours with me holding my hands and caressing my face. She could also be generous with older people and prepared to spend time helping them. She could shed tears at emotional moments in a movie. She was a wonderful mother.

"My brother phoned me one day. He was in bed with fever and wanted to see me. I told him I was very busy. Still I would come to see him for a short visit. Nelly *ordered* me not to go. I told her I am prepared to compromise on everything except if it would cause me to be ashamed of myself. I drew there the line. When I went out to the car, she shouted to me: "go to your death!"

"Nelly and me agreed to seek the help of a family counselor. We went to *Family Services* where we were put in contact with, David Green. He had a session with Nelly and then one with me. These two sessions were to be followed by a common session for the three of us. Nelly refused to attend it.

"I went alone and was told by David that it was a hopeless case. Nelly, possibly, was suffering from a chemical imbalance. He advised me to divorce her. He would help me in court to obtain the custody of her two children.

"I replied that, had he told me that Nelly was selfish and heartless, I might have considered divorcing her. But if she is sick in mind, I will stand by her.

"Obviously, David could not come out with a reliable diagnostic in such a short time. Moreover, he was not qualified to make such a diagnostic. However, he had little choice. Nelly did not want to see him. She would not agree to be referred to a psychologist or a psychiatrist for a professional diagnostic. All he could do was to give me his best guess.

"A few years later, we went again for counseling. Two counselors were assigned to us. They made us go through an elaborate test comprising a great number of questions. The data was then analyzed by a computer program. When the results came back Nelly was told she needed medication against anxiety. Nelly exploded on the two counselors telling them they did not know

their job. Had they done their work properly, they were bound to find that it was I who needed medication, not she."

Melanie interrupted Alfred:

"I do not have much faith in counselors and psychiatrists. There are a lot of circumstances in which people stressed to their limit, may seem to us to act strangely, while acting in a way that still can be understood. I and Nelly have some common acquaintances. They all respect her very much, have a good opinion of her and would be very astonished if told she is chemically unbalanced."

"I think", answered Alfred, "that Nelly has a mental problem. I am not sure it is a chemical imbalance. It is a conclusion which I started entertaining only after counselors told me something is wrong with her. Whether I am right or not, the fact is that I acted on that belief. And that is why I did not leave her. I thought I cannot leave her while she is sick."

Melanie challenged Alfred:

"Have you ever considered you might be unfair in thinking that Nelly is sick in mind when everybody else finds her normal?"

"The counselors did not find her normal" replied Alfred. "Besides, my experience with Nelly strongly pointed to an abnormal mental behavior. I was therefore prepared to believe the counselors when they told me that something was wrong with her. I can remember thousands of cases in which Nelly had been exceedingly mean to me. I do not rely on those cases to make the point that Nelly is sick. Still, if she is indeed sick, then these cases could be explained otherwise than by her being very wicked. And then I cannot blame her for her meanness.

"There is a number of aspects of Nelly's behavior that made me think she is sick. Some are related to traits of character pushed to an extreme. So, it is not so much the trait which is indicative of sickness but its exaggeration. She is for instance pessimistic. So are many other people, but not as much as she is. She will hear of the depression of the thirties and will start worrying that it could soon come again. She will then be afraid that her sons would then not be able to go to University. She will then develop that scenario still more. I would then tell her that I would sell the house for the sake of her sons. There will then be a shift in her worries. She knows quite well that I legally cannot sell the house without her agreement. Still, the words *selling her house* will evoke in her mind such a worry that she will refuse to talk with me for a few days."

"I am not impressed", said Melanie. "I do not deny that Nelly seems to see everything in black. That is not a mental disorder. It is just a trait of character."

"Yes," resumed Alfred, "but when a trait of character is exaggerated, it becomes noticed as such. But there are limits and, after some limit, the exaggerations borders on sickness, particularly if it is associated with some other effects.

"For instance, Nelly would interpret my actions in the worst possible way. Sometimes she would not be able to put a bad twist on my action. She would at first accept that what I did was good and acceptable. She would then work hard on it till she would be able to reach a different interpretation which puts what I have done in the worst possible light. She would never chose the most likely explanation. She would chose the worst possible one. And then, she is unconsciously manipulating her memory so as to distort her perception of the facts till they allow her to have the worst possible opinion of me. Any time she would hear of a man having behaved horribly, she would convince herself that I am exactly similar to that man. She would attribute to me thoughts which are not in character, provided it would allow her to have a bad opinion of me.

"And finally, she had recourse to actions which can be considered pathological. She once drew a kitchen knife and announced she is going to kill herself. I jumped on her and a battle ensued which ended by my taking the knife away from her. Another time, she came to me slowly with a knife in hand held aggressively towards me. I remained motionless. She came closer and closer and, when she was by me, she put down her raised arm gave me the knife and started to jump hysterically up and down shouting: 'Kill me! Kill me! Kill me!'

Once more Melanie interrupted Alfred:

"Alfred, I perceive you are describing a desperate woman who thinks she is out of means to achieve what is primordial for her. Possibly, she feels she is losing you and she feels terribly hurt. She does not see any rational way to keep you for her, and she is prepared to use irrational ways.

"The truth, as I see it, is that your love however great was not of the kind she aspired to. She would have liked to see you doing anything, even the forbidden, to please her, to prove your love to her. She understood that when a man loves a woman, he would steal and kill for her. She did not want you to steal and kill but at least, to lie for her, to disregard friends and family for her. I do not ask Robert to love me in that way. Still, and though it is wrong, it is not craziness."

"Melanie," answered Alfred, "you did not live with Nelly. It is easy for you to say it was wrong but not craziness. But once more, wrongs must have a limit beyond which comes insanity. Once for instance, I wrote an article criticizing the government. Before sending it to the Newspaper, I gave it to Nelly to have her opinion. I did that very often because she has common sense and is able to give me useful advise. I have many times changed the form of letters, added sentences and subtracted sentences in consequence of her advise and because I thought she was right. This time, she asked me why do I give her something to read when she knows quite well I do not care for her opinion. So I had to remind her how many times I modified my writings as a result of her advises. Finally, she agreed. She read the article and told me that she got lost in it. She asked me to submit it to our friend Rick and to send the article to the paper, if Rick likes it.

I ran the speller on the article, checked the syntax and then e-mailed the article to Rick. I received back from him warm comments. I therefore sent the article to the Journal. Nelly asked me what Rick had said. I told her he approved the article. She seemed quite annoyed. I surmised that she expected Rick to get lost in that article as she did. To make it easier on her, I told her that I had made some cosmetic changes to the article. She then exploded on me. How did I dare

to give the article to Rick instead of submitting it to her after the changes. I said to her the changes were cosmetic, that she had let me know that I could send the article if approved by Rick. And that was what I did. She told me that I have proven once more that I have no respect for her opinion. And she was terribly cross with me.

"She could have considered it a case in which I did prove my respect to her. First, I submitted the article to her. Second I took Rick's opinion as she suggested. Third, I sent the article to the Journal after I got Rick's approval, just as she told me to do. It was enough for her to hear about 'cosmetic changes' to build a case against me, without even caring to know what these changes were. The fact is that even if I do exactly as she says, she can always argue that she had not said what she said. I can never win. Now if this was just her way to make me miserable, I would have said she is a mean person. But such is not the case. She does it in earnest and is herself exceedingly hurt by her false perception of a lack of respect from my part. Whatever I do, she must find it bad. It corresponds to her crazy need.

Once she brought me to the airport. Before kissing her good-bye, I told her that I am grateful to her for having been an inspiration for me. She became exceedingly angry and exploded on me reproaching me to have waited so many years to tell her something like that. And when I told her that it was not the first time I told her so, she told me I was a liar. I then opened the book *A better society in our time* and showed her how, in the acknowledgments, I thanked her for having been my inspiration. To which she answered that what is in the book does not count. And once more she was earnestly hurting from her imaginary belief that I waited so many years to tell her she had been my inspiration.

"Even if she were right, why should the late compliment had worsen her mood?"

"She once told me that her youngest son's coat was too small on him. She suggested we bring it to the Shermans, the coat would fit their son. This we did a month later when we visited them in Red-Deer. After giving them the coat, Nelly told them that she would have brought the coat much earlier, was it not for my reluctance to have the coat given to them. It was of course a lie. What she accused me of, was totally out of character. I protested to the Shermans that Nelly was mistaken.

"Once back home I asked her how could she say such a thing. She answered that she does not know what came over her and made her say it.

"I knew what it was. She wished it was true and, while telling the lie, she believed it to be true. Months later, she told me that indeed I had opposed giving the coat. I told her that even if it were true, she did not have to tell the Shermans what supposedly occurred between us. She recognised I had a point.

"As you see her wish for having a given memory can make that memory true to her.

"Whenever our recollections would differ, she would not say that her recollections were better than mine. She would insist that our recollections are identical but, motivated by a pervert purpose, I do pretend to have a different recollection than hers. Anytime, anywhere, anyway, she

could put me down, she would do it even if it takes to distort the truth. The distorted truth becomes for her the reality."

Alfred rested for a moment and then resumed:

"There are cases in which I proved my love to her beyond any possibility of doubt, and still it did not help."

Robert interjected with a smile: "I sure would like to know how you do that!"

"I am dead serious" said Robert, somewhat irritated. "One day, Nelly told me she is certain I do not love her. I told her I would give my life for her. She said in a challenging tone that I could give it to her just now. We should commit a double suicide by exposing ourselves to the car fumes in the closed garage. I warned her never again to repeat the suggestion unless she is sure that it was indeed what she wanted.

"Two weeks earlier, she had been in a traumatic condition. She had told me she had driven almost to Red Deer, with suicide on her mind. I caught her writing what, she said, was a good-bye message. I had no doubt she was serious with the suicide suggestion. I knew that if I would refuse, she would be certain I do not love her, do not care if she does or not commit suicide. I could not prevent her from committing it when I was away from her. I therefore accepted. I knew it could well end up with both of us dead. I had the weak hope that, realizing I loved her so much that I would rather die with her than let her die alone, she might conclude there was no point going on with the suicide plan. It was a gamble because I knew quite well that I would not stop her. It could only be stopped by her.

"We went towards the back door of the house, and, just as we were opening the door to proceed to the garage, she asked laughingly: "is it ok to die before making pee?" She then pulled me from the door. I was emotionally drained. I hoped that she would realize how much I do love her. I asked her that any time she felt like committing suicide, she should delay acting on it for at least a week.

"A week later, she once more told me I do not love her. I mentioned that my readiness to die with her was an ultimate proof of my love for her. She denied it saying that I knew that, as long as the car was not started and we were exposed to no fumes, there had been actually no danger.

"She then said she is tired of living and she wanted us to commit suicide. Once more, I felt I had no choice. She had made up her mind that the previous time proved nothing. My refusal would have confirmed her in that opinion.

"This time seemed to be it. We went to the garage, closed the window and the door, went to the car, pulled down its windows. We then took our seats. I reminded her of my request to postpone action for a week. She refused. She then started the car. I asked to hold her in my arms. She at first refused. Then, when I reminded her that these were our last moments, that I came with her just so that she does not feel alone and unloved while dying, she let me take her in my arms.

"I thought she might have felt certain that, at some point, and before it be too late, I would crack and stop the motor. To remove any doubts, I told her that it was totally out of the question that I would do that. If she wished to stop the suicide-attempt, then the only possibility open to her was to initiate herself the stopping of the motor.

"While the fumes filled up the garage and the inside of the car. I started to repeat continuously: 'I love you, I love you, I love you...' If I was to lose consciousness, and then die, my last words would have been: 'I love you'.

"I started to feel sick. I felt it first in my eyes than in my lungs. My head started to ache and the lungs were hurting more and more. An then, suddenly, Nelly put off the motor.

"While going back home, she told me she had suddenly remembered our scheduled cruise trip to Alaska. That made her change her mind. Half an hour later, she again complained that I do not love her. I reminded her that I had just honorably passed the test she devised herself. I had risked my life for her.

"It did not help. She told me I would have done the same for anybody else."

Robert and Melanie exchanged glances. Then Robert said:

"Don't you think, Alfred, you were foolish to enter her game and expose yourself to the car fumes?"

"It was a risk, I was willing to take," replied Alfred, "And that is not the whole story. I took other risks.

"A few months later, Nelly was reading the Montreal Bank report on our checking account. She found a debit entry of \$1380, and other much smaller entries which were not clear to her. I told her that it was not the first time that, when checking the account she found strange entries that could not be explained. A few days later, the matter could be clarified.

"Nelly became exceedingly angry. She accused me of inventing the 'story' that she had checked such accounts many times before. I was, she said, a liar bent on forcing her to kill herself, and many more such accusations.

"She then said to me she was going out to kill herself in a car accident. She went out to the garage. I ran after her and stood behind the car to prevent her from backing out of the garage. I stood there long minutes. I could see the back of her head through the rear window. She could see me through the rear mirror. She kept the engine on. She was waiting for me to let her go out. Then, realizing how obstinate I was, and determined to remain in the way of the car, she started slowly to back-up and came close to me.

"I do not have the strength to stop a moving car. So, I threw myself on the ground in such a way that she could not proceed without overrunning me. Laying low on the ground, I was now out of her field of vision, and I was not sure she saw what I did. The possibility existed in my mind

that, mistakenly, she would run over me. Somehow, she had seen me. She came out of the car and kissed every square centimeter of my face, more affectionately than usually, while repeating that she now realized that I love her indeed. But this state of mind did not last. Minutes later she told me that I do not love her. Again, she said, I would have thrown myself on the ground in front of the car of anybody else."

Alfred would have gone on but Melanie interrupted him:

"Alfred, what does it say about you that you were willing to risk your life at Nelly's whim, while knowing from experience that nothing you would do would convince her you did love her?"

"Yes, indeed it says a few things. On the one hand, I was terrified at the thought she would commit suicide. On the other hand, I was having a difficult life. I was depressed, and life did no longer mean much to me. Still, I did not want to die just then, to die so unnecessarily. But, in my state of depression, decreasing slightly the possibility that Nelly would commit suicide, was weighing more in my mind than my attachment to life.

"Living with Nelly, and accepting an extraordinary and unbearable amount of control did depress me. Later, I looked for professional help and was told I should remain true to myself. The way I wanted to conduct my life was not indecent. If Nelly could not accept it, she had to seek professional help.

"When I tried to be myself and act according to my nature as a loving friend, brother and son, the crisis with Nelly reached such proportions that we had to divorce."

Then turning to Lynda and taking her hands in his, he added:

"I am very grateful to Lynda for making do with the friendly feelings I still have for Nelly, and not keeping a grudge against me."

Robert rose from his seat, went to Alfred and gave him a hug without saying a word. He then went to Lynda and hugged her too.

Lynda must have heard the story before. Still, she was very moved. She was hurting for the difficult time Alfred went through. She felt no empathy for Nelly. Addressing Alfred she said:

"I know your attachment to Nelly is innocent and derives from the goodness of your heart. What disturbs me is that your caring for her, reawakens your hurt. I would like you to forget her."

Alfred lowered his head and while looking at the floor said:

"Nelly has stopped to be my wife. Still, I feel for her like for my own child, and an unhappy child at that. You cannot forget your children.

"I might feel differently the day I learn she had been treated and she has healed, has remarried and is happy. Then, I will still have friendly feelings towards her, but would stop thinking about her."

Melanie was absorbed in deep thoughts. "I bet," said Robert, "you are hesitating to say aloud something which is bothering you."

"You seem to read my mind," said Melanie. "yes indeed I want to say something which Alfred may not like to hear"

"I doubt it," said Alfred. "I value your opinions and I can promise that, whatever they be, however much they could disturb me, I will give time to consider them and learn something from them."

"I hope," said Melanie, "you will not regret having encouraged me to speak."

"Go ahead," said Alfred, "I can't wait to hear what you have to say."

Melanie got up from her chair and went to the kitchen followed by all eyes. She came back with a glass of orange juice and started to speak while looking at Alfred in his eyes:

"Nelly is not here to tell her side of the story. I would like to speak in her name. Obviously, I have no direct knowledge of how she felt living with you. I think it takes a Lynda to be able to be happy with you.

"You are driven by an urge to do what is right. You are a saint while Nelly is just a mortal. You occupy the high moral grounds, and Nelly cannot but think you feel she is inadequate, imperfect, wrong, whenever she differs with you.

"She does not like that corner in which your sainthood is putting her. How liberated she would feel if only she could pierce what she hoped to be a thin veneer of principles and uncover the normal man hidden under a mask of ultra-respectability.

"And that is not all. You have put her all the time on the receiving end. You have been good to her sons and to her mother. Had you been a man instead of a saint she would have understood you did it because you love her. But she knows you are a saint, she is convinced that you are being good with her side of the family because it is the right thing to do, and not because you love her.

"She knows you would do anything for her because it is the right thing to do, and provided it does not conflict with your being a saint. However, if in most cases you were doing what you do because it pleases you and not because it is right, then she could accept to receive while believing it is an act of love rather than of duty.

"You could not convince her that you love her by acting with her as a saint. She needed to know and to feel that you could be somewhat less pure for her sake, that you could do something for her which is not dictated by duty.

"If you are a saint, you get no merit points by being good. But if you are human, then every good you do for her sake is much more valued.

"Is Nelly a mental case? Possibly yes. But that is not a problem. She gets along with friends and her children. But not all women can live with a saint without becoming crazy. In such a situation many women would have developed some mental and psychological trouble and would require professional help. It takes a special woman to cope with sainthood and to appreciate it. I am happy that Lynda is such a woman."

After a silent uneasy moment, Lynda responded:

"Alfred is no saint. He is a good and loving man. I have no difficulty perceiving his deep love for me."

Alfred seemed to be shaken by what Melanie had said. He interrupted Lynda to say in a low but clear voice:

"Melanie, I appreciate your stand. Nelly is still dear to me. I am pleased when someone stands for her. I may be too subjective to have a clear understanding of what Nelly went through. In fact, I do not dismiss off hand what you just said. You are providing me an angle of vision which I did not have, which I did not know existed. I am certain it is a valid angle. But, taken in isolation, it would lead to wrong conclusions. I still have to digest what I heard from you.

"I want you to know that, at one time, the future and the happiness of Nelly depended on an action of mine which was 'not right', and which an inhuman saint would certainly not have done. I did it and am still ashamed of what I did. Nelly is unhappy to feel she 'owes me' to be grateful. Had I not done it, it would have seriously damaged her self-esteem. I did not hesitate. I did the wrong thing for her sake. It was the kind of wrong thing which she knew that, to do it, I had to act against my conscience. It was an act of love. But she chose to consider that I was torn between two duties, and I had chosen one of them. She chose to ignore that for me, one choice was an act of principles while the other was one of disregarding the principles but could only be explained as being an act of love. It is her sickness that forced her to interpret each of my acts of love as being an act of duty.

"Melanie, though I cannot say something definitive, I think that what you said to me has some validity. It may be that what you call my sainthood, has exacerbated Nelly's condition. It helps me better understand her. Had this vision been available to me before, I might have acted differently. I might have better directed my efforts. But it would not have changed the essentials. She was enough capable to follow an unreasonable exaggerated sense of suspicion so as to come to her worst conclusion,

"This being said, I do not think I am more of a saint than, say, your father. And your mother does love him as he is."

Melanie smiled and commented:

"That is not so difficult for mom. She is herself a kind of saint."

An embarrassing silence followed. It was interrupted by Alfred:

"Melanie, I need time to consider what you told me. So, my following comments are not definitive. I do know some saints who fit your description. I do not like them. The fact that they occupy the high grounds of morality do not disturb me. What I dislike in them is that they are insensitive to human faults and mistakes. They can give an advice to a person. Then, if the advise is not followed, they do not care whether as a result the person will suffer or not. They will just say: 'I told you so' and then feel free of any obligation to help or rescue.

"I know for certain that each time I felt compelled by my 'sainthood' to do something which displeased Nelly, it hurt me very much."

"This is of no great help," said Melanie. "All you are saying is that you are not the kind of indifferent 'saint'. You are the kind of 'martyr saint'. I think that this makes matters worse. Not only did Nelly had to cope with a Saint, she had also to cope with a martyr. She would prefer a person who enjoys being good to her to a person who would be good in spite of the high emotional cost he has to endure in terms of feeling pain and hurt."

"I am afraid," replied Alfred, "that either you are playing the role of the devil's advocate, or you are being unfair. Let me give an example. It was a few months after our marriage. I went with Nelly shopping for a wedding present for one of my cousins. Nelly insisted that I should buy a miniature statuette in porcelain the value of which was two-three dollars. I told her how ashamed I would be, were I to bring such valueless gift. It was of no help. Not only did she strongly insisted on her chosen gift, but she tried by force to take away from my hands a slightly more acceptable gift I had chosen. I gave in. Was it an act of a saint or the realization that it exceedingly mattered to her that I buy the cheap ugly gift, and it mattered to me not to cause her too much pain? And in this case, was it not an act of love?"

"I do not think so," said Melanie. "It would have been an act of love if pleasing her would have made you happy. But on the contrary. You were unhappy. Nelly perceive it, and resented your pain. You would have been better off had you stood up to her and bought the gift you intended. Nelly would have been angry. But then, she would have more enjoyed the cases in which with pleasure you did what pleased her."

"I wish you were right," replied Alfred, "It was not always just a matter of refusing to do what is wrong. What made me wonder is that the wrong thing I was supposed to do represented a case of abuse from her part. She wanted me to accept that abuse and to feel well about that. It was asking the impossible. When for a time she forbid me to see my brother it did hurt me in many respects. On the one hand I do love my brother and resent being told not to see him. On the other hand, I

cannot avoid looking at it as a sign of her wickedness, and it hurt me to find her wicked. Finally, it was saying to me that she does not love me. Possibly it would say that she loves me possessively.

"When I was told she might have a chemical imbalance, I felt somewhat relieved. I could now believe that Nelly was a good person behaving wickedly under the influence of her sickness."

Melanie was visibly disturbed. She immediately started to tell what was on her mind, just seconds after Alfred had finished talking:

"Alfred, I do not like your attitude. You have suffered quite a lot while living with Nelly. You now reach conclusions which allow you to feel very good, very proud, and very generous.

"In short Nelly is a good person who is sick. You therefore have no grudge against her. Had you believed she is not sick, you could not reach such satisfactory conclusions that allow you to have no anger and formulate no blame, no reproach. Did it not come to your mind that thinking of Nelly as a sick person was for you very convenient? You do not like to hate, you do not like to blame, you like to feel good about yourself, and believing in Nelly's sickness allow you to do just that.

"I think that if Nelly was indeed sick you would be able to mention actions of her not related to despair, not related to her being wicked or mean, in which her sickness is apparent. In times of despair normal people can act crazy."

All eyes once more turned to Alfred. Melanie, Lynda and Robert wondered what would be his response. Melanie had been quite aggressive in taking Nelly's defense and they were all, including Melanie, quite embarrassed.

For a time nobody broke the silence. Lynda seemed to empathize with Alfred's present difficult moment. Alfred stood up, paced the floor for a short time and came back to his chair and spoke:

"You are right Melanie. The belief in Nelly's sickness is a thread that allow me to make better sense of a number of facts of which, each one alone do not point to sickness. My mistake is that I tend to talk about what hurt me most instead of about what makes the strongest point. I will tell you now about a category of Nelly's actions which did not hurt me as much as the rest of the story, but which point more strongly to a case of sickness.

"I have been nice to Nelly in many occasions. When she would tell me I had never been nice to her, I would remind her cases proving her wrong. It turned out she suffers so much to remember cases in which I was good and nice that she forbids me to ever remind her of that. Those cases are so numerous that remembering them should have led her to realise that I love her indeed. I told her I am prepared to never remind her cases of my being nice to her, provided she abstains from asserting that I never have been nice to her. She would agree but not for long. She would again and again tell me I never have been nice, and I would remind her that I had often been nice indeed. She would then complain that I broke my promise not to mention it again. I would

remind her of the condition on which I was prepared not to mention I had been nice to her. This has been going on for years."

When we separated, just before divorcing, she told me that since I am making presents to everyone, she does not see why I should not make a present to her. In short, she wanted me to buy her a breadmaker of a specific make. When I agreed, she told me she would accept my gift on the condition I would never mention it again. Once more I made my usual reservation. Yes I will not mention it, provided she will never say I never made her a gift. And so it was. I bought her the breadmaker of her choice. Soon after, she told me I never made her a gift. I reminded her the most recent gift, the breadmaker. She entered in a state of rage and told me to take back my gift. Still, when we separated, she kept the breadmaker.

"I think that her insistence in making statements contradicted by evidence, statements to the fact that I had never been nice to her, derived from her sickness. She did not want to hear of any facts which should make her love me more, make her accept me more. On the one hand she was extremely hurt by the conclusions she was reaching about my character, about my not loving her. And at the same time, she had to reject, against all evidence, the fact that I did love her did deserve her love. That is why she felt the need to interpret everything I did in the worst possible manner.

"I did not suffer too much from her denying my acts of kindness. But I think that more than anything else, it points to a case of sickness."

Robert had remained quiet for some time. He now started to speak addressing his words to Melanie.

"What you said to Alfred represents a given scenario. It is not the only possible one. It all depends on the facts, and we do not have them all. I could present a different scenario which is more compatible with the facts as I know them. More than one scenario is possible. We should be prudent. Your scenario might not be entirely wrong, but I feel confident that my scenario is closer to the truth. I know Alfred for a longer time than you do, and much of what you said do not fit him. I did meet people who knew both of them. They were in agreement to say that even in the early days of their marriage, Nelly was treating Alfred with great disrespect and seemed eager to humiliate him, even in front of his friends. What I do not understand is that Alfred, even well before he was told of Nelly being sick, accepted Nelly's exaggerated control. I think that, had he stood up to Nelly since the beginning, she would have respected him more."

"You are certainly right," interjected Alfred, "I should have done it from the very beginning. But at first, I thought that it was my responsibility to make her happy. I was badly inspired by what I witnessed at home as a child. I knew my father was to blame for my mother unhappiness. I had taken an oath towards myself that I will take the responsibility of making my wife happy. I hoped that by accepting her control for a short while, will give me the time to get her trust and to let her feel secure in my love. Later it was too late and every attempt to reject her control lead to a major crisis.

"When I was told she has some chemical imbalance, it threw a light on her incomprehensible behavior. What I went through with her could only confirm that she was at least affected by irrational fears to an unhealthy degree. My heart was bleeding for her at the same time as I was hurt by her control. That is why I still care for her and very much so. I am passed the time at which I thought to congratulate her with flowers for her birthday. But I will remain interested in receiving news about how well she is doing."

Melanie, with a large smile to Alfred, told him:

"You should forgive me. I assumed too much in the scenario I presented. But it is a fact that what you told about Nelly was disparaging her, and she was not here to answer. I tried to say what would make her look best, and I did it in the spirit of a devil's advocate. I myself did not believe all of it, but I still think that some of it might be true."

"Let us leave the subject," said Lynda. "The fact is that there is no real problem. I do not mind Alfred caring to have news about Nelly, as long as he does not do it too often, and he does not."

Part 4, Chapter 5

A difficult choice

Melanie displayed a lot of patience towards Robert. Though their relation had improved almost to the best it ever had been, she noticed in Robert a lack of security, of self-esteem and a kind of indefinite fear. She was there to help him and to make him feel good. She had forgiven him for having suggested an abortion. She knew he thought of it at a time at which they were considering separating. It was now obvious that Robert was very happy at the prospect of becoming a father. He was daily asking if the child had kicked, had moved or had in any other way made his presence known. "Yes," replied Melanie on one of these occasions, "the baby has just said he wants your hand on my belly!"

Melanie's pregnancy was becoming more and more visible. If she could pray she would have begged God to ensure a safe delivery while her dad was still alive.

In fact her dad was feeling good and seemed to give the lie to the prognostics. He had started to write a book. It would be a feminist book, he told Melanie. The project seemed to have infused in him life and energy.

Robert was very affectionate and very protective towards Melanie. He acted as if the pregnancy had made Melanie fragile. He would not let her lift any weighty object. He was taking more than his share of house chores. Had Melanie listened to him she would have been sitting or laying in bed all the time.

They went shopping for a cradle, for diapers and for a monitoring system. They spent time looking for names, a boy's name and a girl's name. They gave thought to the birth announcement they would send to friends and relatives. And when they had nothing in particular to do, they would look at each other, exchange glances telling of their happiness and radiant expectations. They would then join hands and let the fingers complete the talk of the eyes.

Then, within days of due time, Melanie, while in the bathroom, started bleeding profusely. She called Robert with a tone of voice he would never forget. It expressed at one and the same time terror and pain. This time Melanie did not have a smile to express her despair. It was not so much that the pain was great than that she feared something horrible had happened or could happen to the child.

Robert took her to the maternity ward at the *Misericordia*. A doctor examined her and then asked for the assistance of two other obstetricians. He ordered Melanie moved to the emergency surgery room. They were facing a dangerous situation and would not admit Robert in the operating room.

Robert was pacing the lounge. He would then sit down for a few moments. Restless as he was, he could not remain long in his chair. While hoping for the best, he was imagining the worst.

A few minutes later, one of the doctors came out and told Robert:

"I am sorry Mr. Davidson. I have to tell you that your wife is in a very serious condition. I would say that we face the choice of either to save the mother, or to save the child. The chances of saving the mother are about 5%, the chances of saving the child are 90%. The chances to save both are nil. I would recommend saving the child. Still, the decision is yours to take, and it has to be taken fast otherwise there would soon be only one choice: to save the child."

The doctor did not have to wait long for Robert's answer, just a second or two. But Robert perceived these two seconds as taking an eternity. Robert was used to think fast. Though his answer seemed immediate, it was the result of intense thought.

"Do all you can to save my wife" Robert said in a guttural and authoritative voice. Let it be your only consideration. I realize they could both die. I take the responsibility for that decision. Please, do not waste a moment. Go back and do your best."

It took hours. Robert made efforts at rejecting from his mind the pictures of a Melanie in terrible pain, then dead in her bed, dead in a coffin. He summoned all his earlier memories of Melanie the ones from school even before he knew Lisa. He remembered Melanie at thirteen, a cute little girl with a clever and smiling face. He remembered how he played with her. He even remembered a kiss he once gave her at a time at which it did not yet mean that much, just a naughty gesture. Each of these pictures was accompanied with pangs of pain and fear that he might lose her. Thinking of the past was very difficult when the present was so overwhelmingly oppressive and frightening. Still he had to do it. He had to muster all his will power to think of the past and reject the present. And the past was rolling in his mind, too fast to his liking until the day they had become lovers. And he could not bear it anymore. He could not bear the thought that it could stop to be. He took his handkerchief to wipe away the perspiration from his forehead.

He knew he had condemned the baby to death. He had developed his love to the baby since the early months of the pregnancy. He had figured how much the baby would change their lives. In a sense, the baby already existed, in their hearts, in their expectations. Still he felt the necessity not to think now of the baby. Only Melanie existed now for him. The decision having been made, only one matter now counted: saving Melanie.

He then considered the choice he had made in the greatest hurry. He had no second thought, but he knew he would be accountable for his decision. What would he say to Stanley and Marnie if both Melanie and the child were to die, though the child could have been saved. Robert did not dwell long on that. He felt such a love for Melanie, such a need for her presence, such a pain and empathy for her condition that he decided not to think about the possibility of her death. He rather considered how to deal with Melanie's distress for having lost her child. Then he felt so sorry for his child. He had sacrificed it, may be needlessly.

It was an unbearable thought.

Finally, a doctor came in. Robert looked at him trying to guess from the expression of his face what was Melanie's fate. The doctor said: "Your wife will survive, but the child is lost", Robert

collapsed in a chair sobbing violently. One could not know if it was the tension release at the knowledge that Melanie made it, the pain for having lost the child or the realization that he had made the correct decision.

Early next morning he went to visit Melanie. He waited besides her bed till she would awake. He had mixed feelings. He looked at her pale face both with the love of a father suffering and caring for his child, and with the unselfish love for his life companion.

Melanie opened her eyes and noticed Robert. He took her left hand, brought it to his lips and kissed it. Melanie smiled, a smile of despair. She then said:

"I wish you had loved me less and would have spared my baby. I have been told the conditions in which you made the choice. It must have been terribly hard on you"

"What was hard on me," replied Robert was the thought that you might not make it. You are alive, and it justifies my decision." He gave a tender look to Melanie whose face remained marked with deep distress. Robert added:

"I also grieve for the baby. I know that nothing can compensate for it. Still, life goes on, and it should not be the end of our dreams. We will have other children."

"No," said Melanie in a sad voice, "I can no longer bear children."

Robert remained silent for a while. He looked at Melanie with tenderness, caressed her hair and then said: "Do you remember Melanie that, just after we found each other, we considered adopting children instead of conceiving our own? I will not repeat our arguments. Just tell me if you remember." Melanie nodded, and smiled to Robert, a happier smile.

Part 5, Stanley and June
Chapter 1
Facing death a second time

Stanley had been happy to learn that Melany was pregnant. At first he believed that he was happy for her. And then, as the due time approached, he realised that he had a xx in her pregnancy. He indeed was more and more looking forward for his first grandchild.

The death of the child, so close to delivery time affected him more than he would have believed. He did not yet know how vulnerable he had become.

The last eighteen months, 1980-1, had been a turning point in Stanley's life. The doctors had told he had a single year to live. He gave away Melanie to Robert in a beautiful and emotional wedding ceremony. Melanie got pregnant, and then lost her child just before due time. What a year!

These were important events. However, what particularly marked Stanley was the discovery that, within a couple of months, he could write a philosophical work of fiction with a feminist touch. Many people had read his manuscript and strongly expressed their view that the book deserved to be published. It was indeed published in December 1984 by *Lone Pine Publisher* under the title *Memoirs of God*.

Stanley did not stop writing. To write became for him a kind of addiction. His office was in the basement. Coming back from work, he would go to his office, stay there long hours facing the computer's screen and typing on the keyboard. His presence was little felt in the house. He hardly had time to spend with Marnie. Yes, every now and then he would *surface* from the basement to drink a cup of water or eat a fruit or go to the washroom. If Marnie was at home, he would hug her or otherwise express his love and affection. Still, the fact was that writing was an absorbing activity which took him away from Marnie most of the day.

Stanley realized he was giving too little time to Marnie. He opened the subject one day.

"Marnie," he started. "Five years ago, you encouraged me to write *Memoirs of God*. This took me every day away from you for long hours. At the time, you did not seem to resent it."

"At the time," answered Marnie "only one thing mattered. I wanted the single year the doctors gave you to live, to be a year you feel fulfilled. Writing took away your thoughts from your state of health. It put you in a better disposition. I considered it to be a wonderful medicine. I was happy when you were writing."

"I am grateful," commented Stanley "for the support and the encouragement you then gave me. The year passed and I was still alive, possibly in better health. The feminine hormones seem to held the tumor in check. I may have many more years to live."

"It seems like it." commented Marnie with a large smile.

"That is why," said Stanley, "I think we should reopen the matter and see whether it is right I go on with a new project requesting concentrated work for many years to come. After all, I would take away from you time we could, and maybe should enjoy together."

"How long do you think you need to concentrate on your new project?" asked Marnie.

"I am afraid," answered Stanley, "it is not a matter of a few weeks. I want to deal with the real causes of World War 2. I suspect the current views to be at odds with the historic truth. The more I examine the documents and the books written on that matter, the more I realize there still is a tremendous amount of work to be done by whoever wants to clarify the situation and get closer to the truth. I am afraid I can do nothing of worth unless I unceasingly work on the matter and research it for a few more years, say eight years. Is it fair to you to get less of my time for so many years to come?"

They remained silent for a few moments. Marnie got off the kitchen table, went to monitor what was going on over and in the oven. She took her sit back and said:

"Eight year is quite a long time. It is a long time for me to be deprived of your company most of the day."

They both remained quite till she resumed:

"And you Stanley, is it not also for you a long time during which you will give me only minutes a day? Will you not miss me?"

Stanley was put on the spot. He had no ready answer. He too asked himself how could he manage to live most of each day with little contact with Marnie. Would they not become estranged?

He stood up and went to hug Marnie and told her:

"You know how much I love you. But you also know how uncertain is the state of my health. Though I have done quite well in the last months, the dying sentence still hangs over my head. I cannot escape the consideration of how best to spend the rest of my life. Already, looking ahead, eight years might be somewhat presumptuous. A dying men should not make such long-range plans. I must therefore make a choice.

"I cannot hope finishing my project unless I concentrate on it, and even then the illness can catch up with me before I end it. Still, I cannot advance in the project without your support. I will daily need many of your hugs and your smiles. I will find in them the strength to isolate myself from everything which is not related to my research. From time to time, I will have to interrupt my work to enough steal from my research-time what will give me precious moments with you.

"Of course I can chose not to pursue my work. I will then have more time with you. But I will not cease to wonder whether I had in me what it takes to solve the puzzle in history which

baffled me. Moreover, regardless of what that would mean for me, I think it would be of value for a better understanding of history. Uncovering the real causes of WW2 may help avoiding a third world war.

"Stanley," replied Marnie, "you know I share many of your opinions. We have often discussed them together. Like you, I think it is important to uncover the real causes of World War II. I wish I had your research ability and your power of analysis. We could then have shared the work and I could have done my part. I feel you have taken a double load, yours and mine, and I should thank you for that. I too so very much want to see the truth coming out, and I believe you can do it. Nothing should stand between you and your endeavor at clarifying the matter."

She stopped a moment but it was clear she still had something to say. She soon went on: "I also look at the matter in this way. You were expected to die five years ago. Since then, whatever fraction of your time we can share together is that much of an unexpected bonus. You would have died then, I would have remained enjoying our past common memories. How can I complain when I have now so much more than that! After all, you are often taking breaks and we are doing some traveling together."

"I admire you," said Stanley and, before he could add any word, she interrupted him.

"I did not tell you the main reason why I want you to concentrate on your work. I had wondered how it came that you could beat the odds and remain alive. I am convinced it is your writing and the demands it puts on your mind which are the cause of your survival. I am afraid that if, for me, you were to take away some of the time you are giving to your writing, the illness will then get the best of you. It is the writing that gave you an additional special meaning to life and a powerful motivation to remain alive."

Stanley pondered over Marnie's words. It was not a matter to consider how true they were. It was more an emotional rediscovery of Marnie's unselfish love for him. He never considered writing as a medicine which keeps him alive. He considered his history research and writing as an obligation he had towards truth in history, towards the whole world. He felt that to retreat from that obligation, would be an act of betrayal.

There was no opportunity between Stanley and Marnie for misunderstandings. Each one so much trusted the good intentions and the decency of the other that all actions were interpreted in that light.

Once, coming up from the basement into the kitchen, Stanley saw Marnie busy with preparing coffee and cake for some of her friends sitting in the living room. Stanley did not want to interfere with that visit. He told Marnie:

"If only there was a refrigerator and a washroom in the basement, I would not have to surface."

Marnie was astonished. "It is not in character for you to tell me you do not want to see my face. Is this indeed what you intended to say? I do not believe it!"

Stanley was puzzled. "I cannot possibly," he said, "have been so rude to you, now or at any time."

"It must be," said Marnie, "you are not hearing what you are saying. You just clearly stated you would like a refrigerator and a washroom in the basement so that, in your own words, *'I will not have to see your face'*."

Stanley exploded laughing. It was Marnie's turn to be puzzled. He then explained:

"You heard the three words *see your face* when I was saying the single word *surface*. They sound very much alike."

Stanley was a lucky man. He had in Marnie a wife who would not believe he could be rude.

Stanley suggested she go out in the evenings with friends, or alone, to attend concerts and plays. She agreed. A routine developed between them. She would ask him if he is prepared to go out with her. He would ask "Is it a must?". If she had good company and felt comfortable to go without Stanley she would reply: "No, I have no problem with your staying home and work at your book." She would then leave, after hugging Stanley in the most warming and comforting manner.

If she had no company or if she, for any other reason, felt the strong need for his company that evening, she would say in a smile: "Yes Stanley, this evening is a must evening". At such times, he would be happy to stop his work. Marnie was not "musting" him too often. He felt he needed to be with her from time to time. He was happy when Marnie would say to him "it is a must evening".

Things would not change much after Stanley's retirement. The hours he would have been at work were now spent in the home basement, or at the University's library.

Somehow his health went on improving. His physician thought he was lucky to have the kind of prostate cancer for which his medication proved to be so effective a check. With time somewhat on his side, he went on working more and more eagerly on what would become *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*. It took him eight years, and it was well worth the while. He, an amateur historian, had succeeded in unveiling the true causes of WW II. The work was indeed important but, in the university circles, the opposition to it was great. It showed up mostly in ignoring it.

During the fourteen years from 1980 till 1994, Marnie had constantly been by his side. She encouraged him to give all the necessary time to his projects. She did not mind to be deprived of his company most of the time. She was proud of his achievements, and believed in the importance of his work. She realized that Stanley had uncovered the true causes of World War II, and that it would be difficult to have peace in the world without understanding the real causes of that war.

In reality they made each year some trip together. They went to France more than once. They took a guided tour through Europe, They went to England, Italy and Germany. They even took a trip to China followed a few years later by a trip to Morocco, Spain and Portugal. They also went for three weeks to Czechoslovakia and Hungary. But in between these trips Marnie would not feel Stanley's presence, even during the weekends.

She took great comfort in Melanie's happiness with Robert. Marnie adored their two adopted children, Brian and Tracy.

She noticed that, Stanley's work and reputation brought him in contact with numerous people, many of them women. Stanley had a page on the WEB. He was receiving through the internet messages related to his work. Sometimes, these contacts were evolving into friendships.

Stanley worried about the effect those friendships may have on Marnie's feeling of security. One day he opened the question:

"Marnie," he said, "I feel awkward when through my contacts I come to befriend women of all ages. Some of them are much younger than me. I thought it would be fairer to you if you would also be in contact with them and participate in our friendships. I want all my friends to also be your friends."

"That is hardly possible," commented Marnie, "they are in contact with you for the support you give them, for the information they get from you or for your kind of tutoring. For some you are their mentor. I cannot do the same"

Does it not bother you," asked Stanley?

"May be it does bother me, a little. But I want to be reasonable," replied Marnie.

She looked at a disquiet and troubled Stanley and added:

"There was a time when a physician would do house calls. He would sometimes be invited to join in for supper. People would trust him so much they would ask his advise on family matters. He would become a friend of so many families, more so with the women than with the men because, in these time more than today, women were the nurturing persons and shared more their concern with the doctor."

"In most cases, the doctor's wife would not mind it at all. She would be happy that her husband could do so much good. She would offer her help in such cases where there was some good to be done of a non medical character."

"In the same way," she continued, "I am proud of you for having written such eye-opener books. I know they are important. I know how difficult it is to overcome the resistance of those opposed to the truth in this matter. I can understand you try to spread the word. I can see that one of the ways to do it is to build friendships with people sharing that interest of yours. If some of those friends are women, I become proud of them and proud of myself as a woman."

She stopped for a moment and then added: "What matters is that you go on loving me. You can have hundred friends as long as you have one single love. Is that not so, Stanley?" Stanley went to her, kissed her and hugged her. He felt so lucky to have married Marnie and be so much loved by her and in such an unselfish way. She then added:

"You know, I am a member of two hiking groups. There I am meeting men and women. We are all good friends, and you do not resent it. Besides, my volunteer work brings me in contact with men and women. There is reciprocity in what we have to accept and tolerate from each other."

Stanley threw a glance at her and noticed how deep in thoughts she seemed to be. He said:

"What are you thinking now? Marnie." She answered:

"I am not sure of the matter, but it seems to me you have more women friends than man friends. Moreover, It appears to me that the women friends are more important to you. What do you think?"

Stanley understood that Marnie was having a difficult time. She was torn between her desire to give to Stanley all the personal space he needed for his emotional well-being and for his work, and her fear she could loose him. She was worried. He remained thinking for a few moments and then said:

"The matter is not simple though I do have simple answers, simple explanations. My relations with people are conditioned by two factors: the **I** factor and the **them** factor. I will start with the **them** factor. The people who contact me through the internet are mostly young students attending highschool or university. They request my help. It so occurs that girls are more inclined to ask for help than boys. So I do start with a greater number of connections with girls than with boys. This has nothing to do with me, it is not the result of a choice from my part. The students requesting my help are overwhelmed by my dedication to them, to the subject matters, and by my readiness to do whatever it takes to satisfy their studying need. I am sparing no time and no money. The money comes in when I sometimes do not hesitate to send them material by *Federal Express* so that it reaches them in time. I also send them material not directly related to their studies but which they always found fascinating. Many of them did express their gratitude. However, girls and boys do express it in different ways.

"Girls, for instance, sign their messages with 'with love'. Since they all know I am over seventy, the 'with love' has no romantic significance, but its emotional significance is unmistakable. Boys never do that. Some girls do treat me as a 'grandpa' boys never do that. Some girls confide in me their personal worries. Boys hardly ever do that. Finally most boys, once they get the help they expect from me, get scarce on the e-mail and eventually stop. As a result, I have more e-mail friendships with girls than with boys. Once more, this is not my choice. I am very happy with the friendship I still have with few boys who remained e-mailing with me.

"This is the **them** aspect. The **I** aspect is troubling me for what it says about me. You know how close Melanie and I have always been. I was happy that, like me, she was so interested in history

and social justice. I derived an immense pleasure at opening perspectives for her allowing her to by-pass years of research and to come closer to understanding the world at a much earlier age. I always wanted her to reach her own conclusion. I was by her side to provide her with references, and to signal to her the traps to be avoided.

"When Melanie left home, when in view of her life problems her interest in history and politics dimmed. I felt a loss, and felt at a loss. I need a few Melanies to replace her. I need it to regain a sense of purpose, that of putting good seeds in the minds of young people. I also need it for my emotional well being."

"This means," commented Marnie, "that I cannot satisfy all your emotional needs."

"That is true," said Stanley, "and it would be unhealthy if it was otherwise. You too, besides me, have friends, Melanie and the grandchildren to satisfy your emotional needs. It is true you do not have young male friends, and I do have young women friends. It may have to do with the fact that we have a daughter and not a son. And when the daughter leaves home, it is a surrogate daughter that we may miss. In my case what I miss most is to be the tutor of a surrogate daughter or granddaughter."

"I would have thought," said Marnie, "that, not having a son, it would be a surrogate son whom you will most miss as a pupil."

"It depends" argued Stanley. "I do miss a son I never had. And I do miss a daughter which, in a sense, I have lost. I do miss a very dear cousin whom I adored and whom I did not see since she was twelve and who has recently died in Australia.

"And then, I am not certain I know exactly what is going on in me. What I know for certain is that those young girls are indeed dear to me, that I have no romantic feeling whatsoever towards any of them, that the kind of feeling I have for them does not compete in the least with the different very strong feeling I have for you. What is more is that I have for a few boys feeling somewhat stronger than those I have for the women friends. The fact that my feeling for man friends and women friends are congruent is enough to rest my concerns."

"It may be enough for you," said Marnie, "but not quite enough for me. I do not want to put any restraint on you. I want you to remain winning the battle against cancer, to remain successful in your research; but, in the measure in which it is possible, in the measure you do not feel too constrained, please be careful and do not involve yourself emotionally in a way which deflects you from me."

"Nothing, absolutely nothing can deflect me from you" said Stanley earnestly.

She went to him and hugged him tenderly.

Part 5, Chapter 2

A depressed old man and an abused young girl

Just after the publication of *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal* at the end of 1993, Stanley noticed his mood was becoming darker. He could not understand why he felt a heavy load on his heart. At the same time he started to have blood circulation problems. He was developing a case of phlebitis in his legs. Sitting on a hard chair would become painful. He avoided going to concerts and movie theaters. The chairs there were not enough comfortable for him.

His health was deteriorating. It had occurred in the past without causing him emotional difficulties. Now he was afraid he was loosing his mind. He did not yet know it, but the accumulated effect of the feminine hormone he was taking for fourteen years – to keep the cancerous tumor in check –, was also taking its toll on his emotional makeup. Stanley had become depressed without knowing it was related to his medication.

The medicine had also enlarged his breasts. He was very self-conscious about it. He would, refuse to go to swimming pools. He thought it might have contributed to his dark mood. Marnie's libido was naturally declining with age. Stanley, feared his enlarged breasts could be the real reason. Marnie had assured him she preferred him with larger breasts. He would not believe her. He thought that in her generosity, she was trying to make him feel good. Sometimes, though rarely, the medicine instead of causing impotence was increasing the patient's libido. It was the case with Stanley. The lack of adequate response from Marnie contributed to his depression.

It was more than just a depression. It was accompanied with delusional feelings. Contrary to what his rational mind was still telling him, Stanley was feeling that people, including Marnie, had stopped to love him or to like him.

Most of the time he had tears in his eyes ready to pour out for the least reason. Stanley realized something in him was wrong, but he did not know what it was. It was not the best time for him to confront an emotional situation which arose just then.

Stanley made an effort at hiding his state of depression from Marnie. This was not too difficult since he was hours long in the basement's office away from Marnie's eyes.

For professional reasons and for a short time, Stanley subscribed to *Femisa*, an e-mail list of about 800 people. Any message sent to the list would automatically be distributed to all members. The subjects discussed had to do with feminism. The e-mail address of a sender would not reveal much about that person. It would not say for sure if it was a man or a woman and what was the age of the person.

Many of the subscribers were certain Stanley was a woman. They thought "Stanley" was not his real name. In a message announcing the cancellation of his subscription, he explicitly said he was a man. A number of subscribers, men and women, registered their astonishment. They thought that only a woman could be as sensitive as he had proved to have been.

June was a casual contributor. Stanley had noticed her very few messages. He had been impressed by her wisdom and the extent of her knowledge. He thought she could be a professor aged fifty or over.

He was therefore happy when he received the following message directly from her and not through the list:

Thu Apr 21/94

Stanley -

I have been reading your messages lately and I am interested in what subject you teach. Could you send me a list of the books you have written or explain **what your specialty is, if not feminism?**

Thank you

June

Before canceling his FEMISA subscription, Stanley had been invited to deliver a talk in Fort Collins, Colorado, concerning his latest book *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*. When he announced to the FEMISA list that he would be away to give a lecture in Fort Collins, most subscribers thought he would be talking about gender and feminist issues. To put the record straight, he had let it be known that his credentials were not in that field.

After the cancellation of his subscription, he would have liked to remain in contact with those subscribers who had impressed him with their objectivity, their knowledge and the courtesy they observed in the debates. June was one of them, possibly the best of them. Stanley noticed in her message a hint that she had noticed his past messages and considered him a *bona fide* feminist.

He did not know her age. As long as communications are public, there can be little ambiguity in relations between participants. When the message exchanges move to the private e-mail, there is always a possibility for a stronger and personal connection.

Just in case, he put on record that he was old. He answered June in that sense. He also used the same kind of addressing. He would not say "Dear June" before she would say "Dear Stanley".

April 21, 1994

June -

I am seventy one years old and do not teach anymore. I left school at the age of 12, resumed studies much later. Life was hard on me. I did all kinds of works.

.....

.....**In 1976 I was treated by radiation for a prostate cancer.** After five years, in 1980, while on the operating table, doctors discovered the cancer had spread all over. I was told I had a single year to live. It is then that I turned to writing. I wrote a short essay (10-11 on-line pages) titled "Conquest of Death". ...

.... I also wrote a book called "Memoirs of God" The book is a fiction story strongly criticizing the concept of a misogynist God.

.....
Since ten years ago I put to myself the task of solving the mystery of a Chamberlain who on the one hand apparently gave a freehand to Hitler to 'go East', and later gave a guarantee to Poland, seemingly barring to Hitler the road to the East.

.....
I am, in a large measure, a self-educated man.
I believe I am a caring person.

I hope you do not find all this boring
Stanley

His answer provided many clues about his life. He did not know how otherwise he could explain his active participation in feminist debates, the writing of a feminist book and a book on history, while having no credentials in these two fields. A woman professor, might have thought she got more than she had requested. She might not have been much impressed. The message however, as it turned out, was sent to a young girl, and she was moved. June's response left Stanley wondering.

Thu Apr 21/94
Subject **Boring?!!!!**

Stanley,

Your life sounds fascinating. I would **love to learn more** about you. Please send me "Conquest of Death" and the critique of "Memoirs of God." I will look for the book in our library.....? I guess I should tell you a bit about myself, **eh?**

As you know, my name is June actually, though I am not religious, I turned twentysophomore at College.... I love to run track and travel. Last summer I took some art classes in It was wonderful. I am not an artist. I try to write poetry I like to run track (my mile time is 6:11!) and drive fast and ski fast. I like stress and pressure because it always produces the best results. I am a post-modernist feminist, in that I believe in the dissolving of gender differentiations. I think the rules to today's competitive game are fine; I just want women to have a fair chance, without discrimination. I think you have heard this rap before

Please send me your writings. **I would love to keep in touch.**

June

Stanley spent time pondering on the message. It was a flattering and friendly one. It contained none of the formal expressions usual between strangers, or between people separated by age or

by social conditions. Such a message would have pleased him anytime. However, suffering from delusional depression, he was prepared to read in June's message more than was indeed in it. The exclamation "**eh**" at the end of the first paragraph, would have been natural coming from a child, or from an uneducated person. Coming from June, it introduced some level of familiarity and meant she took it as granted they already were friends. Besides, the last sentence left no doubt about it. June was treating Stanley not as a published writer fifty one years older than her, but as a friend on an equal footing, a friend of her age.

Her friendly feelings were expressed with unusual enthusiasm. She would love, and not just like, to know more about him. She knew from him what were his publications. To know more could only extend to his thoughts, feelings and his personal life. She would love, and not just like, to keep in touch. The friendliness and good feelings were unmistakable. Stanley's lengthy message was in answer to her questions. She felt the need to respond in kind and tell him about herself, her likes and her feminist ideas. It was as if she had said to him: let us become better acquainted.

Stanley had women friends much younger than him. Marnie and him had remained in good terms with Lisa, Robert's ex-girlfriend. Stanley treated her as a close friend. However, that friendship resulted from years of acquaintance. Nothing like the instant friendship that seemed to take shape between June and Stanley.

Seven years ago, before his retirement, Denise was working under his supervision. Friendly relations grew between them. She was young and happily married. Denise was a nice person, very able at work, endowed with wisdom and charm. She seemed simple, never raised her voice, and apparently had no pretensions. Effortlessly, she was recognized as an important asset in the group of her co-workers.

Denise and Stanley used to arrive early at work to avoid the busy traffic hours. They would always start their day with some conversation for the time it took Denise to drink her coffee. She could not function without it. Denise had lost her father at a young age. This made it natural and easy for them to establish a friendship with the flavor of a father-daughter relation. Without elaborating about it, they each knew they were good friends. Nevertheless, their relation never admitted the kind of familiarity which could exist between a father and his daughter. No jokes, no physical familiarity, and no felt necessity for either.

Each one could say about an idea: "What do you say?" but not "What do you say, eh!" Once more, Stanley was reading in June's message more than what really was in it. It was however the first time he felt that his age, or accomplishments, or his reputation for high moral standards, did not constitute a separating wall. It made him happy and worried.

The happiness was out of proportion with whatever justified it. It was a fact he would observe again and again. In an exceedingly short time he became addicted to June's messages, checking many times a day whether a new one had arrived in his e-mail. In tune with his general dark mood, and if June would be late in answering, he would imagine having committed improprieties in his previous messages. He was becoming more and more dependent on June.

Having been away in Colorado, he read June's message three weeks after it was sent. He felt secure with respect to June. With over fifty years difference of age, romance was excluded from her side. On no circumstance could it have existed on his. With an older woman, and for the record, he would have mentioned how deeply in love he was with Marnie. He mentioned it to June for a totally different reason. It was his way to be friendly with her by telling her something private about himself. His next message showed he was receptive to June's implied suggestion. On this occasion, he made a small step forward and addressed his message to "Hi June"

Wed May 11/94

Hi June

I came back from Fort Collins two weeks ago and have just caught up (almost) with accumulated back-work.

.....
To make it short, when I came back on April 28, I could not remember what messages needed a follow-up. I had some hard-copies and I reread some of your messages, **and was struck with their friendly tone. I was moved by what appeared to be an offer of friendship. It would be quite a challenge to close the gap of the fifty years separating us, and it would please me very much.**

.....
My marriage which already lasted thirty three years is an example of the kind which is today hard to find. Anything my wife Marnie does, whatever it might be, is for me a proof of her wisdom. Anything I do, whatever it might be, is for my wife a proof of my caring. My wife and I are still deeply in love. How could we maintain, and make it work, such an extent of mutual tolerance is sometimes difficult to grasp. I could offer some advice on that. But then I do not know if that is what you meant with "life advise" nor if you need or welcome this kind of advise.

My book THE CHAMBERLAIN-HITLER DEAL has been recently published. I think it is an important book in as much as it reveals the real causes of World War 2, which are quite different from those taught in schools and universities.

If you want I could send you "Memoirs of God", the book I wrote when I was told, fourteen years ago, that I had a single year to live.

Stanley

It soon became evident that the age gap challenge did not really exist between them. She treated him as if he were much younger, close to her own age. He treated her with the respect one has for a nice and wise person who, though very young, cared for social justice, freedom and equality of rights. She was a devoted feminist who recognized that there were other important problems besides feminism. Was it not for the external world, was it not for cynical prejudices, the age gap could have been inconsequential. As it turned out, it destroyed their friendship.

The friendly tone of her answer was evident in what she wrote under "subject" of her message.

Wed May 11/94
Subject: **glad you are back!!**
From: June

Hello again,

.....
You're right, I would like to strike up a friendship. You sound like a fascinating man.
.....

Talk to you soon,

June

"I would like to strike up a friendship". What made June advance such a proposal? In fact June had already an idea concerning Stanley. She had read his many contributions, debates and quasi-quarrels over the network. When he decided to contribute to FEMISA no more than once a week, he also underlined his gender: he was a man.

Possibly, it was the strength of his logical arguments, his sensitivity and the kindness with which he treated his opponents, which attracted June's interest. As to Stanley, he was very moved by this offer of friendship. That message from a young woman who, for all he knew, could be ugly and physically unattractive, moved him beyond words. He felt he *froved* that young woman.

Stanley had once defined two new verbs: to *froved* and to *carelove*. He had once written a message for Femisa that he never sent:

To Froved and to Carelove

Consider the following:

I love my pet
I love going to movies
I love dogs
I love dogs fried (it is true for some Chinese people)
I love being naughty
I love my boyfriend (or my girlfriend)
I love my friend
I love my parents (or my children and grandchildren)

So many different meanings of "love" expressed with one same word "love"

And then, there is the jealous husband who just killed his wife. When asked why he did it, he replied "I loved her too much!!"

That is why I have defined two new words *frove* and *carelove*.

Frove is the love as stated in the command "love your neighbor". It is devoid of any physical gratification. It is what parents, children and friends should feel for each other. In this sense, and without any possibility of ambiguity I can say I frove you.

Then, there are the feelings between the woman and the man who form a couple. Besides the very natural physical attraction between them, there should be a sense of caring for each other which includes mutual respect. I express these feeling with the word *to carelove*. That is why I wish all of you, when the time will come, to have a significant other in your life who careloves you and not just loves you.

Your friend who froves you all,

With the same purity and decency with which he had "fallen" *in love* with his schoolmate Ezra fifty-eight years ago, he "fell" in love (froved) with June. In both cases the love was totally devoid of physical attraction. It was humane love, the caring for a person, the need to see the person happy. In the case of June, there was an additional element, her age.

He was indeed interested in young persons for a very special reason. It took him years and years to discover how much current knowledge in politics and social sciences was colored by prejudices and by distortions fostered by a media at the service of the privileged. A young person represented for him a mind that could be helped to see the truth. He did not want anybody to trust him and just believe his version of events. He wanted to help the person discover the truth on its own.

June was a caring person. Social justice mattered to her. She had an independent mind and, before her college years, had already noticed the bias prevalent in history books. She was good material for the search of truth.

Had he been twenty-five, he could have thought that June was flirting, or inviting him to flirt. With the fifty years gap, June's "fascination" was obviously no more than her recognition of the extraordinary circumstances that marked Stanley's life. It also showed that there was no inhibition, be them social conventions or others, in her relation with him. She had no fear of being misinterpreted, and she was right.

As was his want with any remarkable event in his life, he told Marnie of June's offer of friendship. He suggested to her to transform the dual friendship into a three-way one. Marnie smiled and said to him: "I am proud when people seek your friendship. You can do for them what I cannot. I do not feel threatened. I know how much you love me. I also know what a decent person you are. Still, try to be wise, and careful." In fact the moment he held Marnie's

hand, they both could feel waves of love emotions moving from one to the other. The contacts Stanley had with women friends were handless.

In a next message Stanley told June of the possibility he would attend a conference in a city close to that of her college. He was not sure her college was in that city. He wondered if he could, with Marnie, meet her just after or before the conference. This is how June answered:

Thu May 12/94
Subject: Yes!!!

Dear Stanley,

I am from Actually, I live in St. Louis, but go to school out here in **I would love** to meet you and your wife if you do get a chance to be here at the same time I will be.

By the way, I go to College in,

.....
You also said you needed an address to mail me "Memoirs of God." **I would love** to read it! My address here is

.....
Talk to you soon...

June

"I would love to" seemed to have become a fixture in all her messages. This was also true of her generous use of exclamation marks, in the header and in the text of the message. Stanley did not give too much thought to the fact. that, in her public messages, she would never use that expression. Instead she would simply say "I would like" as when she expressed the desire to meet other subscribers at the Chicago conference. Now that she addressed him as "Dear Stanley", he felt free to reciprocate.

May 13
Dear June

I am sending you "Memoirs of God" by Airmail. It will stay in your Mailbox till you are back from Chicago.

Stanley

Stanley had included in this message a summary of the causes of WW2 as revealed in his book. He was doing what he liked most, demystifying prejudiced opinions about historic events. It mattered to him to "educate" a young mind, particularly a friendly one.

Two weeks later, June, back from Chicago, wrote:

Mon May 30/94

Subject: I'm back!!!

Hello there, Stanley!

I wanted to thank you for mailing me your books! I appreciate them and will begin to peruse them as soon as finals are over. I love the inscriptions too!

Chicago was wonderful. I made many contacts and met lots of interesting women. **I also met a man (woo-wooo!).** He's a 27 year old engineer. **Very nice guy.** Anyway, the trip was successful...

I will be in Germany when you are May-June right? We can meet each other **then if not sooner.**

June

One inscription mentioned the bridging of a fifty years gap in age. The second described June as being part of Stanley's eternity. That expression had been used in his essay *Conquest of Death*, a copy of which he had sent June.

He could not understand the warmth he felt on reading "Hello there, Stanley!" It sounded very friendly and bore a sound of closeness. The rest of the letter was in tune. Girls meet boys everyday, everywhere. The fact that she mentioned the engineer (woo-wooo!), meant that the men had raised in her an unusual interest. It sounded like she was confiding into Stanley. He felt happy at the expectation of a romantic relation between June and the engineer. He would have to conceal how strongly it made him happy. He did not want June to think he felt fatherly towards her. How could he explain that he felt fatherly towards all young people, that is people younger than forty?

Stanley was at a loss and could not remember how did she know he would be in Germany in May-June. He did not know it himself.

Mon May 30/94

Hi June,

It is good to know you are safely back. I worried for you as I would have done for any friend, woman or man.

I am happy to hear about the young engineer. I hope he is the kind which believes in the equality of sexes. I would be happy to hear that romance is developing between you two, on condition, of course, that he has a deep respect for women in general, and for you in particular.

Please, do not peruse my books. You cannot do justice to them except by reading them. MEMOIRS OF GOD reads easily. As to THE CHAMBERLAIN-HITLER DEAL, you could start by reading the first chapter. It is self contained and gives a fair idea of the importance of the work.

I intend indeed to be in Germany in 1995 a few days in May or June. I did not yet fix the exact date. You may help me do that. Have you seen the Canadian Rockies? Edmonton is a good starting point for touring them. They are overwhelmingly beautiful. If this can tempt you, then we could meet earlier.

Stanley

He would have invited June to Edmonton, as he would have done with any friend. He believed Marnie would not resent it at all. She would have treated June as her own granddaughter.

The next message gives a hint at how much he was suffering from emotional depression and in doubt of the wisdom of his actions. His fear of offending anyone, friends in particular, is also evident.

Tue May 31/94

Hi June,

On second thought, I should not tell you how to deal with the books. Peruse them, read them, do as you please within your own constraints of time and commitments. -----

Stanley

Stanley hesitated before sending next message. He wanted to reveal his socialist tendencies. He knew his views were not popular, particularly among the middle-class and the well-to-do in the US. June seemed to belong to the later. He knew that by doing that, he could lose June. He also knew how important her friendship had become for him. He was aware that there was an unhealthy element in his being so much dependent on that friendship. Still, he was prepared to risk it all for the sake of a small chance of being able to preach socialism to her.

Thu Jun 2/94

To: june@.....

From Stanley

Dear June,

Is there a subject you would like to discuss with me, that is to say with the friend I am to you? Politics? History? Social problems? Life experience? Or whatever

else. According to the mood your letter could just be casual, giving me your news, helping to keep in touch, or, in part, taking up an intellectual agenda of interest to both of us. This agenda could be the object of a small or greater portion of the letter. One possibility could be just to exchange opinions on the world events.

Just now, I am starting a study which will end up in a book on socialism. It seems to me that a society like ours in which the continual progress in technology is not always accompanied by a continual increase in the well-being of the population (particularly the poorest and most vulnerable part) has serious flaws. Our society is flawed.

Socialism was supposed to cure society from its flaws. Obviously it did not succeed in the Soviet Union. However, Christianity is not judged through its record during the Spanish Inquisition and the Religious Wars. Should we judge socialism just through the Stalinist experience? Is successful socialism impossible? Would it have more chances in industrially advanced countries? Etc.. etc..

This matter, and related ones, is important to me. I would like to try to clarify the question in my own mind, and then may be, publish my conclusions. I would be more than happy to be challenged by a person who could see what I do not. It would be of great help to me if, without committing time to it, you would be willing, on occasions, to discuss some aspects of this problem.

Friendly,
Stanley

June's answer was rewarding.

Thu Jun 2/94,

Stanley,

Your idea about socialism sounds complex. Are you familiar with chaos theory? I think you are taking a more realistic, holistic approach to the study of applied ideology. Too often fearful capitalists point to the example of the former Soviet Union as the fate of all attempts for social and economic equality. Marx recognized that political institutions are superstructures, or paradigms resting on economic foundations. If you accept an economic system that is inherently exploitative, how can you expect a society to result that is truly based on liberty, equality, or justice? I have often wondered some of the same things you have. Especially since the former Soviet Union by all accounts was not ready for socialism. Lenin accelerated the process of industrialization and hoped to create skip the capitalistic stage in Marx's evolutionary theory. But of course it failed!!

That is not to say that I believe Marx was right. I haven't yet decided about that. But there is some validity to the idea that an evolutionary process in the industrialized nations is occurring. Take Europe, for example. The Clintons are insisting that we are the last of the developed countries to have socialized health care. Indeed we already have socialized education. Perhaps we are heading in that direction. Maybe if our government had not scared Americans for fifty years that communism was a threat to democracy, we might be more helpful to the suffering victims of enforced totalitarianism under the guise of communism, and realize that we had, and have, nothing to fear. Change can be very good. Socialism does make sense in a modern world. We'll have to talk more about this later...

I will not be in in October or November. I will be in Germany when you are, though. ***We will have to get together then - if not before!!***

Yes, the engineer I met is very sensitive to women's issues. When he was talking to me about examples in the law where women are tried rather than the criminal (and this is in more case than rape) he spoke with such a passion I knew he was sincere. I like that about him. I have never dated anyone more than 2 years older than me. This is quite a learning experience. But, as I said before, change can be good. I have found that this guy doesn't play all the games that twenty year old play, and his values are a little more mature, as you would expect. He also doesn't kid the way most of my friends do. People my age have perfected the joke of saying exactly what you don't mean in order to be funny like, "No, I don't want you coming' to my house tonight. You and all your slimy friends. No way." That means the speaker would love to see you. I did that a couple times around him and he believed what I said!! I had to tell him that I was kidding. Oh well. We do laugh a lot and have pretty good conversations!!

"We will have to get together" is not the same as "we might get together". It points to a strong desire for a meeting, desire assumed to be reciprocal.

Stanley was happy. June was confiding more and more to him And, more to the point, she was open-minded concerning Socialism. He should not have answered that message. She was going home and promised to keep in touch. The ball was in her hands. It should have been left there.

But he had difficulty abstaining from comments on her open-mindedness towards Socialism.

June 3?, 1994

June,

Later, after I receive from you a message from St. Louis, I will tell you about what I have already written concerning socialism. Though I have a great respect for Karl Marx, my approach towards Socialism comes more from a Christian perspective (I am neither Christian nor a believer in God) than from an economic

one. I realize nevertheless that any system, however strongly value-motivated, has to make economic sense. I will tell you (and you may find it in my book) that the "West" hated the Soviet Union for what ever was good in it, and not for what was there so evil. I have written some essays on democracy which I might send you to your St. Louis address.

.....
The point of the story is that I do not know you enough. There are people, good people, some of whom I love and respect, who, when they hear the word "Socialism", feel very discomfoted and may react in an unpredictable way. **Was it not risky for me to mention "Socialism" to you? Was there not the possibility that, like so many, you confuse socialism with a kind of Satanism (or almost)? Was it not to gamble with a friendship?**

You did say to me that I am a fascinating man! **Allow me to tell you that you are a fascinating woman!** At this young age of twenty, to be intellectually so mature, to take an interest to so serious matters and to carry such an impressive luggage of knowledge is very uncommon. Add to it your sensitivity and your kindness, and you may understand that while I knew I could trust your good judgment, I was scared at what I could lose

.....
I reckon I have dramatized the matter. The idea, as I said, is to make you smile.

Concerning the engineer, it sounds that things can get serious. If and when he comes to mean something very special to you, I would love to have him too as a friend.

I have somewhere in a U.S. city, a friend whose grand daughter's behavior indicates she had been abused in her early childhood. She now lives with her grandparents. She told me by phone (I had never seen her yet) that she liked "Memoirs of God" her grandfather gave her to read. I visited them, and the grandparents welcomed me to keep in touch with her. We became friends. She hugged me when I took leave. We correspond regularly. In her last letter, she asked me if it was not too premature to sign her letter "with Love". I replied, somewhat jokingly, that, at the safe distance of thousands of miles, she could say to me "with Love" without being embarrassed. The real challenge for her, I told her, is to now go to her grand parents and say to each of them: Grandpa, or grandma, "I love you!". I am thrilled with the fact that this girl, which during the last years, could not pronounce the word love, has finally overcome the difficulty. My problem is that I feel guilty. Not to say "I love you" was for her a protection against disappointment. If she meets a man who pretends to be serious, to whom she will now say "I love you" only to be later disappointed, could for her be deadly. More than others, she has to be shielded from this kind of disappointment, and I do not know how to tell her that the word "love" has to be used only with people one can be sure they are honest and sincere.

I just reread this incoherent letter and I am afraid you could think that there is a relation between my advice to the abused girl and a hint to you concerning the engineer. I swear there is none. I am absolutely certain that you are as wise as can be in evaluating people, and your engineer is in my view totally honest and sincere. It just so happens that I am about to write to my friend's granddaughter and my concerns appeared in the letter, may be at an inopportune place.

It is time to end this letter. Is it premature for me to tell you that I consider you a very dear friend, and that I want to be for you a friend in need, that is to say a friend indeed. Happy holidays, happy readings happy dreams. Friendly, Stanley

It was an extraordinary coincidence. At that point, Stanley did not know that June too had been abused in her childhood. He did not know how pertinent was his remark about the need to not say the three word "I love you " easily.

This letter would haunt Stanley for a couple of months. In the acute emotional depression he was in, he interpreted an absence of reply as resulting from the offending character of that letter. Rereading it latter, he could not find in it what June could take exception to. Blinded by the emotional depression, he wrongly assumed that by paraphrasing "if it is not too premature" to end her letter with "with Love". he was coming too close to June. In his paraphrasing, he did not use the word "love". Had he used it, the meaning would have been as decent as it was in the granddaughter's letter and in his reply to her. In fact he only spoke of friendship. He still was afraid that June, in a wrong attempt to put two plus two together would complete the paraphrasing and include the world love. She could then reach false conclusions. A depressed person has strange ways of thinking.

"Happy dreams" obviously referred to her romance with the engineer. The worry expressed to the grand daughter about saying "I love you" to the wrong young man, was not intended to also warn June. As it will be seen later, it might as well have been.

In the early stage of their friendship, June had told him he is a fascinating man. It took him longer to reciprocate. June had to demonstrate her open mindedness to Socialism, before he would tell her he finds her fascinating.

Stanley wonders today what would have occurred had June answered his letter, had she remained in regular correspondence with him, or even had she expressly interrupted corresponding and messaging for the summer. He would have then had no reason to wildly interpret her silence. His emotional problems might then not have been entangled with June. He might not have gone to visit her in St. Louis. Their friendship was bound to grow. Eventually they would have met, may be in Edmonton, may be in Germany.

A meeting anywhere else than St. Louis would have had no grave consequences. Only in St. Louis, where the direct pressure of parents, boyfriend and friends would prove unbearable, would June crack and give up on her friendship with Stanley.

As a precaution, in case June would have already left college, Stanley send to June, at her St. Louis address, a copy of his last message. Now he thought he could expect an answer. But it was not forthcoming and, in his state of emotional depression, he was finding irrational reasons for June's silence. He wrote her again.

Tue Jun 21/94

Hi June,

It is said in French, and may be in English, that "speaking is of silver while silence is of gold". It is a wisdom that too often passes me by, and I had more than once regretted having spoken, or written, instead of remaining silent. I hope I will not have to regret it once more.

Did I blew it? Is it possible you saw, in my paraphrasing of the abused girl, something else? You must have noticed that my words "Is it too premature.." were taken from her. When you kid, you sometimes add "I was kidding". Should I have added "I am paraphrasing"? It seemed so obvious!

Yes the word friendship means a lot to me, and I do not use it casually. The word, however, does not need more definition. By its very nature, a friend has to be dear. Would it not have been for my itching to paraphrase, I would have considered the matter as granted and in no need for being more explicit. I consider myself lucky for not having paraphrased the "with love" signature of that girl.

I still cannot believe that you could find exception to anything I did. Could you please let me know what was it I did so wrong.

Thinking of it, I might indeed be a strange person and, at times, a bit "too heavy" to deal with. But consider the following: My cancer-tumour is checked by a medicine which produces clots in the blood. If I take too much of the medicine, I am certain to die from a stroke. If I take too little, I am certain to die from cancer. I do consider each year I lived in the last fourteen years, as the equivalent of three years (measured in terms of enjoyment, of being productive etc..). I therefore consider myself having already lived over one hundred years. This means that I can have no more claim on life. I had more than a fair share. That is the reason why I would like that my death be an occasion of celebration and not of mourning. After all, it would be the end of a fulfilled and productive life.

The problem is that, on the one hand, I have not yet secured the survival of the historical truth imbedded in my last book, and, on the other hand, friendships that are so important to me (I mean all friendships; do not take it personally) are unconsciously pursued by me at a speed three times faster than normal. That fast speed, which is normal to me, may take some people out of breath. Please, remember that what is for you just four months, is for me a full year. However, if I go too fast, I can slow down if told to do so.

I will never again, even in paraphrasing, speak of you as a very dear friend. Can we now make peace? Can I remain a simple friend with whatever minimal meaning you want to give it? Please, reply three times faster than you would do usually. Friendly, Stanley

P.S. Was it, may be, a mistake to send you a letter in St. Louis? I have no sense of protocol!

This letter was indeed very nice, written with a sense of humor, it should have melted June's anger, if anger there was. That such a nice letter should remain without reply, should have indicated to Stanley that June either did not receive it, or was facing events which did not allow her time for correspondence. However, he was no longer a normal person. He was deep in trouble with his emotional depression. He wrote again but got no answer.

Being depressed, Stanley was getting frantic. The medicine he was taking against the cancerous tumor was increasing the blood's propensity for clots formation. His sleep was often interrupted by pricking feelings moving from one point of the body to neighboring ones. These pains could be due to the formation of small clots. And then, a vein inflammation in the leg left no doubt that he was running the danger of getting a stroke. He therefore reduced the dosage of the drug and latter ceased to take it. He realized that he was feeling emotionally better. Was the drug the cause of his emotional problems? In a moment of lucidity he wrote the following letter to June.

June 28

Hi June,

What a mess! What a mess did I do!

Now that the anxiety-wave has subsided, I can have a look at the damage it caused. It was enough for me to cease taking my medicine for a week (instead of the original dosage of three pills a day, I am now taking one pill a week) and already I feel different and have a different perspective

I can more objectively see what occurred: Anxiety had always been there in variable measures. I remember how anxious I was for having told you to read my books and not to 'peruse' them. I felt guilty and sent you a message apologizing for having told you what to do.

The anxiety reached higher levels when you accessed your e-mail with your comments on the movie WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMEN. Having accessed your e-mail, you did have an opportunity to send me a message acknowledging mine to you. You did not. I took it as a sure proof you felt offended by my e-mail and letter.

I am embarrassed, contrite and quite sad. **The idea of having hurt our friendship is very painful. I cared very much for it. As I told you, I do not use the word "friend" casually. The idea of closing with friendship a generation gap of fifty years thrilled me. Besides I felt intellectually close to you.** What remains of all that? Obviously, it is for you to decide. If I can judge from the little I know from you, you will generously, and compassionately, allow to put that period behind us and resume our friendship undiminished. The Stanley you befriended is still there, essentially the same, just a little bruised by the experience. May be, one day, if we are to remain friends (still a little bit of anxiety!) I will tell you what I have to go through to remain alive. You can guess that anxiety-waves caused me trouble in other circumstances too, not at all related to you. **It is however the first time I feel so sorry.**

I know I have no claim on receiving messages. I remember even having once told you not to worry: I would always think that an absence of answer from your part has to be due to the best possible reasons. That is how I feel now, though, in the circumstances, I would not mind a message or letter telling me that indeed the damage I caused to our friendship is not beyond repair.

Stanley had assumed that June was not accessing her e-mail and was not aware of his e-mail messages to her. However, he noticed she had sent a message through FEMISA. She must have accessed her e-mail. Still, she has ignored his messages. He would later learn that, though sending a message to FEMISA, she was not in a position to check her personal mail.

Stanley send June an e-mail commenting on her FEMISA message.

Sun Jun 26/94

To: June

WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN

I have also an addiction, that of feeling guilty. I do not mind the absence of messages or letters from you, as long as I am sure that it is due to the fact that you are enjoying your time. In this respect, I would love to hear that you have and had occasions to see the young engineer again, and that you are having a splendid holiday.

What is difficult for me to bear is the thought that I am guilty of whatever impropriety towards you. Truly, I am not aware of any. But, the medicine I am taking does cause in me a sense of anxiety and fear. I then see myself guilty and look for reassurance. In so doing, I may discourage the very people from whom I seek that reassurance,

Like an addict, I know that I make matters worse when indulging in guilt feelings. However, that is the way I feel when dealing with people I do not know enough. My last guilt-trip was caused when I knew I have become a high-risk candidate for a stroke.

If I am guilty of any offense, as I incline to think is the case, please tell me so, and forgive me. If not, forgive me once more for bothering you. I look forward for having all this behind, never repeat it again, and resuming our friendly relation.

You have been friendly enough to message me in a confiding tone. It is therefore to a friend that I dare confide my medically-induced guilt addiction. All addicts need help, and I need help too. **The only help I want, and I need, is being told, bluntly, what I did wrong.**

Friendly,

P.S. -----

Are you interested in an essay in Democracy?

Even at the peak of emotional depression, Stanley would not cease preaching for political clarity.

He was sitting at his desk trying to get a hold of himself. The return of the depression meant it would take some more time to dissipate the effects of the medicine. Just some more patience and it will be over. The damage done to his friendship with June might be beyond repair. It is a pity, but there is more than it to life. He has a wife he loves, a daughter so dear to him, and grand children whose sweetness maddens him. He can count his blessings, and they are many. Besides, He had done some useful work, had a good influence on people, and he is not yet finished. He can still produce more and have more of an impact. He should find comfort in such thoughts and put his misery about June in its correct perspective.

However, he knew that June was not what mattered. Reason told him that were June to phone him and assure him that she hold no grudge against him and had not been offended by whatever he wrote to her, were she to tell him that their friendship remained as it was before his depression crisis, he would then find another reason to be depressed. The reality is that he was probably depressed by the chemical effect of the medicine. That depression being felt as emotional, he was looking for emotional causes which did not exist in reality.

He had just reached that conclusion when the phone did ring and a voice of a young girl inquired:

"Can I speak with Stanley?"

"Speaking", he replied

"This is June speaking. How are you, Stanley, and first of all, how is your health? How serious is the threat of a stroke"

All his fears had volatilized. He felt exceedingly happy. So, June is still his friend, and she cares for him. He replied:

"June, since I stopped taking the medicine, I feel much better emotionally. The danger of a stroke has totally recessed. While depressed, I felt guilty with everybody. With everyone I could check that I did not offend them, everyone except you who did not respond. Instead of realizing that you could have good reason for not writing, and knowing that I could not possibly have offended you, I should have waited till you send me a reply in your own good time. Instead, I wrote those silly letters. And that made me feel still more guilty and afraid of having destroyed our friendship"

"No, Stanley. You acted and worried as a friend should do. It is I who did not fulfill my side of friendship. Forgive me."

"At one point," said Stanley, "I thought you did not get my e-mails. But when I read your FEMISA message commenting on a movie, I knew you accessed your mail, and still did not care answering my messages."

"No Stanley," replied June, "I had gone to the college with my mom. When I accessed the internet, she was looking over my shoulder. I was not going to access my private e-mail in those conditions. I just sent the FEMISA message without reading my mail.

"June, **you are important to me**," said Stanley," and that is what made me very anxious." Then, getting out of the subject, he added: "On the 24th of November, which is my birthday, I phone all over the world to all my friends. On that same day I will phone you to have the pleasure of conversing with you"

"Do you say," said June, "that your birthday is on November 24th? Wait a moment, I take note of that."

"Can you give me your phone number?" Stanley asked. "Certainly", she replied

"I will send you a few of my pictures," Stanley proposed. "Do you want me to do likewise?" she asked.

"Thank you very much for phoning. It makes me feel much better. So long"

Immediately after the phone call, and still under the emotional influence of that call, Stanley wrote a letter to June.

July 4
Dear June,

Thank you for your warm phone call. It put to rest doubts and fears. It was good to hear your voice. I intend to phone you by the end of September, a few days before your departure for Germany. I will also phone you during the week following November 24. You will then be in Heidelberg.

Five days later Stanley wrote a more emotional letter. He realized that it might be better to rewrite it when he would feel less emotional. The letter was not sent but later, Marnie found a draft on the floor of Stanley's office. He was then in St. Louis. Marnie was in the basement when the phone rang, and the closest phone was that in Stanley's office. Marnie read and reread the letter:

July 9, 1994

Dear June,

Now that I am no longer anxious, now after I received your friendly phone call, I can safely try some "deconstructing" analysis to at least understand **why, and in what sense, you have become so important to me**. I think it is only fair to let you know my conclusions.

I am a searcher of truth, in history, religion, politics, and in myself. I know that in the quest for truth, the most dangerous enemy is one's self. Self-delusion is so subtle that one has to always be on alert. It never mattered to me to reach pre-defined conclusions. I need to reach the truth whatever it is. The more self-serving and satisfactory the truth seems to be, the more I consider it suspicious (this is, by the way, how I wrote *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*. Any evidence supportive of my conclusions was first considered false, until proven true).

The question I asked myself was: is there any unhealthy element in my considering you so important to me? Do I, for instance, consider you the kind of daughter I never had and always wanted to have? If true, it would be unhealthy in the sense that, on the one hand, it lacks reciprocity since you do have a father and have no use for a second one. On the other hand, it would introduce an element of inequality. Fathers and children are generally not on the same level, and I would hate the absence of equality. Besides, I cannot imagine a daughter I would rather have other than my daughter Melanie.

I found out that you are important to me intellectually and emotionally.

I feel with you this element of closeness. While we obviously have much respect for each other, you could write to me "Hello there, Stanley", and you could confide to me personal thoughts and feelings. This made me very comfortable, and happy. I felt our relation was not handicapped by the fifty years of age

difference. It gave me a good feeling. That takes care of the emotional part. More about that later.

I was and still am impressed by your intellectual qualities. I am amazed that what takes years to achieve in terms of reasonableness, going to the point, distinguishing the essential, is already well developed in you. While in FEMISA there often is so much attention to the trivial, so much bitterness sometimes, and sometimes unjustified aggressiveness, you sounded the voice of wisdom, and you are only twenty years old. It is my firm conviction that you are called to do great things. You have the potential. Moreover, I distinguish in you an interest for truth which is not less than mine. Add to it your sense of compassion and sensitivity and it made me wonder. **I had and have no doubt you are part of my eternity.** I say this in no mystical or transcendental sense. It is simply the case of a sense of internal peace and security in the knowledge that what I consider best in myself does not disappear with my death. This is not only a theoretical and abstract truth, but I know at least one person which embodies intellectually, what I like and respect in myself. This intellectual closeness, a closeness in attitudes more than in definite opinions (though I suspect that we do have much in common in matters of opinion) has also its emotional concomitants: **you are important to me.**

Though it may well be that I still have a number of years in front of me, I must take some precautions concerning the eventuality of a sudden death. These precautions, as I will soon explain, have to do with you. One reason more you are important to me.

Memoirs of God. I understand you appreciate the book. I think it is a measure of my commitment to feminism and fairness that I wrote such a book when I believed I had only one year to live. The time of dying is not a time for false pretense. Feminism and fairness were and are essentials in my heart and my mind

There are no reasons why that book should be a success only in Edmonton.

Almost nobody in the world is aware of the importance of its message. It saddens me to know that the book is "dying". It does not have to be so. And here I think you can be of help in more than one way. The first way is the simplest, though not the best.

I am sure that one day, be it in five or in ten years, you will brush with editors and publishers. I want therefore to give you authority to negotiate, if the occasion presents itself to you, the republishing of the book, or its adaptation to a movie script. I would totally agree to give you also the freedom to define the percentage of the royalties that should compensate you for your efforts.

You must know that what matters to me is neither seeing my name on the shelves, nor securing royalties. What matters to me is the good such a book can do to the readers. Its contribution to the fight against patriarchy, to the fight for truth.

There is however a much better way. It might require my coming to St. Louis to see you, **for as short a time as you want**. I could come by car. It is a three days drive from Edmonton to Denver where I have dear friends (among them Carolyn the incredible 11 – not 9 – years old fan of history). I would there make a stop of a day or two and then take again the road for two days and arrive in St. Louis. **If you do not mind giving me half a day or a day**, I might well do that.

Coming back to the better idea, it relies on the fact that *Memoirs of God* was written in a hurry. It should be rewritten. I have produced a rewritten manuscript which is far from satisfactory. I would like, for instance, to bring one more witness in the trial. I would like to call a feminist women to come and expose patriarchy for what it is. I told you in my previous letter that I once thought of bringing Mark Twain or Bernard Shaw to represent the non-believers. I felt I lacked competence. Likewise, I do not think I am entitled to take the voice of a feminist woman. I thought **you** could do it. There are many others aspects of the book which could benefit from improvements introduced by you.. The book could then appear with our both names, and have much more chances to be accepted. I know you can do it, if only you try. I do not expect you do anything before five to ten years. You first have to take your degrees and start your carrier. But I want today to give you all necessary authorization so that you not be hampered when the times comes. Would you prefer the book to be buried with me?

The word "love" is one of the English words needing re-definition. We "love" dogs. Some Chinese people also love dogs.. fried or boiled. The word love is the same in both cases. A child loves his parents and a parent loves his/her children. A person loves his/her spouse. You said you would love to read my book. A friend loves his/her friends. Two lovers love each other. So many different meanings for the same word "love". In the measure in which the word love is appropriated to express the best feelings between friends, I love you so very much. I did say it and will never have to say it again.

I hope to soon hear from you. Warm regards to the people you love in whatever way.

I am under the vague impression you did send me a hug by phone. I am sending you one in writing. When will technology catch up with hug-communication?!

Friendly

As mentioned, that message was not sent. Stanley feared it could be misconstrued. Few people are ready to extend the expression "love your neighbor" to "love your friend".

Stanley phoned June to ask her for the best time for his visit to St. Louis. She suggested that he stay at her house. He could hear in the background her mother's anxious voice. She was asking

how long he would remain, to which June answered "a couple of days". He had suggested only half a day. The date could not be fixed that day.

June's suggestion that he should stay at her house was an indication of how greatly she valued their friendship. At the time June had not yet received any letter explaining the aims of the visit. She could only infer that the visit had no other aim than meeting her and being with her for a few days.

He was quite prepared to make the visit to St Louis as short as possible. Half a day would certainly have sufficed to settle the details of an agreement concerning June's cooperation to a new version of *Memoirs of God*. It is clear that such was not what June intended. Obviously, she considered him a good friend, and a good friend has to have some friendly time with her besides that needed for *business*.

She was to phone him next day. She was late and he phoned instead. It turned out her mother opposed his staying at their house. He then asked if the parents were opposed to his visit. She said "not at all. They want to see you".

He understood that the parents did not fathom a visit to their twenty years old daughter by a seventy-one year old man. He decided to send them what could possibly explain the situation. By special courier, so that it could arrive before his visit, he sent the parents a modified version of the previous letter, though it was addressed to June. He also added the following personal letter to the parents.

July 13

Dear Mr. and Mrs. >>>>

I owe you an apology and an explanation. I should have refused June's generous offer to stay at your home. I accepted it in view of the additional time it would have given me with her and with her family. I do have a daughter who was once twenty years old, I also would have then been reluctant to let a person who, in many respects is a stranger, be invited in my home. I am certain June understands that, out of love for her, you have to be protective. I cannot but agree that, knowing so little about me, your decision is wise. It is my acceptance which lacked wisdom.

You might wonder what makes a seventy-one years old man drive his car 2500 miles to visit a young girl. You might wonder if there is not an unhealthy element in my feeling friendly towards June. This would be the case if, for instance, not having had sisters or daughters (only brothers and sons), I feel fatherly towards a girl which would represent the kind of daughter I never had. But, on the one hand, June has a father, and has no use for a second one. And on the other hand, I do have a daughter, Melanie, who is so very dear to me. Besides, the feeling of intellectual equality which rules our exchanges would not have been possible had I acted and felt fatherly towards her. I have too much appreciation for her knowledge and her wisdom to feel anything else than pride for having as friend a

partner in the search of knowledge, justice and truth. Big words, maybe, but words we believe both in. Besides, I cannot imagine a daughter I would rather have other than my daughter Melanie.

This explains our friendship. It does not explain my trip to St. Louis. I am including a letter which I intended to send to June suggesting my coming to St. Louis. I wrote it prior to my first phone call. Please, do read the letter. It may be the best answer as to the reasons for my trip.

I very much look forward to meet you. Sincerely

P.S. I am including material of interest to June. Please give it to her and tell her that, for the purpose of my trip, it would be helpful if she manages to finish reading *Memoirs of God and The Conquest of Death*. The latter is a 10 pages paper which throws some light on the reasons for my visit. You might want to read it.

July 11, 1994

Hello there June,

Concerning my health

It might be one reason why I am tempted to take one day vacation in St. Louis. I want to see you smiling when I speak of my health. There are other reasons. On the one hand, it is not such a bad idea. On the other hand I have some serious matters to tell you, mostly about how you could help the survivability of *Memoirs of God*. You seemed to have liked it and you would not like that the book be buried with me. This sounds like a puzzle and I would have explained it. But with the prospect of seeing you, say for a day, there may be no need to put it down on writing. Suffice me to say that the book is "dying", or rather already "dead". Don't you think it deserves better? Please, do write to me about your impressions concerning the book.

This letter is indicative of Stanley's emotional mess. He cited two reasons for which it mattered to him to live longer: the literary projects, and enjoying his friendship with June. What about enjoying Marnie's companionship and having a daughter such as Melanie?

In the depressed mood resulting from the hormonal treatment, he felt a strong emotional *deficit*. His daughter Melanie had long left home. Then after marrying Robert, after adopting two children, she had less and less time for her parents. Her focus in life changed and she became less interested in world events and in social justice.

As to Marnie, after eight years of isolating himself in the basement, after the great effort he made at hiding his depression from her, against all logic he felt resentful that she did not come to his rescue in the state of depression he was more and more drowning in.

Part 5, Chapter 3 Visiting with June

Stanley made the journey from Edmonton to St Louis in four days. He stopped to visit friends in Colorado. The whole trip going and coming was about 7000 kilometers.

He arrived in St. Louis on July 18th. June expected him next day at 4:00 p.m.. In order to ensure he will be in time, he went out on the 19th in the morning to find out how to reach her house. It took him some time. It was easy to get confused. He knocked at the door expecting to speak to June's mother. She opened him the door. She looked so young he thought at first she was June. He was let in. He knew June was not free that morning and he thought she would not be home. It turned out she had come late from work the night before and had not yet gone to work. The younger sister, seven years old, went to wake her up

He saw June going down the stairs from the upper floor. He was astounded to notice how much she resembled a younger version of a well known political woman. He followed her with inquisitive eyes while she was advancing smiling at him. This then was June, his young, caring and talented friend. She hugged him and complained loudly and affectionately of her mother's authoritarian ways. He left soon enough since she had to go to work.

He still remember the emotions he felt when he first saw her. There was such a contrast between the qualities she revealed in her messages to FEMISA and to him, and the frail and young girl who appeared to his eyes! He was very moved and he still do not know how to describe the emotions he then felt. Having never felt something of the kind, he had no means of comparison. Still, it seemed to him that, had he had a close and beloved grand-daughter who had been taken away from him for years, he would then have felt as he now did when he saw June. But then, no granddaughter of his had thus been separated from him and what he felt describing is closer to presumptions. He also felt as if June was Melanie's daughter, the one that had been sacrificed to save Melanie's life and would today be the same age as June. In fact June was a bit like the Melanie at the time she still lived with her parents.

He came back at 4:00 in the afternoon. Her mother immediately suggested they go to an office room at the left of the main entrance. They could then address the matter of his literary proposals. They set at a coffee-table. June was enthusiastic. She thought that, thanks to him, she might get an opportunity for an early start in publishing. He wrote the codicil to his will, she signed it as a witness. They agreed that she would make a copy for him. She also read some of his short stories. She loved the one titled "Kisses sweeter than wine". He told her he brought two more copies of The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal, one for her parents and one for her boyfriend

The atmosphere was very friendly. They did not need additional introduction. They acted as friends of long standing. Though he could feel how much she respected him, age did not seem to be a factor. It was clear to her that he too respected her very much.

And then, after they finished the business part of their meeting, and while they could still enjoy the privacy of the office room, June's face reflected a profound distress as she told Stanley:

"I have something very personal to tell you."

"June," answered Stanley, "I am your friend and you can tell me whatever you think I should hear from you."

Most of the time, they were facing each other and looking into each other's eyes while talking. But now, June stopped the eye contact with Stanley and looked down and said:

"When still a young child, I had been sexually abused by my maternal grandfather."

Stanley felt an acute physical pain. The words had fallen on him like a sharp knife. He then looked at her and felt a huge empathy for his young friend. He also thought that may be she cared for his friendship precisely because she considered him a decent surrogate grandfather. He sensed her hurt and it hurt him. He said to her: "I see the hurt is still there. It must have been very hard on you."

"Yes," she said "I had to take therapy for a few years." She then added: "What enrages me is that mom intended to go to see her father in a few days and take my younger sister with her." I told mom: *Over my dead body!* How can mom risk to have her father abuse my little sister as he has abused me." June then smiled and told Stanley: "My seven years old sister is much smarter than I. If you think I am that good, wait and see what will become of my sister."

With sadness in her voice she told Stanley: "I am not lucky with my grandparents. My father died in a car accident. His parents, my paternal grandparents, wanted to take for themselves the insurance money which had been put in a trust to ensure my education and that of my other sister. Can you imagine that! Grandparents trying to deprive their grandchildren of what is rightfully theirs?" She went on: "Yes, I did not tell you. I have a sister almost my age. You will see her this afternoon. She is sweet. Don't pay attention to the way she dresses. She has strange patterns in her hair which is made to stick out like nails. But she is indeed a great person."

She told him how adorable her boyfriend Bob was.

"Are you committed to each other?" Stanley asked.

"Yes," she replied. She then suddenly became sad.

"What is the matter," asked Stanley. She answered without hesitation:

"Ten days ago I still was a virgin. Can you imagine that? Still a virgin at the age of twenty!! Bob and me decided to have sex. It did not come suddenly. We discussed the matter and concluded it was the right thing to do."

"Did you practice *safe sex*," asked Stanley? "Yes," she answered again, "I had purchased condoms for the occasion."

He was proud of her for having taken in her own hands the protection against pregnancy and sexual diseases.

"Does your mother know," asked Stanley, "that you recently made love with Bob?"

"My mother" she replied, "was very happy when I told her. "Finally", she had said to me, "something is happening to you!"

"It had been very painful," said June suddenly. "and what pains me more, was that just before the start of our lovemaking I said to Bob *I love you*, and all that Bob could answer was *That's nice!* I felt devastated."

Stanley asked: "What is then the meaning of his commitment if at such a moment he could not say: *I love You*".

She replied: "The commitment is that, as long as we would be together, we would date nobody else and would remain faithful. I must admit, there is indeed no long range commitment."

Stanley commented: "In my view, this is no real commitment." June had to agree he was right.

They both remained quite. She broke the silence saying: "I found out I am totally asexual. I did not enjoy lovemaking. Once *he finished*, he fell sound asleep, exhausted as he was, and replete, while I was wondering if that was all there is to it. He realized I had not enjoyed lovemaking. He told me that what mattered was that we had decided to have sex, and not how good it had been. I think it was sweet from him to put it that way."

Stanley was somewhat at a loss. Among friends, he never had dealt with private and intimate matters. He was somewhat of a puritan. He disliked sexual jokes. People around him knew it, and would wait till he was away rather than make such jokes in his presence. He had endeavored to avoid any familiarity with female friends or just acquaintances. He would not put his hand around their shoulders, he will not kick them on the side with his elbow and, even at midnight of December 31, he would never kiss a woman on her lips.

He felt, may be wrongly, that allowing himself to discuss with June such private matter as that of her virginity – and later her lack of sexual pleasure –, came close to becoming too familiar. What was he to do? He hesitated but not for long. June was a decent person who trusted him and confided in him. She might be in need of advice from an older person who is also her friend. She might also need to *cry over the shoulder* of a trusted friend. He would not disappoint her.

Stanley did not believe June was asexual. He was certain that the trauma she underwent when abused by her grandfather, added to her boyfriend's insensitivity, were the main reasons for her inability to enjoy lovemaking with her boyfriend. He thought it was important to convince her that there was nothing organically wrong with her. She was a victim and was not to be blamed.

He knew he could easily dispel her anxiety. However, to do that he had to move to a level of intimate conversation which had not yet been justified by the level of their friendship. Besides, it

was something that did not appeal to Stanley at all. But it was his adoptive granddaughter who hoped he could help her understand herself. Stanley felt obligated, out of grandfatherly love, to act out of character. He asked her:

"Have you ever masturbated?" His question fell on her like a bombshell and visibly embarrassed her. She seemed to wonder why he would ask such a question. For a moment Stanley feared his question threw a shadow over their friendship as if she was not so sure that he was the friend she thought he was. After some hesitation she replied "yes".

"Did you," he asked her, "derive more pleasure from masturbation than from lovemaking?"

"Much more." was her answer.

"You here have the proof," he explained that you are not at all asexual. You have the potential to normally enjoy sex. What is needed is better communications with your boyfriend. You should tell Bob, what are your needs."

"I did express my needs to Bob," she replied, "but he did not want to listen."

"Stop to blame yourself for the crimes of others" Stanley said in an authoritative but gentle voice. "You should repeat to yourself the obvious truth that you are ok. What is wrong are the people who abused you."

He added: "In a way, you had been abused by your boyfriend. You deserved to be treated better. You are a feminist, and you accepted inequality in the emotional relationship with your boyfriend."

Stanley felt for her a sense of humiliation. She must have indeed felt herself very humiliated; humiliated by the way she was treated and humiliated by her accepting being treated so.

"You should tell Bob," added Stanley "that, unless he is prepared for a long range commitment, it was finished between you."

"I indeed think" said June seemingly convinced, "to present him with that kind of ultimatum."

At the end of his visit she would change her mind and would rather give to her boyfriend a few years to amend his ways.

The conversation moved to other subjects of an ethical and intellectual nature. It went smoothly and congenially. She then asked:

"Why did not your wife come with you?"

"Marnie," he replied, "thinks she cannot help in matters concerned with my writings. She agrees I should have many friends. She thinks that my friendly feelings to others is that much enrichment of our mutual love."

June smiled and then commented: "You are lucky that Marnie does not believe in the zero-sum hypothesis. I mean she does not think that any friendly feeling you have for others is necessarily that much less of your love for her"

"No," said Stanley. "she is not like that. She knows how much I care for friends. I did go to France to visit an old woman friend who was seriously ill. I had no difficulty with Marnie."

They discussed a number of topics. Among them was "The Beauty myth" an interesting essay June had written a few years ago.

Later, she asked him: "How was the car trip"

"It added a new dimension to my life," he explained, "Now, if a friend, yourself for instance, needs me, I could go to him or her by car, I would not hesitate to just do that. I know it is very unlikely that you would thus need me, but you have just to say a word and I would come back to St. Louis within three days of driving."

She remembered what he had told her earlier and said: "If you are prepared, for a friend, to take the plane to Paris, I cannot doubt you would come for me to St. Louis, if I ever needed it".

"Do not take that commitment personally," he urged her, "I would do the same for any other friend, male or female."

He then added: "Marnie has total trust in my decency. She had once asked me what would I do if, at work or anywhere else, a young girl would try to seduce me. I answered that if the girl, as was quite unlikely, were earnestly in love with me, I would firmly explain to her that I cannot love any woman but Marnie. I would do that while trying not to hurt her feelings. I would explain to her that at her age, she has opportunities to forget me and meet young men much more deserving of her love. However, if I would realize that she was just looking for some thrill without any emotional involvement, I could go as far as spanking her."

"Would you indeed do that?", marveled June. "Yes", he replied, "I would spank her as I would have spanked my own daughter, if only she had ever deserved it." In reality he might act differently but that was how he then felt. A feminist would not like the idea of a man spanking a girl. Somehow, June nevertheless was happy with his attitude.

"I also remember," added Stanley "how, once, coming out from a movie describing a husband who had refused to forgive his wife her adultery, Marnie asked me what I would have done had I been in his position. I told Marnie that were she ever to fall so much in love with a man that her happiness would depend on her living with him, and were she to come and tell me that, I would be devastated and still, I would tell her that her happiness is my first priority. If in order to be with the man she loves she needs some help, money or otherwise, I would do my best to provide it. If however she does not come honestly to me, and if she hides from me the adultery she is committing, then I do not know what I would do. My hurt would be much greater. I might decide to kill myself to get me out of her way, and to put an end to my pain."

Moving to another subject June said:

"You told me that the danger of a stroke was a side-effect of your medicine. Has the medicine other side-effects?"

Yes," replied Stanley, "it has resulted in an enlargement of my breasts. I feel as if it disfigures my body. It embarrasses me so much that I have not taken a swim for years, though I do like swimming."

"You could, she said "use our in-house swimming pool. I would make certain that nobody would see you."

She had indeed a kind nature and was a good friend to him.

"Thank you," he said "I am very touched by your kindness and caring, but I did not come to St. Louis for that."

Stanley had an aversion for whatever food preparation which would appear to be "milky". June's mother had prepared a chicken salad for the five o'clock "lunch". Offered a creamy dressing for the chicken salad, he had to say no. At this point, referring to one of his short stories, a story her mom had not read, June told him in a loud voice:

"Now Stanley, go to my mom, kiss her on her lips and tell her how delicious it is!"

Her mom was scandalized. Stanley mumbled a few words to the effect that June was being naughty, and was referring to a short story of his. Her mom was not amused.

Stanley did not tell June whether the short story was true. The only link June knew it had with reality was the peculiarity of Stanley's taste. Instead of Marnie and Stanley, the story mentioned Abe and Evelyn. June suspected it was close to truth. Here is the story he gave June to read.

Chapter 22 Kisses Sweeter Than Wine

It was not easy for my mother to prepare meals to my father's liking. The soup would be too salty, the meat not enough dry. What is more, his senses of smell and taste were so developed he could detect ingredients my mother had not put in the meal, and which she did not even have in the kitchen.

There was no point discussing the matter with my father; he knew better than anyone. Could not a spoon, not well washed, have been contaminated with the ingredients weeks ago? And what about the paper used for packaging the meat, the sugar or whatever else, which might have been reused (in those days) after having served to pack the loathed ingredient? My mother was guilty for not having taken enough precautions and for daring to suggest my father was mistaken!

One day, he let a glass of water slip from his hands. It fell on the floor and broke into pieces. My father was stupefied. Nobody was as dexterous as he was. The movements of his hands were always as precise as the best adjusted mechanism. The matter called for a serious inquiry. Glasses do not slip from his fingers without reason, and the reason, obviously, must have been something my mother did and, somehow, caused the glass to slip.

My mother had been absent from home for a couple of hours. Moreover, the day had been, until that moment, uneventful. After a few minutes, my father remembered something my mother told the day before, something she should not have said or should have said differently. That is what caused the glass to slip through his hand. Of course, he will have to scold her for that, the moment she will be back.

My mother tried to keep records of the precise proportions of the ingredients she used. She wanted to make sure she would be able to reproduce any dish which would ever please my father. But then, it turned out the proper relative amounts of the ingredients were a function of my father's mood. The same dish could be too salty at one moment, and grossly lacking salt an hour later. It could be overcooked when served at noon, and too raw in the evening.

My father's temper, however, was mild compared to that of his own mother. No wonder the two did not go well along. He would tell stories complaining how badly she had treated him, how rude she had been to him and how insensitive she had been to his needs. Nonetheless, he never ceased to extol her cooking, to contrast her culinary gifts with my mother's poor cooking. I was therefore surprised to learn from an uncle, that my father, as soon as he had started working, had refused the food prepared by my grandmother and rather took delight in eating canned food (tuna in particular). Nevertheless, he never failed to remind my mother that, as a cook, she was well beneath the standard of his mother.

In my early boyhood, the evidence before my eyes was that my father was always shouting while my mother always kept quiet, not answering with a single word. It was therefore clear to me that my father was always justly indignant at my mother's doings and that her quietness was due to an absence of good reasons or even mitigating circumstances. How proud I was then of my father! And how happy I was at having a daddy who was always right! It took some growing up till I could make independent judgments and find out my father had a very bad temper and was

abusing my mother's kindness and patience. She had learned from experience it was better to keep quiet when my father shouted.

The shock I underwent at the time I lost some of my innocence and had to reevaluate my opinion about my father, was attenuated by the fact I could not deny his many good qualities. However unfair he was with my mother, he had, in every other respect, a strong sense of justice and of duty. He could not be bribed, and would never put his conscience to sleep so as to avoid doing what a man should do in terms of decency and of being helpful to everyone.

I gave a lot of thought to the case of my father's temper and resolved that my wife, when I would have one, would be treated by me as an equal partner. She would be loved and respected. I would not care how good or bad her cooking would be. I would request nothing from her except a smile from time to time. It seemed to me nothing would be easier than to stick to this resolution and, till my marriage, I never doubted that a good and comprehending husband could thus avoid any marital problem.

And so it was that, one day, the Evelyn I married prepared a dish that was not to my liking. I will not say it did not taste good; so far as I know, it could have compared favorably with the best of French *haute cuisine*. However, it was so beyond what I could tolerate that, with the best of my will, there was no way I would eat from that dish.

The moment of reckoning had come and I felt at a loss, torn between the desire to please Evelyn and the impossibility to proceed with the supper. I should have known such a moment would have to come, and I should have prepared myself to behave in such a case as was fit for a husband who loved his wife and treated her as an equal partner.

I pushed back the dish and said to Evelyn I was very sorry for having eaten sandwiches at work. They had spoiled my appetite and I would rather not have supper this evening.

Evelyn did not find anything wrong with what I said and I was happy to be off the hook. But was it a way out? I remained hungry the whole evening and, to my dismay, I had to admit I was in a bad mood and my bad mood was directed at Evelyn. I knew perfectly well she was not to blame. She could not possibly have guessed I would dislike the dish she prepared for supper. However, the mere fact I felt compelled to lie in order to please her, arouse in me some anger. An empty stomach did not improve the situation.

I managed to be nice while looking in every corner for some peanut leftover from earlier servings to guests.

Next day, Evelyn was so considerate as to prepare the same dish. Although the sandwiches I had eaten the day before had deprived me of her good cooking, I would this time share her enjoyment.

I smiled at her, went to the refrigerator, took a piece of cheese and, after pushing aside the dish given to me by Evelyn, I started to eat the cheese with bread.

I took a side look at a bewildered Evelyn and brought back my eyes towards the table. After a few moments, Evelyn said to me:

"Don't you like my dish, Abe?"

I looked back at her and felt disarmed by the sincerity of her disappointment. I rose from my place, went to her, gave her a warm kiss and said:

"It is delicious"

This became a ritual between us that lasted about a year. Each time Evelyn would ask me how I liked a dish I forced myself to eat, I would first kiss her and then say it was wonderful.

Evelyn found this way of mine to express my dislike of her cooking, rather cute. The kiss informing her of my food dislikes was never casual. It was always warm, sincere and as expressive as possible of our deep mutual love.

With time, however, Evelyn came to know what my preferred dishes were, and cooked only these. No longer did I have to express taste dislikes with a kiss of love.

This does not mean there never were quarrels between Evelyn and me. We had our differences, and, eventually, we had our first serious quarrel. It started with a question from Evelyn as we were taking a walk not far from home.

"Abe! Why do you smile at each woman we meet on the street?"

"I am not smiling at any one", I said, "I am just saying 'Hello' and acknowledging the presence of the passer-by with a nod of my head."

This, apparently did not satisfy Evelyn. "Once more", she said. "why do you do it so often with women?"

"I am nodding at everyone", I replied, "but my nods to men do not attract your attention and you are counting more accurately my nods to women."

"Be it as you say", she compromised. "I would still prefer you nod to nobody."

By now, I should have understood the matter was one of feelings and not of reason. I needed more wisdom than I then had and, instead of giving in with a smile, I carried on the argument.

"Be reasonable, Evelyn! We are walking in our neighborhood. The people we meet are neighbors I am supposed to know. I have a bad conscience for not recognizing them, and compensate for it by giving a nod."

"Why should you not wait," asked Evelyn, "till the neighbor nods to you? Why should you always be the one who starts?"

Nothing would anger Evelyn as much as answering her question with a question. I should have known better but my reply came as if it were a triggered bullet which could not be stopped. "Why should I be the one who never starts? Besides, even then we could quarrel over who started first, the neighbor or me."

As we came close to our house, she pulled out her hand from mine, earlier than usually, quickened her gait and reached home before me. The few awkward attempts I later made at being friendly were rejected, and I felt frustrated at not being able to dissipate the clouds, and not being appreciated as the good husband I felt sure I was.

We went to bed without kissing each other good night. I could not fall asleep, and I could feel Evelyn too was somewhat restless. I sent two of my fingers on an exploratory journey. They reached Evelyn's back and tapped it gently, though insistently. Soon enough, my fingers met hers and intermingled with them. She then turned towards me and we fell into an embrace that seemed to be warmer than usual and that I valued particularly for having made up between us. I was not quite back from heaven when Evelyn asked me:

"Was it good?"

I bent over her, kissed her lips and said:

"It was wonderful!"

At that, Evelyn jumped out of bed, grabbed her pillow and almost running went to the living room to sleep on the sofa.

I felt as if hit by lightning, unable to move, to speak or to think. It took me some time to realize what Evelyn thought and felt. I came to the sofa and tried to explain that my comment, "it was wonderful", was... to the point, and not to the kiss that preceded the comment; but Eve insisted that, by now, she knew quite well the meaning of a kiss followed by "it was wonderful".

I was at my wits' end, but then came the inspiration:

"Evelyn! Let us redo it!"

Chapter 23

The visit's sad ending

He went back to the motel. Next morning, they had their breakfast at Denny's restaurant, a few meters from the motel. June had brought her grandmother with her (the mother of her adoptive father). He gained the sympathy of the grandmother. She was almost completely deaf. Still, she said to June:

"Listen well to what Stanley is telling you. He means well, and his advise is good!"

June smiled to Stanley and then told him:

"Would you like I give you a ride through the city?"

"No," answered Stanley, "I would rather have some time to talk and discuss with you."

"We can do both," said June, "besides there are some part of the city which have an historical significance."

While driving, June asked Stanley: "Do you think that virtue in personal life should be an important consideration with respect to a president candidate?"

"All depends," answered Stanley, "on what do you mean by virtue. If a candidate has a common law wife and is faithful to her, I would not mind though many people could hold it against him."

"And what," asked June aggressively, "if he is unfaithful? Is not the important matter whether his policies are better than those of the other candidates? A president's policy directly affects the people's well-being. His faithfulness to his life companion has no relevance in this respect."

Stanley was astounded. For a young woman who had so much suffered from the immorality of her grandfather, one could have expected a revulsion against any stain of immorality on a president. However, June was way above being subjective in her political stands. Stanley took his time reflecting on June's obvious detachment from her own hurt. He then said:

"I think you are right and wrong. You seem to think that some people are irreplaceable. There is not a necessary contradiction between having correct policies and being virtuous. If someone is politically acceptable but wanting in virtue, why not seeking someone else, as politically acceptable but also virtuous.?"

"This does not explain," interjected June, "in what am I right and in what am I wrong."

"You are right in principle. Yes, I do agree with you that the personal life of a president should be of no relevance. However it stops to be true if enough people think otherwise. Let us say for instance that it is discovered that the president has a mistress or made advances to a young girl. If everyone recognizes that it is a matter which should be considered only by his family, then you are right. That is how it should be. However if, by raising the matter, the opposition to the

president can find enough support to the view that the president should be virtuous, if the wrongs of the president can cause a diversion in the political course of the president, then I have to think it would have been better to have a more virtuous president who would not be as much vulnerable to wrong but successful attacks related to his lack of virtue."

June requested to postpone the discussion. The car had arrived to an interesting square and she was taking the role of a tourist guide explaining the importance of the place.

They went back to her home. The grandmother left Stanley and June alone in the family room.

"Thank you," said Stanley, "I enjoyed the morning. We will have to finish our discussion sometime, may be by mail or e-mail."

"I am glad," said June, "you did like the tour of the city. I am sure you will like still more the entertainment evening I have planned for us." Stanley remained quiet, waiting for her to be more specific. That is what she did indeed, saying:

"Essentially, it would be an open-air Shakespeare play. You will there meet a girlfriend of mine whom I want you to know."

"I did not come to St. Louis," said Stanley, "for entertainment. I would much prefer you remain home to finish reading *Memoirs of God*, while I would find what to do in the motel room."

June did not insist. She seemed somewhat relieved. Her face was radiating with a kind of satisfaction. She then said:

"At least we should have lunch and dinner together."

"That would be great," commented Stanley. And then, after a short pause He said:

"I have prepared a letter to Marnie. Can you tell me, June, where I can buy stamps."

"Just leave the letter to me. I will take care of it," said June.

"May be," said Stanley, "you could enclose a few words of your own to Marnie."

June picked up one of her photos and wrote a few lines on the back. They started with: "Marnie,".

"Can you not write 'Dear Marnie'?" He commented.

"I know," June answered, "that 'dear so and so' is commonly used with complete strangers. But Marnie is not a complete stranger Still, I do not know her enough, and writing "Dear Marnie" may sound hypocritical. She deserves a real expression of feelings"

The photo had been taken during a tour at the white house. June was seen at the president's podium and seemed to be a women president making a speech. On the back, June had written: "Vote for me!" Stanley knew June was ambitious and deserved it to be. But she was just displaying her sense of humor.

They had lunch at the restaurant where she held a summer job. They ordered light meals and waited to be served. Stanley was looking straight into her face but could not meet her eyes. She said:

"Stanley, I do not know whether I should tell you. My boyfriend phoned me and told me how mad he was at me for having accepted your visit with me. Also, some of my friends who know about your visit tell me that it is fishy. They say that whatever the reasons you are giving to justify your visit, they are just pretexts. No old man, they say, would make such a long journey by car to meet a young girl, unless he had a dirty mind. I am indeed under a lot of pressure."

"Did you know beforehand," asked Stanley, "that you will be under such pressure?"

"I did not think about it," replied June, "and I do not care. I know how decent you are."

She insisted to pay the bill. She then took him to his motel. She drove fast, largely exceeding the speed limits.

"Are you in a hurry?" asked Stanley.

"No," replied June "I just need to go fast. I had received a number of speeding tickets. The last one gave me the choice, either to pay hundreds of dollars or to take a course in defensive driving."

"Next time," commented Stanley, "you may not get that option."

"I hope I will not be caught again," she said, "I am becoming much better at detecting the police in time."

Stanley was wondering whether her need for speeding was in any way related with the abuse she had suffered from her grandfather. She must then have felt so powerless. May be she was gaining some sense of power by speeding.

She stopped at the parking lot of his motel. As he was going out of her car he told her:

"Please, wait here half a minute. I have in my room a poem by Carolyn I want you to read. I am bringing it to you. It will take me just a few moments." Carolyn was an 11 year old girl prodigy.

He entered his motel room and closed the door behind him without locking it. He did not want to leave a door open while the air conditioning was working its hardest. He did not know she would come after him in the room. She did, and left the door wide open. While she was in the middle of the room, Stanley went to the door and closed it. For a few seconds they were therefore alone in

his motel room. He later realized how stupid he had been for caring so much for preserving the coolness of the room and the integrity of the cooling system, and not enough for her well being. She must have felt awkwardly when he closed the door.

He found the poem fast enough, opened the door and walked her to her car. Before moving away, she told him: "Stanley, you will not die; you will remain living in my heart". She said it with tears in the eyes. She then added:

"I intend to work on the book immediately. I can discipline myself to have time both for my studies and for your book. You will see, I will make of it a best seller while you are still alive".

Her statement "Stanley, you will not die; you will remain living in my heart" was ringing in his ears. She did not say it casually. She said it with a vibrating emotional voice. It felt like a love declaration. And it was indeed a love declaration, that of a grandchild to a beloved grandfather.

She then started to read aloud the poem by Carolyn Croissant:

TOUCH THE BOUNDARY

by Carolyn Croissant

Touch the boundary of a star, reach for a galaxy
People on earth continue reading, continue writing.

Touch the boundary of a mind, seek the ultimate truth therein.
People on earth continue dancing, continue singing, continue living.

Touch the boundary of beauty, seek to banish evil from the world
People on earth continue to talk, continue to walk, continue to live.

Touch the boundary of nature, seek to preserve it.
People on earth continue to mark, continue to measure, continue to live.

Measure for measure, thread for thread, like a poem I meant to write,
All things that live must die in their time,
Time immortal, time eternal.
A new life fills the place and sometimes our hearts.

Touch the boundary of a heart, seek to love and life eternal.
People on earth go on living
Perhaps a little thankful for the help that we provide.

"Carolyn is an amazing, precocious and sensitive young girl" commented June. She then started her car and moved away while waving her hand to Stanley.

Just before dinner time, Stanley drove to June's house. Dinner was to be at a Mexican restaurant, without *chaperon*. During Stanley's short stay in St. Louis the temperature had been high and

oppressive. June and her mom wore shorts. However, this time she wore a dress. At the restaurant, they had to wait for a table. They were given a kind of electronic gadget which, on a radio signal from the restaurant, would shake, an indication a table was free. They therefore went to walk around. It was their first walk together, and their last.

"I know it is easier," said Stanley, "to move through crowds holding hands. But I do not like it. Holding hands should be reserved for people romantically involved"

"You are quite right," commented June in an excited voice. "A man should behave as he would, were his sister observing him." Stanley did not prolong this discussion. He did not think that having a sister as a witness would be a strong restraint for some men. He decided to keep the remark in mind to later ponder over it.

They chose different menus for dinner. She said to him that a given food item on his plate was very tasty. Obviously she liked it. He transferred that item from his plate to hers. She observed that were she to let him do it, he would give her everything for her to eat. She was right. He enjoyed seeing his friends enjoying themselves. Though he was careful to keep their relation on an equality footing, he still felt fatherly, or grandfatherly, towards her, as he would for any young person, male or female. He wished she was still much younger and he could spoon-feed her.

She drove him back to her home where his car was parked. On her way, she stopped at a drive-in grocery-store to buy milk. Her mother might have asked her to do that.

"We do not have drive-in groceries in Edmonton," remarked Stanley.

"It may be indicative," said June, "of the comparative level of violence in Edmonton and in St. Louis."

Next day he arrived at her house in the morning. She told him she had almost finished reading the book. Only thirty more pages remained to be read. She liked the book. She planned to go to the movies with him together with her mom and her youngest sister. She had already seen the movie and wanted to see it again, this time with him, for a special purpose. After the movie, they would all go to a restaurant for supper. He was to be her guest at the movies. They were to be his guests at the restaurant.

The movie was *Forrest Gump*. Stanley was sitting between June and her younger sister. When the movie ended. The mother and the little sister hurried towards the washrooms. While still sitting in their chairs, June said:

"Stanley, I chose that movie on purpose so you can understand me when I say that in my view you are the moral equivalent of Forrest Gump."

Stanley was overwhelmed. "As much," he said, "as I would like it to be true. I have to..."

June did not give him time to proceed. With a face expressing strong feelings, she said in an excited tone: "I sense it Stanley, I sense it!"

Stanley was overwhelmed with emotion. He also thought that, possibly, his visit helped June's healing process. She could now so much respect and appreciate a man of her grandfather's age.

During the movie, twice Stanley felt like holding her hand. Once during a scene figuring a woman throwing stones in a rage against a house where, as a child, she had been molested by her father. Stanley wanted June to know she had a friend standing by her and sharing her hurt. The other time was when a main woman character was about to kill herself. Stanley felt the need to hold Marnie's hand, and for a minute fraction of a second, he had the illusion that Marnie was by his side. On none of the two occasion did his hand even started to move in June's direction. She would have known nothing of it, had he not felt trustful enough to tell her he had been tempted to hold her hand. In reality, he felt guilty for not having done so. He thought she must have needed some emotional support while reviving her abuse evoked by the movie, and he was not there for her. Like a coward, he had kept the hands by his side. He felt guilty and wanted to tell her that, though he had abstained from touching her hand, he had been tempted to express his empathy in that manner. The fact that he did not hold the hand, the fact that the temptation was motivated by the most decent feelings seemed to protect him from any interpretation. Nevertheless, she panicked. and told him in a tone that sounded savage, ironical and angry, while her face was expressing utmost hate and contempt:

"Good for you that you did not". She looked like a totally different person. No trace of kindness and candor in her looks.

"June," said Stanley in a very hurt voice, "don't you remember I told you yesterday I was against holding hands?"

"This proves nothing," she replied in a ferocious tone.

Stanley was so devastated he immediately snapped back into depression, and it must have shown. He did not know what went by her mind. She suddenly became friendly again, though he could still sense in her an effort at distancing. She told him in an apologizing tone that he should understand her difficulties. She was, she said, under strong pressure from her mother, her boyfriend and her friends to get her to believe that he could not but be a dirty old man.

The supper was embarrassing. He could not find his words to answer questions from her mom. June would answer in his stead and he would confirm her answer. Back at her home, he sat at one end of a long sofa, without movement. He must have had a sad and distressed expression on his face. She sat on the other end.

In a caring voice she asked him: "what are your thoughts?" He did not reply. He could not reply.

She must have realized he was under strong emotional stress. She added: "I know that dirty old-men do exist, but I had not said you were in that category." It did not help. It was a far cry from her previous saying that he would be living in her heart.

The time for leaving came soon. He wanted to hug her mother goodbye. She said that a handshake will suffice. Let the hug be for next time. June asked him to understand that it is a reflection of her mother's honesty. The hug, when she will give it to him in a next occasion, will be meaningful. She reminded him that, for a similar reason, she had refused to write "Dear Marnie". It was clear she was doing her best so that he would not be hurt.

He summarized the situation: the literary agreement remains valid. She would send him her whereabouts in Germany. They might even meet there. June agreed. He reminded her a promise to visit him in Edmonton together with her boyfriend. She told him she did not want to let him under the illusion that she would be coming next month in Edmonton. He told her that the promise was for next summer, in a year. She agreed, but he could distinguish an ironical look on her face.

She was expected that evening to baby-sit at a neighbor's child. She was late. Nevertheless she wanted to take him to a Xeroxing shop to give him a copy of their agreement (codicil). He told her it was not necessary. He trusted she would send him the Xerox copy by mail. There was no need for her to be more late for the baby-sitting. She was grateful for that. Finally she hugged him good-bye and he went away.

Chapter 24

June and Marnie

The moment Stanley came home, he realized something was wrong. Marnie greeted him with a warm hug and kept him pressed to her, longer than usual. But her face was emaciated and reflected a hurt soul.

"You must be very tired from the driving," she said. "Leave your bags on the floor. You can later take care of them."

"And you Marnie," replied Stanley, "how are you? You look tired too." Then, trying to be amusing he added: "Have you also done much driving?"

"It is almost sleeping time," said Marnie ignoring his question. "I know you have a lot to tell me and I hardly can wait to hear it all. Nevertheless, we should tonight go to sleep early and we could talk tomorrow to our soul content."

Next morning, Marnie woke up first and prepared the breakfast. When Stanley came into the kitchen he first gave her a hug and kissed her on the lips. Marnie responded warmly. She then said: "The breakfast is ready." She remained silent for a short while and then told Stanley:

"Your office was full of what seemed to be garbage thrown on the floor. While you were away, I did some cleaning. I picked from the floor copies or drafts of letters you sent or intended to send to June. It was for me a revelation."

"Marnie," replied Stanley, "I do not intend to keep secrets from you. Now that you have read some of my letters to June, I can tell you that I was in a mess and probably am still in a mess. I now know its cause. I hope I will soon be out of it."

"I am very hurt." said Marnie, "I feel guilty and frustrated. I feel guilty for not having suspected you were so depressed. I was not by your side in your difficult moments. I feel also very frustrated because I always thought I was your best friend. I was certain you would confide in me and request my help in time of need. Instead, I found you looked for help from a much younger woman for whom you displayed great affection."

"Are you jealous?" asked Stanley.

"I do not know," replied Marnie, "all I know is that I expected you to come to me with your difficulties. It hurts me to find out you suffered so much, and told me nothing about it. I feel as if having befriended June, you felt the need to distance yourself from me."

She stopped for a while and then added: "It might not yet be jealousy but I am afraid it could become so, after you tell me what you have done two days during in June's company."

Stanley started to pace the room for a few minutes then said:

"I do not know how to begin. Maybe I should first tell you that I love you and love nobody else."

"I am sure of that," interrupted Marnie, "but I do not know if you now love me the way I want to be loved. I want to be first in your thoughts, first in your confidences, first at your side in difficult moments"

"Please Marnie," begged Stanley, "let me speak. I told you I am in a mess. A man in a mess might not be able to bring up the best arguments. I feel myself torn between my own self which I do not now understand well, between June for whom I feel an enormous amount of paternal love and pity, and you for whom my love has never been so great. Please do not try to judge the situation according to normal standards. A man in a mess must be understood otherwise."

"Do you mean" interrupted Marnie again, "that being in a mess you are freed from normal behavioral judgment?"

"Please," begged Stanley, this time with tears in his eyes, "hear me well till I finish what I have to say. I am not sure I have yet a clear picture. I know I am not and cannot be ashamed of anything I have done prior to my trip and during my trip. Please listen to me."

Stanley stopped speaking and Marnie remained waiting for him to resume. He went to the refrigerator and filled a glass with orange juice. He then took a kitchen chair and moved it so he could sit face to face with Marnie." He then said:

"Marnie, Do you know what it is to realize you are getting mad? That is the state I was in, a month ago. For fourteen years I was taking a high dose of feminine hormones. It was intended to prevent the cancerous tumor from killing me. But it messed up with my emotions. The point was reached where I felt everyone was hating me. I felt you also were despising me and hating me. In my rational mind I knew it was not true. But I so much felt it true that I became more and more convinced I was becoming crazy.

"I was often looking at you. Your expression was reassuring me. It was so clear you loved me. Nevertheless, the moment I was away from you the doubts were again assailing me. I had become ambivalent with respect to you. It was part of my sickness. Had I been normal I would have requested your help, but then I would not have needed it. It is one aspect of my sickness that I was unable to request your help."

Marnie wanted to say something but Stanley did not give her a chance.

"Please, Marnie," he said, "let me still speak." But once more he went back to pace the room before returning to the chair. He then said: "Marnie, I am not able now to explain myself. I know I am on my way to recovery. I have stopped taking the hormones. I will probably regain my emotional balance. But I am thus risking to die from cancer. Still, it is a life saving measure since the medication was also causing clots in the blood, clots that could cause a stroke any day." I had stopped to take the medicine before starting the trip. I thought I was a dying man. Two weeks before the trip I had added a codicil to my will allowing Alvin Finkel to make a rewrite of my book *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal* in the hope that the rewrite would have a larger

distribution. This shows what were my worries. As to the trip, it was aimed, among other things, to ensure that June would make a second version of *Memoirs of God*. I do not deny I wanted to see her. In the condition I was, any good word even from a stranger, any gesture of affection would acquire an exaggerated importance. It is not difficult for me to feel a lot of affection for a person the age of a grandchild. Moreover June was intellectually far above her age. Her knowledge was impressive. Her opinions were close to mine. The prospect of becoming her mentor filled me with joy. It is thus that June became so important to me. I therefore wanted to meet her and have some face to face discussions and conversations with her. But I was not prepared to what occurred."

Then, with as many details as he could remember, he told Marnie of the personal conversation he had with June concerning her filthy grandfather, her insensitive boyfriend. He also repeated the very intimate conversation he held with June which allowed him to bring some peace into her mind concerning her fear of being asexual.

"Poor girl," said Marnie, "To be so talented and to have suffered, and still suffering so much!" She stopped for just a few seconds then bend over Stanley and kissed his hair. He rose from his sit and they had a tender hug.

She then said: "I know how sensitive you are. It must not have been easy for you to see a girl you affectionate so much revealing to you the terrible extent of her sufferings. I have no difficulty understanding you have adopted her in your heart as your grand-daughter. I feel like adopting her myself as such." Then with an anxious tone she asked: "how does it feel, Stanley, to have been accused if only for moments of being the like of her dirty grandfather?"

"At the time," replied Stanley, "I just slipped into numbness, a numbness of despair. This feeling is still somewhat with me. At one point It seemed that my visit would have had a healing effect on her. I am now afraid that the opposite has occurred. She did not need to feel, though wrongly, that a second old man proved to be treacherous. If only her mum was smart, she would have understood how important it was for her to take my side and convince June I was worthy her trust."

"I could," said Marnie, "write a letter to June and her mum testifying how certain I am that you are decent to the extreme. Coming from me it could be convincing."

Stanley was moved. "How lucky I am," he said, "to have you by my side. I must have been really sick and blind not to have requested your help from the start."

"Are you sure," said Marnie, "you are now healthy, I mean emotionally healthy?"

"No," replied Stanley, "but I have stopped to take the medicine. Its side-effects should dissipate with time."

Marnie seemed to be absorbed in deep thoughts. She then said:

"There are some points which I do not understand. I have no problem with the fact she would confide to you the sexual abuse. It was something so important in her life. The fact it was the first personal thing she told you at the start of your visit, indicates it had something to do with you. I agree she probably was looking up to you as a surrogate grandpa to replace her filthy real one. After years, she still was not over her pains. But I do not see why she had to tell you about the greed of the paternal grandparents."

"I think, " said Stanley, "it was all part of the process of accelerating the friendship binding us. I too had written her a number of letters giving her details about my relatives. However, I had not revealed any family or personal *secret*. Moreover there must be many other details of her life which were unknown to me and which, if told, could have increased the bond of friendship. However, her revelation came so suddenly, without any introduction, that I immediately felt there was an essential relation between the abuse on the hand of her grandfather and our friendship."

"And indeed, this had a serious effect on the nature of our friendship. She had been abused by an old man, and she trusted me, an old man, and now sought my friendship. She had told me, explaining her mother's refusal to let me stay with them during my visit, that her mother did not know, as she did, that I was a nice man. I became convinced that, in some sense, I was for her the decent and lovable grandfather she missed in her youth. It explained that, having liked me through my writings, having learned that I was old, she wanted us to become friends. More than one person had detected in my writings in FEMISA a gentleness and sensitivity which did not lessen the strength of my arguments. June seemed to have thought that here was a *nice* old man in total contrast with her grandfather.

"And she behaved with me as if we were very close friends. I was very touched. I thought that this woman, who had to take counseling for years to overcome the problems caused by her grandfather, might be healed by a surrogate grandfather which was deserving her full trust. I decided I will not fail her. In my heart, I had adopted her as my granddaughter and dear friend."

"It all makes sense," said Marnie, "Still, I do not understand why she followed you in your motel room when you asked her to wait for you in her car."

"At first," said Stanley, "I gave no thought to it. Later, when I realized how suspicious she could become, I could not make sense of her entering my motel room. True, she left the door wide open. She could not guess I would close the door and remain with her alone in the room. She could not know it would last only seconds. Still, she did not panic. She seemed reasonably at ease. My guess is she had already reached the conclusion that I was an exceedingly decent person to a degree somewhat unbelievable. She entered in my room without fear but possibly with the intention to find out whether she could notice in my room any small detail which would contradict the opinion she reached about me. Had she, for instance found on my bed a copy of Playboy, had she found a condom in my open luggage which I was rummaging to get Carolyn's poem, she would then be justified in rejecting the so pure image she constructed of me. It may be an indication that it was just after I walked her out of the room to her car that she told me that I would not die but would remain alive in her heart."

Marnie remained quiet and after a few moments said: "I think the poor girl needs help. She needs it from a professional and not from you. Her attachment to you was exaggerated. Her doubts about you reveals an obsession with old men being 'dirty'. Would it not be wise for you to slowly get out of her life, at least till she would become well?"

"I think you are right" replied Stanley. "I will keep friendly and professional relations with her, connected with our contract about *Memoirs of God*. I will restrict the contacts to the minimum compatible with compassion and an absence of rudeness."

"I am happy," said Marnie with your decision. "On my side, I may write a letter to June, and possibly to her mother, asking them to interpret your visit in the most positive way. I think this will do some good to June."

Marnie remained quiet for a few moment and then asked:

"Stanley, How was your car trip? How safe a driver were you? Was not your depression impeding your ability to be careful and aware of the traffic on the road? Did nothing worthy of telling occurred to you during the long days of driving?"

"It seems to me," replied Stanley, "that when a person drives for a long time, there is some dissociation of his person. One part of him does nothing else than driving and taking care of the road, while the rest of him can think, address problems, even daydream without affecting the awareness of that part of him that supervises his driving. I guess it is not an ideal situation. But I remember quite well how I had to face some driving emergency, like having to stop suddenly, and did it quite well in spite of being immersed in deep thoughts. The moment the emergency occurs then, almost in no time, the whole of me regains control of the driving."

"It is scary," commented Marnie, "and I think you should not drive when less than the whole of you can concentrate on the road."

"I think", replied Stanley, "that it is not only my case. People driving long hours on a monotonous road, with no apparent need for special awareness, cannot prevent themselves from thinking. From considering their worries, their best moments of the days or what they will have to face in a few hours. The only real danger is that of falling asleep. It is a danger I did not run because I was stopping every 100 kms to take a short rest of just three minutes or so, either in a rest area or on the road's shoulder."

"Speaking of something special occurring to me during the driving," Stanley went on, "I have indeed something to tell which seems to me almost miraculous."

Stanley stopped to drink water. He then resumed, while Marnie, whose curiosity had been raised, did not lift her eyes from him.

"On my way back," Stanley went on, "I felt hungry. I looked for an exit which would indicate that it leads to some shopping center where one could find a restaurant. I missed a number of exits, either because I was driving too fast, or because I was distracted by my thoughts. I reduced

the speed and concentrated on the road signs. Soon came one announcing the availability of food on the next exit..

"I took that exit and was astonished to find out it seemed to lead to nowhere. The road went straight for many kilometers. I then arrived to what seemed a small village rather dirty. On one of the buildings was written with charcoal the word FOOD.

"The inside of the building was nicer than the outside. There was a number of tables covered with clean cloth and giving the impression of a reasonable place where to eat. One table was occupied by a couple. The woman seemed much younger than the man. They asked me many questions. From where do I come, where am I going etc.. I replied to their questions and then told them it is my turn to ask. And I did ask:

"Are you interested in History?"

"Nothing interests me more" replied the woman.

"I then went out to my car and brought back a copy of *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*. They both looked at it. The woman appeared to be astonished. She started speaking in a murmur

"Stanley Alperovitz, Stanley Alperovitz! I know this name"

"Yes," I answered, there are so many Alperovitz's that you might easily have heard such a name."

"No", replied the woman, "I mean Stanley Alperovitz" and then she added: "are you not the Stanley Alperovitz of *Memoirs of God*?"

"I was astounded and told her:

"How do you come to know that book. It was sold only in Edmonton?" She replied

"Ten years ago, my supervisor was visiting Edmonton, saw the book in a bookstore. Bought it and brought it to me. I have read it.

Even now, Stanley appeared to be overwhelmed by the story. He spoke again:

"Marnie, She was possibly the only woman in the states that had read the book. Had she taken a different road, where she on the road any other days during those last ten days, had she taken any other exit then the one leading to that strange restaurant, and the author of a book would not have met the only person in the States that had read it. It seems to me quasi miraculous."

"I do not know what to say" commented Marnie. "It is indeed a very unlikely event. Do you give any special significance to that event?"

"Coincidences do occur," replied Stanley, "but I must admit that this coincidence will remain baffling me."

Chapter 25 Closure with June

Contrarily to her promise, June did not send Stanley the copy of the codicil. She ceased all contacts.

"I wonder, said one day Stanley to Marnie, "if June still thinks I am a dirty old man."

You should not," replied Marnie "try to figure out what is in June's mind. She is somewhat sick."

"What saddens me," went on Stanley, "is the thought I might have contributed to her plight. If she believes I am a dirty old man then she also believes that, twice in her life, old men have abused her. I think it is important to help her realize this was not the case. Besides, I need the reassurance that she still thinks the world of me."

"If you want to do something for her," commented Marnie, "I would try to dissuade you. You can never know whether you would be helping her or hurting her still more. On the other hand, if you want to do something for yourself, then go ahead, but be wise."

Stanley pondered over Marnie's comment. He thought he ought to find out the nature of his attachment to June. He thought he should discount no possibility. He was decided to be as honest with himself as possible, however disagreeable the evidence could be.

It is not uncommon for an old man his age to feel attracted to young girls. Was he then attracted to June? It was not easy to answer the question. Stanley was decent to the extreme. He could not be a *dirty old man*. So, if he were physically attracted to June, his feelings would be sublimated into much more acceptable ones. Would it be wrong if it were true? As long as he has no conscious awareness of this attraction, why should he worry? What if he felt an unconscious incestuous attraction for Melanie but was totally unaware of it?

He was entering the realm of imaginary assumptions. He was so sure of the purity of his feelings towards his daughter Melanie that he felt good at having to recognize that his unconscious had not been prodded and he could only know for certain what he was consciously aware of. But then, Melanie and June fell in the same category.

He remembered how happy he had been when he learned that June had met a guy who would become her boyfriend. Where not his feelings for June comparable to those he had for Melanie when she was June's age? Were they or were they not? The answer happened to be quite illuminating. He had dreamed Melanie would become closer to him. Besides being his daughter, she also could let herself be tutored in the hazardous fields of history, politics and social justice. Hazardous field because in them the road to truth was filled with traps. He dreamed Melanie could continue his work. But Melanie did not have the time. On the other hand June seemed to be eager to learn, to discuss, to confront his opinions and, maybe in her own original way, to pursue his work.

It is thus that Stanley send June the following message in November 1995:

Hi June,

I bear no grudge against you, nor against your mom. If only I could be sure that the reason why you interrupted our friendship was the pressure from your parents, your friends and your boyfriend, I would not feel hurt. It would mean that you do know that decent men do exist and one in particular, told you that anytime you would need him he would just come by car within three travel days. He was in your eyes "like Forrest Gump". He "would not die because he would remain alive in your heart". The fact that I was later treated in an humiliating manner, being set up to an answering machine, would matter little.

What hurts me indeed is the fact that there can be other reasons. Did some people succeed in convincing you that I was indeed a "dirty old man"? The thought that this is the case hurts me very much in a way you may not suspect. I DO NOT CARE WHAT YOU THINK OF ME, AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT HURT _Y O U_.

I cannot forget that you had a trauma in your childhood caused by a dirty old man. I cannot forget that another man, at the most important moment of your relation with him, abstained from telling you the three most important words you had the right to expect from him. I count it as a second trauma.

Now, if a man you considered a Forest-gump-like person turned out to be a dirty old man, it would be a third trauma, a trauma you were not in need of. In this respect, what matters is not what I am indeed, but what your perception is concerning what I am. This is why, though I know that I am decent to the extreme, I cannot stop feeling hurt at the idea that, somehow my coming to St. Louis added a third trauma.

As long as I will not know whether this is the case, I will remain feeling that I ought to do SOMETHING to put the record straight, not so much for my reputation, but for my own sake: I can't feel at rest as long as I think that, inadvertently, I increased your childhood trauma.

I wrote a letter to your mom explaining how much she could hurt you if she ever convinced you that I am a dirty old man. You do not need an increase in your pessimist outlook on men, or on some categories of men. To let you with the knowledge that I deserved your friendship, cannot harm you, on the contrary. I beg forgiveness for having told your mom matters she knew did occur, but she might not have known you told me. I was so desperate to induce your mom not to create more difficulties concerning your well being. If you did not read that letter, I could send you a copy by e-mail.

One final point. Fifty years separate us. I do feel fatherly towards all people, male or female, much younger than me. I had decided to combat that feeling regarding

you. This determination fell apart when you told me about your grandfather. I thought I could be for you the loving decent grandfather you missed in your childhood. I even thought that, somehow, you cared for my friendship because I was a grandfather figure you could love and respect. I might have been wrong, but it was not a criminal mistake!

I understand that it is not possible for us to resume our previous friendship. However, just to prevent me from going on being hurt and looking for ways at neutralizing whatever hurt I unwillingly, and innocently, might have caused you, please, do let me know that you were not affected negatively by my visit, if such is the case. I would also be happy to learn that the three most important words have been told to you by Bob, or by a deserving boyfriend.

Your friendship for me might have died in July 22, 1994. Mine will never die, and since it is so decent, it should not die. If, as is very likely, it is best for you that I stop contacting you, let me know, and I will be happy to comply. On no account you should fear that I might remain sending you messages, once we can say good-bye in a more civilized way than by a set up to an answering machine.

Still friendly, Stanley

He was surprised to receive the following answer:

Sat Nov 11, 1995

To: Stanley@

Stanley,

Please know that the skepticism I have for male intentions, especially older men's intentions, is nothing you began. You were the third older man I had become close to in my life, and the two before betrayed me, or at least expressed feelings I interpreted as betrayal. I was sensitive, I was wary and watching. The first small, innocent sign of affection or condolence was picked up by my radar as danger. I think in your hurt feelings you neglected to understand where I was coming from, because if you understood, you wouldn't have taken my response personally. It wasn't you who messed up; it is my interpretation based on my history that judged your actions.

I like to think that I have come some distance from the girl I used to be and still, in many way, am, but the emotional responses I have to people cannot be controlled in a cognitive way. The two paths just don't cross. You may be relieved to know that I am in therapy, working on my emotional responses through the popular "Rational Emotive Therapy," but rest assured, my therapist and I have a long way to go.

I am sorry that you still hurt from me. I know that you are a very caring person -- sometimes too much for people who may not be worth your time. You will remain in my thoughts regardless of time because you represent a symbolic step for me -- the recognition that I am not fully over the pain of my grandfather, and the need I still have to seek help.

Please smile on Marnie for me,

June

Stanley was relieved to hear from June she knew he was a caring person. Still he was pained to realize how deranged were her feelings. He answered:

Nov 12 1995

To: june@

Hi June,

This message could well be, if such is your wish, the last I will ever write to you. To ensure it is the last, you have either to abstain from answering it, or to tell me to stop messaging..

I thank you for your message. It helped me very much. It also saddened me. You seem to be emotionally fragile (it might not be the proper word). You now know that I care, and still you are keeping your distance from me. I thought it wise that the friendly relation should be interrupted. I believed you had yielded to pressure from Bob, your mom and friends. I did not want you to remain under such pressure. I did not know that the real reason was that you realized you needed help and you were still unable to take my good feelings at face value.

Your well being is important to me. You write: I know that you are a very caring person -- sometimes too much for people who may not be worth your time. Yes, I am a caring person, but you are so wrong in underestimating yourself. Take my trip of 3500 miles to see you, our previous messaging, my sending you my two books, my joy at hearing you had a boy friend, the hurt I felt at the interruption of our friendship, TAKE IT ALL AS A TRIBUTE TO YOUR INTELLECT AND TO YOUR DECENCY. I once told you : "You are important to me." Another time I told you, and it is still true: "You are part of my eternity". From me you learned the meaning of "transitivity", that magic word which was supposed to make from Bob a friend of mine. At the time, I did not yet know that he had abstained from telling you three important words. I resented that very much, not only because I care, but because you deserve better. You are a person worthy of true love from your boyfriend, worthy of unselfish and decent friendly love from me and from all your friends. I will never betray you. Try to tell your radar to keep quite on that.

In addition, your particular circumstances prompted me to develop for you the feeling of a deserving and decent grandfather. I hoped I could help you heal from the damage inflicted on your childhood. To lose a friend and a granddaughter is for me no easy matter.

Please, speak about me with your therapist. Ask him if, at some point, now, later or much later, I could be part of your healing process.

If it is better for you that we stop messaging, I intend, once a year, during the month of July, to phone your mom and ask her how you are doing. Please, tell your mom not to hang up on me; I also am emotionally very fragile. Tell her also, please, that you do not mind letting me know how well are your studies, how better you feel, how happy you are.

Friendly, Stanley

P.S. We have to hope that the day will come in which you will feel secure with men, not more and not less than women who were not traumatized in their childhood are feeling. When such a day come, be it now or in years, please remember that, as I patiently waited for your last message, I will patiently wait for that kind of news concerning the girl I respect so much, and for whom I really felt grandfatherly in the most decent way, while also feeling I had in her a great friend.

Sun, 12 Nov 1995

Subject: thanks

Stanley,

I am amazed how much thought you have given to me and how much effort you have put forth to prove your innocence to my parents. I never knew the content of these letters.

I hope your health and your life improve at least to the point of smiling on every sunrise.

June

Date: Sun, 12 Nov 1995

Hi June,

You did not take either of the two choices you had to stop our messaging. I take it that you are not adverse to resume messaging.

It seems to me that you have resumed your studies at I do not know if you had been in Germany. I would not mind if, in order to have more time for your studies, and for your own well-being as well, you restrict the frequency of the exchanges. Once a week? Once a month? It is your choice. I want you to keep open the option to stop that exchange for ever, the moment you find it taxing you too much.

Stanley

He wrote many more messages which remained unanswered. It became clear that June wanted to cut all ties with him.. He therefore sent her the following goodbye:

Wed, 13 Dec 1995
Subject: amends; goodbye

Hi June,

.....
I thought that what I was demanding from you was so easy for you to give: a promise to contact me sometime in the future, be it in five or ten years. I was wrong. I want to make amends.

I know you are a caring person. Therefore I ASSUME (rather than ask you to confirm) that, obviously, when you will be better and remember how caring I was, and am, and what a decent friend I had been, and I still am, you will certainly let me know the progress you have made.

I ASSUME that it is painful for you to read from me what reminds you that we were once close friends.

In short, not only am I stopping writing to you, not only do I renounce to actively try to get news about you, but I retract anything I said that seems to blame you for not caring for a friend over whose shoulder you once cried. I trust that you are doing nothing out of malice. I trust you are caring for your healing in the best way you can. I want to hope that one day I will be able to buy a copy of a book by June .. In an indirect way it will then tell me that you are probably doing fine.

I do not retract a single caring word I said in my past messages. However incongruous my words might have been, they were sincere and true. I regret having written them because they were not helpful.

It would help me if, instead of abstaining from answering, you would send me a message with the single word "goodbye". You had the strength to send me two messages please have the strength to send me this single word. It would tell me that you do not hold a grudge against me for having been selfish..... I did not understand that, in your condition, I was maybe asking too much. However, if you

will not send me this single word, I will understand that, once more, I asked too much.

Stanley

June answered:

Date: Thu, 25 Jan 1996 12:09:04 -0600

GOODBYE, STANLEY.

You will forever be in my memory.

Please be safe, and careful. Suck the marrow of life. Do not despair.

Please, please try to persevere. Hold on to love and life.

Smile more.

Smile more!!!!

Peace be with you, goodbye.

June

Stanley was moved to tears.

In May 1999, Stanley phoned Bev, June's mother, asking news about June. Bev told him on the phone: "Stanley, I am scared by the intensity of your feelings for June. Five years have passed and you still think of her." To which he answered: "Bev, June was one of the most decent and talented young person I knew. I will never forget her. Please, allow me to phone you once a year to get some news. How well is she doing?"

"She is doing quite well," answered Bev, "she has graduated with honors, she is a freelance journalist, she is dating a nice young man."

"Thank you so much" said Stanley, "I will phone again in a year".

Chapter 26

Post-history

Nelly was born in an Italian Gypsy family. Since her school-age years, she felt torn between two very different cultures. Not all gypsy children were sent to school, but her mother, whose Gypsy husband had abandoned her, wanted to open for her daughter the access to the independent and gratifying life that education could provide.

Nelly, who would not trust her gypsy friends, was very suspicious of her schoolmates. She interpreted their actions in the most negative way which most often did not correspond to reality. Nelly was aware that she had a suspicious outlook concerning people, and a deep sense of pessimism for the future. She thought it allowed her to protect herself from people and events.

She married a gypsy man, a Hungarian Tzigane, gave birth to two boys, Terry and Al and, just after the end of WWII, went with him to Canada and then divorced. She met Alfred and fell in love with him. Their courtship was very short. They were soon married.

Alfred represented a bewildering case for Nelly. She could not believe a man existed who would always be true to his word, will never steal, will always act motivated by the purest intentions. For her, there must have been a catch. She was convinced that, under Alfred's thin layer of goodness and respectability, was hiding the real man who, like all men she believed she knew, was essentially egotistic and somewhat evil. Her main task was to uncover Alfred's mask. She could not withstand his caring for family and friends. She did not appreciate his caring for her because, in her eyes, it was not much different from his caring for family and friends. This caring was not a sign of true love.

A man really in love would betray his family, his friends and his country for the woman he loves. Alfred would do none of it, therefore Alfred did not love her. Any time Alfred would display his deep love and respect for her, she would at first appreciate his move and accept it at face value. She would then repeatedly reinterpret Alfred's behavior till she will reach the worst interpretation however at odd it would be with evidence and rational thinking. Life between them was filled with hurt, suspicion, recrimination and frustration. They went for counseling. It is then that Alfred heard from the family counselor his suspicion that Nelly had a mental problem. She could heal if she was willing to accept help. However, the counselor thought it very improbable that she would any day collaborate with a therapist. Her case, he said, was hopeless.

A few years later Alfred and Nelly divorced. They had no children. Nelly succeeded in preventing contact between Alfred and her two boys from her preceding marriage. Still, to her horror, the children had been so much influenced by Alfred that they had adopted his attitude to life, friends and relatives. She had to deal with two Alfred-like people in her house. She hoped they will change when they will have more life experience. She was to be disappointed. The children introduced moral considerations in all her actions. They cared very much to be righteous and avoid wrong behavior. They were critical of Nelly's actions.

Nelly felt rejected by her own children. This did not correspond to reality. The children adored her, considered her a wonderful mother. But when it came to actions they would follow the dictate of their own morality and not that of Nelly's.

The stress became too heavy for Nelly. The children were first in denial but later had to agree that she needed treatment. Nelly became hateful towards the children when she discovered that they had sought the advice of a psychologist on how to deal with her.

A new situation developed when she reached the conviction that her children needed psychiatric help. The children said they would accept a psychiatrist evaluation only if Nelly herself would undergo one.

The psychiatrist understood he would go nowhere if he told her she was in need of treatment. Instead, he explained to her how much she could help her children by cooperating with him in an endeavor to discover what was wrong with them. It is thus that, without even noticing it, Nelly was slowly being treated by the psychiatrist. This went on for a full year and the results were rewarding. The true Nelly started to surface from the abyss she had fallen in. That real Nelly was an impressively intelligent and caring person.

She came to cherish the memories of her life with Alfred. Had he been free she might have considered a reconciliation. She encouraged her children to rebuild contacts with Alfred. It is thus that Terry met Tracy. But that is another story.

Alfred's cousins Amalia, Rony and Rachel remained very close to each other, though each raised his/her own family. Alfred had not see them for ten years. He then went with his wife Lynda to visit them in Israel. Lynda liked them all so much that this visit was followed by another one the next year, and thereafter it became a yearly tradition.

Nelly who, when married to Alfred, could not withstand his relatives, became fond of them after being treated. She too went to Israel, not as often as Alfred, and built with those cousins and their families strong friendship ties.

Chapter 27

Tracy

Tracy was now 17. She and her brother Brian have brightened Melanie's and Robert's days. They were biological siblings with a two years age difference. She was less than one year old when they were both adopted.

Brian had been all the time protective of Tracy. He allowed her to tease him, to beat him to take his toys, even to break them, and he would have only smiles for her.

With time, Tracy realized how unconditional Brian's love to her was. She responded to it intensely and the two became inseparable. When they reached school age, Brian's inclination towards chemistry became more and more developed. As to Tracy, it was difficult to foresee the direction she would later take. One thing was clear. She had mastered the art of logic and discussion to the point that nobody could win an argument with her.

One day, when Tracy was five, Stanley took her for a walk. They went to rest on a bench. Tracy asked:

"Grandpa, what is infinity?"

Stanley was caught unprepared. How do you explain that to a five year old child? He tried his best:

"You see this bench, Tracy, it is two meters long. If I cut it in two I will have two smaller benches each one meter long. If I cut again the two benches in two, I will have four benches half a meter long each. If I go on cutting all smaller pieces in two, I will end up having wood dust of very small particles and their number grows to infinity."

Tracy kept quite. Stanley thought she was content with his explanation. Back home, Melanie asked what they had been talking. Stanley reported the conversation on infinity. Tracy interjected:

"I did not like grandpa's explanation. He told me we will have to cut the pieces of wood a great number of times to get an infinite number of them; but at no moment can he tell me to stop cutting because we have reached infinity. It seems that infinity does not exist."

Stanley tried another approach:

"Mom's love for you IS infinite. There is nothing she would not do for your sake."

Tracy remained thinking and then asked Stanley:

"And you, grandpa, is your love for me infinite or not?"

Stanley preferred to throw the ball back to Tracy:

"It is not for me to tell it. It is for you to perceive it!"

Tracy remained quite. Then Melanie prodded her:

"Tracy, you are supposed to tell something to grandpa."

Tracy raised her face, looked deep into Stanley's eyes and then jumped at Stanley's neck while saying: "Yes, his love for me is infinite."

Tracy became the chess champion of her class. She studied so well that she jumped a class. Stanley was so proud of her.

Brian and Tracy of course knew that Stanley had written books and essays. They both liked to ask Stanley no end of questions. They delighted in his many stories. "One day," thought Stanley, "I will have to talk with them about more serious topics."

The day arrived earlier than he thought it would. But in the meantime, Stanley was content to tell the grandchildren stories from his life.

One day, he told them June's story. They were fascinated and impressed by Stanley's description of June's talent and the goodness of her heart. The children loved June for having told their Grandpa: "You will not die because you will remain alive in my heart". How could then matters later go so wrong? Tracy noticed that Stanley was quite sad while telling the story.

"Do you still miss her", asked Tracy?

"I miss her in many ways," replied Stanley. "More than anything else I miss her news. And yes, I miss my pupil who was so talented and so affectionate. I hoped I would remain her friend and tutor for long years."

Tracy bit her lower lip as to prevent her from asking more questions.

Alfred and Lynda were now visiting Robert and Melanie more often. Tracy was responding well to their views in history and social issues. Soon Tracy decided that her grandpa Stanley and Alfred ought to be friends. Each time Stanley would be expected for a visit, Tracy would insist that Alfred and Lynda be invited.

Stanley and Alfred took to each other. They were the same age and had similar opinions on what mattered most to them. Tracy would participate in their discussions and soon became an equal partner.

Chapter 28

Tracy and June

It was a snowy cold winter day. The whole family had gathered in the living room to celebrate Stanley's birthday.

"It is now time for the presents", said Melanie.

"I will start with the best one" said Stanley. He turned, put his hands round Marnie, pressed her to his heart and gave her a warm kiss while the family applauded. Then Stanley looked at the pile of presents and said he would start with the smallest. It was an envelop. He opened it, took out a letter and read aloud:

"My dear grandpa,

I hope my present will please you though it is quite an unusual one. During last month, and as a present to you, I read *Conquest of Death*, *Memoirs of God* and *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*.

"I did not think it would be possible, but I have to tell you that I do now love you still more than before, and am so proud of you. It might be presumptuous of me to say that I could be the June you lost. She also was for you a granddaughter. What do you think, will you let me try?

"And now, I am sorry to say, I have to scold you. You were not well inspired when you offered to donate a kidney while alive. Please, promise me never to jeopardize your life again. The world can expect from you more writings, more insight. You have the duty to make sure you live as long as is possible.

"With love,
Tracy"

All eyes moved from Stanley to Tracy. She went to him and gave him a tender hug. He was overwhelmed with her so special present and with the warmth it exhaled.

Two months later Tracy, Alfred, Lynda and Stanley, went together to Seattle to join the protest against the WTO meeting. As they were walking side by side, Tracy took Stanley's hand in hers, pressed it and did not let it go. She could not say later whether she had a premonition.

Tracy had done well at school. Stanley enjoyed tutoring her in history and politics. Yes, she was somewhat like June. But you do not forget a granddaughter when you get another. Stanley felt a few tears in the corner of his eyes.

He remembered the main events in his last few years. Day dreaming, he summoned the image of Marnie whom he loved as much as when they were young lovers. Then he saw Melanie's image and felt his heart swelling with happiness. Then, still day dreaming, he saw Tracy walking hand in hand with June. He then collapsed. He was dead on arrival at the hospital. Dead as he was, there was a big smile on his face. A letter to his family was found in his pocket it read:

Dear Marnie, Dear Melanie and Robert, Dear Brian and Tracy.

No one is immortal, and my day is bound to come. I feel it will be soon. I wish you would celebrate my life and not mourn my death. Consider:

A man wakes up in the morning. He is bored. He comes out of his bed, does not say "I love you" to those for whom it could matter. He does not teach a thing to anyone, does not learn anything, does not help any person and, at the end of the day, he goes back to sleep after having added one day to his biological age.

Another man wakes up in the morning, full of the strong will to make that day count. He says "I love you" to his wife and children. He learns from his experience, his readings and his conversations. He teaches people, he helps people and, at the end of the day, goes back to sleep after having added one day to his biological age.

Obviously those two days have not the same value. Since I was told, twenty years ago, that I have a single year to live, I made sure that each of my days would count at least three times the usual value.

This means that my real age is greater by forty years than my biological age. I am therefore well over 117 years old. And when a person dies at that age, it is cause for celebration. So, please, do celebrate, do be joyful.

Marnie, I am so fortunate to have had you as my life companion. You have been my inspiration. I love and loved you with such an intensity that its fire should have consumed me. Instead it has been my main support. Without you, I would have achieved nothing.

And you Melanie and Robert, I love you as you are, and you are great. There was a time you took a greater interest in the world and its problems. May be you will let Tracy guide you towards more care for history and social justice.

And you Brian, I predict you will direct your great scientific talent for the good of humanity. I think a great future is before you.

Tracy, thank you for having tried to replace my lost June. But remember, you and June are two individuals, each great in her own right. You deserve much more than just replace June. I want you to remain yourself, to aspire at being yourself. I wish you and June could become friends.

Goodbye.