

# TUESDAY'S CHILD

[A Journey towards a new democracy]



by  
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Whats in a name publications  
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# The Journey

## Chapter 1

Peter arrived at the station early. Frazer had dropped him off, they had had a great time. Peter was lucky to find a seat on the busy platform and opened the sandwich that he had bought as a 'meal deal' at Frazer's local supermarket. He started eating it while looking at the train's notice board. A piece dropped on the floor and a pigeon hopped and quickly pecked at the morsel. Peter wondered whether to give it more of his sandwich but decided that he better not. He watched the people coming and going on the platform with some rushing as the announcer told them that there was a change of platform. He hoped that it wouldn't happen to him and so glanced nervously several times at the departures board, his train was recorded as on time.

The pigeon hopped away and found the remains of what looked like a chocolate cake and tried feasting on it but some other pigeons had also spied it and a mini battle took place leaving Peter's pigeon standing on the sideline.

Peter thought that he'd often felt like that.

It had been good seeing Frazer again. His mind drifted back to all the shows that they'd been to, he'd had a great time, but now had to return to his Granny's funeral. He was so glad that he had seen her before his trip, she'd told him to enjoy himself and not to worry about her. She knew she didn't have long to go.

Peter loved his life, loved his job and was happy living at home knowing that when he'd saved enough he'd be able to buy himself a flat.

It had been great staying with Frazer, but he was upset the day he heard Granny had died, he knew it would happen, but was still shocked, he wanted to rush home but Mum said that Granny wouldn't have wanted that and he knew that she was right. Frazer had been great knowing when to distract him and when to leave him alone, fortunately Frazer having his own flat made this easier.

He'd met him at the University choir. Peter had liked the idea of doing something different. It was Kate who had encouraged him to join. They had dated a few times but they knew that it wouldn't go anywhere and so when she said she'd found someone else, Peter was sad but not heartbroken. It had been different with Helen. He'd never found anyone like her. She was from Birmingham and a hairdresser. He'd met her in Wales when he was eighteen whilst camping with some mates just before he went to Uni.

She was warm and bubbly and came bursting into his life. She was everything that Peter wanted in a woman. The fact that she was five years older than him didn't matter to him. They'd met in a pub. Peter had never been much of a drinker, but that night thought, "why not" and found himself the next morning in a strange bed rather than in the tent in his sleeping bag. For a moment he panicked but then he remembered everything that had happened the night before. He turned over and there she was with her beautiful long brown hair. She turned towards him, opened her eyes and said in her Brummy lilt "morning" and that was it he was smitten.

They met when they could afford it and messaged frequently, but it was hard.

It was just after he started his doctorate four years later that she decided she wanted more, she wanted to settle down but he couldn't give it all up even for her.

He watched the train as it entered the station. There were so many carriages. He nervously looked for F and wondered whether he'd find 17b "Of course I will" he reassured himself. He'd been on trains loads of times, but recently only short journeys from Guildford to Woking.

The journey to Edinburgh had been uneventful. He'd slept most of the way knowing that he could as the last stop had been Waverley.

“Take a deep breath” he thought “Stop it, you’ve done train journeys so many times before, why do you get so nervous about something that is so stupid?”

Granny had said when he got nervous that it was in the stars, but he didn’t know what she meant, it just wasn’t logical, but then so many things in life weren’t logical. Mum and Dad had laughed when Granny said this. The first time was when he was eighteen and heading off to Cambridge. He’d told them how nervous he was but Granny had said it several times since then. It was as if she knew something that he didn’t and wanted him to find out.

“You’ll be fine, just take a deep breath” Mum had said cheerily, and he was and he did, frequently, but he still remembered the twinkle in Granny’s eye and the frown on Dad’s face.

Each time he’d left his home in Guildford to go back to Cambridge he felt nervous and each time he arrived at Uni he felt excited.

Peter found 17b after leaving his suitcase in the luggage rack. He preferred the aisle seat as it was easier if he wanted the toilet. He’d stupidly had the window seat a few times on his trips to and from Uni and had to climb over sleeping people or got snapped at as he woke them.

“Why did it take me so long to learn?” he questioned, but then he liked gazing out of the window and entering his own world full of memories and ideas so that was probably why. If you sat in the aisle seat sometimes people bumped pass you. A couple of times people had nearly landed on his lap as trains jerked into stations.

He often wondered what Helen was doing. When he’d told her he was staying three more years in Cambridge she cried “You could move here” he said. “How can I when my life is here, my family and my friends, why can’t you do your doctorate here, there’s loads of engineering in Brum” she sobbed. She was right, but what had been offered by Cambridge was too good to refuse. Helen exclaimed that she was too old to move. Peter had thought that twenty- seven was young, but to Helen it was old and so they had broken up. A year later she emailed saying that she had found Mark and she would have to stop being in touch because he didn’t like it.

“Don’t worry” said Granny “You’ll find someone else”, but so far he hadn’t and had thrown himself into his studies and work.

Peter sat down as the announcement came over the tannoy. He felt much calmer, he was going back home, he’d had a good time at the Edinburgh Festival, he’d always wanted to go and Frazer had pushed him this time. He was sad about Granny but at ninety- nine she’d had a good life “Sorry I’m not going to make one hundred “she’d said as he left. “Well you might” he said, but in his heart he knew that she wouldn’t and so when the news came he was upset but remembered the twinkle in her eyes. That’s something he would never forget.

“Is this yours?” Peter asked the person sitting opposite him, a woman older than him, well at least he guessed so.

“No” she replied.

Peter picked up the book, turned it over and read about the author.

The woman settled down and soon she was fast asleep.

The train started and the window seat was free so Peter put down the book and moved across leaving his bag on the seat so that he could move quickly at the next station if someone claimed it. After watching the world pass by for a few minutes he picked up the book, opened the first page and began to read.

## Chapter 2

It was a beautiful day and Peter felt happy. The weeks leading up to his thirtieth birthday had been strange. In some ways everything was the same, but in others he felt that he was coming to the end of one chapter in his life and starting another.

Claire, at work said that it must be lovely having his birthday on midsummers day, but to Peter it was usually just like any other day.

“Are you having a party?” Claire had asked when Peter had told her that he’d be thirty. He’d thought about it, but felt sad that Granny couldn’t be there. He missed her so much and cried quietly in his room quite often so not to upset his parents. He had been close to her and she was very good at helping him make decisions about his life. Mum and Dad were always supportive but felt that he should make the decisions for himself, whereas Granny would sit down with him and help him consider different options.

Peter had a busy day ahead at work, so he got out of bed, grabbed some clothes and headed off to have his shower.

“So how was your day?” Mum said as she shut down her laptop.

“Fine” said Peter as he hung up his coat and took off his shoes.

“What time is the meal tonight?” he asked

“Eight, but we thought we’d get there a bit early because of parking” Mum replied

“I’m making a cuppa, do you want one?” she added

“No, I’m fine, I think I’m going to chill a bit”

“Ok, love see you later”

Peter felt tired, he lay on his bed, covered himself with a blanket and drifted off to sleep.

He felt warm and contented, he started to dream. It was a nice dream, Granny was there, she was telling him that everything would be fine and then suddenly he was dreaming of his driving lessons and was telling himself that he’d already passed. He woke with a start as Mum knocked on the door and popped her head round.

“We’ll need to go in about twenty minutes” she said.

“Mum..... I had the most bizarre dream” Peter exclaimed, as he sat up.

Mum came in and sat at the end of the bed.

“It was Granny she was telling me everything would be Ok and then I was doing my driving lessons again.

“Yes that is strange” Mum acknowledged thoughtfully

“But I remember she was adamant that you should learn to drive and was insistent that she paid for your lessons”

“I was glad when I passed, as it was such a lot of money for her to find”

“Yes, but Granny was very careful with her money, she always knew what she was doing”

“You mean she was secretive” laughed Peter

“Well yes, your Gran was a real mix of an open and closed book, we knew so much about her but I’m sure we didn’t know the whole of her story!”

Can anyone know everything about someone, Peter pondered as Mum went to get ready.

He changed out of his work clothes, chose something more colourful and made up his mind that he was going to make the most of his birthday meal. Mum and Dad had sung ‘happy birthday to him at breakfast time and had given him his presents.

They arrived at Goblins with plenty of spare time, but as Mum had predicted the car park was very full.

Peter thought that they might have some surprise for him, but felt a bit panicky as they entered and he saw the crowd that were all waiting for him. Although he was an only child he came from a large extended family but very rarely saw any of his cousins as they were all older than him and busy with their own lives.

Peter also spied three of his close work mates, some old Uni and school friends and Frazer.

“Well!” said Mum smiling

“Wow” Peter exclaimed, but secretly inside he was telling himself not to panic “You can cope with it all, just take a deep breath”

“Are you Ok?” said Dad putting his arm around him reassuringly.

“Yes its just...”

“I know, but it was Granny...”

“What was?”

“She said we should do it, she said you deserved it, she said it would boost your confidence, entering the next chapter in your life”

“But the cost, Dad...oh she paid as well, didn’t she?”

“She insisted...” he replied.

Dad was pulled away to get everyone seated

“But what about my cousins!” Peter said anxiously

“She gave me so much, what about them!”

“They’ve done ok, she helped them over the years” Mum said.

Peter felt slightly overwhelmed, Frazer came over put his arm around him and said

“You alright mate?”

He understood, he’d met Granny and they liked each other.

“Its too much” Peter said full of emotion.

“Granny paid for all of this”

“Your Gran was very canny, she knew what she was doing, she never spoilt you did she, she just enabled you”

Peter thought about this and knew that Frazer was right.

They went and sat down and the meal started, interspersed with a few speeches. Peter wondered what he had done to be treated as the star of the show. His emotions were topsy turvy, he loved it all but also was totally embarrassed.

They ate, drank and laughed and then there was a disco to follow.

Peter danced with everyone, his aunties, cousins, old next door neighbours and felt an incredible buzz.

He didn’t drink much remembering the night he had met Helen, he never wanted to be out of control that much again. He wanted to remember and relish every moment.

The Karaoke started and he was expected to sing. He knew that he’d have to, but the nerves started taking him over again.

“We’ll do it together if you like” said Frazer

Peter knew to face his fear he had to do it alone, but what song could he sing!. He just had a total block.

The time was getting closer and closer and his nerves were so intense that his brain went dead.

“Hell” he panicked

“I can’t do it”, but he knew that he had to, then suddenly the song came into his head, the one that he used to sing with Granny and he knew he could do it.

“So what will it be?”asked the DJ

“Imagine” said Peter, knowing that it had to be, its what Granny had hoped for, a world of peace.

Peter started, he could do it and he did and then everyone joined in, it was amazing, incredible. He felt an intense closeness, he knew that everything would be Ok just as Mum had said and that Granny would always be in his heart. He knew that he would have the courage to do whatever he was meant to do.

The music stopped and Peter gave the mic back to the DJ but everyone shouted for more.

The DJ played “Angels” and handed the Mic back to Peter and he sang and everyone listened.

Then there was a duet with his cousin Becca, “I’ve got you babe”.

Peter loved it, he felt like he was floating on a cloud, all of his fears had disappeared.

Others took over the singing as he danced, on his own, in groups and with cousins, one after the other.

“Are you having a good time?” said Mum

“Amazing” Peter replied and this time he meant it, that feeling went on until the music stopped and it was time to go.

“There’s just one last thing we need to do” said Mum as they arrived back home.

“Granny wanted you to have this letter but insisted you read it alone after the party”

### Chapter 3

Peter lay on his bed and twisted the envelope in his hands. He recognised Granny's handwriting. The envelope was thick and so contained more than a letter. He had mixed feelings, he was excited to see what was inside, but sad too. He wondered whether to open it straight away or to wait until the morning.

The party had been so nice, all of his fears had been danced away. He was so proud of himself for singing, and was shocked to realise how much he loved it, all of it.

He decided to open the letter, ripping it open carefully, he wanted to treasure it. Inside he found a lot of money. He thought that Granny might leave him some money but not this much. The envelope had deceived him and it must have been one of Granny's jokes, she had loved playing silly games and tricks. What would have been three ten pound notes for his birthday or Christmas had been turned into several fifty pound notes.

There were twenty. Peter had never seen so many fifty pound notes and felt a little overwhelmed. He read the enclosed letter.

"Dear Peter, I think its time you went on a journey "Granny wrote, and added  
"Or should I say an adventure, I would like you to find a nice hotel in Stafford and stay there for a couple of nights, but before you book it please arrange an appointment with my Solicitor who will at the appointment give you instructions about the next part of your adventure. There is no rush Peter, you can do this when you feel ready. Your parents don't know what's in my letter and it's up to you to share it if you want, but I'm sure that they will be very happy for you. Sorry that I gave you fifty pound notes but I would have to have found a very big envelope for tenners. I know that you will spend the money wisely. There should be enough for your train fare and to treat yourself to a couple of nice meals and still have more to put towards your adventure. I suggest that you buy an open ended return ticket because you never know what might happen to you along the way. Gallons of Love, Granny" It was signed with thirty kisses and several smiley faces. [The Solicitors details were at the end of the letter.]

Peter decided not to share the contents until the next morning. He had booked the next day off work and so there was no rush in the morning.

He crept to the bathroom and then snuggled into bed. He thought about the thousand pounds. He could do what Granny asked and still put plenty into his savings for his flat which he dreamed of one day owning.

He thought about Stafford, he'd never been there and wondered why Granny would have a Solicitor from there and why he couldn't just talk to her or him on the phone, but Peter had a lot of respect for Granny, she might have been fun and whacky but in lots of ways she had also been wise and careful, she hated waste. She was right, he did need an adventure. His life for the last few years had been mainly study and work which was his choosing, nobody had forced him to do any of it.

"Morning" said Mum as she loaded the dishwasher. "You've had a nice lie in, I think it was a good idea of yours booking the day off work, you need a bit of a rest"

"Yes, I've got a big project coming up soon, err Mum, do you want me to read Granny's letter to you?"

"Only if you want me to", she replied, smiling. "Yes, I'd like that, you can tell Dad later, can't you?" Peter asked.

"Yes, of course, I don't think he plans to be late tonight and I'm working from home for the next few days, its much easier writing reports without other people around"

Peter had never really taken much notice of his parents jobs, they were much more interested in what he did. His Dad, as a Headteacher of a Primary school was always busy, but his Mum often worked from home, she worked for a publisher and all Peter knew was that she did a lot of proof reading.

So he read out Granny's letter and Mum listened attentively and smiled.

"I've never seen so many fifty pound notes" Peter said, "Nor me" Mum replied "I think you should go and bank them today" Mum commented, "Yes" said Peter "But I think I'll keep two out" he said. Mum smiled. "I'm going to treat, you and Dad to a nice take away tonight and we can watch a film together" Peter exclaimed. "That sounds nice" said Mum.

After breakfast Peter decided to go off for a bike ride. The roads were busy in Guildford, but he was used to it. He stopped at a cake shop and bought three apple turnovers and then went next door to the local co-op and bought a bottle of Zinfandel, he knew that his parents liked that. He would order the takeaway when his Dad came home.

His parents had always done so much for him and although he had tried to contribute more than he did they insisted that it was important for him to save as much money as he could.

"You don't want to be forty and still living with your Mum and Dad do you?" asked Dad one day about a year before.

Most of the time Peter was quite happy living there but also began to realise that maybe they wanted time on their own. They were both getting near retirement age and had hinted about moving away. Dad had originally come from Yorkshire, he'd met Mum on a weekend course, they were both in their late twenties and ready to settle down. Mum was living with her parents in Guildford and a teachers job had come up and they just went from there. Two years later Peter was born.

He had often wondered why they only had him, but never asked. He had always had lots of children to play with if he wanted, but liked spending a lot of time on his own.

He enjoyed going on his bike and even more so when he was in Cambridge where he could explore down country lanes. Frazer had suggested them taking their bikes and going to Holland but they had both been too tied up with studying and work.

He remembered that it was Granny who suggested that he go to the Edinburgh festival. "You can stay with that nice boy, you know, the one you brought home with you from Cambridge, such a nice pleasant chap" she'd said "And rather dishy too" Peter had wondered at the time whether Granny was thinking of herself having a nice toyboy or whether she thought that Peter was gay, which he wasn't, he was just too busy for any kind of relationship. He still thought about Helen, but he knew that long term it just wouldn't have worked. She didn't want to move and he had nothing against Birmingham, he had enjoyed his trips there and was surprised how quickly you could get out to some countryside such as the Clent Hills, but then his career mattered most.

He wondered whether that was still the case or whether being thirty really was significant and did he want to live with his parents when he was forty?

He rode up the drive, took his bike through the side gate, took the cakes and wine through the back door into the kitchen.

"Did you have a nice ride?" Mum said as she popped her head around the corner "Oh those look yummy"



## Chapter 4

“So how long will you be away?” said Claire, sitting herself next to Peter.

“I’ve taken a fortnight off. I thought I could explore around the area I’ve never been there.”

“You’ve been too wrapped up in your work that’s why” Claire laughed.

“True” Peter acknowledged

He was looking forward to his adventure. Since his party, a few months before he seemed to have gained more confidence. September would be a good month to explore. He’d booked the two nights in the middle of Stafford as Granny had suggested in her letter but felt that he wanted to be more daring and just see what took his fancy after that. He could get buses and trains and just see what he could find. He thought about Helen but decided not to get in touch with her, even though she was not that far away. He thought how strange it was that he had been to Birmingham several times but never really explored anywhere other than local to where Helen lived.

He wondered whether two weeks would fly by or whether he would find it a drag and partly wished that he’d gone up to Edinburgh again and stayed with Frazer, but knew that was being too safe, it was time to be more daring.

“I still think we should go on that biking trip in Holland” Frazer said when Peter spoke to him a few days before. Peter wasn’t sure, but was trying to keep an open mind. That’s what he wanted to do about everything.

He’d looked up where his hotel was and saw that it was a short walk from the station. He got off the train followed a crowd of people over the bridge to the sign that said exit and placed his ticket in the machine.

For a small station it was very busy, soon he was out in the open, crossed over the road and entered a park. The app on his phone showed him how to walk to the hotel. His suitcase made a rumbling sound on the pavement. Mum had persuaded him to buy both a new phone and a new suitcase. He was so used to living off small amounts of money so she couldn’t persuade him to buy anything else. “I need to keep as much as I can for the flat” he reminded her.

“I know, but it won’t hurt to spend a little” she’d said, but he was adamant it really was time that he had his own place.

He’d arranged to meet Sally Booker, the solicitor at 4.30pm and couldn’t get into the hotel until 3pm. It was just after one and so he decided to find a pub and have a snack. Although his confidence had grown he was still rather nervous and decided a sandwich or toastie would keep him going and then he could have a larger meal in the evening.

It was a bit of a nuisance having his suitcase but fortunately ‘The Vine’ was pretty empty when he entered and he found a table easily. He stood by the bar and ordered a bacon and brie toastie and a coffee, he wasn’t a great drinker and especially during the day. A few people looked at him with interest and then got on with their pints. There were two older guys sitting on their own. Peter wondered whether he would be like that, maybe they had wives at home, but they seemed pretty settled. The décor in the pub was much the same as pictures he’d seen of his parents when they first met.

“Going anywhere nice?” asked the barmaid, as she brought his toastie

“I’ve just arrived” said Peter

“where you staying?”

“I’ve got a couple of nights at the Grange hotel”

“Oh, it’s nice there, but a bit pricey, we have rooms here for £40 a night with a good breakfast, if you’re staying any longer, you’re not from round here are you?”

“No, I live in Guildford”

“Oh, well have a nice time”

It was obvious that she didn’t know where Guildford was, Helen hadn’t either, but then why should she. Peter had passed places on the way that he hadn’t recognised. He thought having a doctorate that he knew a lot, but there was still so much to learn.

His toastie was good and coffee ok, maybe he should have had a pint, he thought.

Peter was just about to leave when he spied a couple nearby, the woman was the woman that he had sat opposite on the train when he had returned from Edinburgh. He had to pass her to go to the toilet.

“Hello” she said brightly

“You are the guy I sat opposite on the Edinburgh train last year aren’t you!”

“Yes” Peter replied

“Did you ever read that book?”

“Yes” he said and she smiled at him as he passed.

How strange he thought.

Peter strolled up the main street and found his hotel, he was far too early but he wondered whether he could leave his suitcase.

“Oh don’t worry about that dear” said the woman on the reception, who looked well past retirement age.

“You can go in your room now if you like, its all ready for you, we have to say a time otherwise we would get some people coming far too early. I expect you wonder why an old girl like me is still working here, well you see its company, being on your own at my age can be lonely so they let me work here three afternoons a week...well what else would I be doing, just watching some murder film on the tele which I’d probably snooze through anyhow. Well I better let you go otherwise I’ll get told off for talking too much, but its been lovely chatting with you, oh and if you get lonely I’ll be here tomorrow at the same time. Right lovee here’s your key, you’re in room 222, thats rather a good number and a very nice room. I hope you have a great time in Stafford, oh and the lifts over there” she pointed to the side of the reception.

Peter smiled and thanked her and headed off towards the lift.

The plastic key slotted easily into the door. The room was pleasant but there was nothing striking about it. He sat on the bed, it was very comfy. He checked out the bathroom and was pleased to see that he had both a bath and shower. He would enjoy lazing in there wondering about what was ahead of him.

He thought he ought to text his Mum and say that he had arrived safely, he didn’t need to, but he expected she would be pleased, he didn’t tell her about the woman in the pub who had been on the Edinburgh train, that was just rather strange. He wished now that he had stopped and chatted to her more.

Peter arrived at the Solicitors office five minutes early. The receptionist welcomed him and asked him if he’d like a drink, he declined. She smiled and carried on with her work. He looked around the room. There were comfy chairs and some modern art pictures on the walls.

Sally Booker was a rather tall woman with red short cropped hair, dressed in a dark blue skirt suit. She shook his hand and led him to a rather grand room with old fashioned book shelves full of large books.

“We don’t really need them now” she said, indicating the books “But the partners think it gives a comforting air, especially as we deal with a lot of grieving people, as you can imagine”

Peter half listened.

“Right and now to the bequest from your Grandmother, firstly you did bring all the ID I asked for hopefully including a driving licence didn’t you?”

“Yes” Peter replied and took everything out of the folder that he had brought with him.

“Your Grandmother left you one letter requesting that we read it to you, but she indicated that you will find others”

Peter listened as Sally Booker read Granny’s letter. Granny had left him a further five thousand pounds which was to be transferred by the Solicitors to Peter’s bank account and she had left him a Garage which was located in a village called Gnosall which the Solicitor told him was about seven

miles away. Sally told him that although they had the keys to the Garage they didn't know what was in it as a resident of Gnosall had been put in charge of it until it was passed to Peter.

The Solicitor explained that the Garage would have to be registered in the land registry in his name and told him that he could do this through her or another solicitor, but that his Granny had suggested talking to the people who were caring for the garage about what to do first.

"It seems that your Granny had a lot of trust in these people but I believe that they weren't related"

The Solicitor told Peter that he could get a bus to Gnosall and gave him the names of the people who were looking after the garage and suggested that he phone them as soon as possible.

Peter thanked Sally and made his way back to his hotel. He thought that he better book at least one more night.

When he got back to the hotel the receptionist was pleased to see him.

"Have you had a nice afternoon dear?" she enquired.

Peter didn't answer directly, but instead asked if he could book an extra night and how to get to Gnosall. She said that was fine and told him about the buses and where they went from.

"Oh do you have friends there dear?" she said

"No, I just need to go there thats all"

"Oh I see" she commented not enquiring any more, which pleased Peter, he was never one for sharing all his business with strangers although he was already beginning to like her.

## Chapter 5

“This is your stop” said the bus driver as they got near a pub.

Peter thanked him, he wouldn't have had a clue where to get off but in fact the route to Gnosall was fairly straight forward, only going through one other village called Haughton before the bus got there.

Peter had arranged to meet Doreen and Mike outside the Royal Oak “It's only a small walk to the Garage” Mike said on the phone and suggested a pint in the pub before hand. This time Peter thought he'd take him up on the offer as he felt more daring and having a pint might not seem much, but in some ways it was to him.

Claire had messaged him asking how he was getting on. It was nice to hear from her and so he'd messaged her back a few times.

He spied a middle aged couple outside the pub and thought that it must be Doreen and Mike. They walked towards him.

“Peter, I assume” said Mike, holding out his hand. Peter shook it. “So are you up for a pint?” Mike asked “Yes, that would be nice?” Peter replied.

They entered the pub and found a table near the window. Doreen sat down while the men went to the bar. “It's on me” Peter said quickly. “I believe that I owe you a lot.”

“That's Ok, we were very happy to help out” Mike said, “We liked your Gran, I expect you want to know why you've inherited a Garage and maybe what's inside it?”

Peter nodded. They ordered the drinks and took them to the table, then Mike began the tale.

“Your Gran was a magical woman, she had several aspects to her, you know, she was sensible and down to earth, but she also had another side to her, a side that your parents didn't know about, no she didn't have a secret family or anything like that, but she had a talent which she kept to herself, making money, but she didn't want to keep much for herself, she had everything that she wanted in life, she wanted to give it away and so that's what she did, she hid it and gave it to people she felt that needed it. She didn't evade tax or anything like that, so you won't have a debt to pay and in fact you wouldn't as not being her direct next of kin anyhow, but she certainly didn't want to put any burden on you, she just wanted you to become a little more daring.”

Peter listened intently and asked “How did you know Granny?”

“It's rather strange actually” said Doreen, who had kept quiet up til now. “I met her in the cafe at Stafford station. I was waiting for a train and hers was delayed, it was about ten years ago. She was on her way to Liverpool meeting an old school friend and had stopped a night in Birmingham on the way. We just got chatting and kept in touch from there on. She would come and stay with us a couple of times a year and got to like Gnosall. She said she'd like to move here but felt that she was too old and that her son would worry about her. She told us about you and how you were getting on at Cambridge and about your job, but she was a bit worried about you”

“She never said” Peter commented

“Oh it was just that she thought you worked a bit too much and that you had been very upset about splitting up with your girlfriend”

“Yes, we were very close to your Gran” said Mike

Peter looked confused

“Do you know my parents?” he asked

“No, we know of them but have never met them”

“But didn't you think it was a little strange, the garage and everything”

“It was what she wanted and it was all legal”

“But” Peter was about to say more but Mike butted in.

“You mean what would have happened if we’d died, is that what you were thinking?...well you needn’t have worried about that, the solicitor had sorted all of that, your Gran had a back up plan. Well I suppose you want to know what’s in the garage.” Mike said

”Well your Gran told us she wanted you to choose whether it was a surprise or not. We have a letter for you which we are to give you after you have seen the garage. Would you like another pint or shall we walk to the garage now?

“I think I’d like to go now and I think Granny wanted whatever it is to be a surprise” Peter said, feeling excited and anxious all muddled up together.

They left the pub and Mike and Doreen chatted briefly to a couple they met outside and then they headed up a road to the right, crossed over another road and turned left. They passed a small shop on the way “They have some wonderful bargains in the bakery” Doreen said indicating the shop.

“If you have time you should pop in there before you go back to Stafford”

Peter was warming to them already and knew why Granny enjoyed their company, but he wondered why she had kept this part of her life so secret, she never seemed to be a secretive person.

They reached the garage, the door was painted red. That was like Granny. She loved the colour red. Doreen handed Peter the key, he unlocked the door and lifted it, inside was a vehicle, it was bright red to match the door.

“She’s a beauty isn’t she” said Mike

“Wow” said Peter

Not only did he own a garage in a strange place but he now also owned a Volkswagen camper van.

“This set of keys are for her” said Doreen, handing Peter some more keys. He took them nervously.

“But Granny hadn’t driven for years” he said.

“She had a friend” Doreen said

“Oh”

“No nothing like that” said Doreen smiling.

“They were just friends, she’d met her on a course, that’s why she was visiting Birmingham at the time, she’d stayed the night with her before heading on to her other friend in Liverpool.

“I never realised that Granny had such a social life” Peter commented.

Mike and Doreen looked at each other in a knowing way.

“Your Gran asked a local garage to maintain the van and they would run her to keep her going until she was passed to you”

“I’ve never driven a van” Peter said

“In fact I haven’t driven much at all, so that’s why the solicitor was insistent on me bringing my driving license.”

“Well you better take a look inside” Doreen remarked

Peter unlocked the van, climbed in and invited Doreen and Mike to get in too.

“She’s a beauty” Mike said admiringly

“You’ll have lots of fun in her” said Doreen

“But I’ve got nowhere to keep her” Peter commented anxiously

“Of course you have, you have your garage”

“But its so far from my home”

“Well maybe your Gran was hinting that its time for you to explore a bit” Doreen said “She certainly helped me”

Doreen told Peter about how nervous she used to be and how Granny had helped her.

Peter listened wondering why he didn’t know all this side of Granny. He looked in the cupboards and found everything he needed for a trip, but not only that but everything was what he liked not what Granny had had in her house. It was as if she had chosen it all for him, but she had obviously used some of it as some of it looked a little worn.

“You’ll need to get her insured” Mike said, “which might be a bit pricey if you haven’t driven much.”

“That’s Ok, Granny obviously thought of that too”

“Look, how long are you planning to stay for” Mike asked.

“I could go out with you to get used to it if you like?”

Peter told them that he was booked at the Grange for another two nights and had two weeks off work but hadn’t planned anything else. He thought he could extend his time at the hotel then thought he could sleep in the camper van if there was somewhere nearby.

“There’s a campsite at Red Lion farm in Haughton” Doreen said

“Of course you could stay with us but perhaps you’d like to get used to the van”

Peter thought about it and decided that it would be good for him to do that.

“And either me or Doreen could go with you until you’ve got used to driving” Mike added.

Peter accepted their offer. He felt very comfortable with them and preferred stepping stones, he felt that for now he had made enough leaps.

“Here’s the letter from your Gran” Doreen said taking it out of her handbag. “I expect you’d like to read it later”

Peter felt that he’d done enough for today and although Doreen offered for him to have tea with them he declined feeling he needed a bit of time on his own to digest everything and to read Granny’s next letter. He had decided to keep the first and wondered how many more that he would find.

The camper van felt comfortable, he felt at home, at ease, it was a wonderful feeling.

His home in Surrey seemed so far away, but he didn’t miss it, he was enjoying this new Peter that was emerging.

He locked up the van and the garage and walked back to the bus stop. Doreen had offered to pop Peter back to Stafford but Peter had enjoyed the bus ride. They arranged to meet him at 11am the next day by the bus stop giving time for Peter to arrange some insurance and would accompany him in the van until he felt ok.

They would visit the camp site together.

Peter got the bus back to Stafford and arrived back at the hotel at 3pm. There was a different receptionist on, who was friendly but a little more business like.

Granny had told him who to insure with and about the garage that had looked after the van.

By 4.30pm he had completed the tasks and decided to have a rest before he found somewhere for his evening meal.

He closed his eyes and drifted off, when he awoke he realised that an hour had gone by and that he felt hungry. He went into the bathroom and washed his face to wake himself up properly, as he did this his mobile rang. It was Mum, he’d missed the call.

He decided to ring her back later.

Peter walked up a back street and found a pub that claimed to have live music. He entered, saw that they had some food and so decided to stay and eat. He ordered a lasagne with salad and garlic bread. It was quite tasty. He realised that even though he was in a strange place that he felt comfortable and a thought went through his mind, perhaps this is where he was supposed to live. He chose apple pie for his pudding with custard it was good although the custard was a bit too hot so he had to blow on it.

“Anyone sitting here?” asked a young man

“no” said Peter

“you here for the live mic?”

“No”

“You don’t say much”

Peter was about to say no again but instead told the young man that he was just visiting. He didn’t go into detail, just said that he was on holiday.

“Oh where from?” said the young man

“Guildford” Peter replied expecting the young man to pull a face, but instead he told Peter that he had a friend there and visited him a couple of times a year.

“So are you from Stafford?” Peter said

“No, I live in a village nearby, a place called Gnosall”

Peter laughed and told him he had been there earlier in the day and how his Gran used to visit there occasionally. He didn’t tell him about the garage and the camper van.

“She wasn’t the old lady with the Red VW Camper van was she?”

Peter couldn’t believe it, firstly he meets the woman off the Edinburgh train and now this guy knew his Granny.

“Yes” Peter laughed.

“She’s my Grandmother”

“Nice lady, how is she?”

“She died last year”

“Oh I’m sorry to hear that”

Mark, which was the man’s name talked about how he enjoyed chatting with her when she came with her friend to service the camper van and how he wondered how she was as he hadn’t seen her for awhile.

Peter listened intently, he loved all these people talking fondly about Granny. Mum and Dad hadn’t much recently. He began to wonder who the friend was and who the woman on the train to Edinburgh was, he was keen to find out as much as he could about Granny’s other life.

“You don’t have a phone number for Granny’s friend do you?” Peter asked

“At the garage yes” said Mark

“I could ring her and see if she is willing to speak with you!”

Peter said that he would like that and gave Mark his mobile number to pass onto her.

The music began to play and soon it was difficult for them to continue their conversation. Peter enjoyed being with Mark.

He got back to the hotel and had a feeling of satisfaction.

Next morning whilst he was eating his breakfast his mobile rang. He thought it might be Mum as he’d forgotten to message her but didn’t recognise the number.

“Hi is that Peter, this is your Gran’s friend Elaine are you free to talk?”

## Chapter 6

Elaine asked Peter how long he was going to be in Stafford. He told her that he was hoping for at least another week and that he would be staying at Red Lion farm campsite in a couple of days time.

They agreed to meet there on Saturday as she was working but could come over for the day then. They chatted for half an hour, Peter found her voice comforting and was looking forward to meeting her. He had planned to explore more of the area but now he had to concentrate on everything to do with the VW Van.

Doreen and Mike were keen to help him practice driving the van and he planned to meet them at the bus stop in Gnosall as previously agreed. For now Peter was more interested in the van than finding out more about his Gran's mysterious life, he had enough to think about.

"So!" exclaimed Mum

"Sorry I didn't phone or message you"

"No worries, we assumed you were just busy or had nothing much to say"

Peter laughed and then told Mum everything.

"Wow" she said

Peter laughed again, he felt happy, he felt that Granny was there with him on the adventure and she was giggling, she had such an infectious laugh, but then he began to feel sad. His mobile rang.

"Did she ring?" Mark said

"Yes" said Peter, recognizing Mark's voice

"Fancy meeting for a pint? I can tell you more about your Gran if you like"

Peter agreed and they arranged to meet at one of the other pubs in Gnosall Mark said the food was good and a reasonable price there.

Peter wasn't sure what he was going to do until then as he was meeting Doreen and Mike at 11am but he was getting used to things just happening and not having a predictable organized day.

He chuckled to himself, he liked the new Peter who was emerging, the more confident Peter who was going with the flow rather than the rather nervous Peter who worried too much.

His bus to Gnosall was at 10.35 am and so he had about an hour to spare, normally he would just get there early and sit and read but he decided to explore one of the back streets that he had passed on his first day.

He turned right off the main street into a smaller street, there was a charity shop on the corner. He looked in the window but didn't find anything of interest and so decided to continue along the street. He went in an interesting veg shop which contained some vegetables that he had never heard of. He was the only person in the shop and so the assistant noticed him looking at the veg.

"I didn't know them either" she said randomly.

"The Gurkhas are stationed here and often come in asking for all sorts of veg and so we now supply them"

Peter explained that he was just killing time before he caught his bus to Gnosall.

The woman, who was in her forties and had short cropped hair and wore jeans and a jumper suggested him visiting the bookshop further up the road.

Peter took up her idea, bought one of the veg which he immediately forgot the name of and walked up to the bookshop. He looked at his watch, he still had time enough to make sure that he got to the bus stop in plenty of time and so went inside.

There was an old man sitting behind the counter, one of those people who you wouldn't dare guess his age as he could have been anything from between seventy and one hundred.

"Looking for anything particular?" the man asked looking directly at Peter

"No, I'm just browsing, actually killing time until I catch my bus"

"Oh going anywhere nice?"

"Gnosall" Peter replied, he was getting used to people asking what he was doing.

The old man didn't comment and went back to reading his book.



The bookshop was stacked high with books leaving only narrow spaces to get through each section. "If you want anything particular, I can find it for you" the old boy mumbled as he continued reading.

Peter walked out of sight of the old man and picked up a couple of books and then spied it, the book that had been left on the train. He felt compelled to buy it even though he had kept the original copy, it just seemed such a coincidence and it was only a pound.

"She used to live in Gnosall" the old boy said looking at the book.

"Not sure where she moved to, but somebody will know"

"So do you live in Gnosall?" Peter asked

"No I live in a cottage in Haughton, do you know Red Lion farm? well I'm in spitting distance from there, I've lived there all my life, for ninety two years, never married, never moved, quite happy"

Peter smiled and gave the old man the pound.

He left the bookshop and headed to the bus stop.

His life seemed to be full of these strange coincidences.

Peter stood near the bus stop. There were two other people, both retirement age he guessed.

He wondered how buses made any money when most people using them seemed to be retirement age and so could have a free bus pass. It was so different to the busy tubes that he was used to going on when he had trips to London, such a different world but he was enjoying being part of it.

The Gnosall bus arrived exactly on time. There were three other people picked up at Haughton and one got off the bus in Gnosall with him.

Mike and Doreen were waiting for him, they were wearing matching blue jackets and Jeans. It reminded Peter of tweedle dee and tweedle dum. Doreen gave him a hug as if she had known him for years, he liked it. In fact he liked them, he felt comfortable.

They suggested going round to their house for a cuppa before he had his driving practice which he agreed willingly to, he was intrigued to see what their house was like.

They lived in a semi with a drive and a garage. Everything was pleasant with matching colours, they obviously favoured blues and greens.

Doreen put the kettle on and Mike indicated to Peter to sit at the kitchen table. Mike put a tin on the table, took the lid off and offered Peter a biscuit. He took a shortbread.

"What would you like?" Doreen asked

"Oh whatever you're having"

Doreen made a pot of tea

"So what have you been up to?" She asked

Peter told them about the old man and the book in the bookshop

"Did you say he lives in Haughton?" Mike said looking at Doreen anxiously

"Whats the matter?" Peter said

They didn't say anything

"If there's something I need to know, I'd rather" Peter said in an anxious tone.

"Oh shall I, or you" said Mike looking at Doreen

"You know more than me" said Doreen.

"Well" said Mike and continued to tell the tale. "If its who I think you are talking about he was rather partial to your Gran. We never knew exactly what happened but we believe that they became rather fond of each other. He was always a bit of an artist, but he never believed in his paintings and it was your Gran who encouraged him to have an exhibition. He thought that he was too old but she told him not to be silly and there's a rumour that he told her if he sold any paintings that he would give half of anything he earned to her. He'd inherited the family home being an only child and said that he had what he needed and just liked painting."

"So do you think that's where Granny got all her money from?" said Peter

"Well I've never really thought about it until now, but that does seem to make sense" Said Mike

"It certainly does" said Doreen and added "Are you ready for your driving practice? if we go up to Newport and then around the lanes on the way back it will give you a good run and then we could

pop to Haughton and you could treat us to an ice cream at Red Lion Farm. Oh we didn't tell you that, do you like ice cream?"

"I love it" said Peter

"There's the little boys room if you want it" Mike indicated pointing towards the front door.

Peter popped to the toilet and then they set off walking towards the garage.

The trip to Newport and round the lanes was uneventful. Peter found the camper van easy to drive and didn't feel that he'd need more practice, but he enjoyed their company and so kept an open mind.

They stopped at Red lion farm and sat in the cafe eating their ice cream. Peter had one scoop of orange and one of peanut butter. He felt rather full and wondered how he would manage another meal with Mark later.

He told Mike and Doreen about meeting with Mark at six and so they suggested that he just stayed at theirs and then he could walk up.

"You seem fine with the van" Doreen said "But if you'd like us to come out with you again we'd be very happy to, wouldn't we Mike" Mike nodded

"I think I'd like that" said Peter knowing that he was completely fine. But had enjoyed their company.

"So if you come over tomorrow afternoon we could have a practice and then you could drop us off at home and go and set yourself up at the farm afterwards."

Peter thought that was an excellent idea.

They sat and watched 'Pointless' together and Peter said his farewells leaving just before six as it was only a few minutes walk to the pub.

It was fairly quiet in the pub and so he was able to spy Mark who was standing near the bar.

"Are you eating?" said Peter as they ordered their drinks.

"No, I think I'll get something later"

Peter wished that he had declined too but thought he better not and so ordered a pizza.

"You not having chips!" Mark said

"I'll eat them if you don't want them"

Peter admitted that he was feeling a bit stuffed after his ice cream

Mark laughed "You should have told me mate, I'll help you eat it" he laughed

Peter thought perhaps Mark couldn't afford it as he knew that he was an apprentice at the garage and so shared half of his meal with him. He could always get something later in Stafford if he was hungry.

At eight O'clock Mark said that he better get home and so Peter headed off towards the bus stop and was lucky to get there in time for the bus. He had forgotten to look at the time. He wondered what his life might have been like if he had been born in Stafford instead of Guildford and whether he would have gone to Cambridge and done what he had. He realized that he was ready for a change. He was going to go back to Guildford and give in his notice and he would go with the camper van wherever it took him, but first he had to give her a name or was it a him but really an it he didn't really know. It suddenly came to him, the only name it could possibly be was Emily, named after his Granny. Yes from now on he would refer to the van as Emily.

He was the only person on the bus this time. He gazed out of the window recognizing some of the places he passed as if he had done this journey for years.

He wondered about Granny and the old man he made his mind up that he would visit the bookshop again tomorrow and tell the old man who he was.

## Chapter 7

“Oh so you’re checking out today!” the receptionist said. “I shall miss our chats”

Peter thought that he would too and wondered what was happening to him, chatting to random people about random things but also feeling quite at ease!

He asked if he could leave his bag for a couple of hours “Of course you can dear, sometimes they charge, but as its you, well I think we can ignore that” she laughed as she said this.

Peter smiled back at her, she had made him feel so welcome.

He’d made up his mind that he would go back to the bookshop and see if the old man was there.

The doorbell tinkled as he entered. There was a different person sitting at the desk.

“Oh were you looking for Ed?” the young woman asked.

“He’ll be back in a minute, can I help you?”

“Thats ok” Peter replied and decided to pretend to look at books near the counter so that he could see if Ed was the old man that he had seen the day before.

The door tinkled again and in walked the old man.

“I’ll be off now” the young woman said and put on her coat and picked up her handbag.

“See you on Monday”

The door tinkled again as she left.

“Oh you’re back said the old man”

“Yes” said Peter, wondering whether to say anything or not.

He picked up a couple of other books and then decided.

“Actually I’ve come to see you” Peter said

“Oh!” said the old man surprised.

“Do you know Emily Talbot?” Peter asked and could tell from the old man’s expression that he did.

“Well she was my Grandmother” Peter said

“Was” said the old man

“Yes, she died last year”

The old man had a tear in his eye and said slowly “Yes, I knew her well, so you are Peter who she talked so often to me about, I wondered why she hadn’t been in touch for so long”

Peter felt sorry for the old man and realised what a shock it was to him to find out that Granny had died.

“I’m so sorry telling you in this way” Peter said “But you see I knew nothing about you, in fact I knew nothing about Granny’s life here!”

“look lad, we can’t talk here, where are you staying?”

“Well from tonight I will be at Red Lion Farm, I’m staying in a camper van that Granny left to me”

The Old man smiled “Yes she’s a beaut isn’t she?”

“Did you go out with Granny in her?”

“Oh no, that was Elaine”

“Oh so you know Elaine?”

Just then the door bell tinkled and a couple came into the shop.

The Old man gave Peter a card “Give me a ring and we’ ll meet. I’ll tell you everything then” he said.

Peter nodded and left the shop.

It all seemed to get weirder and weirder, so the old man, who he assumed was Ed also knew Elaine, but he said that he’d never married and lived on his own. It was all intriguing and unsettling. Peter wondered what Granny had got herself involved into and why, neither he nor his parents knew anything about it.

He sat on the bus to Gnosall and the same couple got on at Haughton, they smiled at him and he grinned back. When he arrived in Gnosall he walked round to Mike and Doreen’s house passing the shop that she called the bakery. He was a little earlier than he planned and so he decided to go

inside and see what he could find. He found a treasure trove of bargain cakes and chocolates that were massively reduced. He chose a packet of mini rolls. He thought that they might like them.

“That’s kind of you” said Doreen as Peter gave her the mini rolls.

He told them all about the old man.

“It will be interesting to see what he has to say” said Mike

“And the links with Elaine, that’s intriguing” said Doreen as she nibbled one of the cakes.

“You don’t really need us to come with you, do you” said Mike

“The thing is…” Mike hesitated

“What Mike’s trying to say without upsetting you is that we really miss your Gran”

Peter began to feel overwhelmed and Doreen recognising this got out of her chair gave him a huge tight, long hug.

“I’m afraid you’re stuck with us forever” said Doreen with a tear in her eye.

Peter released her hug “I’m so glad, this last few days, meeting you, finding out about everything has been so exciting. Granny was so right, there is so much more for me to explore and I’m so grateful for you being here to help me”

He hugged Doreen tightly again and then Mike joined them and the three of them shed a few tears.

“Lets go and get Emily out” said Peter smiling and wiped away his tears.

They decided to drive to Shrewsbury. Peter had never been there and liked all the old black and white buildings. Emily was very recognisable when they returned to the car park.

“You won’t have trouble finding her” laughed Mike

“No” Peter replied grinning

Granny had certainly picked a bold colour.

As they said their goodbyes Peter felt a slight sadness. He had decided to take Emily to Guildford to show his parents. He would keep the Gnosall garage for now and think about what to do later.

He arrived at Red Lion farm at 4pm. The cafe was still open and so he went in for an ice cream and to find where his plot was. He was going to stay until Wednesday. He wasn’t at work again until the following Monday. He felt a little more confident now and thought of going beyond Stafford and Shropshire, but first he needed to find out more from the old man and was meeting Elaine tomorrow.

Peter chatted with the owner of the farm who told him that the pub across the road from the farm had nice evening meals. He thought it was time that he cooked one himself but decided to start the next day. He would go supermarket shopping in the morning and make a picnic meal for Elaine who said that she would arrive about midday. Although Peter still had enough money he was rather aware of how much he had spent.

He wondered whether to phone the old man or wait until he had met Elaine. He decided that he would wait until he met her. He thought it might get too confusing and preferred to hear from her first about Granny. He would phone the old man on Sunday.

He messaged Mum “I’d like to bring you and dad here someday, the people here are so friendly” Mum sent him a hug emoji.

Peter started to explore the inside of Emily more and looked underneath the seats. He found a little wooden box, looked inside and found two envelopes. He opened the first envelope and read “Dear Peter, so you’ve found me. I’m glad that you are becoming more inquisitive. Before you open the other envelope I want to reassure you that there is nothing illegal about everything that you find, just a kind hearted soul who I got to know too late in life wanted to share what he had. I hope one day you will meet him, but if you do it will be by destiny alone.

Enjoy your adventure Love Granny”

Peter thought that destiny had already come his way, surely Granny was talking about the old man. So did Granny really have a secret love. He knew that Grandad had died a long time ago but never

did he imagine that Granny would look for someone else, she had been so devoted to him. She had pictures everywhere in her bungalow.

Inside the other envelope was the name of a campsite near Matlock in Derbyshire.

It was obvious that Granny wanted him to go and stay there. He phoned the number on the leaflet and asked if they had any space on Wednesday night. He booked two nights. He could then work his way back to Guildford to arrive on Saturday.

Peter entered the Cross Keys and saw the couple off the bus. They waved to him. He went over and said hello to them and they asked him to join them.

“We go and visit Tom’s Mum every other day” said Jill

“She lives in a residential home in Newport, we could go in the car but we might as well use our bus passes”

Peter listened to the chatting, he liked the fact that they weren’t asking what he was doing.

“Do you like darts?” said Tom after they’d finished their meals.

“I’ve never played them” Peter replied

“Well we’ll have to change that” said Tom, who got up and went to the bar.

“He loves his game, he’s not that good, but that doesn’t matter, does it?” Jill laughed

Tom returned with the darts and walked towards the dart board which was a few feet away from their table. Peter followed him.

The rest of the evening was taken up with darts and beer. Peter decided to make his pint last as he needed to be sober for Elaine coming the next day.

He realised that Tom really wasn’t that good at darts and so tried to miss a few times himself.

Some other men came and joined in and soon teams were set up.

The women sat together, laughed and chatted.

Peter’s mobile pinged. There was a message from Frazer “How you doing?, haven’t heard from you for ages”

Peter messaged back that he’d give him a ring tomorrow as he was playing darts in a pub with a load of pensioners”

Frazer sent a laughing emoji back.

Peter got back to the van at just after 11pm. He was surprised at how much he enjoyed himself. The meal had been good and the company. He hadn’t thought about his work at all, in fact hadn’t thought about anything back home. He was enjoying living in the moment rather than worrying about the future.

He put the little box back under the seat but then saw another envelope hiding under a plastic box.

He thought that he’d looked at everything in there but moving the box must have made the envelope move too.

On the outside of the envelope was a big smiley face and his name. He opened it.

“Dear Peter, when you were a little boy you loved playing hide and seek and the truth is I did too.

Now you are older I can give you much more complicated clues...”

At the bottom of the letter she had written. “Look near the Oak tree”

Peter wondered what Oak Tree, where! This clue was very confusing. He’d have to forget it for now.

He was comfortable lying in the van. He had one of the windows open a crack and a gentle breeze blew in his face. He knew that he was going to enjoy his new life with Emily. He had no doubts now that he would work out his notice and just see where life brought him. He drifted off to sleep easily.

It was light when he woke. He looked at his mobile and found that it was 8.30 am. He’d had one of the best nights ever. After making himself a cup of tea he decided to go to the local super market’ which was a short walk away. They had sufficient for his needs. He bought some bread, cheese, tomatoes and lettuce. He would just make a simple salad for Elaine. They had some home made apple pies and so he bought one of them as well with some double cream. He had squash if she didn’t like tea.

He walked back to the van with his shopping. It was quiet with no one about. He decided that he would read but thought that he ought to ring Mum. He could leave ringing Frazer until after Elaine had left.

Peter rang the house phone and Dad answered "Mum's out shopping at the mo, I'll get her to ring you when she's back. She shouldn't be long. How's it going anyway?" asked Dad

Peter told him that he was waiting to meet Elaine and asked if Mum had told him everything. Dad said that she had. He said that the house phone was ringing and so Peter told him that he would ring later after he had met Elaine.

It was eleven o'clock and Peter had everything organised. He decided to re read all of Granny's letters so far. He thought that in some ways he was just like her with his planning, but not as creative. He was just wondering what to do when there was a knock on his door. He opened the door and a woman roughly his age was standing there.

"Peter" she said, holding out her hand "I'm Elaine, I'm sorry I'm a bit early, but you can never tell what the M6 will be like.

"Come on in" Peter said

Elaine stepped into the van

"It feels like coming home" she said.

"I expect that you are very confused by everything" she said in her soft Brummy lilt.

"Well" she continued "I'm kind of your cousin. I was searching my family tree several years ago and found that my Granny had a brother that I knew nothing about. I asked her about him and she said that she thought he lived in Surrey somewhere but that she had lost his address as they had an argument. She said that she regretted it but didn't know where he was. She died a few months later but I decided to do some detective work but found that he also had died, but that his wife was still alive.

That is how I met your Gran and we struck up a friendship. For some reason she didn't want to tell your Dad but she wouldn't say why and so I swore not to contact any of you. She must have changed her mind by making it possible for you to find me."

"That was sheer luck" said Peter and told Elaine about meeting with Mark from the garage.

He also said "Don't tell me that you are related to Old Ed who lives down the road from here!"

Elaine looked shocked "How do you know him?" she asked

Peter told her about finding him sitting in the bookshop.

## Chapter 8

Elaine took her mobile out of her bag and rang a number. “Hi Ed, its Elaine, I’m with Peter, he said he met you in the bookshop, are you free? Can we come round? Ok, I’ll just check”

Elaine turned to Peter “Ed’s free now if you want to go round!”

Peter had been listening to the conversation and was initially taken aback, but also not surprised “Yes, Ok” he said hesitantly. He knew that he had to just go with the flow. It was what this whole trip was about. It was what his new life was about. It was all sudden, but he guessed that life went like that sometimes.

They left the remains of their picnic on the table and locked the van door.

It was warm enough outside and so they didn’t need coats, but even if they did neither of them thought about it. They were both too busy putting the pieces of their lives together.

The walk from Red Lion farm to Ed’s house was only a few minutes away. He lived in an old cottage down the lane that lead to the centre of the village. There were cars parked in the drive of the next door house. Ed had a small drive which was in need of weeding. The front door was a little shabby. There was a large knocker on the door which Elaine knocked, within seconds the door opened and there was the Old man from the bookshop.

“Come along in” he said beckoning them in a cheerily.

They followed him down a dark hallway into a room at the end which seemed to be the kitchen but was also full of books. Peter noticed a distinct smell, a mixture of stale cooking and damp.

“Would you like a cup of tea?” asked Ed

“I’ve just had one myself but I’m happy to make you one”

“Thats Ok, we’ve just had lunch, Peter made me a picnic” Elaine said

“Oh that’s nice, and how are you finding it staying in the van on the farm?”

“Very comfortable” Peter replied

They carried on making small talk until Ed suddenly announced

“Well..... its true, I loved your Gran and she loved me, but we were too old, too set in our ways. If we’d met ten years earlier it might have been different. I suppose you’re wondering how we met? Well it was through art. Elaine had told your Gran about my paintings and how I needed someone to push me to try and sell some. She was right, the house was full of it and I was reaching a point where I just couldn’t move. I remember the day Elaine came to visit with your Gran. Emily was just so enchanting and full of life. She had lost your Grandad a couple of years before and missed him terribly but she was determined to live life to the full. She said that she had never come across an artist who enjoyed painting copies of old masters but also created original modern art. She thought that it would make an amazing exhibition and she was right. She had the idea of using the Haughton village hall and to invite people that she had come across from all over the country, we even had the local TV. Then one day I had a knock on the door and a man with a posh car asked if he could see some of my work and how much I was selling them for. He asked if I had ever thought of combining the two themes together. The masters in a modern context. I thought it was an intriguing idea. He gave me his card and asked me to get in touch. My neighbour had been washing his car at the time and when the stranger left he asked me if I knew who he was. I showed him the card and he told me that I had struck gold”

“What do you mean? Ed?” asked Elaine

Ed told them that the neighbour had thought but wasn’t sure until he saw the card that the man was a famous TV star.

Ed gave Elaine the card which he had placed near his phone.

“Well it all just went from there, I sold everything. I had enough money to buy this place, as we had always rented it. I could have had a car but preferred riding my bike”

“So you bought the camper van” said Peter

“Yes, it was a present, I knew your Gran would enjoy using it and also she could stay nearby”

“But what I don’t understand, is how you know Elaine?”

"I can answer that" said Elaine.

"Well although I live in Birmingham and its where I was born and brought up, my parents moved to Haughton to be near my Gran and the house they bought had a large garden.."

"And so they wanted a gardener" said Ed interrupting

"Thats how"

"Oh I see" said Peter

Everything suddenly fell into place. Peter liked Ed and could see why Granny was attracted to him but he still didn't understand why she had kept it all a secret, was it really just because they were old when they met. He still wasn't sure how old and didn't really want to ask.

"Yes, your Gran was the love of my life" Ed said with a tear in his eye.

"I'm so sorry I didn't know" Peter said gently

"I have lovely memories" Ed replied

"She was a good woman, she adored all of you"

Ed showed them his beautifully kept garden. The house and garden seemed to be as contradictory as his paintings, reflecting an old view and a modern view of life. Peter understood this and was rapidly entering his new life but also very aware of his old.

Elaine suggested it was time they left. They walked back to the van.

"I need to get back home" she said

"I'm meeting up with some friends tonight, but its been lovely meeting you and maybe I can take you to meet my parents sometime soon."

Peter said that he'd like that, but secretly felt that he had an awful lot to take in.

Elaine gave him a hug and left waving as she drove down the lane. It was about five pm. The last few hours had been mind blowing.

He looked at his phone, there were several messages but he needed some time before he replied.

He lay on the bed and drifted off.

He woke slowly from a dream. Granny was smiling at him as if she was trying to tell him something. He didn't think it was anything awful.

"How exciting" said Mum, when Peter told her about the visit to Ed's house.

"Yes your Gran loved art, but said that she was scared of cluttering her house and didn't want to be a nuisance when she was gone. We used to joke that she could never be a nuisance, she was such a kind soul. I'd love to come and meet Ed someday. I'll talk to your father and see what he feels about it."

Peter chatted about his other plans and said that he was going to bring Emily home and that he felt fine driving her.

He made himself a stir fry and sat outside eating it, as it was a nice evening. A robin hopped nearby. Peter watched him, he seemed quite friendly.

"Lovely evening" said the middle aged man from the caravan next to him as he passed by.

"Yes gorgeous" said Peter smiling

Peter's mobile rang it was Frazer. He got up and went inside the van. He didn't want everyone to know about what had happened today. There were so many coincidences flying around that he thought he might find another long lost relative staying in one of the other vans, nothing would surprise him now.

"Wow, your Gran was certainly a dark horse" said Frazer

"Do you think she has a stream of men floating around the country?"

Peter laughed and said that nothing would surprise him now.

"So this old boy is pretty rich then?"

"Maybe, I don't know" said Peter getting a little irritated with Frazer

"Sorry mate, I didn't mean to..." Frazer exclaimed, not wanting to upset Peter. He knew how close Peter was to his Gran.

Peter accepted the apology. They chatted a little longer and then he finished the call.



He headed outside but stopped when he saw the Robin pecking at the remains of his meal. He didn't want to disturb him. It was a delight watching, until a man with a dog passed by and disturbed the Robin.

"What a shame" Peter thought and hoped that the Robin would come and visit him again before he left on Wednesday.

He had three more days before he went to the next site and so decided to ask in the cafe what might be good for him to explore.

He thought again about getting in touch with Helen but quickly dismissed the idea. He had moved on in life and he didn't think that he could ever be just friends with her.

The next few days past quickly as Peter explored some of the villages and towns around Staffordshire. He went for a walk on Cannock chase and went all around the Wrekin, a phrase that he didn't know, but had heard Helen say. He hadn't realised that there was a real hill called the Wrekin until he popped in for a cup of tea at Mike and Doreen's and filled them in about Ed and Gran.

He was particularly taken with Iron bridge Gorge. Doreen said that she had seen the local Morris dancers there on boxing day. She also told him about the toilet museum near Stoke. She laughed as she told him but said that it was very good and that there really was a Mr Crapper.

Doreen had a very infectious laugh.

It was now time for him to leave Red Lion farm and head off to Derbyshire. He'd felt very at home in Gnosall and Haughton and wondered whether he'd feel the same in Derbyshire.

The Robin had reappeared each evening and on his last evening he quietly told him that he would be back again and left something on his plate for him to peck at.

## Chapter 9

Leaving Red Lion farm was a little sad. He had enjoyed staying there in Emily and meeting Elaine and Ed but Peter was also excited about going on to the campsite at Matlock.

He couldn't get on the site until 3pm and so he decided to stop on the way, he looked on the map that he had brought with him from home. Mum said that she thought it would be useful. He decided he'd stop first in Uttoxeter.

Doreen had told him about Amerton farm and so not having bothered with breakfast he thought that he'd stop there for a bite as it was on the way. Mike said they made nice bacon butties. "Its a good place for small kids" Doreen had said, as Peter said his farewells and had one of her wonderful hugs.

"Give him a chance" laughed Mike

Peter had laughed with them. They didn't have any children, he wondered why as already he felt that he had a new adopted Aunt and Uncle, but he wasn't going to ask. They had been so welcoming and supportive towards him and had helped build his confidence.

Going through Stafford was a little, busy, but he had plenty of time and so it didn't matter. Mike hadn't been sure what time the cafe opened but Peter wasn't bothered if it wasn't open he'd find somewhere else on the way. He felt chilled and that was a good feeling. He felt open to whatever he found on the way.

The cafe was open and Mike was right about the butty, it was good and so was the hot chocolate that he chose.

"I hope you're going to look at the animals as well" said the waitress as she brought him his food.

"Of course" he replied smiling at her. She was rather attractive and he realised that it was the first time for a long time that he had really looked at anyone in that way. He had been trapped too long in his feelings for Helen, maybe Doreen's comment really meant something to him.

He finished his drink, wiped his mouth and put the cup and plate on the tray ready to place in the trolley. As he left the cafe the waitress smiled at him again, this time it was a less confident smile, in fact rather shy, he liked that.

Peter walked towards the cowshed, it was very quiet even the animals seemed as though they had only just woken up. He remembered as a young child going to a farm like this and how much he enjoyed it. He'd said to his parents afterwards that when he grew up that he'd like to be a farmer, they'd smiled, but he didn't remember the conversation coming up ever again. It wasn't as if they didn't want him to do it, it was just they were happy for him to do whatever he chose to do.

He left the cows and went on to the pigs, passing an old sheep who was wandering around on its own. He didn't know whether it was a he or she and realised how ignorant he was about animals. He stroked it as he passed and it stood still as if this was its duty whilst living there.

There were piglets nuzzling up to their Mother oblivious of their future. The thought that he'd just eaten a bacon sandwich and enjoyed it flashed through his mind. He had several friends who were vegetarians and enjoyed meals that they'd made for him. He recognised how wrapped up he had been in his engineering and thought how strange it was that he had thought so little about it since he had been away.

As he walked back to Emily he passed a large pond and watched a family of ducks. One of the ducklings was struggling to keep up but Peter saw that the Mum was watching on.

He'd once seen the same when he and Frazer had come back home in the early hours to the house that they shared and found a family of foxes in the back garden. They watched as the two young foxes played together whilst their Mum looked on. Peter suddenly had a pang for the sibling that he never had and wondered what his life would be like now if he'd not been the only child. Would Granny still have given him Emily to explore the world with? would he have met Old Ed and saw the tears in his eyes for the woman that he loved but found too late in his life?

As he'd left, Ed had given him an envelope and told him not to open it until he got to Matlock. Peter acknowledged how obedient he was, he could have opened any of the envelopes before the appointed times but he had huge respect for Granny and now for Ed and so didn't peek. After one last look Peter popped to the loo and went towards Emily. He passed the waitress again "Come again soon" she said Peter smiled and thought that he would.

It took about ten minutes to drive to Uttoxeter and Peter was lucky to find a metered parking space in the main street. It was already 1.20pm, Uttoxeter seemed a nice place for a short wander he reckoned and so just paid for an hour on the meter. He'd stayed at the farm a lot longer than he originally planned, but then he was in no rush, as long as he got to the site by late afternoon it would be fine.

Peter walked towards the market square and read a plaque that described the events in Uttoxeter during the civil war. "What a long time ago" he thought and wondered what he would have been doing if he had lived then and which side he would have fought on, if he'd had to choose. He was glad that there were so many things that he didn't have to choose, but hadn't changed his mind on one thing. He would return to work and give in his notice, but what he'd do next for work at the moment he just hadn't a clue, but he was sure that this journey would help him decide.

Uttoxeter had the usual charity shops and had quite a homely feel to it. People smiled at him as he passed them in the streets. He didn't mind wandering on his own just seeing what he could find. He popped into an old fashioned sweet shop and bought himself some pear drops which were weighed carefully by the shop assistant.

"Is there anything else you'd like?" asked the assistant smiling directly at Peter. She reminded him of one of the dinner ladies at school who had often given him extra custard on his pudding.

"No, I think that will do for now, thanks"

He left the shop and slipped a Pear drop into his mouth, yet another reminder of Granny.

"How could one person have such an impact on you" he pondered.

He got back to the car just in time which was a good job as he spied the traffic warden heading towards Emily, fortunately she didn't fill more than one space but it was a tight fit.

Peter was surprised at his parking skills bearing in mind that he hadn't really driven much.

The Journey on to the campsite was uneventful. Peter had thought of stopping at Ashbourne but then decided he'd get there earlier and set up. There was supposed to be a pub near the site which said it had food and so he could be lazy again.

He found the Arthurs site fairly easily. It looked pretty basic but it would do.

Jean Arthur welcomed him as if he was a long lost family member.

Mike had helped him set up at Red Lion farm but it hadn't been too complicated and so he managed on his own even the awning at the back which was really just like a porch.

As seemed to be his custom recently he lay on the bed and drifted off to sleep. Mum had suggested that if he had afternoon snoozes that he should always put on a light and this had become a habit which he had been thankful for on a few occasions when he was at Uni.

Peter noticed that he hadn't had any messages from anyone today but then the reception wasn't that good on the site.

He was just stirring when there was a knock on the door, he opened it and found Jean Arthur.

"I didn't want to give you this straight away" she said. "I thought I'd let you settle in and have a rest after your journey. Did you come from Guildford today?"

"Oh no I've been staying near Stafford" he said

"We were sorry to hear about your Gran" Jean said

Peter was shocked.

"Oh didn't your Gran tell you how she loved staying here, when we saw the van we thought for a minute that your Gran was back, the last time she came here she left a letter addressed to Peter and she said that one day her Grandson Peter would come here and that we should give it to you, Oh dear you look rather shocked"

Peter just didn't know what to say. He took the letter from Jean and thanked her.

He opened the letter and read

"Dearest Peter

I hope you are enjoying your adventure. I suppose by now that you have met Ed and he has told you about us. He is a dear soul. I hope that you like him, he would have loved to have been in your life but it would have made things complicated and so it was best just left as it was.

I wanted you to come to this campsite as Jean and I became dear friends.

Remember I told you to look for the Oak Tree well she will be able to tell you where it is and if you're lucky you might find some buried treasure there.

All my love

Granny

Peter walked to the George Pub. He had passed it on the way in to the campsite. It was quite busy and so he had difficulty finding a table. A couple asked him if he'd like to sit with them. He agreed as there was no other option and offered to buy them a drink, they declined.

"We haven't seen you before", the man said

"I'm on holiday, I'm staying at the Arthurs campsite"

"Oh that's nice, we've only moved here recently, we love it"

"Where did you live before?"

"A place called Woking, I'm not sure if you'd know it" said the Woman

Peter laughed and told them that he worked there and lived in Guildford.

"What a small world" she said.

Peter ordered some food and settled in to a nice conversation with the couple about shared information of his home town.

"So what do you do?" said the Woman who was becoming more chatty?"

"I'm an engineer" Peter said and asked her what she did.

She told him that she was a carer and her husband was a Youth worker. Peter asked them about their jobs. They talked passionately about what they did and how there was a national shortage of paid carers.

They had to get home as they had a babysitter but Peter exchanged email addresses with them as he was interested in finding out more about their jobs.

The meal had been good and he felt well satisfied, as he walked back to Emily it was getting dark and so he decided to have an early night but before he went to sleep he reread Granny's latest letter and he suddenly remembered that Ed had also given him a letter.

He opened Ed's letter and found inside a cheque and a note.

Dear Peter

I couldn't spoil you as a child, you were in your late teens when I knew Emily and we agreed that it would make life too complicated and so I'd like to spoil you now. I want you to have the life that I was never brave enough to seek, but then if I had I wouldn't have met your wonderful

Grandmother.

I really would like to get to know you that's if you'd like that too.

All the Best

Ed

Ed had put his email and phone numbers at the bottom of the letter and his address at the top.

Peter decided that as soon as he was in a good reception area that he would email Ed and thank him.

He had given him a cheque for £3000.

## Chapter 10

Thursday morning was bright and sunny. It was about 7am and Peter stepped out of Emily and popped to the loo.

The site facilities were basic, loos and showers and a farm shop but it suited his purpose of just having a base to stay. He was grateful for having an electric hook up as bunging a couple of pieces of bread in a toaster was a great start to the day.

Peter had slept well, but now wondered about the story of the Oak tree. He walked towards the office and read that it opened at 9am, he would have some breakfast and then go and talk to Jean to find out the answer to the mystery.

As the toast was cooking he pondered what to have on it and laughed at himself for thinking too long about something that seemed so insignificant. He had much bigger decisions to make in life. He was determined to email Ed today, he thought that it was only right and he had decided that he wanted to get to know him better.

He remembered the conversation that he had last night with the couple in the pub. He had enjoyed hearing about their jobs and wondered whether he could do something like that, maybe it would be a way of him gaining more confidence with meeting so many new people all of the time.

He could try it for a year, he thought and just see how he got on, but would people be suspicious of someone with a doctorate in engineering, all of these thoughts started hurtling through his mind but as the toast popped it jolted him back to the moment and to today.

He had peanut butter on one piece of toast and butter and jam on the other, he'd made the right decision both tasted good. His tea wasn't as good as the hot chocolate of the previous day but it was fine. It gave him a flash of memory of that day and especially the old dutiful sheep and the waitress. Peter decided to read for a bit, he would leave washing up until later in the day as he only had a mug, plate and knife.

He picked up his book, a scifi that was a bit too predictable and rather like a romance just set on another planet. He had persevered with it too long he thought and so pushed it in a cupboard, instead he read the local paper that he had bought from the shop in Haughton.

It was full of local advertisements and events which he found reasonably interesting listing unfamiliar places. The dating adverts were something out of ancient times.

The church news also indicated times gone by and he could imagine similar stories when granny first met Ed. He felt sad for Ed finding the love of his life so late in life, but then thought about the people who never found that special someone.

He had found it with Helen but reality had also kicked in, the same as it had for Granny and Ed, but Peter was so glad that he knew and had the chance to meet Ed and was keen to hear more from him about their adventures together.

At 9am he walked towards the site office and found Jean on duty, she was on her own and so he thought maybe this was the right time to ask her about the Oak Tree.

"Morning" Jean said. "I hope you slept well!"

"Yes, very well thanks" Peter replied "Do you have a few minutes free for a chat, I'd like to know about the Oak Tree, Granny told me in her letter that you would know about it"

Jean looked amused "It was an old pub in the village and is now a house, it belongs to a family from Birmingham, they are quite friendly and know some of its history and so I'm sure that they wouldn't mind meeting with you. I can give them a ring if you like"

Peter felt a bit disappointed but agreed to Jean phoning them.

She looked up their number and rang. "Hi this is Jean from the farm." she said and told the voice at the end of the phone about Peter. "They said that's fine" Jean said and are happy to meet you this afternoon, they said 2pm would suit them, but to ring back if that's no good"

"That's fine said Peter I can have a wander around Matlock this morning"

Jean handed a piece of paper with their name address and phone number. "Its a couple of miles from here" She said "You should be able to park nearby"

Peter thanked her and left just as a customer was coming into the office.

Peter drove Emily into the centre of Matlock parking in the central car park. He visited the tourist information centre where he found the following “The name Matlock derives from the Old English *mæthel*(*ormæðel*), meaning assembly or speech, and *āc*, meaning oak tree; thus Matlock means 'moot-oak', an oak tree where meetings are held.”

Peter thought how strange that Granny had written about the Old Oak Tree and wondered whether she meant an actual tree, or was she just talking about Matlock given what he had just read. If it was Matlock then she indicated that he might find some treasures there.

He wandered around the streets and found a nice tea room and stopped for a sandwich and a cup of tea. He also found a couple of book shops but there was no secret old man there, at least not the day that he visited. He then walked along Dale road looking at the historic buildings and wondered what it was like living there a hundred years ago. He decided to go straight away to meet the couple who lived in the house that was the Oak Tree pub. As he drove to the address he wondered what other coincidences lay ahead. He was enjoying his adventure.

Giles and Suzie Street were welcoming and invited him in to their house which they ran as a bed and breakfast.

“We had thought of still running it as a pub” Suzie said “But because there are two other old pubs nearby that have much better parking we thought of being a B and B which we’ve been doing for only three months”

Peter loved hearing a brummy accent again.

“I know you might think this a bit strange but...” and Peter told them all about his adventures and then took a swig of the coffee that they had given him.

“It sounds like your Gran found the local Pagan group which meet at Nine Ladies Stone circle in Stanton Moor. We have had people stay with us who go there.”

“Are you Pagans?” Peter asked shyly

“No, we just love all sorts of people and try to make everyone feel welcome, I suppose its being brought up on the Bournville Trust Estate in Birmingham that has made us feel like that. The Cadbury family did so much for this country and its so sad that the Government didn’t save the factory.”

“I had a girlfriend from Birmingham” Peter said

“I thought you might even know her, I’ve had so many coincidences recently”

They laughed. But ascertained that they didn’t.

“I’m thinking of starting a new life”

“What as a High Priest!” Giles said getting a scornful look from Suzie.

“Maybe, one day” said Peter smiling “It just depends what else happens on my journey”

“Well this place has its own ghosts” said Giles

“How old is it?”

“Seventeenth century and near the garden there is a very old Oak Tree”

“So you mean that Granny could have been referring to your Oak Tree and not Matlock!”

“Well it is possible, if she came here when it was a pub, maybe she came with Old Ed! Do you want to see the tree?”

“Yes, I’d love to”

They went into the back garden which was part of a wall garden, walked to the bottom and through a gate to an area that looked like a meadow.

“We’ve been very lucky to keep this as someone wanted to try to build on it but they would have had to have access over our land. One day we’ll try to buy it. Maybe if we find your Gran’s buried treasure we could. We’ve never actually used a metal detector to see if there was anything to be found but know that the land had some involvement with the Civil war and so there could be something there.”

Peter got more and more intrigued. He wondered whether Granny had found something and hidden it again by the Oak tree.

“Do you have a metal detector?” he said

“Yes, but it doesn’t work”, said Giles

“Well I could see if I could get it to work”

“Why are you a whizz with electrics?”

“I know a bit” said Peter. He didn’t tell them that when he was fourteen years old he rewired the whole of the family home and when his parents got an electrician out to approve it that he complemented them on the work of the electrician, they didn’t give away that in fact it was their fourteen year old son.

“Come and see the tree first” said Suzie

“Yes, of course” said Peter

The tree stood before them looking a bit worn with a few damaged branches.

“Oh that was the storm last year” Giles said indicating the damage done to the tree.

Peter thought that the tree still looked splendid.

“If we had a tape measure we could work out roughly how old the tree is” said Peter

“Yes, that would be interesting” Suzie replied

“I can look up the formula, I know that its something to do with how many centimeters it grows in a year.”said Peter

“Oh yes, lets do that” Suzie said excitedly

“Well while you’re doing that I can dig out the metal detector”

They headed back to the house and then Peter and Suzie went with the largest tape measure she could find to measure the tree.

“Wow Seven point seven metres” said Peter

“Its approximate of course”

He loaded the calculator on his phone and divided by one point eight eight as somewhere he found a reference of that amount of growth in a year for an Oak tree.

“That would make it about four hundred and thirteen years old, so planted in about 1608 and so it would have been there during the civil war”

Peter and Suzie walked back to the house and found Giles in the kitchen with the metal detector.

“Actually it seems to work” said Giles

“I thought the last time we tried it that it didn’t do anything!”

“I think I was out at the time” said Suzie

“Peter has worked out that the Oak tree has been there before the Civil war”

“Well lets get cracking then, you haven’t got to get back for anything have you, you could have tea with us if you like, its my turn for cooking”

“Yes, I’d like that” Peter said and yet again he had found nice pleasant people, no wonder Granny liked her trips to Staffordshire and Derbyshire, he just wished that he had come with her.

Suzie suggested that they wait until the next day to do the detecting which they agreed to, so just sat and chatted whilst Giles got the tea.

“Could I borrow your Internet” said Peter, “The pick up at the campsite isn’t very good and I want to email Ed”

“Of course you can, go in the next room to be private” said Suzie.

Peter followed her instructions, wrote a short email thanking Ed and said that he would write again when he got home, he then rang Mum, he had neglected her rather recently. She sounded jolly and told him that they had had a surprise visitor, it was Helen she had moved to Woking.

Peter was shocked, what would he do now? He had decided that he wouldn’t meet her again and now she had visited his parents.

“Are you OK?” said Suzie

“Yes err its just my old girl friend the one I told you about has just moved near my home”

“Oh and you were thinking of starting a new life elsewhere!”

“Err yes”

“Never mind I’m sure you’ll sort it, just make the most of the rest of your holiday and just think of the treasures we might find tomorrow”

Peter wanted to do just that but he was a worrier by nature and wondered what he should do about Helen. Could he go forward into his new life?



## Chapter 11

Peter was enjoying himself so much that he decided to head home on Sunday rather than Saturday as he had planned.

“Oh she’s lovely” said Mum as she climbed inside Emily.

Peter was tired from the trip home but was glad that Mum liked Emily, it mattered to him.

“I’ll put the kettle on, you must be tired!”

“Yes, I’ll just bring my bag in, I don’t think that I need anything else for now”

Peter felt strange being at home, everything was very familiar, but somehow he knew that he had changed.

He’d parked Emily on the road as there wouldn’t be room on the drive. It was fortunate that it was a quiet road and that she wouldn’t get in the way of anyone.

They sat down and Mum asked all about his adventures. Peter filled her in about the last few days.

He had gone back to meet with Suzie and Giles and they had used the metal detector around the Oak Tree but they hadn’t found anything and so the mystery of the Oak tree had remained just that, a mystery.

Peter wanted to know about Helen and why she had suddenly turned up but didn’t want to really ask and thought he would wait until Mum told him.

“Mum, I’ve decided to give my notice in at work and continue my adventure” Peter said

“With the money from Granny and Ed I have enough to live on for now and I’m thinking of exploring becoming a carer. I’d really like to do something different”

Mum laughed, “I think that’s a great idea, but what are you going to do about Helen. She’s obviously moved thinking she can have a life with you.”

“Why what did she say?”

“That she was too hasty, that she should have thought about things more, that she missed you”

“But its ages Mum, what does she expect and no there’s nobody else, its just that I’ve changed, I have different things that I want out of life now, its not that I will never do the engineering again, its just that I want to do something different for now?”

“Well then go for it love, you know all we want for you is to be happy. It was Granny that was always more ambitious for you. She was the one who insisted on you learning to drive, who obviously thought that living around here and having a good life and a family wasn’t enough. It was her that seemed to believe that there was more for you to explore in life. We just wanted to give you the choice”

“But what do I do about Helen? What did you tell her?”

“Just that you were away and that I’d tell you when I next spoke to you, she asked if I could get you to ring her and gave me her new phone number, but its up to you!”

“I’ll have to otherwise it will just bug me” Peter moaned.

Mum gave him Helen’s number but he decided to leave phoning her until later.

He had a nice evening with Mum and Dad and showed them all the photos he’d taken and talked about all the people.

“Sounds as though you’ve had a great Time” said Dad

“I have, in fact I loved it there, I’m going to give my notice in tomorrow”

“Are you sure?” asked Dad pondering.

“Yes, Ive had plenty of time to think about it and I know that it’s time to do something new and explore new places”

Dad smiled

After tea Peter thought that he better get the torture over with and phone Helen.

He went to his room and dialled the new number.

“Hi Helen, this is Peter”

He heard her voice but it sounded different. He agreed to meet her the next night. He knew now that he wasn't looking forward to it, but he couldn't avoid seeing her. He slept badly worrying, not about work and giving his notice he was certain that was the right thing to do, no it was meeting Helen again that's what bothered him.

"Wow a beard" Claire said the next day as Peter walked into the office

"It rather suits you"

Peter thought he couldn't give his notice in straight away, he would have to wait a few days. His company had been good to him and he wanted to get a good reference from them.

"Did you have a good holiday?" Claire asked

"Yes it was great"

Dave, one of the Directors came over and told Peter that they had a special project for him.

"Perhaps we can meet up tomorrow to discuss it" he asked

"It will give you time to catch up on things"

"Yes, great" said Peter, wondering what the project might be and hoping that it wouldn't last too long, his plans hadn't changed he was keen to leave as soon as he could.

By the end of the day he was glad to be going home, but also rather nervous about meeting Helen.

"Had a good day?" asked Mum cheerily

"It was fine, Claire liked my beard"

"I do too" said Mum smiling

"So what time are you meeting Helen?"

"At eight"

"I'm sure it will go Ok"

"Hope so" said Peter, not sure at all. He just knew that he had to be determined. He couldn't go backwards. The trip had given him a strength that he didn't know that he possessed.

Peter arrived at the George smack on eight. He didn't want to be early or late.

He found a window seat and waited for Helen. She walked in at ten past. His first impressions were that she had aged and was rather over made up. She was wearing a provocatively low cut top, well that's what it seemed like to him.

"Hi" she said as if she had seen him the week before. He stood up and gave her a hug.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked

"Yes, a red wine would be nice"

Peter went over to the bar and ask for a coke and a medium sized house red.

He walked back to the table where Helen was now sitting and placed the wine in front of her.

"I'm sorry to hear about your Gran" she said

"Thanks" he said

"I suppose you're wondering why I'm here!" she asked

"Well frankly I woke up one day and well realised that I just missed you and so decided to get a job and move, mad I know but that's what you do for love isn't it"

Peter was stunned and was in horror hearing the L word. He started panicking and then as if like magic he heard Granny telling him to get a grip.

"You look shocked" Helen said

"Well thats cos I am" Peter replied

"Err so you don't still love me" Helen said anxiously

"Its not that" Peter said

"Well what is it?"

"To be frank Helen time has made me see that although you can love someone that maybe the love you have is the wrong kind of love."

"So what are you saying, that you don't want me in your life anymore!"

"I think that's exactly what I am saying and I know that it sounds harsh but I was hurt years ago and wouldn't want to hurt you but I've moved on, my life is different now"

"You have someone else?"

"No"

"Then why?"

"I am a different person"

Helen got up and began to cry

"I'm sorry I came" she said and marched out of the pub.

Peter got up and followed her. She was sitting on a low wall sobbing. He wanted to go and comfort her but he knew if he did that, she would win and get her way, but that her way wasn't his way anymore.

"I'm sorry you feel the way you do" he said

"Where do you live" he said

"Not far away" she sobbed

"I'll walk you home"

Helen cheered up a little and started to chat as Peter walked her home.

"Are you coming in?" she asked.

"No, you'll find someone else" he said and turned and left.

Peter didn't dare look back, it was hard walking away, but he knew it was what he had to do.

"How did it go?" asked Mum

"Awful" Peter replied and told her what had happened.

"I hated leaving her crying, but what else could I do?" he said

"Nothing" said Mum as Peter burst into tears

"It's hard being tough but sometimes you just have to be" said Dad, who had kept out of the conversation until now.

"I knew about Ed" he said

"And I was a fool. I should have encouraged Granny to move and be with him, but I was old fashioned and selfish. If you find the right person you can never be too old. I want to meet him and tell him I'm sorry"

Mum was shocked it was obvious that she knew nothing about it and thought that she knew everything about Dad.

"What other secrets do you have?" she asked.

"None" he said

It had been a heavy day and so Peter retreated to his bedroom and left his parents talking about things. He was sad for Dad too, making decisions can be hard, but he knew that he could no longer have Helen in his life.

"His phone had five messages from her"

He deleted her number, that was it, the end of that episode in his life and he hoped that he had learned from it.

He decided to email Ed. He told him that his parents wanted to meet him. He didn't tell him that Dad knew, that was up to Dad he couldn't interfere the way that Dad had done. He was so surprised because it just wasn't the Dad that he knew, he just didn't interfere like that and he just wondered why!

## Chapter 12

“Well what do you think?” said Dave “It will be a good experience”

Peter’s heart sunk. If this had been even six months ago he would have jumped at it, spending a year in Holland but now he felt different.

“Do I get a choice? Peter said

“Of course”

“Can I be honest with you Dave?”

“Yes, whats up?”

It was unusual for Dave to be so matey with him. He had always seemed a little distant.

“Well actually I was thinking of giving my notice in” said Peter, amazed at his own outspokenness

“Oh” Dave exclaimed.

“Had it been a year ago or even six months ago I would have jumped at it, I would have been scared but I would have dealt with that, but you see Dave I’ve changed I want some different experiences in life”

“But this is a different experience”

“I know, but I mean a totally different experience”

“Oh well never mind I’ll ask Jenny”

“Yes that’s a good idea. I think she’d love it”

“So when were you going to give your notice in?”

“Well, I was going to leave it a couple of weeks but..”

“You mean you want to do it today?”

“Well only if its Ok with you!”

“Could you make it three months instead of one?”

“Yes, of course I’m not rushing and desperate to leave. I’ve liked working here, I’ve just changed that’s all”

Dave asked if Peter would like to go for a drink sometime which he agreed to. He wondered why after nearly six years that Dave suddenly wanted to be mates.

“I didn’t mean to give my notice in today but well when he made the offer it just seemed the right time” Peter said as he and Mum sat down together with a cuppa

“A time of change” said Mum smiling

“Yes I suppose so. You looked really shocked when Dad said about knowing about Ed!”

“Yes, it was so unlike your Father”

Mum told Peter that Dad had opened up later that evening and that he truly did regret not encouraging Granny to move to Staffordshire and realised that in some ways although he was worried for her, he was also being selfish. He just couldn’t imagine living so far away from her.

Peter opened his laptop and found amongst the emails one from Helen and one from Ed.

He decided to read the one from Ed first, he just said that he would love to meet Mum and Dad whenever they were able to come to Haughton and that he hoped that they were OK.

Peter opened the one from Helen

“Dearest Peter and that’s what you are to me. I so regret the years that we missed being together. I was a stupid idiot, but I understand you wanting to go forwards. I will always love you, Helen”

For a second Peter felt in pain and wanted to cry and then he was jolted into reality. Helen was history. He deleted the email. He just couldn’t go backwards.

“Dinners ready” Dad shouted up the stairs

The next few weeks were strange. Dave who had always been rather distant suddenly wanted Peter as his buddy and he wasn’t sure whether he liked it or not.

"I like the new you" Dave said one day when they went for a pint after work.

"You sure you don't want to stay...oh I know the answer to that, actually Pete I admire you. I wish I could do the same but responsibilities you know" he said smiling

Dave had told him more in the last few weeks about himself and his family more than he'd known in the last five years. Peter found a warm hearted family man who loved his wife and kids to bits. He wondered whether he would ever be like that. He had thought when he was with Helen that he could have been, but for now it was just not in his horizon.

Helen had emailed a few times more but Peter had become strong willed and didn't reply.

Mum and Dad had gone to Haughton and met with Ed and had got on really well. They planned to visit again.

Jenny was really pleased at getting the Dutch job. "I'm glad you turned it down" she said.

"You should have had it anyhow" Peter replied "I reckon that Dave just felt sorry for me"

"Only a week to go" Claire said

"Yes, the time has gone quickly" Peter remarked.

"I'll miss you" she said "You will keep in touch?"

"Yes, we can have a weekly catch up email if you like?"

"Yes that would be nice"

Peter had never really noticed before how attractive Claire was. He had been so trapped in his work that in fact there were lots of things that he hadn't noticed.

"I could easily have stayed here for twenty years" he thought

He was glad that he wasn't, he was a little sad about leaving but knew that the people he wanted to keep in touch with would keep in touch with him.

A few days later Claire came bubbly into the office.

"I've got engaged" said Claire, showing off her ring

That had solved one problem for Peter as he had begun to think that perhaps after his adventure he could pursue a life with Claire. He hadn't really thought much about women since he broke with Helen. He thought about the waitress at the farm cafe. He felt ready for someone knew in his life but he wasn't desperate, he wanted his new adventure first.

"Can I have a word" said Dave looking a little anxious

"What's up" said Peter as he shut the door behind him.

"I just wondered whether you'd think of continuing part time..err..from a distance...you can say no but"

Peter was shocked he didn't know what to say.

"Err, can I think about it?"

"Yes, of course, its just that over the last few weeks Ive learnt more about you than the whole time you've been here and you have some good ideas, I just don't want you to close this door completely. I understand why you want your adventure and I know you'll never come back in the way you've been, but instinct tells me that one day you'll have that amazing idea and I want to be part of it"

Peter couldn't believe that this guy had so much faith in him

"Yes, Ok but only a few hours a week and from a distance" he replied

And he couldn't believe that he was saying what he was saying. Who was this new person that was emerging, was it really him, making split decisions on the spot?

"Wow" said Mum as Peter told her about the offer.

"Maybe we should go on an adventure too" said Dad

“Steady on” Mum replied laughing.

“Lets get used to Peter’s first, besides you said you wanted to spend more time with Ed”

“Yes, he’s a decent bloke so maybe we should have a couple of weeks exploring the area too”

“Actually, I like that idea” she replied

Peter liked this, all three of them looking to new futures and he knew that Granny would be pleased.

He went into work the next day and found everyone looking on edge.

“Whats happened” said Peter to Jake

“Its Claire, haven’t you heard?”

“Heard what”

“That guy that she is engaged to has beaten her up. She’s in hospital, but nobody knows how she is. Dave’s been trying to find out”

Peter didn’t say a word, he just felt numb. Yesterday she had come in all bubbly showing off her engagement ring and today she was ...he just couldn’t bear to think..

He sat quietly at his desk and then suddenly he got a text.

Peter looked at his phone it was from Claire.

“Please tell everyone I’m ok, I just need somewhere to stay tonight. I just don’t understand...”

Peter knocked on Dave’s door.

“So you’ve heard about Claire” he said

“yes, but I just got this”

Peter showed Dave the text

“But you can’t” Dave said

“Claire’s in a coma, I haven’t told anyone, we better ring the police”

Peter was confused why would anyone send such a message and why to him? He got on with Claire but she was just a work mate there was nothing between them outside of work.

A couple of hours later the police arrived and asked to look at the message.

Claire’s fiance had also been in touch. He had been away on a course and got a message from the police and was distraught. So there was a mystery of who had beaten Claire and also who had sent the message.

“How awful” said Mum as Peter told her the day’s events.

“Yes and I’ve only got two more days at work”

“Its sad but you couldn’t do anything about it, its just one of those horrible things in life, were they giving you a leaving do?”

“I don’t know, I haven’t really thought about it”

The next day Dave called Peter into his office.

“look mate, we were going to give you a surprise leaving do but given the circumstances I just wondered..”

“No worries, it wouldn’t be the same without Claire, have you heard anything?”

“No, its all rather strange, especially you getting that text”

“I’m glad you agreed to still do some work.

“Yes I am too, I’m not giving up engineering forever”

## Chapter 13

Peter woke up from a vivid dream and for a second wondered where he was. In his dream he was with Dave and was saying "I'm not giving up on Engineering".

It was a month since that day and Peter had been living on Red Lion farm for three weeks.

"Why don't you come and live with me?" Ed asked, but Peter liked his independence. Even though Emily was small, she was home and he liked it.

"It won't be very nice in the winter" Ed had continued.

Peter wanted to enjoy just now, not think about the winter. He wondered how Claire was, but didn't want to intrude. Ed had asked him round for lunch, it was early but he planned to go to an agency to see about jobs as Carers and find out what he would have to do. He had an interview at 9.30 am and so he thought he better go and have a shower.

He liked living on Red Lion farm and had got to know the owners so well that any new ice cream mix they would try out on him before it went on sale. The only one so far that he really hadn't liked was sherry and pickled onions. He told Alice that she must have been drunk when she thought up that one, but also thought it was great that her parents gave her a free hand in the choice of the flavours, surprisingly a few customers had actually liked it.

"It depends how you market it" Alice had said. Peter still wasn't convinced.

He arrived at 'Joy to care' at 9.25am and was met by Joy herself, an outgoing Jolly woman who turned out to be extremely straight talking.

"So Peter, why would someone with all your qualifications want to be a paid carer?"

Peter decided to tell Joy all about Granny.

"Wow, how exciting" Joy said, "And you really just thought you needed to do it after spending an evening with a couple in the pub, well thats certainly an original approach"

Peter was a little annoyed "So Joy you don't take me seriously, I knew this would be a problem, but the fact is that at this moment in time and for the foreseeable future it's what I'd really like to do and am willing to do whatever training is required and work whatever hours you want me to. I could go back to my old job tomorrow if I wanted, I still do a bit of work for them but I don't want to, and I'm not saying I will want to do this forever."

"Hold on Peter, I haven't said no, and I like your passion, so can you see where you might be in say five years time?"

"Actually I can" said Peter, surprised at his own outspokenness.

"I think that I will be doing something that combines the two, caring and engineering"

"You are aware that the pay is low and that there are times you are so busy and that you lose people, many of the people you will work with are very frail and it can be hard to detach yourself. You will be doing a lot of personal care, what do you feel about that?"

"Its just part of life" Peter said, remembering the occasion when Frazer had a terrible bout of Flu and relied totally on him. Frazer had been very grateful and was embarrassed that Peter had had to help him in such intimate ways but strangely it hadn't mattered to Peter, he just wanted to make sure that his friend was ok.

"Well your referees rate you very highly and so rather than keeping you hanging on I'm going to say yes, my gut feeling is that you will make a good carer, so we will need to do your DBS and so I reckon you can start the training in about a weeks time. What do you feel about that?"

"Sounds good to me" Peter said smiling.

"I see that your current address is Red Lion farm, are you staying with the family?"

"No I'm currently living in a camper van which I like but family is nagging me to find somewhere else, so I suppose I'll have to think about it."

"Ok but remember to give your new address when you move, we'll need it for the DBS"

Peter left feeling pleased, he knew that the money wasn't great but he still had money that both Granny and Ed had given him. He drove back to the farm, parked Emily and only had a short time

until he was due at Ed's, so he decided to do absolutely nothing and then his mobile rang. It was a number he didn't recognise.

"You know Claire" said a voice aggressively.

"Well leave her alone, she doesn't want anything to do with you anymore" and then the person hung up.

Peter was shocked, who would ring him in such a threatening way. He decided to ring Dave as he thought it was strange that he hadn't heard from Claire and was wondering how she was.

"Hi Pete, how are you getting on?" said Dave

"Oh, I'm fine" but then told Dave about the phone call.

"Strange, she seems ok to me, she's been back at work for a couple of weeks, do you want to talk to her, but I wouldn't tell her about the call, ring me later and we can talk about it as I'm just about to go into a meeting, I'll get her for you"

Peter was a little concerned he didn't want to lie to Claire but he understood where Dave was coming from.

"Hi Peter, how are you?" Claire said a few minutes later.

"I'm fine, I am doing some work for Dave and so thought I'd ask how you were as I haven't heard from you" Peter replied sounding a little unconvincing to himself.

Claire told him that she was doing OK and had just been busy catching up, but there was a different tone in her voice. She told him that she better get back to work but she never said keep in touch and that just wasn't Claire.

"So how did your interview go?" said Ed as he poured a cup of tea for both of them.

Peter told him all about Joy and mentioned living in the van.

"Well the offers still here and I won't fuss about what time you come in and with whom" Ed said, laughing

"I could say the same for you" Peter replied smiling.

They both laughed, Peter felt so comfortable with Ed.

"Ok he said but I want to do the job for a month first and I insist on paying rent"

"That's fine" said Ed smiling.

"Oh and your Mum said give her a ring"

"I bet she didn't" Peter remarked

"No, but you should"

"You're getting to sound like a bossy Grandad" Peter laughed

"I wish" Ed said with a soulful look on his face.

Peter had often seen that look and reckoned that at those moments Ed was thinking of Granny. She would be so pleased that at last they were spending quality time together.

He told Ed about the telephone call telling him to leave Claire alone.

"That sounds worrying" said Ed

"Didn't you say that the message from Claire said that her fiance had beaten her up?"

"Yes but then the police informed him that she was in hospital and he said he was on a course"

"But did they check it out I wonder, well I think your old boss will probably keep an eye on things as you said that he was a decent bloke, anyhow our soup will get cold"

Ed made the most delicious home made soup. He had told Peter that he had thought about being a Chef but that his parents didn't approve saying that it wasn't for country boys like him.

After Lunch they played Scrabble together, this was a pastime that Peter had come to enjoy. Mum laughed when she told him.



“Well I think I’m ready for my afternoon nap” said Ed

“I don’t want to pressure you to live here, but it would be nice and it would save you a lot of money, [ignoring the fact that Peter wanted to pay him rent] and I meant what I said about you bringing whoever here”

Peter decided to pop to the local shop before returning to Emily. He said hello to a couple of people he recognised on the way. He liked the friendliness of Haughton and decided to ring Mark to see if he’d like to go out for a drink. He thought he’d also go to Gnosall and see Doreen and Mike. He wished that he had his bike with him and thought perhaps it was time for him to have a trip back to Guildford before he started his new job.

He made a list of tasks to do on his phone.

He messaged Mark about meeting up, messaged Dave to see if there was any news about Claire and then rang Mum.

“Great, see you then” said Mum when Peter said about coming up in a couple of days time. She sounded very happy which made him wonder even more about Claire.

“Yes we’d love that” said Doreen, when Peter suggested coming over to there’s the next day.

He agreed to come for 11am and then they could have a walk before having some lunch. Doreen was very excited about Peter’s job.

“Great at the George at 8?” was the text back from Mark

Peter text back that he’d see him then.

He was pleased with his arrangements he just kept wondering about Claire.

His phone rang it was Dave.

“Bad news, I’m afraid” said Dave

“Claire’s in a refuge, that guy was lying. We don’t know where she is for obvious reasons but we have managed to set up for her to do some work from there remotely and keep her on the pay role.

As Dave hung up Peter realised how many kind hearted people that he knew.

He looked forward to his evening with Mark, his day with Mike and Doreen and spending time with his parents. He had an interesting life ahead of him.

## Chapter 14

“I’m not surprised that the woman at the care agency thought you were nuts, of course she couldn’t say it. I’ve heard those ads saying what a rewarding career you can have in social care, but having two Aunts who do just that, well I know that the reality is very different” said Mark  
He’d been waiting for Peter and seemed rather on edge.

“Have you had a bad day, you seem a little.....” Peter remarked

“I’m just a bit knackered that’s all. I need a holiday, but can’t afford it, being an apprentice is shit pay and I can’t just live at home for nothing, so I’m pretty broke and to be honest Pete, you don’t mind me calling you Pete do you, it just seems that Peter is a bit posh and well...”

“Its ok mate and of course you can call me Pete or Peter whichever you prefer or both depending what you feel like. Look can you get any time off work, you could always come with me in the van or you could come to my parents for a change. They are quite easy going people.”

“I’d really like that, but you’re starting your job soon!”

“I can tell you what my shifts are and we can work something out, even if we just go to Derbyshire or Yorkshire, you know what they say a change is as good as a rest and although Emily is small, I’m sure we can manage, or we could take a pop up tent and one of us can sleep in that.”

“Yeah that sounds great, but I couldn’t afford much”

“Don’t bother about that, when you are a famous rock star you can treat me”

“So you know that music really is my thing and being a mechanic is just money”

“I think its not just that, I think you like tinkering with cars really”

“Yes, but it doesn’t give me the buzz that music does”

“So you see now why I want to explore other worlds because I love engineering but its not enough”

“Yeah but I hope you’re not disappointed”

“Not everything can be great, but I never realised how I love people and machines and want both in my life, maybe I’ll even take up writing some day”

Peter felt completely at ease with Mark, even though he was quite a bit younger and had such a different education he just felt that Mark was willing to talk about anything and thats what Peter liked, that freedom.

“Have you ever seen that woman again, you know that one you sat with on the train and that you saw in the pub, you know that she lives around here somewhere and that book that you were talking about, well I reckon it was hers and she left it there on the train for you to find. Oh and have you ever been back to the farm cafe to check out that chick, you know that you saw there who you fancied”

“How did you know I fancied her?”

“Well it was pretty obvious, the way that you talked about her, you don’t put that kind of thing in chat unless.....well you know..” said Mark winking and nudging Peter.

“You should go back and see if she’s still there”

“Maybe I will” Peter replied, not really sure whether he would or not, he felt that he had enough going on in his life at the moment and he needed to figger out what he really felt about Claire, he was never one to play the field, it just wasn’t him. He was a big romantic at heart believing that one day he would find...the one.

The last time they went to the pub Mark suddenly said that he had to get home. Peter wasn’t sure whether he was just bored or that even at his age his parents had some kind of control over him.

They gave each other man hugs and Peter said he’d message about his shifts so they could fix their trip and then Peter walked back to Emily and drove back to Red Lion farm.

He was just settling down when his mobile rang. It was Mum she was just confirming when he would be coming home. It seemed strange her talking about there as home, he knew, that for now Emily was home and that was his parents place.

Peter read for a bit and then went off into a lovely cosy sleep.

He woke and looked at the clock. It was just after eight, he’d had a good long sleep and lay thinking of the day ahead. He picked up the book that he’d found on the train, which now seemed a life time

ago. He had read some of it but then got bored. Its title ‘ Assumptions’ was simple but also powerful. He thought about all the assumptions he had made during his life. He’d thought that he would be with Helen forever, but then when she returned to his life out of the blue he felt so differently.

Chloe Kingdom, the author was in her mid forties when her husband was killed in a farming accident. He was a fit healthy man who had given her the morning kiss and then within hours he had gone and her life had changed forever. She had recorded her journey from this point and it was through finding the book on the train that Peter had also stopped making assumptions. He had thought that Granny would get to her hundredth birthday but that wasn’t to be and he had assumed that he had known all about her, but then found that she had another life one that she had enabled him to share.

Peter ate his breakfast and then went for a shower. He met Alice on the way back and asked what flavour ice cream she was making today and when she said Strawberry he was rather disappointed, he liked her whacky flavours although marmite ice cream was equally as bad as the sherry and pickled onions.

Peter had new neighbours on the site, a couple of women in their forties who described themselves as Mrs and mrs which maybe was a way of saying that they weren’t available. He hadn’t really considered himself as much of a catch, but then I suppose somebody must like him, Helen did. She’d tried messaging him a few more times but he deleted them. He found it hard, he could have so easily kept in touch, but he knew that it wouldn’t really help either of them. He’d talked to Mum about it one day and she said “You know in your heart what you need to do”

Mum was always good at not taking sides. When he’d told her about the book she said that she totally agreed that often people make too many assumptions and that she personally tried hard not to.

Peter looked up Chloe Kingdom again and found that her latest book was called ‘coincidences’.

He borrowed Ed’s bike to go to Gnosall. He didn’t see the point of taking Emily as he was going for a pub lunch and then would be coming straight back. He laughed to himself when he thought of his plans in relation to Chloe’s book, maybe something else would happen as she said ‘ you can’t assume anything’ but Peter thought that you can at least hope. He hoped that he would do ok with the carers training and that he would be able to do a decent job.

He had told Dave that he would have to cut back on any work for them until he knew how time consuming the job would be. Dave understood but asked Peter not to give up completely and gave him a piece of work that he could plod on over a several months timescale.

Doreen gave him a big bear hug as if she hadn’t seem him for years, it was a couple of weeks but mainly because they had been away in a caravan near Aberdovey.

“We had such a lovely time” she said

“You should come with us sometime, you said you’d never been there. Mike’s just had to pop around to the next door neighbours. She’s just moved in and was having trouble finding the stop cock. He’ll be back in a minute. I told him to invite her round for a cup of tea, you don’t mind do you?”

“Of course not” he said

He was getting used to meeting adhoc people and he would soon be getting to know a lot of strangers.

“I met with Mark last night, he seemed a bit low and so I invited him to come in the van with me somewhere or to come down to Guildford, he’s struggling financially and is a bit frustrated” Peter remarked.

“He’s a nice guy and good at his job, I hear that he broke up with his girlfriend recently!”

“Oh he never told me”

“Well maybe he didn’t want to bother you, when do you start the job?”

“I start training next week and then shadow with someone as soon as my DBS comes through which they think should be the following week”

“So are you looking forward to it?”

“Yes, I know lots of people think I’m nuts but I think I’ll enjoy it, of course I’m lucky as I can always go back to engineering, but I think there’s a lot of people like me who would really like to do two completely different jobs at the same time. Mark for instance loves music and says that’s what he’d really like to do but I think he also likes cars.”

“Hi Peter” said Mike as he came in followed by the neighbour

“Chloe has brought a nice chocolate cake with her”

“We meet again” said Chloe smiling.

Peter couldn’t believe it. Doreen and Mike’s new next door neighbour was the woman from the train who gave him the book.

Peter laughed “Oh and the book you gave me was yours all along”

Chloe laughed “Well it was fun just leaving it on the train, I never expected to see you again”

“You know each other” said Mike looking confused.

Peter told Mike and Doreen how they had met and how by reading Chloe’s book that his life had changed.

“And I hear the next one is called Coincidences” said Peter looking directly at Chloe.

“Yes” she replied and told them all about the number of coincidences she’d had since she had written the first book.

For the next half an hour Peter and Chloe chatted about all sorts of topics and yet again it seemed that he had known her for years.

Peter put his key in the lock, it felt strange even though it had only been a few weeks since he had been in Guildford.

He smelt cooking and could hear the radio on. He took off his shoes and hung his coat on the peg that had been allocated to him for years. Mum came bursting out of the kitchen.

“You got here early, that’s great” she said and gave him what he described as a snuggle hug. It was like he was being wrapped in his favourite cosy blanket.

“Yes, I picked the right time to leave, the traffic flowed easily.”

“I’ve got a surprise for you” Mum said and that surprise came bursting through the door.

“Frazer, wow, what you doing here?” Peter exclaimed

“I’ve got a conference in London next week and your Mum said you were coming home and as I didn’t have much on I took some more time off. I got here yesterday, I hope you don’t mind me stealing some of your Mum and Dad time?”

“Of course not” and Peter didn’t, Frazer always felt like the brother that he never had and Mum and Dad loved having him around.

So the weekend would be even more special.

## Chapter 15

“Piss off” said Helen

“That was a bit off” Frazer exclaimed.

“I only said hello to her”

“I heard that!” Helen said fuming in front of a whole street of people.

“Leave it” whispered Peter, feeling totally embarrassed. How could he know that Helen would be at the same pub as him at exactly the same time when it wasn’t near either where he lived or she did. What had started as a nice night out was heading in a more undesirable direction. Peter began to wish that he was back in Haughton having a pint with Ed, but he knew not to panic, they would be ok in a minute if they just got away.

“No, I’m not putting up with that” Frazer added defiantly and went over to Helen.

Peter stayed away, frightened that things would escalate but in fact the opposite happened. Frazer brought Helen over.

“I’m sorry” she said

“It was just a shock seeing you and I’ve had a bad day and you ignore my messages and...”

“Take a breath Helen” said Frazer putting his arm around her.

“Look Peter doesn’t have another woman, its just you wanted different things, give him time and he could be friends with you”

Peter didn’t feel that he could be, but he kept quiet and although still feeling a little on edge he saw that Frazer was trying to help. Frazer was always like that trying to help, but he had looked forward to an evening just the two of them.

“So shall we have that pint?” said Frazer, rather loudly

“Ok” said Peter wanting to hide in a corner.

Frazer had noticed that the pub had karaoke and within minutes he was asking Helen to sing with him.

Peter remembered his birthday and how he had loved singing but there was no way that he would be pulled into singing again especially under these circumstances. He sat with his pint while Frazer and Helen sang ‘Ive got you babe’. Then another couple sang and Peter began to relax a little.

“Do you want another?” said Frazer.

“I’ll just have a coke” said Peter

“Well if you’re offering I won’t say no” Helen said giggling

And then over the speaker the DJ called out Peter’s name saying he’d heard that he had a good voice.

“Oh go on” said Helen in a pushy manner.

“Don’t be so bloody cowardly, if you’re mate can do it, you bloody well can, your voice is far better than his”

Peter got up reluctantly and took the Mic, unfortunately the song was ‘ The wonder of you’

Peter dared not look at Helen as he sang and instead concentrated on looking at the words.

The audience applauded.

“That was great” said Frazer as Peter sat down

Helen had disappeared, but Peter decided not to ask.

“I think Helen’s had a crisis at home” Frazer said

“Oh” was all Peter could reply.

“You’re a bloody good singer” Frazer said

“Have you ever thought of doing it professionally?”

Peter just laughed.

As they left the pub a guy came up to Peter and offered him his card, Peter put it in his pocket thinking it would be rude to throw it in the bin. Frazer had popped to the toilet. They took a taxi back to Peter’s parents house as they were a few miles away.

“Have a you had a good time” Mum said  
“Well yes and no” said Frazer  
“Oh” exclaimed Mum  
“Err we saw Helen and she was a bit off and.....”  
“Oh dear!”  
“Frazer sorted it, he was brill actually” said Peter  
“And we sang karaoke”

Mum made them a cup of coffee and then said she was off to bed.  
Frazer and Peter decided to watch a late film  
“Where’s Dad?” said Peter, just as Mum was leaving  
“Oh he’s in bed reading, he thought I was daft staying up for you, but I wasn’t sure whether you had your key with you”  
Mum blew them kisses as she left.

“You know, Your Mum’s great” Frazer exclaimed  
“I know” said Peter, feeling more settled than he had since he had come back home. It did feel like home and although he still longed to be in Haughton he could wait and enjoy the time that he had there.

The next day was peaceful. Mum and Dad went shopping and Frazer decided to go with them, Peter declined, instead he sat in the back garden and read his book. It was one that Mum had lying around a romantic chick flick type story, he’d never read one before. A lot of the story was predictable and obvious, but that’s what he wanted at the moment something easy that he didn’t have to think much about. He needed to chill before he started his training. He knew that people thought he was mad giving up his Engineering career, but to him he wasn’t giving up, he was just postponing.

Frazer came bursting in to the living room.  
“Why aren’t you sitting in the garden” Frazer said  
“I was, but its more comfy lying here while I’m reading as the pages kept blowing”  
“I love weather like this, sun and wind, there’s nothing better”  
“Did you buy anything?”  
“I did all the charity shops while your Mum and Dad did all the shopping”  
“Find anything?”  
“Nah”  
They both laughed.  
Dad came in.  
“We wondered whether you’d like to go out for lunch, our treat” he said  
“Yes that would be nice” said Peter  
“Yes, get him away from that book, what’s the point of me coming to visit my old mate and he spends most of the time reading a book”  
“Only this morning” Peter remarked  
“I know what you’re like”  
They all laughed.

As it was a beautiful day they decided to sit outside at the George. It was in walking distance from the house and so they left the car at home.  
“What you having?” said Dad, indicating the drinks  
“I’ll just have a Lager” said Peter  
“Pint?” Dad queried  
“Yes thanks”  
“I’m really proud of you, you know” said Dad

“It takes a brave person to change career, but I think you’re right, you’ve always been a caring soul and I think you will end up combining the two, maybe you’ll create something that could benefit people world wide”

“Maybe” said Peter, laughing

It felt good chatting with Dad. Peter realised that he talked a lot to Mum, but not so much to Dad.

“It would be nice for just you and me to hang out together sometime” said Peter

“Yes I’d like that” said Dad.

It wasn’t that Peter didn’t like being with Mum, he did, but he just thought perhaps he might get to know Dad more, maybe Dad had some secrets, like Granny that he had never told anyone.

“Did you ever want a different career?” Peter asked

“Yes, I wanted to be in a band, but it would have meant a lot of travelling and probably a struggle financially and I didn’t want to do that to you and your Mum.”

“Did Mum know?”

“No”

“So do you play an instrument”

“I used to play drums and guitar”

“So that old guitar in the loft is yours, I thought it belonged to Grandad! I remember him playing it”

“Yes he did, but it was mine”

“Are we ever going to get those drinks!” said Frazer coming over.

Peter and Dad laughed. Peter decided not to mention about the guitar.

The rest of lunch was nice. Peter listened mostly to the others chatting away. He liked being an observer.

“You were very quiet” said Mum as they walked back home

Peter laughed “You’ve forgotten already that I usually am”

“You’re Ok then?” she replied

“You’re not getting nervous about your new job?”

Peter said that he was fine and just enjoying the moment and it was true he felt very happy to just let his life unfold and not plan his next chapter.

“You know” said Frazer

“Sometimes I feel like a character in a book!”

“Don’t we all?” Dad commented

Peter laughed, he’d spent his whole life feeling like that.

When they got home Frazer offered to cut the grass, while Mum did some weeding and Dad dug over the veg plot. Peter went back to his book.

Tea was cheese on toast in the living room, then Mum went off to make some coffee.

Dad disappeared too

“I have a surprise” he said five minutes later

“I’ll be back in a minute”

He returned carrying the guitar that Peter had often seen in the loft and especially when he went searching for the Christmas decorations.

“Why have you got your Dad’s guitar?” said Mum

“That’s the surprise its not his, its mine. I wonder if I can still play it?”

Mum looked shocked

“But” she said

And Dad told her what he had told Peter

“But” Mum said

“That’s why I am so glad that Peter is becoming a carer. I think that we pushed him into Engineering because he was bright and clever and it just seemed to suit him, but maybe we shouldn’t, like I should have encouraged Mum to move to Staffordshire”

“But I never knew” said Mum

“You never told me, we could have made it work”

“It seemed too much of a risk” said Dad

“Look” said Frazer butting in

“You can’t go backwards, you can only go forwards, so are you going to see if you can play, or not?”

So Dad picked up the guitar, tuned it and played as if he had played earlier that day.

“So when did you last play?” asked Frazer

“The day I met Peter’s Mum” Dad replied

“So next time I come down, we’ll go to the George and I’ll sing and you can play” said Peter

“Will you do that?” asked Dad with a tear in his eye.

“Yes” said Peter and he knew that he would.



## Chapter 16

Peter was nervous when he arrived at the Castle hotel, which was where the training was taking place. He also felt a bit like a fish out of water as he was only one of two men with fourteen women attending the three days of training.

Joy introduced herself and Gary Masters who would be jointly carrying out the training.

Joy had worked her way up over a thirty year career in caring and was passionate about it. Gary had a legal and financial background but then trained as a Physiotherapist.

He said that after seven years working as a Solicitor he just realised that he wanted to do something else and so took the risk and retrained and never regretted it. His previous career had made him invaluable as part of the small team that managed the agency.

They broke for coffee and Joy came over to Peter.

“Are you Ok?” she said

“It can be a little daunting being with so many women” she laughed

“Yes, its like the opposite to engineering, although there are more women joining now compared to when I started” Peter commented.

“So how did you feel sharing with the group why you had decided to be a carer?”

“Actually it felt fine and put me at my ease, I must admit that I was a little nervous to start with”

“I think you’re going to be a good carer as you’ve genuinely thought it through, so many people drift into it just because they don’t know what else to do”

“I hope so” Peter said and meant it.

The rest of the session was business like and outlining what they would discuss during the further two days.

They were told that they would do some role play but that they shouldn’t worry, it wasn’t about getting everything right it was about learning to empathise with the people that they would be working with.

Peter was tired when he got back to Haughton but was glad that he had taken Emily rather than ride his bike. He had left overs from the previous night and so sat and read his sappy book, Mum said that she didn’t want it back and to give it to a charity shop. He read the final three chapters and was rather disappointed by the predictable ending.

He heated his meal and sat outside. His Robin came to visit and so he left a few remains for him.

Peter had a lazy evening. He watched some telly, nobody rang and he got ready for bed.

He slept like a log and woke to his alarm. He always liked plenty of time to get ready.

The role play was OK, everyone wanted to be the service user [the name they gave for people who needed care] so Peter ended up being the carer and Joy played an annoyed relative.

Joy told him in the break that she was impressed with how he had dealt with her character.

“I might seem to be a bit over the top but I have met some relatives whose expectations are greater than what we can provide in the short time we are allocated”

Some of the trainees seemed to be bored with the session as if they knew it all, but what showed in reality was gaping gaps in their knowledge.

Peter always liked learning and so was open to new ideas.

On the final day he began to ask more questions and felt his confidence growing.

He rang Mum in the evening and told her all about lifting, moving and handling and about safeguarding.

“You’ll be able to run the training soon” she laughed

“I doubt it” Peter replied.

“So when do you start some proper work?” Mum asked

“On Monday, we do two week’s shadowing and then we get our shifts” Peter replied

“So how do you feel about it?”

“I’m looking forward to it, I shall be covering local to Haughton and so can ride my bike”

“That will keep you fit”

“I have news” Mum said excitedly

“Your Dad has started playing the guitar regularly, its so lovely”

Peter could hear how excited Mum was, but then thought about his promise to sing with Dad and panicked for a second.

“That’s great” he said

“I’ll have to start singing in the shower”

“Frazer enjoyed his course, he is very good company and enjoys playing scrabble” Mum remarked  
Peter laughed.

“I’ll speak soon I’m popping around to Ed’s for tea so better go bye”

“Did you know Dad played the guitar?” Peter asked Ed as they ate their apple pie and custard.

“No, but your Gran played it”

“Really, another secret I didn’t know”

“Well you can’t know everything about someone”

“I suppose not”

“Granny shared a lot with you”

“I suppose I was far away from you all and so in some ways it was easier”

“Did she love Grandad?”

“Oh yes, deeply”

“Really more than she loved you”

“In lots of ways yes”

“What do you mean?”

“Well different people come into your life at different times and with different interests and personalities and so they bring different things into your life”

“You really believe that!”

“Oh yes”

Peter walked back to Emily and thought about what Ed had said.

The next two weeks were busy. Peter learnt to be very organised when he arrived at a service users home. On several occasions he had been the first person there and after making sure that everything was ready to help wash and dress the person he was able to spend a few minutes talking to them. Although he had a variety of service users, every morning he had to help Doris Baker to get out of bed and get dressed.

“Oh I do like a nice handsome young man help me” she said at the end of the first week.

“I do hope that I get you regularly she said”

Doris was 77 years old and lived on her own. She had three children but they all lived a long way from her and although they visited regularly she spent a lot of time on her own.

Doris liked to read and fortunately her eye sight was still pretty good. She would read everything from saucy books, to science fiction and political dramas.

So Doris was completely full of her faculties she’d just piled on the weight which had lead to diabetes and bad feet and so she struggled with her mobility.

The doctors had told her to cut down on cakes and pastries but Doris wondered what other pleasures there were in life. She had put on 7 stone since her husband died six years ago.

“My Bob was such a lovely man, you know dear and he had a great sense of humour, I do so miss him.”

Peter loved listening to Doris and her enthusiasm for life, so many of the service users seemed to have just given up which made Peter feel sad.

Katy, who was in her forties with grown up children had been a carer since her children were small and knew a lot of the people she cared for well.

“Yes it is sad” she said, as one day Peter expressed his view

“But although you can feel sorry for them, you just don’t know what lives they have led”

“What do you mean?” asked Peter as they sat in the local cafe having a cup of tea before they visited the next service user.

“Well we are brought up to respect our elders, well at least I was, but then when you see how awful some parents are it’s not surprising that some children don’t feel inclined to help their parents much when they need the help, oh and lots of people think that they have a right to be cared for, maybe I’ve just done this job too long.” She commented

Peter could understand her viewpoint, even though he had only been doing the job for a few days he could see that some service users were very demanding, whereas others expected very little.

He had read all about the nature/ nurture debate several years ago in relation to children but surely it also applied to adults.

Each night when he got back to Haughton he felt tired, there seemed so much to learn and he wanted to do a good job, but as Joy had said there was so little time to do anything in depth.

“So you want to give up already” Ed said on the Saturday evening after Peter had finished his induction period.

“No, I’m just tired, thats all”

“So when are you going to move in with me?” Ed asked

“Why?”

“I was just wondering”

“Have you changed your mind?” said Peter

“No, your parents were saying about coming to stay and I’d have to sort out all the junk if you were here”

Peter laughed “Its not junk, most of its pictures”

“I know” said Ed

“But I’m just no good at selling them, its the packing them up, oh I just like painting, you know that!”

“Then you should have someone to do that for you, why don’t you ask Elaine whether she or anyone she knows might be interested and no, Ed, don’t ask me, I just don’t have the time”

“I know, but I just hate it” Ed moaned

“And I hate having exhibitions and talking to people who say all sorts of things about my pictures that I don’t even see myself, it makes me feel stupid, and I have enough money anyhow and you won’t go short when I drop down dead” Ed said rather anxiously.

“What do you mean?” Peter asked worrying that Ed hadn’t told him something

“No, I might be old but I don’t intend dying tomorrow” Ed laughed.

“Well I suppose I better tell you” he added

“You are going to inherit from me”

“Oh” said Peter, wondering what he would inherit

“Everything” Ed said

“There’s no one else I want to give anything to, you’re the only one except for your Gran who cared the most for me and so I want you to have it all”

Peter was shocked and all he could say was “But”.

## Chapter 17

Peter awoke with a jolt, he had a vivid dream that Ed was telling him that he was going to inherit from him. He looked at his clock. It said ten past three. He turned over to go back to sleep but then realised that it wasn't a dream. Ed had really told him that he would inherit from him.

Peter remembered saying But.. and then not knowing what to say except 'really' and Ed had laughed and said "Don't look so surprised"

"But I've known you such a short time" Peter said tentatively.

"But I've known about you for several years. No Peter it's settled, what you do with it is up to you, maybe it will give you an opportunity that you may never have had"

"Ed I really don't want to talk about it"

"Why, cos it means I won't be here, I just wanted to get it out of the way and not be a surprise, like the ones that Emily gave you, I did say that she should tell you about me, but she insisted that it would be best to leave it"

"You mean you talked to Granny about me inheriting and getting to know me!"

"Oh yes, she said that you would worry about it, but I thought that you could manage and you have, but lets just enjoy now. When are you popping to the farm again to see if the waitress is still there?" Ed laughed.

It was strange because Peter had thought about her but not said anything to Ed and so it was as if he could read his mind.

Peter looked at the clock it was quarter to four he was glad that he wasn't working that day and decided to read for a bit. He picked up Chloe Kingdom's book about 'coincidences' and read some people's experiences. Peter thought about Ed mentioning the waitress from the farm and wondered whether she was still there.

Since he had moved to Haughton he had very little interest in pursuing any kind of romance, let alone a relationship, but now that he had a job and would be moving in with Ed maybe it was something that he could consider.

He also thought about the fact that he had never understood what Granny meant about the Oak tree. He didn't think that it had anything to do with that pub or Matlock but wondered if he would ever find out.

All these thoughts rumbling around in his head wasn't helping him get back to sleep and the birds dawn chorus was beginning, but whereas lots of people complained about birds singing Peter was the opposite he found them rather soothing and soon he drifted off.

After having a couple of lazy days Peter awoke to a wet and windy morning. He had planned to ride his bike to work but thought he'd be soaked before he got to his first service user, Carole King.

"Yes people often think that I'm her" she laughed

"But I'm quite a lot older than her, although she's getting on a bit now"

Carole loved to chat and only needed one carer.

"Lots of carers have dumped me because I talk too much, I hope you won't do the same Peter!"

"Well as long as we get the tasks done in the time I have then we should be Ok" Peter replied.

He found that he was getting a growing confidence. Carole didn't need anything more than prompting, she was just rather forgetful and would say the same things several times over but already Peter had learned that if he got her talking about the past she would keep to the task.

"That's interesting" said Joy when Peter had told her in his supervision session.

He had supervision for half an hour every week at the moment as he had only been in the job for a short time. It was a way of sharing any difficulties that he was having but also so that Joy could decide which service users he worked with.

After Carole, his next person was Howard to help get washed, dressed and sort out his breakfast. He too needed prompting as often he would forget to put his under pants on before his trousers and would put one sock on and not the other.

Howard was 89 years old and had been a GP and so his medical knowledge was still great but he got muddled in the day to day tasks. His daughter lived nearby but found with a job and three teenage children that she needed some help.

Howard had initially had two female carers but he didn't like them supervising him in the bathroom but needed some help. Peter had been asked what he would feel about working with Howard on his own and although a little nervous about getting things wrong he agreed to take him on.

Joy was very good at trying to match the service users to particular carers and sadly Howard had thought that his previous carer was his wife and this had led to some awkward situations. Joy didn't feel that Peter needed to know the details.

"Oh its so lovely seeing you" Carole said as Peter left and blew him a kiss. Peter smiled and waved. He was feeling happy and was enjoying his new life.

He drove the short distance to Howard's house, parked Emily on his drive, locked the doors and walked up the path. He looked in his diary for the combination number so that he could get Howard's front door key, unlocked the door and headed upstairs to find Howard as he was usually still in bed.

He wasn't in bed and so Peter called out to him, firstly checking the bathroom. He went in all the upstairs rooms and then headed downstairs and there was no sign of him anywhere.

He unlocked the back door to see if Howard had gone in the garden and found him with a spade digging.

"Morning Howard, you're up early, what are you digging for?" Peter asked trying not to sound worried.

"Treasure" said Howard who was bare footed, wearing his pyjamas and was wet and muddy.

"Its not really the right weather for digging" said Peter gently

"But I have to find it" Howard said angrily

"Who are you anyway, what are you doing in my garden, how did you get in here, I'll get the Police onto you" said Howard angrily.

"I'm Peter, I help you get up in the morning"

"Do you, why I'm perfectly capable of getting up on my own"

"Of course you are" said Peter

"But its always nice to get a bit of help, you didn't do everything on your own when you were a GP, did you?"

Howard thought for a moment and said "You're right, maybe I'll look for it later. Its Elizabeth you see, she said that she had lost it and that I need to find it straight away, otherwise I would be in trouble"

"Oh I haven't met Elizabeth, have I?" Peter said going along with the conversation as he coaxed Howard into the kitchen.

"Of course you have, she's my sister, I'm the baby and she's the oldest, she's 8 years older than me and bosses me around"

"Howard I just need to make a phone call, why don't you sit down a minute, I won't be long, You wouldn't want me to get in trouble would you?"

"Certainly not" Howard said assertively.

Peter went into the hallway and phoned the emergency number for the office, fortunately Joy answered straight away and told Peter to stay with Howard and she would call his daughter. Peter was concerned that he would be late for his other service users but Joy told him that they would get the help that they needed.

It took two hours to get any medical help for Howard as the GP's couldn't come out until the end of surgery.

Howard's daughter had gone to a conference in London and so was unable to come and help.

Joy had suggested that Peter just try to keep Howard warm and coax him to get dressed. She was sure that Peter would manage.

Peter decided to see if Howard liked playing scrabble as he spied a set near one of the bookshelves in the living room. He hadn't persuaded Howard to get dressed but had managed to get him into his dressing gown and a pair of slippers.

"Would you like a cup of tea and some toast?" asked Peter

"Yes that sounds nice" Howard replied being a little submissive

"And then I wondered whether you'd like a nice game of scrabble"

"Yes, do you have a set?"

"I think I could find one" Said Peter

Peter coaxed Howard into the kitchen, made the tea and toast and put Howard's favourite jam on top and then went into the living room and found the scrabble whilst Howard ate his breakfast.

"Would you like to play here or in the living room?" Peter asked

"I think here's fine" Howard replied

Peter cleared the table and gave it a wipe and realised that Howard had rather sticky hands and face and so he washed his own hands and wet the flannel that was kept near the sink.

"I got really sticky hands" Peter said

"Better make sure we don't get the scrabble all sticky"

Peter handed Howard the flannel and Howard automatically wiped his hand and face.

"I need a towel" Howard insisted

"Elizabeth says you must always dry your hands properly, you did dry yours Peter didn't you, Mummy would be so cross with us if you didn't"

Peter was rather shocked to find Howard knowing his name but also taking him on as if he was a sibling.

Peter took a deep breath and laid out the scrabble board.

After 8 games the door bell rang.

"Who's that, we're not expecting anyone are we Peter? Howard said anxiously

"I'll go and check" Peter said

"So Mr Jones how are you feeling today?" said the GP as he sat near to Howard

"Oh I'm fine, who are you and what are you doing here. Peter I don't like him will you please tell him to go, Mummy said we should never open the door to strangers, we'll both get into trouble and you know what she's like, we'll both get the belt"

The GP realised what a state Howard was in and made his excuses to go into the hall way.

"I'm glad he's gone, he seems like a horrid man, can we have another game of scrabble and Mummy can sort him out when she gets back from the shops"

"Ok, but I need to go to the Loo first" Peter said making an excuse to go and talk to the GP

"I think its best if you sit in the living room until help comes" said Peter to the GP

"And I will just have another game of scrabble with Howard"

The GP agreed.

About half an hour later the door bell rang

"That must be Mummy, she's forgotten her key again, you know Peter she's getting such a terrible memory"

## Chapter 18

“So what happened?” asked Frazer

“Well sadly he was taken off to hospital, that was two weeks ago and he’s being assessed by a Social Worker, she thinks that he’ll have to go into residential care”

“So what was it like being his sibling?” laughed Frazer as he sipped his cup of tea.

“Strangely it was fine, I didn’t mind at all, as long as he was happy”

Frazer was staying at Ed’s house as there wasn’t room in Emily for both of them. He had come for a week and had borrowed Peter’s bike while he was at work to explore the local area and had also spent time with Ed.

Ed had gone out for the day with a friend and so Peter and Frazer were having a nice catch up.

So what do you fancy doing? Said Peter

“I’d quite like to meet those friends of yours in Gnosall if they’re around”

“OK I’ll give them a ring”

Peter phoned Mike and Doreen who were in and happy to meet with Frazer. They agreed to meet at 12.30 at their house. He sent Ed a text so that he didn’t wonder where they were.

“I’ve just got time for a shower, then” said Frazer

Peter caught up with his emails whilst Frazer was in the shower.

There was one from Joy giving him an update on Howard. Peter had been careful not to share any specific details with Frazer as he respected confidentiality, but realised that what had happened to Howard could have happened to anyone and what a lonely life it could be. He felt a little sad about it all but knew that he couldn’t take everyone’s life stories on his shoulders.

“Right, I’m ready when you are?” said Frazer bouncing into the room.

They parked Emily outside Mike and Doreen’s house as she was too big to go on the drive. Peter was careful not to go too near to the neighbours. .

Doreen opened the door and darted for Peter, giving him one of her wonderful hugs and then she said hello to Frazer.

“Can’t I have one too” said Frazer laughing.

“Why not” said Doreen giving Frazer a hug

Mike hovered on the doorstep.

They entered the living room and Chloe Kingdom was sitting there.

“You don’t mind me tagging along do you?” she asked

“Of course not” said Frazer.

“Fancy going to Norbury Junction?” said Mike

“We quite like the cafe there”

The weather looked a bit doubtful so they could sit in or out.

They all piled into Doreen’s car which was a bit of a squeeze but it wasn’t far so it didn’t really matter.

“This is nice” said Frazer heading towards the lock.

“I’ve never been on a canal boat” He said

“You mean narrow boat” said Chloe correcting him and standing rather close to him.

Doreen laughed and gave Peter a knowing look.

Mike took a photo of the group of them standing by the lock, sent it to Peter who forwarded it to Ed.

It had taken Peter a few seconds to understand what Doreen was hinting at and then thought “surely not, Frazer had always been interested in younger pretty women”

Peter chose fish and chips with mushy peas which was reasonably good.

“So Peter was telling me about your book about Coincidences” Frazer said  
“You sound as though you don’t believe in them” Chloe replied  
“Well they don’t seem to happen much to me” he said  
“Maybe you just don’t notice them” Chloe said  
“Maybe”

After they’d eaten they walked along the canal for a bit before returning to Mike and Doreen’s.  
“Fancy a game of scrabble?” Doreen asked.  
Peter suddenly found tears running down his face.  
“Are you OK?” asked Mike  
“Yes” said Peter but actually feeling a little overwhelmed.  
He wiped the tears away and forced himself to be controlled.

“So what was that about?” asked Frazer as they got back to Ed’s  
“What was what about?” said Ed looking up from his newspaper.  
“Nothing” said Peter  
“Well it didn’t look like nothing, its not like you to cry in public”  
“Oh just leave it” snapped Peter and left the room.

He needed time on his own.

He sat in Ed’s garden.

A few minutes later Ed came out.

“No I haven’t come to ask anything” said Ed. “Frazer and me are popping to the shops and I just wanted to know if you wanted anything!”

“No, I’m fine” said Peter feeling a little guilty for his behaviour, it wasn’t like him to storm off like that.

While Ed and Frazer were out Peter thought about the last few days, then his phone pinged. There was a message from Joy saying that Howard was home and could he carry on working with him. Peter said yes, but he just wasn’t sure, what if it happened again and he couldn’t manage. He began to panic, but then he heard the front door and Frazer and Ed’s chatter which helped him control his fear.

He was pleased that Frazer got on with his Grandad, because that’s what he felt about Ed. He had been guilty thinking that way but thought why shouldn’t he think of him in that way. He had asked Mum about it a few days before and she thought that Dad would be perfectly happy about it.

“So I see that you have been flirting with Chloe” said Peter looking directly at Frazer.

“Whats wrong with that?” Frazer said laughing

“Nothing, except you always fancied girls who were young and pretty” said Peter

“Well maybe my taste has changed, but I don’t think I’d want a long distance relationship” Frazer acknowledged.

“No its quite hard” said Ed, thinking of Emily and feeling a pang.

“Ok I’ll tell you” said Peter suddenly

“Yes I did cry, it was thinking about the old boy in his confused world, I just felt so sad about it. I don’t want to feel that way as I know it doesn’t help anything but I thought how lonely it must be waiting to see if your Mum is coming home, because you have forgotten that she died a long time ago and you are no longer a child”

“Yes, the mind is a strange thing” said Ed

“But what can be done about it?” said Frazer

“There are loads of people with dementia, being supported by a crumbling system”

“I wouldn’t say that its crumbling, its just not glamorous for enough people to choose and the pay is so poor. Look at you and me Frazer, you have a good paid job so that you can afford to come and visit me when you like and I was the same. If I didn’t have the money that I have been given I would really struggle on the pay that I get and I know that Joy would like to pay more but its just



not possible with everything that she has to pay for. Its not just people and equipment there's also training and the transport bills must be enormous" Peter said in a passionate tone.

"So you want me to become a carer?" said Frazer laughing

"Why not?" said Ed

"I'd be hopeless" Frazer said

"No I think you're wrong, in lots of ways you would be wonderful, its just giving up what you do and that's the major problem, it shouldn't be an all or nothing system. Although I have only done caring for a few weeks I know that I wouldn't want to do it full time on a long term basis, but if someone said I could do it two days a week and the rest of the week I was an Engineer I think that I could be very happy"

"So why can't you do that?" asked Ed

"I don't know, maybe I can in time but for now I know that I need to do this for at least a year and to learn as much as I can." Peter exclaimed.

Ed smiled listening to the discussion. He was so proud of Emily's grandchild, his grandchild he thought and then pushed the idea to the back of his mind, but that's the way that he felt about him. He was so happy now that Peter was in his life. He had always wondered about him and his Father. Yes he had regrets for not having his own family but there was nobody that he felt the way that he did for Emily. "Why is it that you have to wait until you're old to meet the love of your life" he thought but didn't want to taint his wonderful memories of Emily with regrets. He would just have to enjoy Peter while he was here and hope that they had time and selfishly hoped that Peter would want to stay living nearby.

Ed decided to go to Amerton farm to see if the waitress was still there, he didn't know what she looked like, but he might be able to guess that she was the one.

The next day Peter and Frazer had a massive brunch and then Peter drove Frazer to Stafford station. He waved Frazer off at the station and felt a little sad that he wouldn't see him for awhile. He also remembered the day that he walked out of the station to find his hotel and found both Mark at the pub and Ed in the bookshop. That seemed such a long time ago, years, rather than months. He hadn't seen Mark for awhile and thought that he should message him.

Peter was doing the evening shift but had mixed feelings about seeing Howard again. As he drove back to Houghton there was a ping on his phone.

He had rather neglected Emily, she needed a spruce up and he had enough time before he started his shift but firstly Peter checked the messages on his phone. There was a big smiley face from Frazer and there was an email from Joy. He opened the email and found that Carole King was in hospital. She had fallen with a suspected broken hip and so he had a new service user Stephen Cartwright who he would be visiting jointly with Alison one of the other carers. He was a young man with severe disabilities. Joy said that Alison would fill him in. He was to visit Stephen before he went to Howard.

Peter made himself a cup of coffee and then started reading his book, a murder mystery that Mike had given him ages ago and he'd forgotten about. He got so engrossed in the book that he forgot all about his plans to give Emily a good clean.

"Oh well, there's only me, it will wait for another day" he thought as he made himself a sandwich" He would be eating late tonight he knew but felt that it was too early to have a larger meal after the brunch. He could eat the sandwich between service users.

Starting work at 3pm wasn't the best of times but somebody had to

## Chapter 19

It was a sunny day and so Peter decided to ride his bike to Stephen Cartwright's flat. He had agreed to meet Alison outside. They would only have a few minutes before they were due at Stephen's to talk about him.

Peter was surprised to find a young woman with an old car.

"Before you say anything" she said

"Yes I'm only 20 but I'm committed to the service users and I'm trying to run two careers alongside each other"

"That's great" said Peter

"What's your other career?"

"I'm at Staffordshire Uni studying Journalism.....anyway we need to concentrate on Stephen. I've been working with him for about 6 months. I could work with him alone but Joy isn't happy because Stephen is only a few years older than me and although severely physically disabled, mentally he is very alert and well you can guess the rest...."

"Oh" is all that Peter could say.

"You are Ok with helping with personal care..... Joy said you were!"

Peter laughed.

"I prefer poo to sick," Peter commented

They both laughed

"When you said that he's bright, how bright?"

"Well nobody actually knows, Peter was abandoned by his parents as a young child and was brought up in the care system. I think his education has been lacking. He does have speech but you need to get used to it and at times he can get frustrated and has been known in his way to lash out"

Alison showed Peter the combination to get the key to the flat. He jotted the number in his diary.

They entered the flat which was purpose built and found Stephen in bed.

"Morning Steve, how are you? Alison said touching Stephen's hand

Stephen smiled and said something that Peter couldn't understand.

"This is Peter, he's come to help you get going today, he's only been working for the agency a short time and so you will be nice to him won't you? I've told him that sometimes you are a grumpy shit" Stephen laughed and said something that Peter could vaguely understand as hello.

"Hi Stephen, or should I call you Steve?" Peter said.

Peter was pleased with how things had gone. He had washed Stephen and chatted to him and it was obvious that Stephen was listening to everything that he said.

As he left he told Stephen that he would be back the next morning, as Joy had said that she wanted him to visit each morning of his shifts.

"I think he likes you" Alison said as they left the flat

"What did you do before you started as a carer?"

"I was an engineer"

"One day you'll have to tell me your story" she said

"But I must be off, I'm late and my next service user panics if I'm too late, see you tomorrow"

Alison got in her car waved and drove off

"Wow" thought Peter

Howard didn't live far from Stephen and that's why Peter thought he could use his bike but realised that it was much easier having a car.

Howard was still in bed when Peter arrived.

“Morning Howard” Peter said as he knocked his bedroom door.

“Morning” said Howard

“I’m sorry but I’ve forgotten your name”

“Oh I wouldn’t worry about that, I’m terrible at remembering names” Peter said

“I’ve been in hospital, you see. I had a funny phase and .....well needed some extra treatment, but I’m a lot better now, this dementia lark is so annoying you know. I hope I didn’t do anything to annoy anyone. I certainly don’t want to be a bother.”

“What are you reading?” said Peter, spying Howard’s book on his bedside table.

“A detective, but it takes me ages to read these days, its my annoying memory.”

“Well if you like I have time to help you have a shower or bath” said Peter

“Yes that would be nice. I think I’d like a bath”

“Do you like it with bubbles in it or without?” Peter asked

“Oh with bubbles” said Howard smiling

“I like to sing in the bath, you can sing with me if you like”

“If I know the songs otherwise you’ll have to teach me” Peter said.

Peter’s shift went well, although he was a little late for his third service user he was able to cope with them all and finished his morning shift at one. He was due to start again at 4pm and got back to Emily by 1.30. He made a sandwich and then lay on his bed. He felt tired and decided to have a power sleep. It was his Mum that suggested it. She’d told him just to have half an hour and put a timer on his mobile. He had tried it a few times and found that it was a good way to rebuild his energy.

Ed sent him a message asking if he’d like to come for tea but Peter had to decline as he probably wouldn’t finish his shift until about 9pm. Peter had different service users in the evening to the mornings as Joy felt that both workers and service users benefitted from regular but different workers.

Peter had no problems with his evening shift. He had driven in Emily as he knew that it would be dark and that the lights on his bike weren’t effective enough.

When he got to Ed’s there was a car on his drive and so he wondered who his visitor was.

Ed opened the door.

“I’ve prepared you some food but if you don’t want it I can eat it tomorrow” Ed said

“Actually, I’m starving” Peter exclaimed.

“I’ll bring it in the living room”

Peter dropped himself down on the settee, although he’d had a rest he still felt tired, “being a carer was hard work” He thought

“I thought you had a visitor” Peter said after he’d thanked Ed for the stew and dumplings.

“Oh the car, its a present” Ed said flippantly

“Oh who from?”asked Peter

“No its from me, to you” Ed said

Before Peter could get a word in Ed told him that he didn’t like him riding a bike at night time and that he really did need a car to do the job.

“What if you get held up with a service user” he commented

“But I can go in Emily”

“No, she’s lovely but not practical, besides I’ve sold two pictures recently, just be grateful and leave it at that besides why shouldn’t I treat my grandson!”

“Oh, thanks Ed but....”

“Well I’ve said it now” Ed remarked

“Well that’s what you feel like to me “

Peter was quiet for a moment, he ate his stew while Ed looked at the newspaper

After an awkward few minutes Ed read out a choice of TV programmes.

“Do we have to?” asked Peter

“I’d rather just chat and I feel the same and I’m very grateful, and it will be easier”

“Hold on a minute, get your breath, you mean about the Grandad bit”

“Yes”

Peter put his plate on the table next to him, got up and went towards Ed to give him a hug.

Ed hesitated for a minute and then said

“What the hell” and hugged Peter tightly.

“But I still want to call you Ed” Peter said

“Of course” said Ed

“And I am really grateful about the car, you are right and I can keep Emily in the garage when I move here” Peter said

“I want to show you something” Ed said sitting next to Peter on the settee

Ed showed Peter a photo on his phone.

“Is this her?” he said

Peter saw a picture of the waitress from the farm.

“I went there today and well I know her, she’s the grand daughter of an old friend of mine”

“Its a very small world” said Peter laughing

“So it is her then?”

“Yes”

“Oh and no I didn’t say anything about you. I just wondered that’s all, she works there three days a week...and no I wasn’t nosy...I don’t know her whole life story”

“Guess what” said Frazer when he messaged Peter later that night

“What” Peter messaged back

“I’ve got a new girlfriend and no its not Chloe, its a nice girl a few years younger than me, a school teacher called Kirsty”

“That’s great” messaged Peter.

Peter thought about the waitress. Ed hadn’t even told him her name. He thought about Frazer with his new girlfriend. He thought about Helen and then out of the blue he got a message from Claire.

“Sorry I haven’t been in touch for awhile, how are you?”

It was late and Peter was tired he decided not to reply straight away.

The next morning his Robin was waiting for him. Peter wondered what the Robin would do when he moved into Ed’s, they hadn’t fixed a date but Peter felt ready to move in, he enjoyed Ed’s company but they also liked their own space and so Peter thought that it would work out Ok. His parents were coming to stay over the weekend and so he thought that perhaps they could decide after that.

He would have to get the car insured during his lunch break and so he drove Emily to Steve’s house.

When he got there, there was no sign of Alison and instead there was a middle aged woman waiting.

Peter got out of the car and went towards Stephen’s flat. The woman joined him and introduced herself as Louise. She said that she’d been here once before but some time ago.

“Alison is sick” she said

“Oh, right” said Peter

“probably a hangover, you know what young people are like” said Louise

Peter didn’t feel very comfortable with Louise and neither did Stephen.

Peter wasn’t very happy with the patronising way that Louise spoke to Stephen as if he was a little boy and talked to Peter as if Stephen didn’t understand anything, whereas Peter knew that even after one day that Stephen was a thinking human being.

“Well see you tomorrow” Louise said as they left Stephen’s

“I hope not” thought Peter.

It was the first time that he had felt like that since starting his job, but he did really hope that he wouldn’t work with Louise again and could understand why Stephen might get frustrated and try to lash out.

## Chapter 20

Peter was relieved to see Alison when he got to Steve Cartwright's house.

"Oh I'm sorry about yesterday" she said

"I'm one of those women that suffers I'm afraid. I've tried all sorts of pain killers but they just knock me out. A friend uses Chinese medicine and so I have made an appointment with the person she sees, but then you don't want to hear about this. How did you get on yesterday? Who did Steve with you?"

Peter smiled as Alison came out with a stream of questions. He told her about working with Louise.

"Oh not the grumpy one who treats Service Users as if they don't exist!" she said

"Yes" Peter replied

"Joy knows all about her, but she's been working for the agency for a long time and gets the work done so she feels there's not a lot she can do. Anyhow we better crack on"

They entered the house and found Steve in good spirits, it was obvious that he liked Alison or even more so, Peter could see why Joy was concerned that Alison didn't work with him alone.

After three days working with Steve he was beginning to understand him more, as they reached the cars Peter asked Alison who came in to support him after they left during the day.

"You know I'm not sure" she said

"Why don't you look at his care plan sometime and it will tell you, I've been so busy recently that besides doing the basics I just have so little time. I know its terrible and I'd like to do more but its just the shortage of workers. Joy is always trying to recruit new people but so few stay any length of time. I'm just lucky to have lectures in the afternoons and so I can work mornings and then go to Uni afterwards. I did the work originally just for money because I was fed up with my evenings being all taken working in a bar, but now I love it and would love to do it long term but whether its possible when I'm a Journo I'm not sure"

Peter had a good session with Howard who remembered who Peter was and whilst he prepared his breakfast Howard told him about his job as a GP.

"I miss it you know" Howard said with a tear in his eye.

"It was my life. I just loved helping people and especially people with dementia. I never thought that it would happen to me."

Peter wasn't sure what to say

"I know its hard to know what to say" said Howard reading Peter's mind.

"I still like to follow all the latest research to see if they have any more clues. I am very grateful to you for putting up with me" he said

"You know Howard" Peter said

"I'm grateful to you for opening my eyes to a world I knew very little about. I was an Engineer before I did caring. It was my Grandmother who made me realise that there was more for me to explore in the world"

"She must have been a good woman!"

"She was, but it was after she died that my life changed, but I won't bother you with it all"

Peter started to feel very emotional but Howard insisted on him telling him.

"The good thing is that you can tell me anything" said Howard

"But I'm likely to forget most or all of it anyhow"

They both laughed. Peter saw a kind hearted man who must have been an amazing GP and understood how he must get frustrated at times.

That evening Peter talked to Ed about being a carer.

"It's a shame that there aren't more people like you" Ed said

"What do you mean?" Peter queried

"People who have given up good jobs to care for people"

“But I don’t think I’ve given it up forever, although I’ve only done this for a few weeks I know that I wouldn’t like to do it full time forever. Alison, who I work with is a student and works in the mornings and then goes to Uni in the afternoons but she says that she is just lucky that her lectures fit in”

“What is she studying?”

“Journalism”

“Well she would be the ideal person to write about it then. Maybe she could do it for one of her Uni projects”

“That would be a brilliant idea, I’ll mention it to her when I’m next working with her.”

Peter went back to Emily. He would be moving in to Ed’s the next day and so had booked the day off work as he needed to do some sorting first and Ed said that he’d like to take him out for a meal in the evening to celebrate. Working the split shifts left very little time for doing anything in the evenings as he generally didn’t get back home until around 9ish.

At 10 am the next morning Peter drove Emily to Ed’s. Although it was only a short distance he needed to empty his possessions before he drove her to the garage in Gnosall. He had arranged to pop into Doreen and Mike’s who said that they would give him a lift back to Ed’s.

It seemed strange leaving Red Lion farm. He had enjoyed living there but he was looking forward to living somewhere with a bath again. He didn’t mind showers but liked to ponder life whilst soaking in a bath.

Although Peter was contracted to work five days a week recently he had been working six as Joy was so short of staff. She had promised him that it wouldn’t be for long but even three weeks of only one day off was tiring. He thought about what Ed had said about Alison using it as a Uni project and would suggest it to her tomorrow if he had the chance.

Some carers worked from 7am until 4 pm but he had been given the split shifts with generally a three hour gap in the middle. He was one of the few men working for the agency and there was an increasing amount of male service users who either themselves or their families had requested a male carer.

“Stop worrying about tomorrow, today he thought to himself”

Although Peter had increasing confidence in lots of things he did still have a tendency to worry too much.

“You can’t do everything” Mum had said when He’d talked to her the night before.

She was excited to tell him that Dad was still playing his guitar and had even played in a pub.

Peter was pleased but wasn’t surprised when Mum reminded him that he promised to sing with Dad playing sometime.

When that sometime was Peter hadn’t a clue as even getting one day off for moving he knew was hard for Joy.

“Need some help?” said Ed, as Peter started unloading Emily

“No, I’m nearly done, you could make me a cup of tea though”

“Ok when, now or twenty minutes?”

“Oh about ten, I should think. I can sort it all out properly later!”

The room Peter was using was bigger than Ed’s and had a double bed. Ed had insisted that he have the bigger room but he was pleased as he didn’t realise how much stuff that he had. He had still left certain things in Emily for when he went away which he hadn’t any idea when that would be.

In his old job he could pretty well choose most of the time when he took leave, but with this he knew that if he had time off then people like Stephen would miss him and have the Louise’s of the world cover for him.

“Can I come to Gnosall with you?” said Ed whilst they drank their cup of tea.  
“I just don’t seem to have gone anywhere much recently”  
“Of course, I’ll be leaving in about half an hour if that’s ok with you”  
“Just give me ten minutes notice and I’ll be ready whenever you want to go”

This was the first time that Ed had asked Peter to take him anywhere and thought that perhaps he should have suggested it before. Ed was nearly ninety and had given up his car before Peter knew him.

They arrived at Mike and Doreen’s but this time there was no Chloe sitting in the living room.

“Nice to see you Ed” said Mike

“No Chloe today” Peter said smiling.

“Oh yes that was funny the way that she flirted with your friend” said Mike

“I think he was just as much a flirt” Peter replied

“Peter doesn’t have time for any of that” said Ed

“He’s far too busy with his job”

The plan for the evening meal changed as Ed was getting on so well with Doreen and Mike that they chose to go to the Boat Inn instead.

They arrived at 7pm, Doreen had booked a table to make sure that they could get one.

“Hello” said Ed as they went to the bar

“So you’re working here now!”

“Hello Ed” said the bar maid who Peter recognised as the waitress from the farm.

She looked shyly at Peter and he smiled at her.

“Oh I know you met briefly before, this is Peter, Peter meet Karen”

Peter and Karen both acknowledged each other.

Doreen and Mike looked at each other and smiled.

“No, I’m far too busy” said Peter as they sat at their table, understanding what they were all thinking.

“She lives in Gnosall” said Doreen.

“But I didn’t know her name, I think she’s a bit younger than you, but don’t know anything about her”

“I do” said Ed

Ed told them that Karen had given up her career to look after her mother and support her father. The Mother had died a few months ago from cancer and the father who was a friend of his was trying to encourage Karen to restart her career.

“What did she do?” asked Mike

“You know I’m not really sure, it was something in the media, I think”

They had a nice evening and then Mike gave them a lift back to Ed’s which Peter had to now begin to think of as home.

He had an early start so he thanked Ed for the meal and said that he would see him after his first visits.

Peter lay on his new bed, the mattress was more comfortable than he had expected. He looked around his new room at all his things in bags and boxes and at the curtains which he would never have chosen and then it suddenly struck him that one day this whole place would be his, but he hoped that it wouldn’t be soon as he was enjoying coming home to an old man with a heart of gold.



## Chapter 21

Peter arrived home feeling tired. He had seen Ed at lunch time briefly, but didn't have time for a chat as he had to rush out to cover someone who was off sick. He didn't mind doing extra hours occasionally but found it was a long day working from 7am until 9pm with only a short break in the middle. He knew some carers who did this regularly but he didn't know how they had the energy.

"You look tired" said Ed

"I am, totally knackered"

"Have you eaten?"

"Not much"

"There's a lasagne in the freezer, do you want me to heat that up for you with a bit of salad?"

"That would be nice" said Peter who had forgotten how starving he actually was.

"I saw Karen again today" Ed said

"She asked how you were, she's looking for jobs at the moment, her Dad is encouraging her to go for media jobs, apparently she was in TV production and doing quite well but had her confidence knocked. He thinks that she might have to move to Manchester which he is encouraging her to do but she is reluctant to leave him"

"How old is he?"

"In his 70's, he was quite old when he had her and his health hasn't been that good either"

"I can understand how she feels but also can see why he doesn't want to hold her back, maybe I could help support him if he needs any help"

The microwave pinged and Ed took out the lasagne, he had placed some ready mixed salad on the plate whilst he was talking to Peter.

Peter took his plate and a drink of squash into the living room. He ate his meal as if he hadn't eaten for a week.

"Shall we watch something?" Said Ed

"I'm not fussed, its up to you" Peter replied.

The food had helped his tiredness.

The conversation returned to Karen and her father.

"I'll ring Doug [which was his name] and suggest it to him and see what he says but you mustn't take on too much, you need some life of your own" Ed said.

"Maybe we could watch a film?" Peter suggested, knowing that it was really what Ed wanted to do.

"You choose" he said

Ed chose a detective story and fortunately it had quite a good plot and they shared what they thought might happen. Peter enjoyed this, it was exactly what he felt like doing, just living in the moment with Ed, not bothering about anything. He knew that he would treasure these moments forever as he did the times he had with Granny.

The alarm rang and another day started. It was raining outside but it didn't bother Peter.

Howard was in top form, he had been like this for several weeks and in some ways it seemed strange being his carer as he could do so much for himself. Peter had realised that Howard could make his own breakfast and do other tasks and the only reason that he had done them for him was because that's what he had been told by the agency.

It was Chloe that had challenged this attitude. One day when he was visiting Mike and Doreen She had been there and talked about the fact that so many older people became dependent not because they couldn't do things, but because they didn't need to do things. Peter had talked to Howard about this the next time he was there and Howard had agreed with her view and said that he wanted Peter to force him to do things if he got lazy.

Peter had discussed this with Joy in his supervision and it was Peter that suggested that it was written down so that people who were intelligent but with dementia could read it if they were able but had forgotten.

He had now been working for the agency for six months and in that time had seen lots of workers come and go.

“What would you feel if I cut my hours” Peter had said to Joy a few weeks ago.

“I would understand” she said

“But I would struggle, you are so good Peter, I would want to keep you on whatever terms you wanted, but its so hard getting enough people and you know that I can’t afford to increase my pay rates.”

Peter felt a mixture of awkwardness and sadness. He had always been very committed to what he did and even since being a carer had still continued to do small pieces of work for Dave. To start with he felt awkward but now was able to say no if he felt that what Dave gave him was not realistic.

“I’ll always have you back” Dave had said

“But I know you’ll never want to”

Alison looked worried, she just wasn’t herself and did the tasks at Steve’s rather robotically.

“Whats up?” said Peter as they left Steve’s

“Nothing why?” she said

“Look I know there is so just spill the beans”

“You are getting too good at this people stuff” she laughed

“Well” he said persistently

“Ive been offered a job”

“Thats great”

“But its in London”

“When”

“As soon as I finish my degree”

“So”

“I just don’t know”

“Why, it sounds like a great opportunity”

“But I’m not sure its me, London and I’d miss this and”

“So when do you have to decide?”

“Today”

“Oh”

Peter could feel the pressure that Alison was under.

“Maybe you could toss a coin” he said

“I knew someone that did that”

“But everyone would think I was mad if I didn’t take it”

“To hell with everyone, its you that matter, not what they think”

Peter was surprised at himself, he sounded more like Frazer than himself but it felt good.

“Do you really think you can live your life like that, tossing a coin?” Alison said

“Well I wouldn’t have done a couple of years ago, but now, yes I do”

“Maybe I’ll try it” she said

“let me know” Peter replied

“Ok, see you tomorrow”

They drove off in different directions and Peter once again was amazed at his outspokenness.

Ed laughed when Peter told him about tossing the coin.

They’d decided to have tea at the pub and walked as it wasn’t far.

“Oh no” said Peter when they walked in and found that it was karaoke night, you knew didn’t you?” he said glaring at Ed.

Ed laughed

“It will do you good, you’ve been working too much, you need to do something on your nights off occasionally rather than just watching TV with an old man”

“So I come to a pub with an old man instead” Peter laughed

“So I’ll do it if you do” Peter said and they did.

Ed had a wonderful crooners voice and Peter could see all the older women totally enchanted by him.

While they ate their Fish and chips which were good, a few people came over and congratulated them.

“Have you done this before?” Peter asked

“No, I never had the nerve”

Peter was amazed he had always seen Ed as a confident, outgoing person.

“I used to be painfully shy” Ed added

“And in lots of ways just felt invisible”

“So in lots of ways you were just like me”

“Yes I suppose so”

“So when did that change?”

“You know” Ed said smiling

“You mean that you were like that until you met Granny?”

Ed nodded

The rest of the evening was fun, they chatted to people Ed knew and some strangers and Ed did a duet with a woman he knew from the village.

“We went to school together” he said as he sat back down.

“Neither of us married”

“So she’s nearly ninety too?” Peter asked

“She was ninety about a month ago, she’s always been in the church choir, she asked me to join years ago but I declined making excuses that I was too busy”

“So did you fancy her when you were at school?” Peter asked laughing.

“Oh yes, I still do, just because you’re Gran was the love of my life doesn’t mean that I can’t fancy people”

“Of course not” Peter said trying to be reassuring.

“Why don’t you ask her out?” Peter suggested

“No I’m too old for that”

Peter decided to leave it but wondered what it would be like to fancy someone for over 80 years and never tell them.

It made him think about Karen as he realised that he really fancied her, perhaps he should take the risk he thought, especially if she was planning to move away. He might never get the chance again and Manchester wasn’t that far away if anything came of it.

“So I tossed the coin and it told me to go” said Alison the next day

“So will you follow the coin’s advice” Peter replied

“Yes” she said

“Its scary, but if I don’t try I will never know. I’ve got a couple on months still to go but the offer is just too good, working as a Junior for the Guardian”

“Blimey, that is good” said Peter

“Oh and I’m going to write an essay about being a Journalist and a carer. I asked my Tutor about it and he thought that it was a great idea, can I interview you for it as you believe that everyone should have combination jobs?”

“Yes, if I can help, but I’m no expert” Peter said

“I wonder if there is anyone who is?” Alison queried

“I don’t know, you’ll have to do some research to find out”

“Yes, of course, I would have to anyhow, but I’m not sure where to start” she said

When he got home Peter decided to google to see if he could help Alison but he couldn’t find anything about carers and journalists, all of the references were either for one or the other.

“Fancy taking me for a pint at the Boat” Ed said a few days later when it was Peter’s night off?”

“Why the Boat?”

“I fancy a change”

“Ok” Peter said and then realised that Karen might be there. Was Ed trying to do some match making he wondered, but then he had thought about seeing if she fancied going on a date.

They walked in to the Boat and Karen was there but there seemed to be a guy that she was interested in so Peter put the idea to the back of his mind.

Ed gave Peter some money and so he went to the bar.

“Hi” said Karen

“Good to see you again”

“And you” said Peter not knowing what else to say.

## Chapter 22

“Do you mind me recording what you say?” asked Alison

“Yes, that’s fine” said Peter.

They had met at Red Lion farm so that Alison could get the information that she needed for her assignment.

“How long have you been a paid carer?” she asked

“Just over six months” Peter replied

“Do you enjoy your job?”

“Mostly”

“Oh this is so false” Alison said getting frustrated .

“Well just chat and see what you get from it” Peter suggested.

He could see that she was upset but also knew that she was determined.

“Look” he said

“Pretend you don’t know me at all and that you have one minute to grab my notice, as you know that is often the case for Journalists”

“Its so much easier with strangers” she said

“Life isn’t easy” Peter said

“Well actually thats not true, sometimes it seems very easy and at other times it feels so hard..just put the dictaphone on and see what happens, you can listen back and make sense of it later”

“Ok” she said switching back on just as the waitress came over.

“I’m sorry but we’ve run out of teacakes, is there anything else you’d like?” she asked

“No worries” said Peter

“No I’m fine”

“Grrr” said Alison

“Now I’ve got the waitress on my recording”

Peter laughed

“Its not funny!” she exclaimed

“Yes it is” laughed Peter

“Whats up? I know you, there’s something wrong”

Alison burst into tears and spilled out in what seemed like one long horrendous sentence how she had been dumped”

Peter knew nothing of her love life and decided not to ask.

“We can do this another time” he said

“It needs to be soon but I just can’t concentrate, she was the love of my life, well at least I thought so”

Peter quickly ascertained that Alison was gay or maybe bi. He didn’t really know and it didn’t matter anyhow.

“See what you feel like in a couple of days time” he said

“We can do it then”

“Ok, thanks, we’d been together just over two years but she’s left me for a man”

Peter listened for the next twenty minutes to Alison’s tale and at the end she thanked him again for listening to her.

“Anytime” he said and meant it. He liked Alison.

“You’re very quiet this evening” said Ed

“Am I?” Peter replied.

“I was just thinking about relationships and how I’ve never been really daring and I’ve never had a long term relationship”

“You’ve probably just never found the right person”

“Or maybe, I’m too scared or too fussy”

“Whats brought this on?” said Ed

“Oh nothing really” not wanting to share his discussion with Alison and his feelings towards Karen.  
“I’ve always admired people who can just jump in and make a fool of themselves” said Ed  
“And sometimes its worked”  
“Yes I know what you mean” Peter said.  
Each day as he lived with Ed he realised how similar they were in so many ways.  
“It always amazes me how daring I can be at certain things and what a wimp I am at others.”  
“Most people are like that” Ed said  
“I never knew that I could sing in front of a crowd, but you know I loved it, its just that nobody ever asked me to do it before and I didn’t feel scared at all. Some people are very good at pushing themselves forward even if they aren’t actually as good at what they have pushed themselves forward for than someone who waits to be invited.”  
“Its like that when you are at school” Peter said  
“Teachers are so busy with the disruptive and nervous children that the quiet ones often get missed”  
“Its always been like that” said Ed  
“But it doesn’t have to be” Peter replied  
“With all the modern technology there should be a way to find the quiet children, because I bet they have just as good or better ideas than the loud children, that’s why we need robots, they would find them.”  
Ed laughed  
“What, the robot is going to read their mind” he said  
“maybe one day, but for now they could interact with a robot as a young child used to with their Teddy bear, computer games are reactive, whereas a conversation with a teddy bear is proactive”  
“I think you re getting a bit deep for me” Ed stated.  
“I’ve asked her out” said Ed  
“Who?”  
“Margaret the woman I sang with in the pub”  
“Wow and did she accept”  
“Yes we’re going to Grove garden centre, they do nice cream teas there. She still drives and so she is going to pick me up”  
“That’s great, I’ll have to be brave too and ask Karen”  
“So you do like her?”  
“Yes”  
“Well go for it, there’s no time like the moment”

Peter knew that Ed was right. He went up to his room rang her number and got her answerphone. He didn’t leave a message, he wasn’t brave enough. He would have to wait for another day. Fortunately Ed had gone to bed and so he didn’t have to explain his cowardice but then he didn’t want to wait and regret not trying so he messaged her and waited.

His phoned beeped it was a message from Mum saying that they were coming to stay at Ed’s for the weekend.

Ed had obviously forgotten how crowded the spare room was and so Peter knew that he would be occupied emptying it out into either the loft or the garage. He needed to get Ed to have another exhibition as it was mostly paintings, following up having a date with Karen would have to wait.

The next morning Peter knew Ed would ask him about Karen but fortunately he didn’t appear before Peter had to head off to work.

This time Howard was in a strange mood, he knew who Peter was but he was very low.

“I won’t have much longer” he said  
“Why do you think that?” Peter asked

"I just do, its my GP instinct and because of my dementia others things have probably been missed so I wanted to show you my Will"

"Oh I don't think you should be doing that"

"I can show anyone I like" shouted Howard

Peter was rather worried. He didn't want to upset Howard, but he also didn't want to get himself into an awkward situation and so he agreed to look at the will.

"I want you to read it properly" demanded Howard

"Ok, you make your breakfast and I'll read it"

"I've forgotten what to do" Howard said

"Ok, I'll help you"

"I'm so stupid" Howard said beginning to cry.

"No You're not" Peter tried to reassure him.

"I used to be able to do so many things and now I'm just useless."

"I'll be back in a minute" Peter said and went into the living room and picked one of Howard's medical books off the shelf and opened it at whooping cough and took the book back to the kitchen.

"Right, Howard whilst I'm getting your breakfast ready I want you to read this section about whooping cough and then tell me all about it"

"Ok" said Howard who suddenly became a lot calmer.

"But I still want you to read the Will"

"Ok" I can do that while you are eating.

"You promise" Howard said in a childlike voice.

"Yes" said Peter still feeling awkward but he could talk to Joy about it later.

Peter spread the butter and marmalade on the toast the way that Howard liked, poured his cup of tea and after making sure that he was settled at the table took the Will and read it.

He skipped through the jargon to the beneficiaries which Howard had wanted to look at and saw his name. Peter was shocked, but he tried not to show it.

When Howard had finished his breakfast Peter asked him to tell him all about Whooping Cough.

For the next ten minutes he listened to the knowledge that Howard had acquired and thought that no one would consider this man had dementia. He left Howard reluctantly that day but his next service user needed his help.

"Oh dear" said Joy as Peter told her about Howard and the Will

"I'll have to consult with our Solicitors about this and his daughter, just carry on with what you are doing and hopefully Howard will forget that he asked you to look at it, fortunately I've only had this once before, just don't tell anyone else about it"

Peter felt very uncomfortable about it all but did what Joy asked. He then thought that he should have told her about Howard feeling that he didn't have much time left and so he rang her back and told her. She just said that lots of older people said that and he shouldn't bother about it if he seemed well enough.

When Peter got home he found Ed sorting out the spare room.

"No I hadn't forgotten" Ed said

"Where have you put the pictures?" Peter said

"Oh I've chucked some and put others in the shed"

"You can't do that, they'll get damp and why chuck them, they are all so good"

"But there are just too many"

"Well then we need to find a shop that will sell them"

Peter retrieved the thrown out pictures and put them in his car.

"I can put them all in Emily for now" he said

“I’ll take them over there after my shift this afternoon”

“Ok but don’t forget to take a torch it will be dark when you go in the garage”

When Peter put the remainder in the car it was completely full even on the passengers seat.

“I hope you don’t want to give anyone a lift” Ed laughed as Peter was leaving for his afternoon and evening visits.

“I’ll get a bite somewhere so don’t bother getting me some food” Peter said

He suddenly thought that as he would be in Gnosall that he could go to the Boat Inn and see if Karen was working as she hadn’t replied to his text.

He’d put a change of clothes in the car, he could change in Emily as arriving in his home care uniform would be a little off putting perhaps. He laughed at the thought of it.

Most of his service users were men and they weren’t all as pleasant as Howard or have homes as clean as his.

Tom Lucas’s house smelt awful, he was a grumpy person who sat in a chair all day and had no relatives. He had meals on wheels and three visits a day but was able to get himself upstairs to the toilet. He had looked after his wife but when she died three years before he had just given up. He was quite capable and so didn’t fit any criteria only that he was 92 and living on his own. Age UK volunteers used to visit him but even they had given up because he had been abusive towards them.

“How are you?” said Peter when he popped his head around the living room door.

“Waiting to die” said Tom

Peter came and sat opposite Tom

“What do you need help with today?”

“Nothing, you can’t bring Sally back that’s all I want”

“Have you got any pictures of her?” Peter asked, normally he’d just get on with doing anything that looked like it might need doing but he thought why not see if Tom would chat instead of just moan. Tom got out of his chair and went to the side board which was piled high with stuff and brought out an album.

“Sit next to me lad” he said

Peter sat next to him and Tom told him about all of the pictures.

“Nobody usually has the time” Tom said

Peter didn’t really have the time as he wanted to get to Gnosall but as it was his last visit he thought why not.

After seeing all the pictures and realising that half an hour had gone by Peter said that he better get on with the tasks.

“Why don’t you help me” Peter said

“We can carry on chatting then”

Peter stayed an hour longer than he should but in that time he had learnt a lot about Tom and they had got rid of all the stinking rubbish.

Peter arrived in Gnosall at 9pm, it was supposed to be his shorter day but he was pleased as Tom was smiling when he left.

He put the pictures in Emily and changed into some clean clothes and headed off to the Boat Inn, he hadn’t given up on his determination to ask Karen out.

He walked into the Boat and she was there serving at the bar.

“Hi” she said

“I was going to message back but have been so busy”

“That’s Ok I just wanted to see if you fancied going on a date with me “he said, amazed at his own outspokenness.

“Yes” she replied

“That would be nice”



## Chapter 23

“Do I look Ok?” said Peter to Ed

Ed laughed

“What are you laughing about?” said Peter getting a bit snappy

“You asking me!” said Ed

“Well I just want to..”

“I know” said Ed not giving Peter time to finish his sentence.

“But the right woman will take you whatever you look like, just go and be early she’ll like that”

Peter hadn’t felt so nervous for ages, but then he hadn’t been on a date for ages, all of his energy had been tied up with being the best he could in his new life.

He drove to the cafe where they had agreed to meet. It was in the middle of a park which meant that they could also have a walk. Karen had said that she didn’t really want to meet in a pub as she worked in one all of the time and that they were often noisy.

Peter parked the car and walked towards the cafe. Karen was already there but he wasn’t late.

They hugged each other, it seemed the right thing to do.

“I’m not late am I?” Peter asked.

“No, I’m early, its just I was ready and so I thought I might as well come and to be honest I was feeling a little nervous and well..”

“You sound just like me” Peter said laughing.

“I was just the same and I even asked Ed if I looked Ok”

“And what did he say?”

“He laughed”

All of Peter’s nerves disappeared, he felt completely at ease with Karen. They went in the cafe and decided that they would both pay for themselves and both chose the hot chocolate but different cakes.

“Try some” offered Peter referring to his apple cake.

“I was waiting for you to ask me it looks yummy, do you want to try mine?”

They ended up giving each other half of both of the cakes as they both liked each of them.

“I love sharing food” said Karen

“So do I” said Peter smiling

Karen then talked about her ex and how he never wanted to share anything.

“When did you last date?” asked Karen.

“Awhile back, but lets not talk about the past, its not that I won’t its just that I like now” Peter said

“Ok” Karen agreed..

“But then if you want to thats Ok” Peter said trying to lighten up the atmosphere.

“He was a bit of a control freak, thats all and I’ve never shared it with anyone properly and so now its hard for me to know what to do or what to expect” she said

“Well isn’t it always when you meet someone new” said Peter wondering yet again where all what seemed like wisdom was coming from.

They finished their cakes and Peter suggested them going for a walk.

“I just want to pop to the loo first” said Karen

“Oh I’ll go too” said Peter

“Shall I meet you out the front?” he remarked

She nodded approval.

She took longer than him and Peter wondered whether she was phoning a friend or trying to find a way of getting away.

“I’m sorry I was so long, there was a queue” she said

They walked for a bit past a tennis court and some beautiful flower beds and then found a bench and sat close but not too close to each other.

Karen looked at her phone.

“I just need to check the time” she said  
“I’m working tonight, in fact I work most evenings”  
“So what’s happened to your idea of moving to Manchester?” Peter asked.  
“I’m not sure” she replied.  
“I just don’t like leaving Dad, I know that he wants me to follow my dreams but..”  
“Couldn’t you find something nearer to Gnosall?”  
“Well I could try to go freelance, but I suppose I just don’t feel that I am experienced enough”  
“What is it that you want to do in the long run”  
“I’d like to direct films”  
They talked at length and then an alarm rang on Karen’s phone.  
“I set it to make sure I have enough time for work” she said  
“So I need to go soon”  
They started talking both together.  
“You go first” said Peter  
“I was just wondering if you’d like to meet again” Karen said  
Peter laughed saying that he was thinking the same.  
“I think we’ll need our diaries” said Karen  
“As we work such different hours, so shall I message you later?”  
“Yes that would be great” said Peter liking the fact that Karen was taking the lead.  
He walked her to her car. He didn’t know whether to kiss or just hug her.  
They hugged and he walked back to his. He was so keen to see her again.

“So how did it go?” said Ed  
“Great, we shared cakes and talked and talked. I really like her and we want to meet again its just trying to find a mutual time”  
“And what about her move to Manchester?”  
“She said that she wasn’t sure, she doesn’t want to leave her Dad”  
“Oh well that’s good for you then”  
“Yes but I’d never want to hold her back”  
“Its only your first date, give it time” laughed Ed.

Peter knew that Ed was right but he also knew that there was something special about Karen and he so looked forward to the next time that he would meet with her.  
Peter’s phone pinged twice, the first message was from Karen to say how she had really enjoyed their date and that she’d look in her diary after work. The second was from Joy asking if Peter could do some extra shifts and to phone her.  
He didn’t want to let Joy down as she had been very good to him but more shifts might mean it becoming more difficult to meet with Karen.  
He rang Joy.

“Hi Peter we have a couple who both have dementia but are still living at home and I thought perhaps you could work with a female colleague and visit three times a day. What do you think. It would initially be for two weeks, six days a week and then it would be reviewed. I don’t think that you’ve worked with Sarah have you? She started a few weeks before you.”

Peter asked how he would fit it in around his current service users and insisted that he carried on working with Howard.

“Oh that’s what I also needed to tell you. I’m afraid that Howard is in hospital again, he has had a stroke”

Peter felt stunned, he had got close to Howard.

“I know its a bit of a shock” said Joy

“But I’m afraid its these kinds of incidents that we have to cope with emotionally, if you need to talk about it then we can fix a specific time soon”

“And what about his will?” asked Peter

“I’ve left that in the hands of our solicitor” Joy said

“Oh and his daughter knew about it”

Peter agreed to the work on the basis that it might not be long term. He wondered how Howard’s daughter knew that he was named in Howard’s will.

A few days later Peter got the call he didn’t want to hear, Howard had passed away.

Joy had phoned him at the end of his shift. She said that she had wanted to call earlier but knew that it might be difficult for him to cope with and so had left it until 9pm deliberately.

Peter shed a few tears and then thought that he had to become stronger. He couldn’t get upset with every service user that he lost because there was always another who needed his help.

He had been messaging Karen a lot since he left her and they had agreed to meet in the middle of Peter’s shifts the next day. It wasn’t ideal but it was better than not meeting at all.

“How are you?” said Karen as she met Peter at Red Lion farm. They had decided that it was the easiest place for both of them.

“I’m Ok” Peter said, as he knew that she was referring to the news about losing Howard although he had been careful just to say he had lost one of his service users without identifying them.

“Can you imagine how many service users Louise must have lost, its no wonder that she had developed such a hard shell”

“There must be a way of getting a balance though” Karen said and referred to Joy and how positive she was about all of the work.

“And when you think about the poor pay and lack of credit that anyone really gets, well we do live in a mad world. If I was a film director I would get paid so much more money and my name would be for everyone to see but very few people would know about Louise or Joy”

“Thats true” said Peter

“But can we just enjoy this time that we have together” he remarked

“Yes” she said smiling

“And I’m going to buy you a great big ice cream, what do you want, a tub or a cornet?”

“A cornet and whatever flavour you choose”

They were sitting outside and so Peter watched Karen go to get the ice cream and felt his whole body relax. He would enjoy these next two hours he told himself and the woman who he was growing more and more fond of and in such a short time. He felt incredibly happy.

Sarah Smith had bright red hair and was about the same age as Peter. He met her in the car park outside Mandy and Martin’s house, the couple who both had dementia.

Joy had met with Peter to check out if he was Ok about Howard and had told him all about the Deans. Mandy and Martin were only in their 50’s and their GP had never come across a couple who had both developed dementia within weeks of each other. They had no children or relatives nearby to support them.

Martin had worked as a car mechanic and his boss had noticed the mistakes he had been making and also his dramatic mood change, to start with the GP had thought that it was a brain tumour but it turned out to be a progressive form of dementia. Mandy had worked as a carer and had fallen asleep on the job twice. To start with the GP thought that it was the stress of caring for Martin and working but soon realised that she too showed signs of dementia.

They had been quickly allocated a social worker who had called a planning meeting which Joy had been involved in.

Mandy and Martin had been together since teenagers and were inseparable and so the idea of them being placed away from each other just couldn't be contemplated by the people that knew them. They both had bosses who were sympathetic to their situation and helped out in little ways so that they didn't become isolated.

"What we need is a rota to support them" said Joy

Sarah and Peter were part of this rota.

## Chapter 24

Howard's daughter was waiting outside the Solicitors office when Peter arrived. She smiled at him and thanked him for all that he'd done to help Howard.

The Solicitor invited them into the office. He sat behind a large old fashioned desk whilst they sat in front.

"Right Mrs James and Mr Wells lets get down to the formalities. I witnessed Howard's will which is dated 12<sup>th</sup> September 1996." Peter was stunned but listened as the Solicitor read the contents.

"As you can see Mrs James receives the house, contents and monies contained in three accounts. Mr Wells you receive the contents of a Staffordshire railways account and are requested to dig near the Oak Tree in Howard's garden where he says you will find treasures which he wants you to have, Is everything clear?"

"Well not really, because I didn't know Howard in 1996 so are you sure that I'm the right person?"

"Well it is your full name, date of birth and you did live at the address that he named on that date didn't you?"

"Yes, but I just don't understand!"

"Well maybe your dig will give you the answers" the Solicitor said smiling.

"Howard was an extraordinary interesting man."

They shook the Solicitors hand and left. Anne, Howard's daughter had suggested having a coffee together, as they still needed to plan the funeral.

"You seem very happy about the reading of the Will! don't you think its odd about your Dad leaving me something in a Will that was written when I was a small boy?"

"I'm intrigued" she said

"After we've finished this I think we should go and dig near the Oak tree and see what we find"

"Yes Ok, but I still think you're very calm about it all"

They drank their coffee and agreed that Howard would have wanted a low key funeral and to be cremated. Anne agreed to make all of the arrangements and would contact Peter when she had found a date to see if he wanted to add anything to her plans.

"I don't think I want to dig today" said Peter soulfully.

"Can we fix another time to do it, I just feel today has been enough"

"Ok" said Anne gently.

"Here's my mobile number" Peter offered

They exchanged numbers and agreed to get in touch within the next few days. Anne seemed more excited than Peter did.

"I'm like my Dad, I love a mystery" she said.

They parted ways as Peter had his next visit with Sarah to help Mandy and Martin.

The first visit had gone Ok with both of them seeming to understand who they were and why they were visiting them, but Peter already knew from his experience with Howard that this could change very quickly and that Mandy in particular had a history of being violent not only to Martin but also towards carers and that was why two were required to work together.

Sarah seemed a down to earth person and was suitably matched with Peter. They had only had a brief chat so far and had a vague care plan.

Joy had said that it was difficult to get a more accurate one because of the short time that they had been known to the agency.

Peter parked his car and waited for Sarah. She arrived ten minutes later.

"Sorry I'm late" she said, as they walked towards the house.

"One of my service users was so slow today and it held up all the others. I haven't had any time for lunch, but never mind it won't hurt me"

They entered the house and everything seemed very quiet. They went in the living room and Mandy was watching the TV.

“Hello Mandy” said Sarah

“Remember me and Peter”

“What do you want?” said Mandy in a grumpy tone

“We’ve come to help you, where’s Martin?”

“How should I know” she said.

Sarah whispered that she would sit with Mandy whilst he go and look for Martin.

Peter looked in the kitchen, the down stairs toilet and then went up stairs, he found Martin sitting on the bedroom floor weeping. He was only wearing a vest.

Peter sat next to Martin

“Whats the matter Martin, its Peter, remember I come to help you.”

“She told me off”

“Who”

“That woman who seems to live here, she was in my bed and ordered me to get out and told me off”

“Why?”

“I don’t know”

“Well never mind shall I help you get dressed again”

“Ok, I couldn’t work out how to put my pants on”

Peter helped Martin into his clothes, [he’d left him dressed a few hours before] and then encouraged Martin to go downstairs with him.

Sarah sat with Mandy in the living room all seemed very peaceful until Peter entered with Martin.

“I told you to get out” shouted Mandy leaping out of her seat and lurching herself at Martin.”

Peter put his arms around Martin who was sobbing and led him into the kitchen. He could hear Mandy screaming at Sarah and wondered whether to leave Martin to make sure that everything was ok.

“You sit here a minute” he said to Martin

“I’ll be straight back”

Martin did as he was told while Peter went into the living room to find Mandy sitting on the floor sobbing her eyes out whilst Sarah hugged her.

Sarah made a signal like ring the phone and for Peter to leave her alone.

Peter returned to the kitchen to be with Martin.

Martin seemed more settled.

“You stay here, I’ve just go to make a phone call”

Peter phoned Joy. It felt like he was making a habit of this as he had when Howard was confused but there was no way that he and Sarah could leave Martin and Mandy in this volatile situation.

“Ok” said Joy, as Peter told her of the scenario.

“I’ll ring their Social Worker and get someone to cover your other service users”

It took an hour for someone to come which turned out to be both a social worker and a GP and eventually both Mandy and Martin were taken to hospital as this was the third time that there had been an incident in the same week.

Peter rang Joy to let her know the situation. She told him that both he and Sarah should take the rest of the day off as she had covered their other service users and that Mandy and Martin had been admitted to the hospital and so their caseloads would be changed. She would email the new list later in the day.

“It was nice meeting you” said Sarah

“It was a shame that things blew up, but I don’t think that there was anything else that we could do” she exclaimed.

They got into their separate cars and drove away.

Peter got home, went up to his room and sobbed.

“Are you Ok now” said Ed, as Peter entered the kitchen about an hour later.

“Yes, it was just a bit too much meeting with the Solicitor and then having difficult service users, I don’t know how people do this kind of work for years!”

“You’ve said that before”

“How did you get on at the Solicitors?”

Peter told him all about it.

“Intriguing, I wonder if the connection is anything to do with Emily as remember she told you to look under the Oak tree”

“Yes, but its all so bizarre, I think I’ll ring Anne, Howard’s daughter and see if we can dig near the tree tomorrow she was keen to find out what was there, it was me putting it off.”

“And what about the money in the building society, do you know how much there is?”

“No the Solicitor said that he would have to formally tell the building society and then they would contact me. He reckoned that it might take them a couple of weeks to process it”

After phoning Anne, Peter rang Karen to find that she wasn’t working that evening and so they decided to meet at the Chinese buffet in Stafford.

“That’s a good idea” said Ed, when Peter told him he wouldn’t be around for tea.

“Well actually” said Ed

“I’m going round to my Lady friends, she’s cooking me tea.”

“That’s nice” said Peter

“So its all going well then” winking at Ed

“Oh come on Peter, its not like that at our age”

“Why not?” said Peter but then deciding not to say any more.

Ed left first and looked very ‘spruced up’ Peter complemented him on how good he looked. Ed smiled back shyly.

Karen looked stunning dressed in different shades of blue, simply in jeans, trainers and a multi patterned t shirt.

She smiled as she walked towards him. They had decided to come in separate cars which didn’t make sense to Peter as they lived so close to each other, but he thought that she must have her reasons.

They entered the Chinese restaurant which was fairly empty, but then it was only just after seven, and being a Tuesday was a less popular day.

They were showed to their table and both ordered a refillable soft drink.

“I love eating lots of bits and pieces” Karen said as she filled her plate with starters.

“So do I” Peter replied.

They sat quietly eating and then Karen asked Peter about his day.

He had told her a little bit when he had talked to her earlier but now told her about the Solicitor appointment.

“Your Gran would make an intriguing story, with all of her secrets” Karen said laughing.

“Yes she certainly would” Peter laughed back.

“So tomorrow you’ll find the buried treasure!”

“Or a few rusty cans” Peter replied, they both laughed.

“I don’t think I’ve come across anyone who’s had such an exciting change in their life as you have”

“Well, its certainly been that” Peter laughed.

They had a wonderful meal together and then Karen said that she needed to get home as she had a busy day tomorrow. She told Peter that she had an interview in Manchester.. Peter’s heart sunk but he pretended to be excited for her.

“I hope it goes well” he said smiling as she went to get into the car.

“Haven’t you forgotten something” she said, offering Peter a hug, but this time he seized the moment and pulled her to him for a passionate kiss which she reciprocated.

They separated “I really must go” she said

“I’ll phone you when I’m back and see you very soon”

“Yes that would be lovely” he replied.

He waved as she drove out of the car park and walked towards his car. The sadness of the day had been lifted by that kiss and he knew now why she had insisted on coming in separate cars, even if she did move to Manchester he was determined that she would be a big part of his life.



## Chapter 25

Peter agreed to meet Anne the next day.

That night he thought about Howard and wondered why he had left him some money, could it really be as Ed had suggested a connection to Granny. Mum had laughed when she told him about it.

“You could write a book about it all” she said

Peter had never thought of writing a book but he had certainly had some strange things happen over the last year.

Karen messaged him to say that the interview had gone well and that she was staying at a friend's in Manchester.

Peter liked her telling him what she was doing, in fact he liked her a lot. He'd never thought when he saw this nervous waitress at the farm that one day he would be going out with her.

Ed had gone to bed early and so Peter had just watched whatever came on, there was nothing that appealed to him. He'd liked to have listened to some music or read a book but he just felt restless and couldn't settle at anything. At ten thirty he decided to go to bed. He had his morning shift starting at seven and would meet Anne at Howard's house at two before he started the afternoon shift that was normally around four but could vary.

He seemed to have very few regular people and was slightly jealous of the carers who always went to the same people, but Joy said that she knew that he was very adaptable and she had to think of the workers with families and those that had worked for the agency for many years.

“I have to make the most of you” she said one day

“I know that you won't work for us forever”

It seemed that Joy knew more than he did, but for now he needed to settle and sleep and not think about anything particular. He put on his head phones to listen to some music and the next thing he knew was that his alarm was going off ready for a new day.

He had a message on his phone from Mum she was wondering what he was doing for his birthday. Peter had forgotten all about it, which was on midsummers day. He thought of all the things that had happened since his last one and couldn't believe that within two weeks he would be a year older. Christmas had been a very low key affair as he was working most of it, in fact he realised that he hadn't had much time off at all and thought perhaps he could go to Guildford for his birthday but then wondered whether he could spend it with Karen. They had only technically been going out for a few weeks but he felt very close and comfortable with her, in fact perhaps too comfortable. They never argued about anything.

It was time to move otherwise he would be late for work and was working alongside Louise and so he couldn't be late, she was so efficient and with many of the service users that was what was needed.

He showered and ate a quick breakfast of cereal, washed up his bowl quickly and sipped a glass of orange juice and then headed off for work. There was no sign of Ed when he left.

Peter was beginning to see a different side to Louise and regretted the first impressions he had made of her. She did have a caring side and only really rushed because the time allowed was so little. In between the shifts he found that she went to visit her own Mother several times a week, who was in a nursing home. She said that she rushed home to prepare the evening meal for her family and then headed back to work. She had two teenage sons and a husband who she said was a bit of a worrier. Several of the service users liked to hear about her life and so she shared the latest events. Louise said she didn't have to but knew that so many service users were lonely and the highlight of their day was when she and Peter visited and by sharing her family it made them feel that they were part of a family.

One day Olive Carter had asked Peter if he was married and had children. He had laughed. She told him that she had married when she was nineteen and had three children before she was twenty five.

They were all retirement age now with their own Grandchildren but she rarely saw them as they all lived in different parts of the country. Peter felt sad for her, but then knew how easily this could happen as he hadn't seen much of his Mum and Dad over the last year.  
Peter liked Olive.

They left the last service user and went their own ways. Peter worked with Louise in the morning but his evening shifts were mostly with people who only needed one carer.

He popped home for a quick lunch and found Ed sitting on his own in the garden.

"Are you alright?" asked Peter.

"Oh fine, I was going to meet Margaret today but she's not feeling very well"

"Oh that's a shame, you could come with me to Howard's house to dig for buried treasure if you like"

"Are you sure, would err wots her name be ok about that?"

Peter laughed. Ed's memory wasn't as good as when he first knew him, but then he was getting on a bit.

"I think that she would be fine about it" Peter said

"Well I'd like that, when are you going?"

"I'm meeting her there at two and so probably leave at about quarter to as you know that Howard's place isn't far away"

"Ok, I'll be ready, I've had my lunch but wouldn't mind a cuppa if you're putting the kettle on!"

Peter smiled and headed into the kitchen, swilled out Ed's favourite cup and popped a tea bag into it.

Anne opened the door looking a bit low.

"This is Ed, I hope you don't mind me bringing him along"

"That's Ok, I remember you knew Peter's Granny!" she said to Ed

"Yes" said Ed soulfully

"I've got a couple of spades and a fork ready, I'm not sure which will be easiest to use"

They went through the house to the french windows in the living room which lead to the garden.

Anne left them in the garden saying that she needed to just pop to the loo.

"Is she Ok?" asked Ed

"She doesn't look too good, perhaps you should just check on her. I can sit on one of these chairs and wait for you"

"Ok" said Peter

He went back into the house and found Anne sobbing in the kitchen.

"I'm sorry" she sobbed

"Don't be" Peter said offering Anne a hug which she accepted readily and continued to sob.

"What about Ed?" she sobbed

"Oh don't worry about him, he'll be fine waiting"

"Its just that I miss Dad so much, I was being too brave. There were things to organise and..."

"Shh" Peter said holding her tightly.

"If you hadn't been upset I would have worried, we all deal with it in different ways. I know I shouldn't but in the short time I knew your Dad I was fond of him and then when the Will was read formally I was shocked and so surprised by your reaction"

"Why?"

"A complete stranger getting left something in his Will, it must have seemed crazy especially when you saw the date of his Will and he hadn't left anything to your Mum"

"Thats because she had money in her own right and insisted that she didn't need anything, anyhow I'm feeling a lot better now and we can't leave Ed so lets get on with the task"

They walked back though to the living room and out towards Ed who was smelling a rose.

"Its beautiful" Ed said

"I hope you're Ok now!" he said directed at Anne

"Yes, thanks"

"Well, we better crack on" said Peter.

They took the spades and fork down to the Oak Tree and decided that each of them would start digging in different spots around the tree.

After half an hour Anne suggested them stopping for a cup of tea, but just at that moment Ed, who was using the fork thought that he had hit something hard.

Peter came over with his spade and together they explored the area.

"There's definitely something here" said Ed

"Do you want me to help" Anne asked.

They ignored her offer and Ed got on his hands and knees and just like a dog started pushing the earth away from the hole.

"Its here" he said excitedly

"How big is it?" said Anne

"I'm not sure, do you have a trowel it would be easier to clear the earth."

Anne went off to the garden shed and came back with a couple of trowels, then both Ed and Peter kneeled on opposite sides and gradually a metal box appeared which was about two feet square.

Peter then got the spade down the side of the box and started to try to leaver it out.

After another ten minutes of leavering and pushing soil out of the way they managed to get the box out of the ground.

Anne noticed that there was something written on the lid.

"I'll go and get a wet cloth, so we can read it better" Anne said, popping back inside the house.

Peter lifted the box.

"Its quite heavy" he said.

Anne wiped the surface of the box and was shocked when she read the name Peter.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Peter when he saw his name.

"This is crazy"

He carried the box to the table near the french windows and tried to open the lid, surprisingly it opened quite easily.

"Whats in it?" said Ed

"A lot of coins, thats why it was so heavy"

Peter took out a handful of coins but the strange thing was that that they were all pesetas. He placed them on the table. Underneath the coins was a blue bag made of material with a pull string at the top.

"Whats that?" said Anne

"I haven't a clue" Peter said.

Peter opened the bag and inside found a letter. He read the letter aloud which was from Howard it said

"Emily asked me to bury this for you by the oak tree in my garden, she said that you liked playing pirates and hoped that one day that you would find it with your own buried treasure, at the bottom of the chest you will find a key and a clue"

"Look for the key" said Anne excitedly

Peter took out more coins and more envelopes including one that said Anne on the front of it and gave it to her.

Anne read the letter aloud.

"When you read this you will hopefully know who Peter is. I have asked my friend to link him with your father Howard who was a dear friend of mine. We were very close to each other when we met on holiday and wrote to each other for years but then decided that it was best only to contact each other at Christmas, you may remember your father getting a card from Betty, that was my nickname, your Dad's was Arthur. Love Emily"

Ed listened and then suddenly looked sad

“Whats the matter?” said Peter looking at Ed

“I remember your Gran talking about a boy she dated one holiday who she called Arthur and to think that every Christmas they still sent each other a card, but where’s this key that she was talking about.?”

Peter emptied the rest of the box and underneath another pile of pesetas he found a key.

There were three other envelopes. Two contained old photographs and the third a letter which when he opened only gave an address in a Spanish town called Nerja.

## Chapter 26

Mum laughed when Peter told her about the key and Spain. He had looked up to see where Nerja was and saw that it wasn't too far from Malaga.

"So when do you go?" Mum asked

"Not this year, I have too much to do, besides.." and before he could say another word Mum mentioned Karen.

"Yes I do like her Mum, but its early days, besides she got her job in Manchester"

"Well that's not that far from Haughton!"

"I know but I've been working a lot of hours and am knackered by the time I get home"

"Well if its meant to be, it will" Mum said philosophically.

Peter had placed the key in the envelope with the Nerja address next to the other letters that Granny had left for him. He was inquisitive, but he was also a realist and what was more important at the moment was Karen, in fact she was becoming more important than his work and he was wondering about whether he should move to Manchester but didn't want to tell her yet what he was thinking. There would be nothing worse than moving and then finding that she didn't like it there. He knew that he just had to be patient.

"So what treasure did you find?" asked Karen as she sipped her wine.

Peter told her about the key and the letter about Nerja.

"I've been there" she said

"It was some years ago when I was a teenager, Mum loved it" Karen looked sad as she said this.

"Well we can go sometime and see what the key opens" Said Peter

"But not now we both have too much to do, it has been there a long time and so it can wait"

"Your Gran's friendship with Howard is interesting though, just think if you hadn't been given your Gran's letter you wouldn't have found any of us including me. I remember that day I saw you at the farm. I had only just started the job and was very nervous. I wanted to get everything right and I kept bumping into you"

"I know" Peter said laughing

"Don't make fun of me" Karen said pouting and poking Peter in the ribs.

"I'm not" he said, smiling and cuddling her.

"What will you do when I move? she said

"Will you miss me"

"Yes, loads"

"You could always move, you can get caring jobs anywhere"

"I could, but what if you don't like it, no I need to stay and see how it goes for now, I can come up on days off in Emily and stay on a site somewhere"

"That sounds nice, I'd like that"

That night Peter stayed with Karen, her Father had gone away with some friends and so they had the house to themselves.

The next morning Peter didn't want to get up, especially as he had to head home first, but "duty calls" he said and kissed Karen goodbye on the doorstep.

He crept in the house and there was no sign of Ed, but then he didn't really expect it at 6am. He had a quick shower, grabbed a banana, swigged a glass of milk and headed off to work.

He was working with Joseph wright who in some ways reminded him of Howard, not in what he had done, no he wasn't a GP and he wasn't confused but there was something that he couldn't put his finger on. He had mentioned this to Louise who visited him in the afternoons and she had laughed and just said "They are both old", but Peter thought that there was more than that.

"I never found the right girl, you know" said Joseph

"What about you, have you found her?"

“I think so”

“Well if you have, make sure that you don’t lose her”

Peter seemed to think that Joseph knew more than what he was telling.

“It all started when I was a lad” Joseph said.

Peter wanted to say “what did” but decided just to listen as he helped Joseph into his clothes.

“I used to tell my Mum what was going to happen, not just to her but to other people that she knew, it frightened her a bit, because I always knew, but the trouble was that I also knew bad things and the day our neighbours cat died I got accused of poisoning it, but I hadn’t done anything, I can tell your fortune if you like!”

Peter said that he’d prefer not to know, but part of him was interested.

“Maybe some other day” Peter said on his way out.

“Ok, if I’m still here, thats one thing that I can never know”

Peter felt a bit creepy when he left and mentioned it a few days later to Louise.

“You haven’t had your palm read, have you?”

“No, why did you?”

“Err yes” she said looking strange

“And it was all true, he told me things that he just couldn’t have known, so I asked him not to tell me anymore”

Peter told Ed about his service user that told fortunes.

“Oh you mean Joseph!”

“You know him!” exclaimed Peter

“Oh everybody does, his Mum kicked him out when he was a lad, something about poisoning a cat but he swore that he never did it. He just lived with whoever took him in. He always seemed to have money when he was older but nobody knew where he got it from. He was a strange person, fancy him needing your help”

The next morning Peter had a call from Joy to say that Joseph had passed away in the night.

Karen moved to Manchester and to start with was very busy with her job. Peter remembered that lovely night that they shared but accepted that for now he would probably have very few times with her. They talked as often as they could on the phone.

One lunch time Peter went home to find Ed crying in the kitchen, he’d eaten half a piece of toast and left the rest.

“Whats up?” said Peter putting his arms around him.

“Its Margaret, she’s gone”

“Oh you mean..”

“Yes, she passed away in her sleep last night, we were going to meet today”

Ed sobbed as Peter held him close to him.

“And I never really told her how I felt about her” Ed added

“She knew” said Peter in a reassuring way.

“Yes I suppose so” he sobbed.

Peter had planned to go for a drink that evening with a new friend that he made but cancelled as he wanted to be with Ed.

They sat and watched TV and then Ed went to bed.

Peter chatted to Karen

“He was so heart broken, such a lovely man, you know I love you Karen,”Peter said

She went quiet for a moment

“ and I love you too” she said

Peter felt this incredible warmth between them.

The job was going well and Peter knew that it was soon time for him to leave Haughton and go and live in Manchester to start a new chapter in his life.

The next day Peter had a call from Joy telling him to take the morning off as both of his service users had gone into hospital over the weekend. It was unusual for Peter to have both Saturday and Sunday off and if he had known earlier he could have gone to stay with Karen in Manchester, but she had a heavy weekend filming and so said that she wouldn't have much time to spend with him.

He had a lie in, getting up at 9am. He thought that Ed usually got up about then but perhaps being upset about Margaret had made him lie in longer. By 10.30 Peter began to wonder and popped up to Ed's room, knocked the door, there was no answer, he went in the room and found that Ed had passed away.

Peter touched his face, he just couldn't believe that Ed was no longer here, he burst into tears. He rang Joy, he didn't know what else to do.  
"I'll come over" she said  
"Just let me in"

Joy was wonderful she helped Peter with everything

"But what about all your work?" Peter queried  
"I've put Alex in charge, he's quite capable, its you and Ed that matter today"  
"He died of a broken heart" Peter said sadly  
"I know" said Joy who just radiated love  
"You know Joy its been an amazing time but.."  
"You need to leave" Joy said  
"How did you know?"  
"I told you that it would be soon, I just know these things, but you will carry on helping people, I also know that and what Joseph told people was often true, its just that nobody can believe that some of us know about the future"

Peter told Karen what Joy had said and she laughed.

"I'm sorry laughing" she said  
"Especially at the moment. I wish I could come home and be with you, but its manic and"  
"I know and of course I'm upset but I know that Ed had a good life and I was so lucky to have known him for the last eighteen months. I want to come to Manchester soon but I don't want to leave without giving Joy a good length of notice. I know that I only have to give her a month but I'd like to give her three, so what if we start New Year together in Manchester, what do you think?"  
"That would be amazing" Karen said.

That was the word that Peter felt too, but then also felt a deep sadness losing Ed.

Mum and Dad came that evening to stay. They both took time off work. They didn't want Peter to be on his own and would help arrange the funeral.

## Chapter 27

John McKenzie had known Ed all of his life. His Father had been at school with him. John was thinking of retiring. He opened the envelope that contained Ed's Will and began to read. Peter was having trouble containing his emotions. Mum and Dad had come with him to the solicitors. Ed had instructed that the Will should be formally read before his funeral. There were no surprises the Will had left everything to Peter and described him as the Grandson that he would have loved to have had.

John was rather surprised about the contents but the Will was clearly written fifteen years before and so it was his duty to make sure that the wishes were carried out.

"You are a lucky man" John said as he shook Peter's hand.

"I know that I only knew Ed for a short time but we became very close" Peter said sadly.

"If you make an appointment with me soon we can discuss the details fully as there will be some tax implications and the house title deeds will need to be in your name. Have you any ideas what you will do with the house?"

"I shall still live in it for the near future, but may be moving to Manchester, but am not really sure at the moment"

"I remember that Ed had a lot of his paintings in the house, I would love to buy one of them from you, it would be a fond memory of him, he was a kind, interesting man and I shall miss him" said John

"Oh I'll give you whichever means most to you, don't consider buying it, it will be yours"

"Oh but I couldn't" said John

"Of course you can" Peter replied earnestly

"Then I shall give a donation to whatever charity Ed supported"

Peter liked John McKenzie and still felt rather guilty that Ed had given him so much.

After reading the Will Peter went for lunch with his parents.

"I just wish the funeral was over" Peter said

"Don't worry love we'll help you" said Mum

"Thanks, I don't know how I'd manage without you!"

"Of course you would, look how far you've come on your journey so far" Mum said assertively

"Is that what it is, a journey"

"Of course" said Dad

"Its a journey of life"

They finished their lunch and walked to the car. The solicitor was based in Stafford and so they began to drive back to Haughton.

Peter was driving and a Pheasant ran in front of the car, he slammed his breaks on to avoid it but unfortunately there was someone driving too close to him. He felt a slight jolt. Mum who was sitting next to him did as well but Dad was the worst as he had been leaning forward.

Peter got out of the car to see if there was any damage and to talk to the other driver and found that it was Chloe.

"Sorry" she said quietly

"I was too close, it was my fault, do you have any damage, is everyone Ok?"

Peter looked at the car but couldn't find anything wrong. Chloe had a slight scrape on her bumper.

Peter went back to the car and found Mum worrying about Dad

"I'm fine" he said in a grumpy tone.



“You’re always worrying about me, sometimes it just gets too much”

Peter had never really heard his parents arguing and so was rather taken aback.

He returned to where Chloe was standing and they both agreed not to pursue anything. Chloe said that she already had some other scrapes on the car.

The journey back to Haughton was silent. Peter felt uncomfortable, but didn’t want to make anything worse.

“I think I’ll have a lie down” said Dad

After Dad disappeared up to the bedroom Peter put the kettle on and made them both a coffee.

“Are you both Ok?” he said

“Yes, your Dad has some pressures at work that’s all. I’m trying to get him to cut his hours but he won’t hear of it”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard you arguing before!”

“I don’t suppose that you have, but no we’re OK. I think your Dad has been thinking about and missing your Gran recently and today just reminded him. He was very shocked when he heard how fond of Ed your Gran was and wondered why she hadn’t told him. He said that he felt a little cheated.”

“I think I might go and check on him, that was rather a nasty jolt”

Peter watched his Mum disappear upstairs and she didn’t return and so he assumed that she too had gone for a snooze.

He was back at work the next day. Joy had told him to take more time off but Peter felt that he would be better working. Mum and Dad were planning to stay another week and then come back for the funeral which was three weeks away.

When he walked in at lunch time he found his parents arguing again.

“What’s up?” he asked

“Your Dad has been getting bad headaches but he refuses to go to the doctor”

“Dad you should go if they have happened since the accident”

“Oh I had them before, its just your Mum nagging me thats all”

“Well if you still have them in a week will you promise me that you’ll go” Peter insisted.

“Ok, but you know what its like, they’ll just tell me to take some pain killers”

Peter felt there was no point carrying on with the discussion and began to wonder whether they had always been like this and perhaps he had just not noticed before.

He went to his room for a rest and rang Karen. Hearing her voice cheered him up.

“I’ll be down for the funeral” she said

“I’ve been so busy, I just love the job”

“That’s great”

“Are you Ok?” she asked.

“You sound very low, is it just Ed or is there something else?”

Peter told her about his parents arguing. Karen laughed and told him that her parents often argued but they were totally devoted to each other.

“I hope we don’t argue” Peter said

“So much of arguing is pointless”

“True” Karen replied and then told him that she had to go.

Peter was pleased for Karen, but he really missed her. In the short time that he had known her he realised how important she was to him.

He went downstairs to get a snack before he went back to work and found his parents snuggled up together asleep on the settee. They looked so contented. He thought of what Karen had said about her parents. He knew that Dad was stubborn but hopefully he’d have the sense to go to the GP if it persisted.

He ate his cheese and pickle sandwich and drank his tea and then grabbed his coat and car keys and pulled the front door behind him.

He passed Howard's house on the way to his first service user, an elderly lady who had just come out of hospital and needed two carers to support her. Peter was pleased to see that Louise was working with him. One of the things that he had had to quickly adapt to was the fact that he would never be quite sure who he would be working with when he was doing joint work. His feelings about Louise had changed, her initial frostiness that he had witnessed seemed to have disappeared. "Hi Peter, I'm glad I'm working with you today. I had an idiot yesterday who didn't seem to have a clue about what they were doing, I had to tell them everything, it was as if it was their first day but I found out later that they had been doing caring work for years"

Peter laughed.

"What are you laughing about?" said Louise as she got the service users front door key out of the box.

"Oh nothing, you just make me laugh"

"That's Ok then, you know all these combination keys, if I didn't have the numbers written down, well I just wouldn't have a clue"

"Nor me" Peter said.

They went in the door and shouted hello, as Mary [the service user] liked visitors to do that. They opened the living room door and Mary smiled at them. She was sitting in an arm chair with her feet resting on a foot stool.

"Have you tried to do any walking today?" Louise asked

"No, they didn't have time, they were very late coming to me and only had time to make me some lunch and take me to the toilet, in fact dear I'm desperate to go now"

Mary was very overweight and so that's why there was a need for two carers. She had said that she didn't mind whether the carers were male or female.

"I'm sorry dears but I've had rather an accident and you know if I'm left too long I get such a sore bottom. I hate being a nuisance to anyone"

"Well we'll sort you out" said Louise in a jolly tone.

"And then we must try and get you walking, I see you've done some drawing today!"

Louise indicated a drawing on a board in front of Mary.

"That's good" said Peter smiling.

"Its my neighbour's cat" said Mary.

"Sometimes she brings her in and I get a nice cuddle. She's a very good neighbour, she always comes in once a week to chat with me"

"That's nice" said Peter.

Getting Mary to the toilet and cleaning her up took most of their allocated time, but Louise was determined that she should have some more walking practice and so instead of immediately sitting her down Peter and Louise supported Mary each side whilst she lifted and walked with her Zimmer frame.

"I can't do it" Mary said getting frustrated

"Oh yes you can" Peter said and started singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers'

They managed to get Mary to walk up and down the room six times whilst the three of them sang and then Louise popped into the kitchen to put Mary's ready meal in the microwave whilst Peter sat and chatted to her.

"Do you have children?" Mary asked

"No" said Peter

"I would have loved to have had them but never found the right fella, I know that there are lots of women that have children and don't bother with the man, but I didn't feel that I could, maybe I should have done, it would have been so nice to have them. You see I get so lonely"

Louise brought the food in and a drink for Mary.

“I wish you had more time and then maybe I could go out, I haven’t been out for such a long time, but then I’m luckier than my old school friend who can’t even get out of bed, well she could, but she chose to stay in bed whereas I decided I’d be better in a chair.”

That evening Peter talked to his parents about the service users who were trapped and didn’t go anywhere. He was careful not to mention names just scenarios.

“Yes we are so lucky” Mum said

“Oh and your Dad has agreed to go to the doctors when we get home”

“You won’t change your mind will you?” Peter pleaded

“I promise” Dad replied assertively and Peter knew that he would carry it through.

“And its time I came to Guildford for a few days and that we did the open Mic together.”

“I’d really like that” Dad said

“And you’re Mum’s right, its time I reduced my hours.”

Mum smiled.

## Chapter 28

The funeral was a small affair. It was what Ed had wanted and he had requested his ashes being spread in his friends field.

Karen had come but had to rush back to Manchester so they didn't have any time together. "I'm sorry" she messaged later in the evening.

"I don't want money wasted" Ed had written in a letter to his solicitor attached to the will. There was also a letter to Peter that had been written recently.

"Dear Peter

I am so glad that you found me and have so enjoyed our time together. I know you may be shocked that I willed everything to you so long ago but I knew in my heart that you would use the money and property wisely. I watched you from a distance growing up and then when we met I was overjoyed. The time that we have had has been one of the best times in my life, the other being my time with your grandmother Emily.

I hope that you find the treasure and don't leave it too long, go with your lovely girlfriend and enjoy it."

Peter knew that he was referring to the key.

He cried himself to sleep the night of the funeral, he was just so sad losing Ed and he also thought of his Gran. He knew that they had both had good lives and yes he was overwhelmed once again as Ed had said in his letter.

Joy had insisted that he have a couple of days off and so he went back to Guildford with Mum and Dad. He could have gone to Manchester with Karen but he knew that she would be busy and he also felt that he needed to do what his Dad wanted, they needed to do the open mic and both face their fears. To think that for all of those years he hadn't known that his Dad was an amazing musician, but also that he liked singing.

The drive down reminded him of when he was a child, with him sitting in the back and his Mum in front of him. It was nice and they had stopped arguing. Luckily the traffic flowed freely and so they had only had to have one comfort stop on the way.

Coming up the same familiar road and parking on the drive was a mixture of so normal and yet also so weird.

Mum unlocked the front door whilst Dad brought in their bags, Peter carried his own, everything looked and smelt the same.

"You look tired" Mum said

"I didn't sleep very well, I think I might have a nap" Peter commented.

"A good idea" said Dad as he placed the bags in the hall.

"But don't sleep for too long, we need to rehearse and find somewhere to play before you need to go back"

They laughed, Peter felt the closeness that he had forgotten about, life had been wild and different. As he entered his bedroom he felt like he was going into a time warp, everything was where he had left it. He had moved on in life, but the room hadn't. He wondered whether his parents felt the same. He knew that he would never come back to live, only to visit and that the room should become a visitors room now rather than his history. He wondered whether he should mention it or not!

He lay on his bed that smelt of comfort and soon went into a cosy sleep.

"What time is it?" said Peter as he entered the kitchen

"We wondered whether to wake you, but thought the sleep would do you good" Mum said

Peter had slept for over an hour and felt refreshed, it was nice being home, that's what it felt like.

"It's lovely having you home" Mum said

"We've got something to tell you" she said as she poured Peter a cup of tea.

"We've decided to sell up and move to Haughton, we like it there and even if you moved to Manchester we would be a lot closer. The money that we could get from here would buy a good house there and we could both change what we do work wise, we don't think that it would be a risk"

"Oh...Where's Dad?" Peter asked

"We're both fine if that's what you're worried about, your father has gone for a bike ride, his latest craze"

Peter laughed, he loved seeing this side of his parents.

"Oh and no, we are not buying a camper van, much better ways to spend money. I'm trying to encourage your father to do more with his music and I might join the local drama group."

Dad walked in glowing.

"So you've told him then?"

"Yes" said Mum smiling.

"Oh, it's not sudden" said Dad looking a bit worried.

"We've been talking about it for awhile and now we're not following you around we genuinely like around Haughton and Gnosall"

"That's Ok then, so when will you put the house up for sale?"

"Well, we had it valued a few days ago and so next week, they valued it at between £460,000 and £500,000 so we're putting it up for £475,000"

"Well if I decide to move to Manchester you could live in Ed's house" Peter said smiling.

"So will you move?"

"I'm still not sure, I don't want to let Joy down"

Peter really wasn't sure and now that Mum and Dad were thinking of moving, should he move again, he wondered or just stay put for awhile!

Mum made some lunch and then they decided to go for a walk. Peter could tell that they were planning to leave as they were being nostalgic about everything.

They had a quiet evening just chatting and watching TV. Dad announced that he had found an open Mic for the Friday night if Peter was able to stay. Peter said that he wasn't working until Sunday and so could go back by train some time on Saturday. It was rather expensive leaving buying tickets until then but Peter realised that he could treat himself a bit. Even though he had inherited the money from Granny he had always been careful. He was meeting John McKenzie on Thursday afternoon who had hinted that he might have a pleasant surprise but Peter never liked to assume anything.

He rang Karen and told her about Mum and Dad moving, she didn't seem like her usual self.

"Whats up?" Peter asked

"You don't sound like your usual self" he said

"I'm just tired" she said, but Peter knew that there was more to it.

Their call was much shorter than usual but Karen reassured him that she was fine.

The next day was fun rehearsing with Dad. They picked a song they both knew and Mum sat nearby listening. Peter could feel the happiness between them and didn't want to spoil things with his worry about Karen.

The Open Mic was a great success, they received great applause and Peter was so proud of his father.

“You’re not too old to start a band” Peter suggested.  
“Maybe” was his Dad’s reply which rather surprised Peter.  
He was learning more and more about his parents.

It was soon time for him to go home. He was going from Waterloo to Euston and then to Stafford. He arrived at Euston and found that his train which was starting there was on time and so he just had time to buy himself something to eat on the journey. He had breakfast with his parents but wanted to get to Stafford to get the bus to Haughton so he could sort himself out for the next day.

The train was pretty full and Peter found himself sitting next to a rather large man who was about the same age as his parents. Nobody talked to each other all the way to Wolverhampton where quite a few people got off including the man sitting next to him.

“Phew” said the woman sitting opposite him  
“That was rather a squeeze, going anywhere nice?”  
“I’m getting off at Stafford” he replied  
“Oh so am I and then going on to Gnosall”  
Peter told her that he was going to Haughton.  
The woman who was about his age then said that she was going to stay with her friend in Gnosall, as she talked Peter wondered whether he knew her friend.  
“Her name is Karen and she was living in Manchester but had to rush back home because her father was suddenly taken ill. I’m going to keep her company”

Peter listened in shock.

“Are you Ok?” the young woman said.

“Err yes” said Peter trying not to show any feelings.

He decided to pretend to read a book and when they reached Stafford he hung back as he didn’t want to meet Karen under these circumstances and didn’t understand why she hadn’t told him.

He got to the gate and saw the young woman being greeted by Karen and held back so they were out of his range. He was trying hard not to cry, he felt gutted.

A taxi driver asked if he wanted a lift, as he had some money on him he decided to accept his offer rather than wait for the bus, he wasn’t sure that he could compose himself all of the way to Haughton.

He got home, paid the taxi driver and just burst into tears, he missed Ed so much.

Half an hour later he was cross with himself, he wanted to be tougher.

There could be all sorts of reasons that Karen was awkward he shouldn’t jump to conclusions and then his mobile rang, it was Karen.

“I’m so sorry” she said

“My friend recognised you from a photo. I just couldn’t face you that’s all, you see it was all a sham They wanted a slave, there was no proper job” She carried on telling him how she felt but he couldn’t understand why she thought that he wouldn’t understand. There were lots of occasions that he had got things wrong.

“And your Dad, is he OK?”

“No, he’s in hospital, he’s had a stroke and I was cross with you because you told me to go and I told you that he wouldn’t manage without me and...”

“Shh” Peter said

“We’ll sort it”

But on this occasion they couldn’t Karen phoned later that evening to say that her Dad had passed away.

“why why why” shouted Peter to himself

And then “when when when” wondering when this sadness would go and be replaced by the happiness he had felt

A few days later Mum rang to say that she thought they may have a buyer. She sounded so happy.

## Chapter 29

“Whats up?” said Karen

They had decided to take some time off work and go off in Emily to a campsite near Barmouth.

“Oh I’m just fed up with people dying. I know its horrible to say but I’ve had enough of it.”

“Me too, so that’s why we need to enjoy ourselves, lets catch a train to Aberdovey. I haven’t been there for years”

“Ok, yes, lets”

Peter began to cheer up, he felt a little guilty as it was Karen who had had to deal with her Dad’s funeral all on her own as she, like him had no siblings and was left the family home.

“Which house do you like the best, your family home or Eds place?” asked Peter

“Why?” Karen queried

“Well because I want to be with you and it seems stupid to have both and so we could rent one of them out”

“Are you attached to Ed’s house?”

“No, not particularly why?”

“Why not then be brash and just sell both of them and buy something new. I feel that its time for me to leave Gnosall and live somewhere else but am put off Manchester by my experience and am not sure that I am a city person anyhow.”

“I think we should leave it for a few months and see how we feel, its best to sell in the Spring and there’s lots to sort out in both places”

“Yes that’s true, shall we go to Aberdovey then?”

“Yes”

It was fun going on the train for a change. The journey to Aberdovey was pleasant and the station at Aberdovey was very close to the beach and so they decided to head there before visiting the town as they had brought drinks with them. Peter remembered his trip to Edinburgh and how much of his life had changed since then. He felt so at ease with Karen and they had talked about why she became distant when her Dad was taken ill and with her disappointment about Manchester and since then talked openly about things that worried them.

It was a beautiful sunny day and Peter wished that they had brought swimming costumes with them instead of just a couple of small towels to sit on.

“Are you coming for a paddle?” Karen asked

“No you go and I’ll watch our stuff”

Peter liked watching Karen paddling in the sea, she danced around, waved to him and pulled funny faces. It had also been fun chasing each other in the sand dunes.

They then walked up to the town and had a snack in a cafe, followed by a short wander around the shops.

The journey back was busier as it was rush hour with people trying to get home from work and so they had to stand on the train, but it was only about half an hour so it didn’t matter. The train jerked a couple of times and Karen clung onto Peter to steady herself. He liked that. He liked her long curly hair and beautiful clear complexion falling next to his shoulder.

“I think we should toss a coin to decide where we live” said Karen

“Ok what will it be” Peter acknowledged

“Heads Ed’s place and Tails mine” Karen said assertively

“And no cheating, whatever the coin says, we do”

Peter agreed. They tossed the coin and it came out as Heads.

“Are you sure you’ll be Ok?” Peter said

“Yes, Its time I left, maybe this is the stepping stone and I’m tired of being a barmaid I think I should do caring like you, maybe for a year and that will give time to sort out the houses and see where we want to be and what we want to do”

“Yes that sounds like a good idea, will you contact Joy or use a different agency?”

“Well she seems to have been very supportive to you and so I think I’ll use Joy, but there’s something I want to do before the winter”

“What” said Peter feeling a little nervous wondering whether Karen was thinking that they should take the next step.

“Oh not that” said Karen laughing

“Stop worrying I’m not rushing to get married if that’s what you were thinking.”

Peter looked relieved.

Karen laughed and tickled him, he grabbed her and held her close.

“But what was it then?” Peter said

“I’d like to go to Nerja and find out what the key is for.

“Oh” Peter laughed.

“Can’t we just sell some of Ed’s pictures and make room first and sort out your place”

“Yes, but I can’t help being intrigued, your Gran was such a mysterious woman. She only gave you the key and the road, you can’t go trying it in every front door, there must be another clue.”

“Well after you’ve worked for two months we’ll see if we can get a few days off to go and find out but I really want to sort out Ed’s house and Mum and Dad have had an offer on their house and so will start looking”

“There’s the answer” said Karen excitedly.

“Why don’t you ask them if they want to live in my house, they could have it rent free and just pay the bills and then it would help both them and us. It would give them time to find what they really want”

“Actually that’s a good idea” said Peter “and they could help sort out stuff in return and in fact they could move earlier if they wanted to as they could leave their things until the house goes properly and if for any reason it fell through they could just visit a few times. I’ll put the idea to them and see what they think”

“But tell them I really don’t want any money, partly because it would just make things even more complicated tax wise” Karen stated.

They arrived back in Gnosall on the Sunday afternoon and decided to stay the night at Karen’s place and then she would drive Peter in the morning to Ed’s house to get the car for work. They were tired after the journey and putting Emily away in the garage, fortunately besides their clothes and some left over food there wasn’t much else that they needed to get out of Emily until she was used again. They made a meal out of leftovers and then settled to watch the TV.

“I’ll ring the agency in the morning” Karen said and give my notice in at the pub. They knew that I wouldn’t stay for long and so hopefully will be ok but I feel I should give them a months notice”

“You wouldn’t be able to start straight away anyhow” said Peter

“As Joy would have to go through all the procedures, training etc and you’d have to get a DBS”

“What if Joy says no because I don’t have the experience” Karen said nervously

“Well I didn’t have the experience and so unless you are a secret murderer or abuser I can’t see any reason why you shouldn’t get taken on” Peter laughed.

“I had a DBS with the Manchester job, but I know that they always have to do them again, if you move area” said Karen

They switched over to a different channel and Karen noticed the name of the director of the programme. It was the guy who had promised her the world.

“One day when I’m rich and famous I’ll remind him publicly about how he treated me” she said angrily.

“It’s his loss” Peter said

“And my gain”

Karen snuggled up to him.



Being back at work for Peter in some ways was déjà vu it was like so many of his service users were just stuck in 'ground hog day', where everything was the same.

He was very fond of the people he helped but he was also becoming restless. Maybe Karen was right they should go and find out what was in Nerja, but he also knew that he was right, they needed to sort out stuff and she needed to do a job for awhile where she would be appreciated. If she did that he felt sure that she would start believing in herself a bit more and her skills as a Director. Maybe they could make films using the stories of the people they worked with. Through misfortune losing Ed and her father they both had enough money to be able to work part time.

A week later Karen came bouncing in saying that subject to references and checks that she had a job with the agency. Peter was really pleased for her. He remember how he had felt but now he was beginning to miss his engineering. He was beginning to wonder whether there was a way that he could combine caring with engineering, it was Frazer that came up with an idea.

Peter hadn't heard from Frazer for awhile and wondered whether he was ok and so a few days later phoned him.

"Yes I'm fine" said Frazer

"I've just been very busy at work and no I haven't got a woman in my life at the moment" Frazer said.

Peter laughed and told Frazer about everything that had been going on.

## Chapter 30

Karen was nervous the day that she started her training.

“What if I’m no good!” she said anxiously

“Why shouldn’t you be?” Peter asked, as he dried the dishes.

“Well its obvious that I wasn’t good enough in the Manchester job”

“No that’s rubbish, you just got an idiot for a boss and you were taken for a ride, thats all. I’ve seen your work and its really good”

“But you’re not in the business!”

“True, but I’ve seen comments from people who are...look, just concentrate on the now...you’ll be fine...I did it, so there’s no reason why you can’t and if you don’t understand something just ask Joy, she won’t expect you to know everything, or we can talk about it later, I’ve taken today off, so that I can be here when you get home”

“Don’t take too many days off, remember the key in Nerja” she laughed mischievously.

“I don’t think you’ll ever let me forget” said Peter smiling.

The last few weeks had been busy at work and Mum and Dad had taken up the offer of living in Karen’s house temporarily so there had been lots of sorting out to give them the space that they needed.

Peter gave Karen a huge bear hug and smoochy kiss. She giggled as she waved to him, going out to her car. Ed’s drive had just enough room for both of them. Emily had stayed in the garage in Gnosall since their return from Wales. Peter had thought at times that it was silly keeping her as they didn’t have much time to benefit from having her, but then he knew that he couldn’t sell her, it was one of his links to Granny.

He thought about what Karen said about the key in Nerja and did want to find out more, but he knew that they had to be patient there were more important things to do for now.

Peter’s meeting with John McKenzie, Ed’s Solicitor had been surprising, as well as the house Ed had left him everything in it and he had a number of shares which hadn’t been valued. Ed had a few thousands savings that was all. John had advised him to meet with an accountant about the shares but Karen thought they could look at the value themselves and so like Emily and the Nerja key they had been left for some other time.

John McKenzie still needed to come and choose his painting before Peter decided what to do with the others. He would keep a couple he thought. He knew that he would have to do something soon as there was very little room for Karen to bring the things that she wanted to keep.

He made himself a cup of tea and sat with a note book making a list. It was nice spending some time on his own. He knew that he wanted Karen in his life for always, but he did miss his own time. He missed sitting outside Emily and enjoying watching his bird and wondered whether the bird could find its way to Ed’s garden. He also wondered whether this house would always be known as Ed’s, it just seemed right. In fact he wondered lots of things, even how Helen was, but he realised that the way that he felt for Karen was much more positive. It might not be as passionate as he had felt for Helen but it felt right.

He often wished that he could stop worrying about things and would have liked to just get on with life, besides that’s what he had just told Karen and so he should start believing it for himself. What did he really want for himself? Did he want to spend years working as a carer? Or did he want to go back to being an Engineer? Or could he do both? He was pondering all of these questions when his mobile rang. It was a number that he didn’t recognise.

“Hello” Peter said expecting the call to be from a salesman or worse.

“Hello Peter, you don’t know me but I’m a friend of Frazers”

“Oh, is he in trouble?” Peter asked

“Oh no, not at all...he told me that you were an engineer”

“I was, but then so is Frazer”

“Yes but he thought that you would understand my idea better”

“Oh, thats flattering, why what is your idea and where are you?”

“I’m based in London and well I was wondering whether we could meet up as its hard to tell you down the phone, of course I would be willing to come to you”

Karen had had a good start and came home bubbly, but by nine she had crashed out. She had told him about all the people on the course and what she had learnt and he told her about the mysterious phone call.

“So are you going to meet with him?” she’d said

“Well if he’s willing to come here then why not”

“It sounds intriguing, did you ring Frazer to ask him about it”

“I tried but he didn’t answer, he hasn’t been so good at communicating recently, but I’ll try him later this evening” Peter replied.

As Karen was fast asleep curled up on the settee Peter thought this was the opportune moment to contact Frazer and see what he knew about the mysterious person who was called Rob Taylor. Peter had wondered why he had to meet rather than email or just tell him down the phone.

“Hi” said Frazer

“Sorry I haven’t been in touch much recently, the days just seem to fly by and then its too late, how are you doing anyhow and how is Karen?”

Peter filled Frazer in about the latest happenings and then asked him about Rob Taylor.

“Oh he’s a bit of an odd ball, but he has some good ideas and I thought of you when he was asking about engineers and didn’t think you’d mind me giving him your number. I’m not sure what he wants you to help him with, he’s always inventing something new. He has the ideas but then he doesn’t know how to do any of it and its not that I don’t want to help him, but its just too far away to meet with him regularly. He’s got one of those controlling women who wants to know where he is all of the time. I reckon that he’s been trying to leave her for years and so maybe that’s why he wants to come to you, it would give him a legitimate break from her.” Frazer laughed.

They chatted for awhile and then Frazer had to go. Peter wondered whether he’d made the wrong decision when he had agreed to meet Rob in Stafford on his day off next week. It seemed that Rob was rolling in money and very flexible with his time, Peter hadn’t enquired any more and in fact he decided to forget about it for now.

He encouraged Karen to go to bed. It was only just after ten but she looked totally worn out. He decided to stay up for a bit and watch the news. He found it was covering the same issues as earlier in the day and so just hopped through the channels, there was nothing that appealed to him, so many of them were about crime or people arguing with each other.

He felt too restless to go to bed and so started sorting through some of his old university designs that had been shoved in a box of all sorts waiting for that day when they might become something that could change the world. He laughed at his idealistic, ambitious twenty year old self with his magnificent dreams, where had that person gone, he wondered. He found a couple of medical designs which he had forgotten about and began to realise that perhaps he could start to combine caring and engineering, particularly for people who were housebound. A lot of gadgets were cumbersome and difficult for people who were arthritic or shaky.

He had several service users who went for hours without drinks or food because they were unable to feed themselves with a knife, fork or spoon but in other ways managed to live at home.

There was an elderly woman who coped perfectly with going to an upstairs toilet but could only eat with her hands as she was too shaky for using even a spoon. This meant that she could only manage 'luke' warm food and nothing that was too runny. She used a cup with a lid and so her carers had to fill her several cups during the day as she was too shaky to fill them herself.

"What I need dear is a Robot" she said to Peter when he had filled in for her regular carer one day. "They want to put me in a home you know, but I tell them that I am perfectly happy here and couldn't give up my garden with my lovely birds. I can still manage to feed them, even if I am useless at most other things" she said smiling.

Peter felt sad for her. She was a lovely woman who was always jolly apparently and all the carers were willing to fill in as so many service users were trapped and gloomy, but then he understood why they might feel this way. He thought about all the service users who sat in chairs all day waiting for the next carer to visit sitting in front of television that didn't reflect their lives and hoped that he would have his Robot by the time that he reached that age.

Peter crept into bed beside Karen. She murmured and turned over. His thoughts about engineering would have to wait for another day, maybe Rob Taylor would have something interesting for him to pursue, or maybe he should talk more to the service users and start creating some devices that could help them more. In the past he had always thought about industrial types of engineering, but now that he had spent this time as a carer and seen the limited quality of life that so many people lead he thought that perhaps he should be considering something to help them, perhaps on his next day off work he would look at some research papers and see what there already was. If Rob was rich maybe Peter could help him with his idea and in return Rob could help fund something to help the lady who couldn't use the utensils, but for now he must sleep. He snuggled up to Karen and started to count sheep.

The next morning Peter woke just as the alarm was going off. He turned over and woke Karen as he knew that she had an early start with the training course.

"Just ten more minutes" she said sleepily.

"No" he said assertively

"People will be desperately waiting for you"

But he knew that this week she could just enjoy the training and then enter the so often rushed and so little acknowledged world as a paid carer.

There are no Oscars for carers!

## Chapter 31

“Are you sure you don’t want anything for them?” John Mackenzie asked as he loaded his paintings into his car.

“No, I’m sure Ed would like you to have them, but what you could do is help to sell the remainder, I’ve taken my two and would like the money for the rest to go to a local charity or perhaps a local arts group, maybe that’s what Ed would have liked, if the money came to me it would just be taxed Ed has provided me well. I am so grateful to him but I wish I had longer time with him.”

“Yes, he was a good man” said John as he sat at the kitchen table.

“How’s Karen getting on with her new job?”

“She’s only just started the training, but she’s enjoying it”

“Well I better be off” John said

“I’ll get in touch with a few people I know about the pictures”

Peter waved John off, he was a nice, kind man he thought, life was so busy at the moment with his work, Karen starting hers, Mum and Dad moving soon and the mystery Rob with his invention who Peter was meeting tomorrow. He couldn’t believe how quickly the last week had gone.

He locked the front door and unlocked his car. His morning shift had been fairly easy, he hoped that it would be the same for his afternoon. Karen said that she would make some food when she got home that he could reheat in the microwave as he wouldn’t be home until after 9pm.

Although Peter had got used to working these split shifts he would still have preferred to be at home most evenings a week, but recently he was lucky to have any evenings free as staff were continually either ill or leaving. He could have refused the extra hours but he felt sorry for Joy who often had to fill in and there were an increasing amount of service users who needed two carers but didn’t want to go into residential care, or didn’t fit the criteria.

He didn’t think that there were many people like the elderly lady who would have chosen a robot to live with them, but maybe they had never been asked and would prefer that if they existed, instead of long days waiting for the next carer to arrive.

Some houses were full of gadgets to help the service users, but equipment like hoists generally couldn’t be used by one person and it took quite a lot of allotted time to use such equipment.

“I had a go at being hoisted today” Karen said as Peter ate his reheated meal.

“So what did you think of it?”

“Horrible” Karen said

“And trying to sit onto a commode is just so hard to do”

“I know” said Peter

“But these things never get talked about by the media. I’d love to make a film about it” Karen said, Peter smiled.

“Well I would..... I know that I was put off by Manchester, but I’m not put off permanently. Its just like you, there’s no reason why I couldn’t combine caring with film making”

“I agree in principle” Peter said

“But in reality we are so needed”

“But something has to be done, it can’t just always be talked about and then nothing done!”

Peter felt tired. His shift had been busy and he hadn’t got home until after 10pm and started again at 7am and so he cuddled Karen and hushed her on the topic falling asleep in her arms.

“Wakey wakey” said Karen

“What time is it?” Peter said groggily.

“Ten past twelve.... you have been asleep for ages and you need to be lively to meet that guy after your morning shift”

“Yes” said Peter getting up in a dazed state and heading for the stairs, not feeling at all in the mood for meeting an inventor but maybe he would feel differently in the morning, well at least he hoped that he would.

During the night he was restless and was woken in the morning by a very interesting dream. In the dream he went to visit his carers and all the humans had been replaced by robots and all the older people were happier. One old lady was being carried by her robot and suddenly they started dancing. It was marvelous.

Peter woke just as his alarm was going off. Karen was already up and in the shower. She walked back into the bedroom wrapped in her towel with her hair a mess. Peter thought how beautiful she looked and how lucky he was to have her in his life. Sadly there was no time for any passionate moments.

“I’ll make some coffee while you pop in the shower she said”

“Ok” was all he could say as he digested his amazing dream.

“Are you Ok?” Karen said as Peter entered the kitchen.

“Yes, fine. I just had an amazing dream before the alarm” he replied

He told Karen all about his dream.

“Do you think that most service users would be happier?” she asked

“I don’t know, I reckon a combination of the two would probably be the ideal, but have older people ever been asked I wonder?”

“And would human contact disappear completely for some people?”

“Who knows, its probably a long way away anyhow”

“But just think, no one imagined when my parents were small that there would be mobile phones or the internet”

“Thats true”

Peter liked these discussions. Karen was able to talk about all sorts of topics.

“I need to go” he said, not wanting to.

“I hope it all fits together ok, with work and the mysterious inventor” Karen said smiling

“Me too” Peter said grabbing his flask and car keys.

He kissed Karen and walked towards the front door.

“Go super man go” said Karen

Peter laughed and left feeling elated.

He was pleased to find that he was working with Louise and felt less panicky about getting through the work reasonably on time. He hated rushing service users but some were deliberately slower than they needed to be he had found, because they just wanted attention. He completely understood why they might feel like that. He thought that it would drive him mad if he was in their position, spending so much time on their own with often only the TV to keep them company or the radio with a few of the older service users.

Eileen Jones was excessively overweight and everything had been done to encourage her to eat less. She was diabetic and often had urine infections and at times would be confused due to this.

On this particular day she was in a jolly mood and said that she had lost some weight but to Peter it wasn’t noticeable. Eileen was only 47 years old and had several family tragedies that was why they thought that she had put on the weight and become immobile. She had tried some therapy but had found that if anything she felt worse and so the medical profession didn’t really know what to do to support her. She needed two carers purely because of her weight.

She spent most of her day sitting in a chair. A physio had tried to help her to stand and walk but with little success. On her bad days she would talk about not having much time to live Louise had told Peter. She had also said that Eileen had brightened up a lot in the short time that Peter had been working jointly with Louise.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” Eileen asked

“Yes” Peter replied as he attached the hoist straps to the frame.

“Thats a shame” said Eileen

“Maybe you could help me lose this weight” she added

Peter didn't want to get involved in the discussion but Eileen wanted to talk and Peter let her.

As they left Louise said that she had never seen Eileen so happy and that she had never talked so openly about the tragedies in her life and wondered in fact whether Peter could help her.

“I'm not sure how, if a Psychologist can't, I don't see how I can?” he replied.

They managed to complete all their visits on time and Peter was relieved as he didn't want to be late meeting Rob. They had agreed to meet at Red Lion farm as it was easy for Rob to find and to park. It would also be easy for Peter to start his afternoon shift.

Peter popped home briefly and looked at his emails. There was nothing of great interest. He made himself a coffee and soon it was time for him to walk up to Red Lion farm which was only a few minutes away from Ed's house.

Rob had told him that he would be driving a red 2cv car. Peter wasn't sure what they looked like and so had looked on the internet to check.

He hovered around the entrance to the cafe and heard the sound of a different type of engine and sure enough a red car which resembled those in the pictures that Peter had seen drove in and parked.

A tall skinny man got out of the car. He was older than Peter. He walked towards Peter and introduced himself.

“Peter” he asked

“Yes” said Peter

“I'm Rob”

They shook hands and entered the cafe Peter followed by Rob.

Rob spoke with a strong Scottish accent.

“I've known Frazer for years” he said

“He went away to England to Uni whereas I stayed in Scotland but now live in London.”

They sipped their tea and ate a toastie.

“He told me about you and how you had given up your Engineering career to work as a paid carer. I was intrigued and then I started looking into the issues that carers have, not only the shortage of workers and limited time that they have to carry out the tasks but also the equipment that they have to use. One of the particular areas that seemed awful was for people who are trapped in bed.”

“Yes, there are so many that either sit in a chair all day or are in bed” said Peter and told him about Eileen but not identifying who she was.

Rob then told Peter about the work that was being done at Bristol University and mentioned JJ66

Peter was really interested and said that he would like to work with Rob but that his time would be very limited.

“So how did it go with the mysterious Rob?” said Karen when Peter arrived back from his evening shift.

Peter filled Karen in about their discussion but told her that JJ66 was a secret and that she shouldn't share it with anyone because of patents.

Peter began to think that perhaps he could combine the two worlds of engineering and caring as he didn't really want to choose between them.

## Chapter 32

“I’m really excited about moving” said Mum to Peter

Karen was cleaning windows.

“You don’t need to bother about that!” Peter exclaimed.

“I want to” Karen said assertively.

“I want it to be nice for them. I know that Mum and Dad would want it too.”

Peter understood and so carried on vacuuming. It had been nice having a chat with Mum, as frankly he found cleaning so boring and realised that often he didn’t do his share at Ed’s house. They seemed to have the old fashioned male and female roles, with him cutting the grass and sorting out car problems [not that he was very good at it] and Karen doing the cleaning.

“I used to love cleaning” Eileen had said one morning when Peter was there.

“But I can’t do it now, its so boring being fat and not being able to do things” she moaned.

Peter remembered thinking “lose some weight then” but knew that any form of addiction was hard to break. He wondered what his addiction was, “perhaps it was worrying or overthinking everything” he thought, but he was getting better at just letting things follow their natural course.

Working as a carer had shown him so many different people and life styles, it had really helped him think and look at life differently, but one thing he believed was that addictions to anything were to be avoided if at all possible.

Peter remembered the conversation with Eileen as he watched Karen cleaning the windows and he walked around with the vacuum.

He then thought about his meeting with Rob and their discussion about JJ66. He thought that it was an amazing idea but knew that it was too early to share it with the world.

For now he would have to just concentrate on three things, his life with Karen, Mum and Dad moving to Gnosall and his job, that would be enough.

Peter’s mob rang it was Joy.

“You, or Karen couldn’t do an extra shift today, could you?” she pleaded sounding quite distressed”

“Are you Ok?” Peter asked.

“Well actually no” Joy replied.

Peter could tell that she was barely coping with the phone call and asked what was up.

“Its Tom, he’s had a stroke and the ambulance have just taken him to the hospital and I need to go”

“Why don’t me and Karen come to the office and help sort things for you!”

“That would be marvelous if you could” she said quietly.

“You get to the hospital and ring us later”

Peter hadn’t consulted with Karen, who was happily cleaning windows.

He told her about the conversation thinking that she would be ok with it, but instead she was disgruntled.

“Oh..... Ok” she said “but I wanted it to be nice.”

“It is” Peter said putting the vacuum away and grabbing his coat.

“I can go now and you can come later if you like” he said

“Oh no, I might as well come now, but I’m not going to be that much use. I haven’t been doing the job for that long.”

“You can support me” Peter said grabbing Karen for a quick kiss.

“You always know how to get around me, don’t you” she said.

And most of the time he did.

They arrived at the office to find Lucy, Joy’s assistant frazzled.

“Oh thank goodness you are here to help” she said.



“Everything seems to be going wrong, they’re are three carers off sick and a service user has had a fall and the carer has to stay with her until an ambulance arrives.”

“I’ll get you a drink” Karen said

“What would you like?”

“A stiff gin, but a coffee with milk will do” Lucy laughed.

Peter looked with Lucy at the morning jobs and noticed that the person that had had a fall was Eileen.

“Are there still two carers there?” he asked

“Oh I hadn’t thought about that, yes, we could release one of them”

“Or I could sit with her until the ambulance comes” said Karen putting the coffee on a mat near to Lucy.

“That’s a good idea because they might be ages”

Peter handed Karen the car keys.

“And I could do one of the other missing carers if you could take control of here” said Lucy

“Yes, but do you trust me?” Peter said anxiously.

“You can ring me on my mobile if you have any queries” Lucy said

“Well its all sorted for now then” said Karen writing down Eileen’s address and key number.

“I’ll quickly ring the carers” said Lucy

Within a few minutes Peter found himself on his own and started to look at who was working where. Joy had it well covered and so he popped into the kitchen to make himself a coffee. Being in the office was unusual. Lucy had given him all of the codes for the computer and so he was able to study Joy’s systems which were very simple and clear.

The phone rang it was Joy.

“How’s everything going?” she asked.

“Everything is under control for now” Peter said

“That’s good and Tom is doing Ok, fortunately it was only a minor stroke, but it was so scary, you are so good helping out!”

“No problems, as long as I don’t screw anything up”

“I’m sure you’ll be fine, you have looked in the diary as well have you?”

“No?”

“Oh I don’t put everything online, I think there’s a couple of new people to contact, if you could do that and tell them how everything works that would be great and just write me a few lines about what you’ve done.”

“Ok”

Peter found Joy’s diary easily, looked at today and found names and numbers to phone. One was a relative of a service user and so Peter looked the service user to see who they were and what support was being given, another said Eric Walker but when he looked on the record it said Lord Walker.

“Strange” thought Peter wondering why a Lord would be getting a service from home care.

He tried ringing Joy but she had switched her phone off.

The phone rang and a man said that Lord Walker hadn’t received his home care today.

Peter explained that he was helping out and asked who the carer was.

The man. Who turned out to be Lord Walkers butler said that it was Joy.

Peter said that he would contact Joy and ask what she wanted him to do.

He text Joy saying that Lord Walker had asked why she hadn’t come today and that his Butler had phoned.

Joy text back to say that she would contact Lord Walker directly and that if they rang again just to say that she would be in touch.

Karen returned from Eileen’s about an hour later.

“Even the ambulance drivers struggled and so I don’t know how the usual carers cope, maybe that’s why they’re off sick” Karen commented.

“How was she?” Peter asked

“Fine except for the shock of the fall and she asked after you, I think that she has a major crush” she laughed.

“I’m afraid that I’m already taken” Peter said smiling and winking.

The rest of the morning went Ok. Joy phoned to say that Tom was staying overnight and that she would be back in the office for two, Peter was relieved as Mum and Dad were coming at about 6pm and were staying the night with them at Ed’s because they’re removal people couldn’t do today. Peter would still have to cover a couple of service users but Karen could be there to greet them.

They got back to Ed’s at 4pm and Peter had to go straight out again.

“Let’s eat in the pub tonight” he said

“Can you book a table in case they’re busy?”

He rushed out the door to one of his regulars and was lucky to finish and get to the pub for 7pm when the table was booked, still dressed in his carers uniform.

He sat in the car park until he saw Karen followed by Mum and Dad walking towards the pub. He got out of the car, gave both of his parents a hug and then lead the way into the pub.

“I’m starving” Peter said, realising that he hadn’t even stopped for a drink.

“Fancy a pint?” Dad asked

Peter looked at Karen.

“Yes I’ll drive home” she said smiling.

“You look dashing in your uniform” Mum laughed.

“You and Dad could start a new band...the carers” she laughed.

“Why do you need looking after?” Peter exclaimed jokingly

“Hopefully not for a long time” Mum replied grabbing her son for another hug.

“Its so good to be here” she said excitedly

“And its good to have you here” Peter replied

“But please don’t talk about window cleaners” Peter laughed and Karen filled Mum in about the day.

“My, you have been busy” Mum said

“You should sleep well tonight”

“And tomorrow it will all start again, getting people up, washing them and helping in so many different ways”

“With very little public appreciation” Dad said

“I could never do what you do, I am so proud of both of you”

“Yes you could” Karen said

“Its just that you don’t choose to and I never expected to be doing this work either, but it has its rewards, just not financial ones”

They ate their meals and chatted about Mum and Dad moving in and how strange it will be for Karen, but she said that she was pleased that it was them.

They also talked about the ideas that they had for a business, although there wasn’t really anything yet firm to share. Fortunately the money that they had received from Granny gave them the chance for a breathing space.

There was some open Mic sessions at the pub and Dad asked Peter if he fancied a go.

“Not tonight, I am knackered” said Peter

“Of course not” Dad said

“I haven’t got my guitar”

Mum and Karen smiled at each other. Peter captured the moment and felt happy that they got on so well.

They got home at about 9.30 and Peter announced that he was going to bed as he had to be up at 6am the next morning.

Karen crept in next to him two hours later, after entertaining Mum and Dad. He purred contentedly next to her.

## Chapter 33

“Look!” said Eileen as Peter and Louise entered the living room where she slept.

Eileen attempted to get herself out of bed.

“Be careful” Peter said anxiously going quickly towards her.

“I’ve lost two stone and the Physio has been helping me”

“That’s great” Peter said smiling.

He looked at Louise who was also smiling.

“It’s a surprise, Eileen has been working really hard since you last saw her” she said.

“It was you that motivated me” said Eileen smiling looking directly at Peter.

“I realised that it was only me that could do anything and now I’ve started Internet dating too!”

Peter was so pleased, but also a little nervous. He had asked not to work with Eileen unless they were short because he knew that she had a crush on him. He hadn’t seen her for over a month and then a few days ago Joy asked if he would go with Louise fully knowing his reservations. Nothing in his training had been about what to do in these situations.

“Its Ok” said Eileen

“I just wanted to thank you and say goodbye. I don’t need two carers anymore” she smiled as she said this and got up from her bed and with the help of a walking frame walked towards Peter.

He was amazed.

“That must have been marvelous” Mum said as she put away her shopping.

“Yes, I kind of wanted to cry, but managed to stop myself, I am getting better at that” Peter said.

“Thats good, you were always so sensitive and could never hurt a soul, but sometimes it just did you no good”

“I think that being a carer has helped, but Mum I feel that its time to move on. I think its time to go to Nerja and find out what the key is for.”

“I think you’re right” Mum said.

“But Karen’s only been doing the job for a few months” she said

“That’s another thing. I think I should go on my own”

“Oh” said Mum gulping.

“You and Karen aren’t.....”

“No, there’s nothing like that, its just something that is telling me that this part of my journey should be on my own. I don’t know why and I haven’t told Karen yet how I feel and I’m not sure how she will react but...”

“Well you’ll need to tell her soon” Mum said

“Otherwise she’ll be livid when you tell her if she finds out that you told me sometime before her and I won’t be able to keep it from Dad for long, you know what he’s like he reads me like a book” she laughed.

Mum and Dad had settled into living at Karen’s house and the rent had helped Karen. They had decided to take their time looking for somewhere permanent, they wanted to get the right place.

Peter decided to tell Karen tonight, he had been putting it off, but he knew that what Mum said was right. He had also decided to give notice to Joy. He knew that he only had to give a month but decided to give longer and see what Joy felt that she needed to replace him.

“How was your shift?” asked Karen who was sitting reading on the settee as he entered the living room.

“There’s some lasagne and salad if you want it” she said.

Peter didn't reply, he went into the kitchen and heated up the Lasagne in the microwave and placed some salad on his plate with a dollop of salad cream by the side of it. He put his plate on a tray and sat next to Karen on the settee. She carried on reading but stopped soon after he had finished his meal.

"I've got something I need to tell you" Peter said nervously.

Karen laughed "It can't be that bad surely"

"Well...err..I'm giving my notice and am going to Nerja" he replied

"Oh...but I've only been doing my job for a few months...couldn't you wait?"

"Well, that's the thing..I think I should go on my own"

"Oh...but"

"I don't know why but I just feel that its part of my life journey...I'm nearly 33 and if I don't do it now...maybe I never will and it will help me to become braver..."

"So how long would you go for?"

"I'm not sure.."

"But what about us...could I come and visit?"

Peter got up and walked around the room.

"For the last year we have done so much together and I just feel that I have become too dependent on you"

"Does that mean that you don't love me anymore?" Karen asked

"No, not at all. I do love you, its just something tells me I should do this alone and I would ring you frequently, its just I don't know what I am going to find and I believe that Granny organised this to make me stronger"

"But I would miss you desperately" Karen said beginning to weep

"Please don't go and leave me on my own"

"Ok, I won't" said Peter slowly

"Really" Karen said

"If its going to affect you that badly I won't"

"We could go together" she said

"No, as you say you need to do the job longer"

"But I'm still going to give my notice and start doing some engineering again." Peter announced.

"Thank you" said Karen snuggling up to him.

Peter thought that he would feel disappointed, but he wasn't, he wanted to know what the key was for in Nerja and still felt that he was supposed to find out on his own, but he loved Karen and he couldn't bear to hurt her. He would just have to wait and find another way.

The next morning he went into the office and gave his notice.

"I'm not surprised" said Joy

"And I'm grateful that you've made it three months instead of one. It means that I can get the person vetted and trained, but it won't be easy finding someone as good as you" she said.

Peter had an idea which he shared with Joy. He suggested that instead of just advertising that Joy tried to get a feature in the local paper and that Peter would be willing to help.

Joy thought that was a good idea and got on to the Editor.

"Well" said Karen that evening.

"Did you give your notice?"

"Yes" Peter said

"I'm leaving in three months" and he told her about the idea for the feature.

"I'm sorry" Karen said soulfully.

“I just panicked, of course you must go to Nerja and you’re right, your Granny probably did want you to go alone and by what you have said about her, but could you compromise?”

“How” said Peter interested in what Karen was about to suggest.

“Well perhaps you could go for two weeks and after that I could come and visit for a few days, so you got to do it on your own but I wouldn’t have to miss you for so long and then we could plan the next stage”

Peter smiled “I probably would have missed you too but probably much quicker than that”

“Really” she said snuggling up to him on the settee.

“Yes absolutely, I love having you in my life, but I also feel that in so many ways I haven’t been as daring as I should and that life is too easy with you”

Karen laughed “Well is that a bad thing, does life always have to be hard?” she asked.

“I suppose not, but I feel that I have been given so much and that I should be giving something back”

“And you think that a key to a door is the clue” Karen said forcefully.

“Surely something like JJ66 is the real key” she said.

“Just think of that woman that you told me about and I met on the crisis day, who was only in her forties and had been bed bound for so long, if she hadn’t fancied you and thought that perhaps there is someone for her she would still be lying in that bed instead of forcing herself to do something to make her life better. But she imposed that on herself, there are other people who become bed bound through genuine illness or tragic accidents and so you working with Rob to make JJ66 happen is what you should be doing. And you can do that either here or in Nerja initially as long as you have an internet connection.”

Peter listened carefully and knew that Karen who was talking so passionately was right. He could do both. They had saved up a reasonable amount of money and so Peter could stay in Nerja for two weeks and Karen could fly out and join him for awhile, but for now he must concentrate on helping Joy find a good replacement, maybe he could encourage more engineers to become carers.

“Hi its Janet from the daily news, I was wondering whether we could come over tomorrow to do the feature?”

“Oh what time were you thinking of?”asked Peter

“Well Joy reckoned it would be best at lunchtime, if that’s ok with you we could meet at Red Lion farm say 1.30 or maybe 2 would be better”

“I think it would be safer to say 2” Peter said

“Ok see you then, I’ll text you my number in case you get held up”

“Who was that?” asked Mum, who had popped around.

Peter told her all about the idea of a feature to try and get different people to become carers.

Mum thought that it was a brilliant idea and thought that they should have done that years ago.

“I reckon if your Father could have worked part time he would have liked doing that as well, there’s still far too much rigidity with jobs” she said.

Janet Smyth was in her 50’s and had been working for the Daily news since she was 16 years old. She had worked her way up and was now a sub editor. Joy had contacted her about the idea for a

feature and initially she hadn't been interested but it was after visiting her own elderly Father that she thought that it was a good idea. Her father had said that he wished that he could have a man care for him instead of a woman and that being housebound he missed male company. Janet had taken the idea of the feature to the Editor and like her had too be reserved about it initially, but decided to let Janet have a go. The young man concerned seemed very interesting going from being a high flying Cambridge engineering graduate to a carer really was something a bit different.

"Are you Ok?" said Karen.

"I'm a bit nervous about tomorrow" Peter replied.

"What if I say the wrong thing and it all back fires and besides I'm stopping being a carer so am I really a good example"

"But if you could combine the two I think you would...well after you've solved the Nerja key issue"

"Do you really think so?" said Peter thoughtfully.

"Yes, if you could job share with another male engineer I think you would" she said assertively.

"Well he wouldn't have to be an engineer he could be a car mechanic or any kind of job really"

Peter said.

"True" said Karen

"But put the idea into the head of Cambridge engineers first and then others will follow" she said smiling.

"But I'd still rather go to Nerja" Peter said.

"I know"

## Chapter 34

“So why are you leaving?” Janet asked, as she sipped her coffee.

“Because there’s something I need to do.” said Peter being elusive.

“Nothing you can share then!” said Janet probing.

“No, its something personal, something my Granny wanted me to do”

“Oh right, Ok”

Janet decided not to probe any further, she didn’t want Peter to shut down. He had talked passionately about being an Engineer and how he had become a Carer. It would make a good feature, Joy was right. Janet had been in a world which was dominated by highly paid men and she had never really thought about who looked after the vulnerable until it affected her personally.

“So if you had to choose again as an eighteen year old, which would it be?” she asked Peter

“Probably what I had chosen, but no one ever suggested to me that I could do both” he replied.

“And do you think that you would have done both, if you could?” she asked encouragingly.

“Maybe, if someone suggested it to me, it just seems crazy to have such a split world, surely if you look at it all logically we should encourage people to do caring because we can never know when we might need it. I was talking to someone recently about a friend who had a teenage child who was suffering with mental health issues and the waiting list to see anyone in the local NHS was two years, can you believe that, its ridiculous, absolutely crazy the world that we live in.”

Janet listened and jotted notes as Peter talked and then abruptly stopped.

“Are you Ok?” said Janet

“Yes, I suppose” said Peter with tears in his eyes.

“It just pisses me off that’s all and I’ve come across people who try to speak out about it all and they seem to get listened to for five minutes. There are endless campaigns and articles about saving the planet and I understand that and am not against any of it ...but would these people who drive to places to campaign go and help the numerous older or disabled people or the child who struggles with who they are...Of course some would but why can’t it be normal!”

Janet decided that it was time to change the subject as she was feeling very emotional about it all and what Peter said was true and she would do her best to write a good feature.

“I think its time for some food” Janet said

“And no I’m not trying to stop you talking”

“I’m sorry” Peter replied

“I’m not trying to...”

“I know” said Janet who found herself wanting to give Peter a hug, but knew that she couldn’t.

She ordered some Staffordshire Oatcakes filled with cheese

“These are delicious” she said

“Yes, when my parents lived in Guildford I used to take them some, but you have to freeze them as otherwise they go mouldy pretty quickly” he said.

They had some ice cream to follow and then it was time for Peter to get back to work.

“Its been great meeting you, I’ll send you the edited copy before its published and the draft if you like, I’m not supposed to but I think you should see what I would like published and you can see the restrictions that I have to put up with that piss me off at times”

“That would be great” Peter said smiling



“And I’m sorry that I got so emotional, all of my life I’ve been told that I’m too sensitive”  
“But that’s why you make such a good carer” Janet said  
“And when you can tell me more about JJ66 well I’d love to know and help in any way that I can”  
“That’s great thanks”

They walked to their cars and Peter wanted to give Janet a hug, it had been an amazing experience, but he didn’t.

“So how did it go? Text Karen  
“Good, I’ll tell you later” Peter Text back as he was already a bit late for his first service user

“You ‘re late’ said Louise laughing  
“I know” Peter replied

Arthur Smith was very confused today and kept asking when the carers were coming and thought that Peter was his brother and Louise his cousin.

“Do you remember when we fell in the river when you were staying and Mum went mad at us” he said to Louise

“Oh yes, it was funny” she replied  
Peter laughed. They talked about whether to try to keep someone in the present ,or go along with when they thought it was, in one of Peter’s training sessions and there was mixed views. Louise’s view was that if it helped someone to be happy what did it matter if Arthur thought she was his cousin who had died several years before. Peter wasn’t sure.

“Oh hello Peter, what time did you come today?” Arthur asked  
“Oh only a few minutes ago” Peter said to reassure Arthur when in fact it had been half an hour.  
“You are a quick worker” Arthur said as they left  
“See you tomorrow”

Peter thought about Arthur sitting watching the TV until the next carer came and fed, changed and washed him. Arthur had to be hoisted, but he never complained. He just accepted his situation. He had no family left and never married or had children. Peter thought of these three years where Arthur had needed carers and compared it to Ed’s last year. It made him want to cry.

Karen was sitting watching the TV when Peter came into the living room.

“I need a hug” he said

“Bad day?” she asked

“No, just emotional” he replied

Peter wondered whether Janet felt the same and what she would write, would she really send him both the unedited and edited versions of the feature when he could use it, but he knew that he probably never would, he needed to build the trust of Journalists like Janet if he wanted to change things for the better which he was beginning to think that he wanted to.

“You’re very thoughtful, this evening” Karen remarked as she brought Peter a glass of wine

“Yes I suppose” he replied.

“I saw your Mum today, she loves living in Gnosall” she said

“Oh and your Dad has gone mad on digging the garden”

Peter was only half listening to Karen and thinking about the day, wondering about Arthur, Janet and Nerja. He really wanted to find out what the key was for. He still had nine weeks to go until he

finished his job and hadn't made any plans to go to Nerja, part of him wanted to take Karen with him but part wanted to do it alone.

The phone rang, it was Frazer asking if he could come and stay at the weekend for a few days. He said that he needed a break.

Peter talked to Karen about it and rang Frazer back saying that it would be fine, but that he would be working most of the time and so Frazer would have to just do his own thing. He had already told him that he was leaving his job.

The next few days were uneventful Arthur Smith knew Peter sometimes and not at others and Peter began to think that Louise did have the better approach. She described it as just a different type of living in the moment.

Karen was really enjoying being a carer and was thinking of ditching her media work completely but Peter felt that she should keep an open mind about it all.

Frazer was catching a train that would arrive at Stafford around 9pm on Thursday evening and Karen had agreed to pick him up as her shifts usually finished much earlier than Peter's.

"I'll get a takeaway" she said as she went off that morning.

"What do you prefer?" she asked

"Oh I'm not fussed, you choose, or probably Frazer will" he laughed.

Peter didn't have to be at work until 10am as one of the service users was in hospital and so he sat with a cup of coffee and looked at his emails. There was one from Janet with two attachments.

"So she kept her promise" he thought.

He read the unedited one first, which made him cry, it was full of passion with snippets of scenarios that he had shared with her.

He then read the edited one and he could see what Janet meant the emphasis had changed from passion to something that had an air of politics.

He wondered whether he had done the right thing being interviewed but realised that in fact Janet had given him some power to use the original if he wanted to.

The email that she wrote gave him full permission to use either just hoping that if he ever used the unedited that he would warn her first. It seemed to him that she wanted him to use the unedited but he saw how it might impact on her career and so he locked it carefully away for some future date if needed.

"Thanks for both copies" he emailed back

"It was great meeting you and no I won't use the unedited, but will archive it for the future, keep in touch, Peter"

Janet replied "I was so taken by what you told me that I have asked to go part time as I feel that I should be a carer too, I told my Dad and he said that he was proud of me, maybe together we can encourage more people to have joint careers, I'll let you know how I get on"

"Wow" said Louise when he told her about the email.

"That's amazing, I hope she does keep in touch"

Peter hoped so too.

He arrived home to an empty house, Karen had text to say that Frazer's train was delayed but that she would still get a takeaway.

Peter went out into the garden to do some watering and a Robin came very close to him and seemed to be talking to him.

"Lovely to see you too" he said.

Frazer came bursting into the garden.  
“Talking to yourself again are you” he said laughing  
Peter laughed back and the Robin flew away.  
“How was your trip?” Peter asked as Frazer gave him a bear hug  
“Oh some sad sod jumped on the track at Crewe” he said  
“So we were diverted”

They ate their takeaway and Peter listened to Frazer and Karen, it had been an eventful busy time.  
He looked across at these two people he loved and who loved him and thought, how lucky he was.

## Chapter 35

Peter didn't see much of Frazer, by the time he got home from work he was tired and just wanted to chill.

"I think Frazer's been meeting someone" Karen said excitedly after he'd been staying with them three nights.

"Oh" Peter commented not feeling in the mood for gossip.

That night Frazer text to say that he was staying over at a friend's. Peter still wasn't that interested. He thought that perhaps Frazer had found someone on a dating site.

"Well, don't you want to know?" asked Frazer the next evening.

"Know what?" asked Peter

"Who she is?"

"Not really, it's your business and you'll tell me when you're ready" Peter replied

"Are you alright? you seem a bit flat" Frazer asked

"Just tired, that's all"

"Yes, you seem to have been working a lot"

"I have to, it's the shortages and I'm beginning to feel guilty about leaving!"

"Well you shouldn't, you gave decent notice"

"I know...but..."

"You can't take everyone's problems on your shoulders" Frazer said assertively.

Peter knew that he was right and it would do the service users no good or his relationship with Karen if he made himself ill.

"Lets go to the pub and do Karaoke" Peter suddenly said, perking up a bit.

"Yes lets, but I just wanted to tell you" Frazer remarked.

"Its Chloe, isn't it" Peter said.

"How did you now?" Frazer asked puzzled.

"Well if it was anyone else you would have told me about it by now" said Peter laughing.

Karen decided to stay at home she had an early start and thought that Peter and Frazer should have mates time together.

They walked into the Royal Oak and found that the Karaoke had already started.

It was quite busy and so they asked a couple if they could sit at the table with them, who responded positively.

"You've made yourself a good life here!" Frazer said.

"Yes, I suppose so"

"What's up mate?" Frazer asked touching Peter on his arm.

"I'm just a bit pulled" Peter sighed.

"I love Karen and living and working here, but I have itchy feet, I need to know what's in Nerja. I don't think that I will settle until I do, and I'd love to go with Karen but I don't want to unsettle her and I just feel that I'm supposed to go alone, part of me is excited, the other part is scared stiff"

"Chloe would say that's your Sun and Moon signs are battling each other" laughed Frazer.

"I know it sounds a bit bollocks but in some ways it does make sense"

"So Chloe has introduced you to AERO then" said Peter smiling.

"Yes" Frazer replied.

"And it does make sense"

The music suddenly got louder which halted their conversation.

The couple sitting at their table got up and sang along to a duet that Peter had never heard before.

The audience clapped and cheered as the couple returned to their seats.

"That was our song" the man said.

“Jean wrote it” he added.

“Very nice” said Frazer.

“She wrote it about twenty years ago, but never played it anywhere”

“Wow” said Frazer.

Peter found it hard listening to the conversation and so just watched everyone in the pub, he recognised a few people.

“Do you play or sing?” the woman turned towards and asked Peter.

“I have sung with my Dad who plays guitar, but only a couple of times” Peter replied.

“Oh you should bring him to the Open Mic” the man said.

“Yes, we were planning coming, we just haven’t got around to it yet.”

Peter explained that his parents had only moved to Gnosall a few weeks ago.

“Oh where from?” the woman asked.

“Guildford, do you know it?”

The couple laughed.

“We used to live in Horsell which is only a few miles away” the man said.

“Its a small world” said Peter smiling.

“Oh come on” said the woman, grabbing Peter by the arm.

Peter did as he was told and once again found himself singing this time duetting with the woman.

As they returned to their seats Frazer was sitting next to the man and they were engrossed in conversation.

“That was really nice” said Frazer as they waved goodbye to the couple.

“Its a pity I have to go home tomorrow”

They walked back to Ed’s and found the house in darkness.

Karen had left a note to say that there was an emergency at one of her service users home and she had gone to help.

“Blimey, its all go” said Frazer

“Well we don’t usually work this late!” Peter said anxiously

It was just after 3am when Karen returned home and crept in next to Peter.

“Did you have a good time at the pub?” she said as Peter turned over.

He told her about the couple in the pub.

“So was the song any good?” she asked

“Yes, but we both need to go to sleep” Peter said bossily.

“Its only a few hours until we have to get up again no time for chat”

He turned towards Karen and she was sound asleep in her own dream world.

Peter tossed and turned and wished that he could be like her, but his mind wouldn’t stop, eventually he slept and then woke to their alarm feeling surprisingly refreshed.

Frazer was catching a train at lunchtime. He had arranged to go at a time that would fit in with Peter’s work.

“So you and Chloe?” asked Peter.

“I’m not sure” said Frazer.

Peter decided not to ask any more.

“But I do like Gnosall” Frazer exclaimed.

Peter felt sad when he waved Frazer off at the station. He had been so involved in his worries that he hadn’t spent enough time with him and wondered when he would see him again. He was a good friend and they had been through a lot of things together.

He popped back home for a sandwich before he had his afternoon shift. The house seemed quiet. Peter ate his sandwich in the garden and his Robin appeared again. He was sure that it was the one that he used to talk to when he lived in Emily. The Robin seemed to be talking to him.

“So you miss Emily?” he asked it and the Robin chirped something back.

“So I need to go to Nerja soon do I?” said Peter to the Robin and yet again the Robin seemed to be trying to talk to him and hopped a little closer to him.

The next door neighbour’s cat which was Tabby on the back with a black tail and a white chest came towards him chasing the Robin away.

Peter was slightly annoyed.

“We were talking” he said grumpily to the Cat

The Cat came over to be stroked and Peter responded, his fur felt soft and silky.

Peter realised that his life was full of interruptions. He had enjoyed his chat with the Robin, but the appearance of the cat made him live in the moment. He would go to Nerja, but not yet there were still people for Peter to help.

Edward Jones lived in a lot of clutter. He was ninety seven years old and refused to live in a residential home.

“Why should I when I have enough money to pay people to help me!” he had said when Peter first met him six months before.

“I know there are more needy people than me but...”

Peter liked Edward who he visited one afternoon a week to help with some housework.

“I want you to be honest with me” Edward had said the first time that Peter had visited.

“In what way?” said Peter

“Oh about everything, I want the last years of my life to be good and sometimes I do stupid things and the last thing I want to do is end up in hospital. Its the mess you see, I’m just hopeless. Its hard to throw anything away. My niece would like me to move to sheltered accommodation but she knows that I would hate it”

That afternoon Peter found Edward sitting on his bench in the garden. He didn’t look his usual chirpy self.

“Are you Ok Edward?” Peter asked as he sat near to him.

“I’m getting old” Edward remarked.

Peter didn’t quite know what to say.

“I know that we all get old” Edward said

“But I have more things I want to do, but because I’m old I can’t do them.”

“Why not?” Peter asked.

“What is it you’d like to do?”

“I’d like to go to Spain, there’s a special place that I went to many years ago, but I know that I wouldn’t manage on my own”

“Well surely you could find someone to go with you” Peter commented.

“Would you come with me if I covered all the costs?” Edward asked.

“What about my job?” Peter said laughing.

“You told me you were leaving, we could go after then. I have no intention dropping down dead any time soon”

Peter told Edward that he better get on with his tasks otherwise Edward’s niece would give him the sack.

Peter encouraged Edward to throw away some old newspapers and they washed up the dishes together. They chatted as they did the tasks jointly.

Peter had an hour a week with Edward and it was one of the most enjoyable times, so different to many of the service users.

“So will you go?” asked Edward as Peter was leaving.

“Where is it?” said Peter

“A small town not far from Malaga, called Nerja” Edward said smiling.

“Blimey” said Frazer as they chatted on the phone later.

“What a coincidence!”

Peter sat in the garden the next morning as he didn't need to be at work early. The Robin came over and he asked it whether he should go with Edward.

The Robin chirped and this time there was no sign of the Cat.

## Chapter 36

Peter and Edward's plane landed on time, as they taxied in Edward told Peter how excited he was. Peter was a little nervous "Would the man be waiting for them to take them to Nerja?" he worried. "Would Edward manage, why hadn't he just come on his own as he had originally planned?" he thought. But Karen was right he needed to help Edward's dream to return to Nerja and they had had fun together on the journey so far.

They waited for the queue of people rushing off the plane and were one of the last to get off. Edward beamed at the steward who grinned back and wished them a good trip. "See you on the way back" she said. Peter just smiled. They hadn't booked the flight back, they just wanted to stay until the time seemed right. Edward had insisted that he pay for most things "You can treat me occasionally" he said smiling.

They had rented a ground floor apartment, initially for a month but the owner had said that they could extend if they wanted as being February, besides the half terms there were less visitors to Nerja. The apartment was near to the Balcon de Europa and so Edward had commented that he could always just walk down, buy an ice cream and sit on a bench all day, if Peter wanted to go on longer trips, but Peter didn't know what he wanted to do.

Edward managed to walk to the luggage pick up area which surprised Peter, but by the time they reached the waiting taxi he said that he had reached his limit.

"I'm getting old" Edward said to the taxi driver who laughed saying "We all are" in his local Spanish accent.

Edward then began to speak to him in Spanish.

"Sorry Peter, I didn't want to leave you out of the discussion but I haven't spoken Spanish for so long and just wanted to know whether I could still speak it."

"And he still can" said the Taxi driving smiling.

"That's Ok, you just carry on, I can look out of the window" Peter replied.

It took about three quarters of an hour to get to Nerja. The views over the mountains and out to sea were spectacular. They made Peter feel alive. It was mid afternoon when they arrived at the apartment. The owner was waiting and seemed to know the taxi driver well, who she spoke to in Spanish and then spoke in English to Peter and Edward.

"Welcome to Nerja" she said and then showed them around the apartment, she then left them to it.

Edward said that he needed a rest and he asked if Peter would help him unpack later, or even the next day. Peter smiled and said "Yes of course I probably need a nap too"

The apartment had everything that they needed including a small private garden and they had a glimpse of the sea. Peter made them a drink and then left Edward for his rest and lay on his own bed.

The owner had left a bouquet of flowers, some fruit and some edible treats which Peter didn't recognise. He messaged Karen and his parents to say that they had arrived safely and then drifted off to sleep.

It was getting dark when Peter emerged from his sleep. There was a beautiful sunset and Edward was sitting outside drinking a glass of red wine.

"This is the life" he expressed to Peter

"I'm so grateful to you for making this happen"

Peter smiled back, he felt protective towards Edward.

"Be careful you don't catch a chill" He remarked

"You sound like my Mum" Edward laughed.

Peter laughed back.

Peter popped to his room to unpack and when he returned Edward was inside.

"Shall we go and find something to eat?" Edward asked.

"Tomorrow we can cook, but today lets just enjoy whatever we find"



Peter liked the idea of just enjoying whatever they could find, fortunately there was a small restaurant near to their apartment where they ate some delicious tapas and Edward continued with more wine whilst Peter had San Sebastien which tasted different to what he had in pubs in the UK. "I'm surprised that a young man like you wants to hang out with an old Geezer like me" Edward remarked.

"Well I wanted to come to Nerja anyhow" Peter said.

"I'm not sure if I told you about the mystery letter and key that I had left me which fits something in Nerja but I don't know what"

"How exciting, I love a mystery" Edward declared.

"Well it could be some junk for all I know"

"Or it could be a palace" Edward said winking.

Peter laughed.

The food was good and the waitress brought them the pudding menu. They decided they were pretty full and so just chose some ice cream.

They were just thinking of leaving when some music started to play.

"Can we stay?" asked Edward

"Yes, if you like"

A couple of women and a man appeared in bright red flamenco outfits followed by a guitar player. Peter was entranced by the haunting music and dance which reached a crescendo and then it was finished.

"I enjoyed that" said Edward as they walked back to their apartment.

"She was younger than me, oh at least ten years, her name was Isabella. She captured me with her dark eyes but then I couldn't stay and she couldn't leave" he said with a tear in his eye.

Over the next few days Edward talked about Isabella and Peter listened. They settled into life in the apartment with Edward helping as much as he could. It seemed that being in Nerja was good for both of them and neither wanted to venture far.

"I don't think you're ever going to leave" said Karen, laughing down the phone.

She told him about the latest happenings in Gnosall and Haughton. Peter's Dad had started playing his guitar regularly at a local Old peoples home and his Mum had joined the Best kept village group.

Peter had a twang of missing what he regarded as home, but he was determined to spend at least a month in Nerja, he just knew that it was part of the journey that Granny had planned for him. He thought that she would be proud of him.

"Your Gran would be proud of you" Edward said.

"Well" said Karen, a week later

"When can I come and stay?"

"Whenever you want" said Peter

"Are you Ok?" Karen asked

"Yes, why"

"Its just...are we OK?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"You just sound different"

"Sorry"

The conversation carried on like this and Peter felt uncomfortable, he didn't seem to be able to reassure her that they were Ok.

Edward suggested going to the Nerja caves. "We could get a taxi" he asked.

"I know you could walk that far but I couldn't"

“When is that girl of yours coming to stay?” Edward asked

“I’m not sure” Peter replied

“You are Ok, aren’t you!”

“Yes, I think so” Peter said not even convincing himself.

That night Peter lay awake thinking of him and Karen. Was she the girl of his dreams he wondered and was there such a thing!

He remembered how he had felt about Helen and how those feelings had changed. Was the same thing happening for him and Karen? Lots of questions rumbled around in his head and then suddenly one word came into his head,.....Key...

Maybe the key wasn’t to a place, maybe it was just symbolism. He wished that he didn’t have to think so deeply about things.

It was 7am and the phone rang.

“I’m sorry” Karen said

“I just thought...”

Peter could hear her crying and wanted to be there to hold her closely to him, to tell her that it wasn’t her, it was him”

“When can you get time off?” he asked

He did want her to come he realised.

“Can you have two weeks?” he queried

She said that she would try.

Peter knew that he needed to have Karen there when he tried the key, whatever it was for she needed to be there with him. All of those ponderings suddenly just melted away. He had no doubts about them, he clearly saw them together for always, it was just this journey that had created a path of puzzles for him to solve.

They ate breakfast and got ready for the taxi which was due at ten. The driver was the one who brought them from the airport. Edward chatted merrily to him in Spanish.

The caves were amazing and the story behind them being discovered by some local boys in 1950’s.

Peter felt uplifted by the time that they returned to the apartment and Karen had messaged to say that she could get a week off work, but not two because of the pressures. She could come in ten days time. Peter replied that he was over the moon...and he was..

“Well that’s good, lad” said Edward, when Peter told him

“I’m looking forward to seeing this girl of yours and then perhaps you’ll stop dithering about the key”

“What do you mean?” asked Peter

“Well we’ve been here over a week and you still haven’t done anything about it!”

“So”

“So isn’t that what you came for?”

“Yes, I suppose...”

“There you go again.....dithering”

“Well there’s no rush, its been there for ages!”

“True but whatever it is your Gran wanted you to have it and to probably to help you now rather than in the future is linked to that key”

Peter pondered on what Edward said but hadn’t Granny given him enough already, was there something that she really would have liked to have given him but couldn’t he wondered and why here now, was this where he would find the real treasure not under the apple tree?

## Chapter 37

“I missed you” said Peter as he snuggled up to Karen.

She smiled and within seconds was asleep.

He lay awake thinking of the past month which he had thoroughly enjoyed just being with Edward in Nerja, but he still looked forward each night to his bedtime chat with Karen.

He thought about how unadventurous he used to be when Granny was still alive.

His greatest adventure had been with Helen, everything else was just expected of him.

He had always wondered what that twinkle was in Granny’s eye, it was more than a fondness for him and his family, but finding out about Ed had so surprised him and he regretted not being able to spend more time with him, maybe that was part of the reason that he enjoyed Edward’s company.

“Why shouldn’t he enjoy time with a 97 year old!” he thought, but also wondered what locals thought of them together as they wandered around Nerja.. The thoughts made him chuckle.

He was back in his habit of thinking too much. Karen had helped him to live each day as it came, not knowing what it might bring.

He looked across at her and all the doubts that he had just floated away, she enabled him to be ‘just him’ whoever that might be.

“Did anyone really know who they were?” he thought.

The comfort of lying next to her calmed him and soon he was fast asleep.

He awoke to find himself alone and for a second thought that Karen being there was just a dream. He pulled on some shorts and walked through to the apartment kitchen to find Karen and Edward engrossed in a deep discussion.

“Morning lazy bones” said Karen smiling.

“He needed that sleep” said Edward assertively.

“And today we can find out about the key as he just couldn’t do it without you!” he continued.

Peter smiled shyly

“And you didn’t want me to come at all initially” said Karen laughing.

“True, but I knew we had to do it together. I’ll grab a shower and a quick bite and then I’ll be ready, but I don’t know where we start” Peter remarked

“With a locksmith!” Edward answered.

“They should know what kind of key that it is, so you see, I had to be here so that I could speak to them in Spanish.”

Peter laughed and went off for his shower.

He stood under the warm water trickling over his body and felt excitement running through his veins. It was like when he was a small boy opening his Christmas presents wondering what he would find. He had been scared to anticipate what the key was for, in case he was disappointed, but now he didn’t really care, it was the adventure of not knowing that gave him this magnificent buzz.

Manuel Rodriguez spoke impeccable English which disappointed Edward, but pleased Peter.

“We can go for a drink together sometime Senor Edward and I will introduce you to some of my friends and they will speak Spanish with you, but its not fair to your friends to talk and they not be able to understand” he said.

Edward accepted the offer.

“Maybe tonight” said Manuel

“We can leave these lovebirds to catch up” he winked as he said this.

Karen laughed loudly whilst Peter did shyly.

“Well your key is to a house” he said

“Its quite old and you say that your Grandmother left it for you, so the only thing I can suggest is going to what would be our Land Registry. You could look up your Grandmothers name and see if you can link her name to a property. I can help you, if you like, as I find this very interesting”

“Yes that would be great” said Peter

“But”

Before he could say anymore Manuel shook his hands in a dismissive way and said that he wouldn’t want any money.

Peter thanked him and they left taking the key with them.

“Right who’s for tapas?” Edward asked as they walked along the road.

“Yes please” said Karen

They found a little bar down a back street that Peter couldn’t pronounce and tucked into platefuls of delicious tapas whilst drinking a local beer. By the time that they finished Peter felt rather sleepy. He had had a busy few days and so suggested returning to their apartment.

“You’re very quiet” Karen said later that afternoon as they prepared vegetables for their evening meal.

“Am I?” Peter replied

“Thinking of the key are you?” Karen said

“Yes”

“Hopefully Manuel will find the answer”

“I hope so, but then in some ways it would be the end of the journey” Peter said soulfully

“You don’t know that, it might lead to other things”

“Part of me wants it to be the end and part of me doesn’t” Peter said

“Do you know, there is only one thing I’m certain of” He continued

“And that’s that I want you always in my life, I did wonder you know, I’ve never been as certain about things as you”

“Well there are lots of things I’m not certain about, I just don’t tell you, but I am about us”

Peter hugged Karen with wet hands.

They laughed.

Peter loved this closeness and laughing about things, in fact he loved his current life even though he didn’t really know where he was going.

His mobile rang and he answered it, he chatted for a short time.

“That was Manuel, he has found something already and suggests meeting us in the bar just around the corner at eight.”

Edward decided to stay in the apartment he needed some time just to rest and read he said. He could practice his Spanish some other time.

They ate at seven and after clearing up left the apartment just before eight and walked the few minutes away to the bar.

Manuel was waiting for them. He saw them coming and got up from the bar seat and headed towards them. He was smiling.

Peter felt worried.

“Don’t look so worried, my friend, its good news, and even more exciting than what I had anticipated, but first let me buy you a drink” he said

“I’d like some Sangria” Karen said

“And you?” Manuel asked looking at Peter

‘Oh, I don’t mind’

“So we’ll all have Sangria then” said Manuel speaking to the barman.

“So the key does belong to a property in Nerja that has been empty for a long time, apparently someone pays for the property to be cleaned regularly and I spoke to the cleaner who said that no one has been there for many years. The property is in your Mother’s name but to get permanent access we will have to prove that you have rights, although the cleaner was willing to take you in to have a look if I come too.”

“Wow that’s exciting” said Karen.

“When can we go and look?”

“I’ll ask her tomorrow and let you know” Manuel replied.

They stayed at the bar and Peter found that Manuel knew a lot of people. He had lived his whole life in Nerja and said that he never wanted to live anywhere else. He had been on holiday to the UK to practice his English, but was always glad to get home.

He had learned to be a locksmith from his Uncle who he had been very close to but who had sadly died a couple of years before. Manuel was 40 next year and would have liked to be married with children but the right woman had not appeared. Peter thought of Ed and how he had found the right woman too late in life.

“Well” said Edward after they returned to the apartment. Peter repeated what Manuel had told them

“Your Gran certainly had an interesting life” Edward exclaimed.

“Yes, but...” said Peter

“Don’t worry, I’ll help you” Edward jumped in before Peter could say anymore.

“We can find a good solicitor to sort it all out, just enjoy some time with this lovely girl of yours, have a couple of day trips somewhere, you know I’ll be quite happy pottering on my own and can practice my Spanish with some of Manuel’s friends”

Karen only had five more days left before she had to fly back to Manchester and although Peter wanted to find out more he could wait.

The next morning Peter and Karen walked to the Nerja Caves. He had told her all about them.

She thought they were beautiful and thought perhaps the key would open a gem house too.

Peter just laughed saying that it would probably be the equivalent of a two up two down but whatever it was like didn’t matter to him, it was just the mystery behind it all that he was interested in.

That evening Peter rang Dad to talk to him about what had been found out so far.

“You don’t sound surprised?” Peter said

Dad commented that having had the other mysteries emerge over the last couple of years that nothing would surprise him now. He then changed the subject and talked about what was happening in Gnosall and ended by asking when Peter was coming home.

Peter suggested that they came out for a holiday, but they seemed so busy getting involved locally that they had no time for a trip.

He ended the call and for a few minutes felt home sick.

The next day Peter and Karen caught a bus to Malaga and visited the Picasso museum. Karen enjoyed it more than Peter.

“Let’s have a carriage ride around the town” she suggested.

It seemed rather expensive, but Peter agreed and loved it. The driver took them up some back streets.

Peter found it a wonderful way to explore.

## Chapter 38

“I’ve got good news for you” said Manuel after Peter answered his mobile.

“Maria, the cleaner has agreed that if I come with you she will let you come and see your Grandmother’s property. It is actually not in Nerja as I thought, but is in Frigliana, a small town about 20 kilometers from Nerja. I can take you there if you like?”

Peter said that would be great if Manuel could, but if he was too busy they could meet him there and go by bus if there was one. Manuel insisted that he would drive them the next day. He would pick them up at 11am. Peter felt so grateful, yet again in this world that reported too many negative things he had found a good soul, who wanted nothing in return.

Peter went out to the balcony where Edward and Karen were sitting.

“Is everything Ok?” asked Karen.

“Yes” said Peter beaming and told them about his conversation with Manuel.

“That’s brilliant” she said

“He is such a kind man and a chance for me before I have to go home”

For a moment Peter had forgotten that Karen was going back to the UK. He had got so used to having her around and he suddenly felt a pang of loss and panic, knowing that she was going. He had so enjoyed these few days that he had with the three of them.

“Lets eat out tonight!” suggested Edward.

“Ok, but we must pay this time though” Karen replied.

But Edward insisted as he always did on paying saying that they needed more money than he did and that he liked paying for them.

“So will you have to isolate for a few days when you get home?” Edward asked.

“I’m not sure, things change all of the time” Karen replied

“It makes it so hard for everyone”

Covid had become a way of life, which also meant that plans changed regularly.

They ate at the local bar in the road that Peter still couldn’t pronounce. Karen laughed every time that he tried. She was picking up Spanish much quicker than he was, which frustrated him a little, but he didn’t say anything.

There was a flamenco dancing performance as they ate.

“I wish I could do that?” Edward remarked.

“You’re never too old” Karen replied smiling.

“Oh yes I am” Edward laughed.

That night Karen suggested to Peter that they had a chat with Manuel to see if he could arrange for Edward to have his own special flamenco dance.

“I’m sure that it must be possible” she said

Peter laughed, but Karen was insistent and so he promised to have a discreet chat with Manuel if he saw him before her.

Peter was restless during the night and when he slept he had vivid dreams of spending time with Granny when he was a child. He woke up with a start, looked at the clock, it was 3.15am. Karen was murmuring peacefully next to him. There was a streak of moonlight through the gap in the curtains. He crept out of bed and looked through the curtains at the moon. It was shining brightly with stars sparkling around it in the sky. Peter was in awe and also was excited about the trip next day.

He crept in next to Karen, she turned over and whispered “Are you Ok?”

“Yes” he said and cuddled her until they both drifted off to sleep. The next thing he knew was the sun streaming through the curtains, the moon had finished her shift and now the adventures of the day were getting nearer and nearer.

Manuel smiled standing next to his red Mercedes.

“Maria has been delayed slightly, so we have time for a coffee and then we can go” he said.

They followed him to the little bar around the corner from Manuel’s key shop where it was very quiet and so they were served quickly with coffee and some delicious sweet pastries.

“If I lived in Nerja all the time. I would be so fat” said Karen laughing

“better to be fat and happy” Manuel replied smiling.

Peter smiled too and for a few moments his natural nervousness disappeared.

Manuel paid and they walked out of the bar towards his car.

“I bet you wonder if I do any work” commented Manuel

“The truth is that I too was lucky to receive some money a few years ago from my Aunt which gives me the freedom to work less hours. She taught me as a child how to save and so although it seems that I am always treating you and others. I live very modestly myself.”

Peter listened to Manuel’s life story and his regrets and decided that both Manuel and Karen were right, he should live in the moment and not worry about what might happen.

A text beeped on his phone as they travelled to Frigiliana, it was from Helen

“I want you to be one of the first to know” she said

“I’m getting married”

Peter put the phone back in his pocket. He felt nothing, she was the past. He was now heading further into his future with the girl that he wanted for ever in his life and the new friend who he enjoyed spending time with and it felt great.

The house was bigger than Peter expected. It had the traditional blue and white tiles at the front and from the road looked like many of the houses but the entrance was wide enough for a car and as the gate opened they drove into a court yard.

“Wow” said Karen

“Its beautiful”

Maria was waiting for them. She was older than Peter expected.

“Hola” she said

Manuel translated for them as Maria only had a few words in English. She told them that she had known Peter’s Granny and thought that she was a lovely lady.

Maria unlocked the front door and they walked into yet another court yard with rooms off it.

“Its massive” said Karen

“And it has views” said Manuel as he translated for Maria.

They had a tour of the whole house. There were two balconies looking in opposite directions which had magnificent views.

Karen took lots of photos “You needn’t worry, they’re just for us” she told Peter and asked Manuel to explain to Maria.

Maria smiled.

They went into the kitchen which was massive, with a large table that could seat a dozen people.

Maria had made a spread of Tapas for them and a large jug of Sangria. She encouraged them to sit down and the four of them tucked in. Initially Maria held back but Peter was insistent that she join them.

Maria chatted telling them about Peter’s Granny and the artists that used to visit the house.

Yet again this was a world that Peter knew nothing about. He knew that Granny used to disappear for a time but he was so busy in his own world that to him it was just normal, but he began to wonder why Spain was never talked about at home.

They stayed about an hour and then Manuel drove them back to Nerja as he needed to open the shop. As they left Maria gave them both a hug and said that she hoped to see them soon and that she would practice her English. Karen said that she would practice her Spanish too and that she would encourage Peter to do the same.

On the journey back Peter asked Manuel if he knew how old Maria was.

“I believe that she is over 80” he said

“But how much older I really don’t know, she just likes caring for the house” he said

Peter was becoming overwhelmed again. He was confused, where did all of this money come from” he wondered. Although Granny had never been mean, she also didn’t throw lots of money around. He always thought that she had a modest pension.

Edward had had a nice day hanging out with some friends of Manuel and was a little tipsy. He’d been practicing his Spanish he told them.

“I like living here” he said

“Perhaps I’ll never go home”

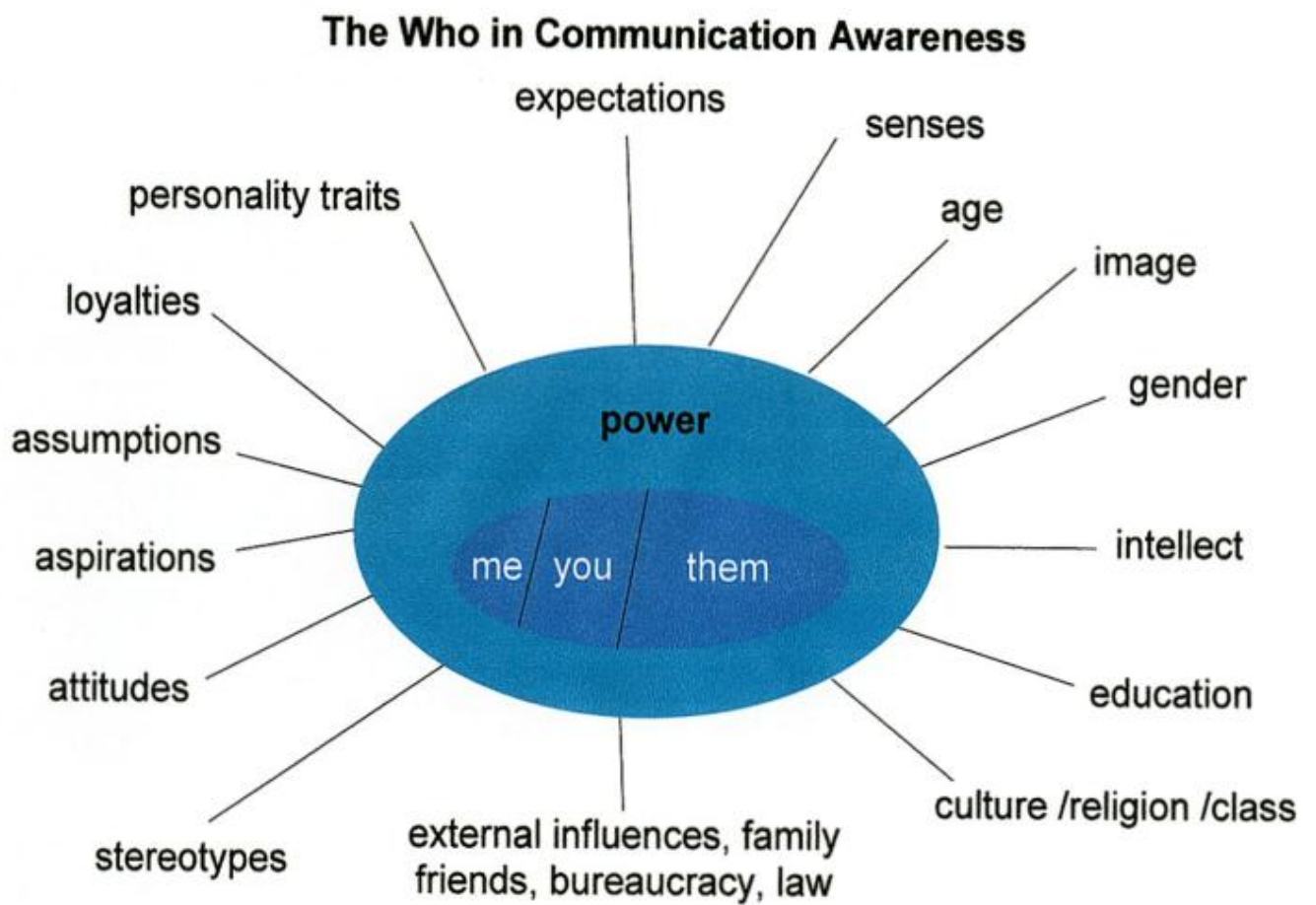
And he never did.

The next morning Peter woke and wondered where Edward was, he had died in his sleep.



# The AERO Effect

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## Chapter 1

“She’s Beautiful” said Mum.

Peter felt he was glowing. He and Karen were now parents to baby Damita.

They had pondered names for weeks but then decided that she should have a Spanish name. Karen said that they should have the fourth letter of the alphabet as it seemed that fours were lucky for them.

” In fact you are both beautiful” Mum said, referring to baby Damita and Karen.

“What about me!” exclaimed Peter laughing playfully.

” Well..” said Mum, rolling her eyes. They all started laughing.

“Its a shame that Dad couldn’t come” Peter said.

He didn’t want to say too much otherwise it would feel like the memory of Karen’s parents wouldn’t matter.

It seemed a long time since they opened the door in the house in Nerja. They reckoned that it was that night that Damita was conceived, just as Edward passed away. Of course they didn’t know at the time and in some ways when they did, it wasn’t the best of times as Peter was without a job and Karen hadn’t been doing hers for more than a few months. They had decided not to get married. They both thought that sorting out their lives and preparing for their new arrival was more important.

Peter looked across at the three main women in his life and had a feeling of satisfaction and pride. He had the best of parents and was determined that he would also try to be a good parent, but the political climate that Damita was being born into was very fragile.

They still had the house in Spain, but could only visit there from time to time because the laws had changed since Brexit. They still lived in Ed’s house, but had talked of moving somewhere different, but for now none of that mattered.

Manuel was renting the Spanish house out for them until they decided what the best thing was to do. Their hearts said to keep the house but their heads said that it just wasn’t practical.

” Don’t rush” Manuel had said

He felt that he could get enough income for them to keep the house going for now and only charged a small amount to do this, he had become a good friend.

Peter kissed Karen and Damita and told Karen that he would return in the morning ready to take them home.

“So” said Mum, as they walked to the car. ” So how are you feeling?”

“ Happy, excited, scared, what if I can’t do it Mum! what if I am a hopeless parent, what if I can’t get a proper job!”

“We all feel like that” Mum said, putting her arms around him just before they reached the car.

That night Peter tossed and turned. He was having the most vivid, ridiculous dreams. He had just been made Prime Minister and was holding his first cabinet meeting. He looked at all of the ministers around the table and wondered why they were all there. Suddenly he woke up with the alarm going off. He had to get up to visit his service users. Joy had welcomed him back with open arms. Peter had felt a little guilty asking her if there were any jobs going. He hadn’t wanted to work full time but Karen had suggested that he do it for a year and then gradually go part time.

” Perhaps when the baby is a few months old we could job share” she had suggested but Peter

realised that if they did that the time that they had together with Damita would be limited and suggested that he work full time for now and see how they got on.

Peter had two service users to visit and then he had the rest of the day off so that he could collect Karen and Damita. They had decided to leave it a few days before they went to register her birth. He arrived at the first service user's and waited for Louise to come, he was pleased to be pairing with her again. His first few months had been with a stream of different carers. Some only stayed for a few days, others for a few weeks.

Joy tried to get feed back about why, but often the carers were reluctant to give real reasons and said that it was nothing to do with the way that she organised the work, it was just 'not for them.' Peter remembered how only the day before he had said to his Mum about looking for a 'proper' job, as if caring didn't fill that category, he felt guilty for what he had said.

Since Brexit the shortage of workers had become a common theme across the service and caring sectors.

Frazer, who had moved to Manchester was running his own small scale engineering business and was regularly complaining about the lack of commitment of workers. On a few occasions Peter had helped him out with some of the initial designs for free.

"I'd love to pay you" Frazer had said

"But you know how it is"

"Don't worry" Peter had replied.

Peter arrived at the first service users house and was amazed at all the thoughts that had passed through his head during the ten minute journey. He spied Louise parking in front of him. They were lucky to be able to do this as often parking added to the frustrations when their time was so restricted.

"Morning" Louise said as she approached him.

Peter smiled.

"Show me a pic then...how are they?"

"Peter shut the car door and locked up, he was carrying the carers bag that they took into most houses. He placed it over his shoulder, got out his mobile and showed Louise his favourite picture of Karen and Damita.

"Oh she's gorgeous" said Louise "And Karen looks glowing"

"Yes" said Peter smiling shyly

"To think of all the things that have happened to you over the last year" she said thoughtfully." And nothing has really happened to me" she added

Peter wasn't sure what to say and so decided to say nothing, that was one of the reasons that he liked working with Louise, as often he could just do that, say nothing.

## Chapter 2

Audrey Carter had moved to Staffordshire to be near her daughter and her family, only to find that after a year her daughter got a job in Oxford where Audrey had moved from. She told Peter that her friends had thought she was mad and sometimes she wondered too, but she liked the bungalow that she had bought and had joined several local groups in both Gnosall and Haughton.

For the first three years her health was fine and at 77 she had expected some ailments but the day that she was found by a neighbour in the back garden in a confused state and unable to move had been a shock to everyone who had got to know her. She only had the one daughter, who as well as a full time job also had three teenage children and although she called her a good daughter and got on well with her husband Audrey realised that she would have to accept the help of carers. Fortunately she regained her speech very quickly but her mobility was a different story. The waiting list for physios was atrocious and the time lost meant that every time that Peter and Louise visited they had to spend sometime helping Audrey with some basic exercises as well as undertaking a list of carers tasks. The problem they had was that Audrey, although a lovely person didn't carry on trying when they weren't there and they noticed that even very simple tasks were becoming difficult for her to do.

Peter and Louise arrived late at the second service user's home, normally it wouldn't have mattered, but today family members were holding a family meeting and the GP was also attending. Louise apologised for them being late. The family said nothing, only gave them looks that could kill. "Well now we are all here we can get on with the meeting", the eldest son said sarcastically. Peter listened, but was also in a dream. It seemed like the same topics always came up with this family and that nothing ever got resolved. They talked about their father as if he didn't exist. How much he understood was hard to know. The family were concerned that the carers were always late and that tasks didn't get completed, "but then how could they" thought Peter. On several occasions George, [as he was called] had been aggressive to carers, but this was minimised. The family refused to consider residential care. They were happy to arrive in expensive, flashy cars but not pay for care.

As Peter left he thought of George and felt sorry for him.

The family left at the same time and walked past Peter and Louise laughing and smiling, but also treating them as if they didn't exist.

When they reached their cars Louise sighed and said "You know he used to have a successful business" referring to George. "What a pitiful family to treat him so badly."

"Are you Ok?" said Karen as they drove home.

"I am now" said Peter smiling.

He didn't want to spoil the coming home of baby Damita and seeing George's family had made him determined to be a good Dad. He was glad that he had a few days off work so that he could just concentrate on his family.

Karen went for a snooze and so Peter was in charge of Damita on his own for the first time. They had placed the cradle in the living room so that Karen could have a proper rest. It was small enough to move easily.

Peter looked at his daughter as she lay sleeping and was amazed at her tiny features. He felt this amazing feeling drift through his body and realised that it was a kind of love that he had never felt before. He wanted to protect Damita, but he also wanted to help her flourish. The warm feeling turned to excitement and wonder, but then for a second the meeting about George threatened to destroy those feelings. Peter decided that he wouldn't let it. He had done what he could for George and would do what he could in the future, but for now these moments were just him and Damita. Of course Karen mattered and everyone else that he cared for, but he would treasure these first moments alone with his daughter forever.

Karen walked into the room a few minutes later and Damita awoke.

” I couldn’t sleep” she said  
” I’m so excited being home, being just the three of us”  
And Peter was too.

### Chapter 3

Damita was crying, it was just before 3am and this was the fourth time that she had been awake.

“I’ll take her” said Peter

“Ok” said Karen.

Peter took Damita from Karen, went down stairs and within seconds She was fast asleep again. He lay her over his shoulder and sang to her, she murmured. He was tired but also happy. This was normal for so many people he knew, but five nights in a row was just rather too much when he had work the next morning.

“Wakey, wakey” said Karen

Peter had fallen asleep on the settee with Damita in her pram. He remembered pushing the pram up and down. He looked at the time, it was just after seven.

“I’ll take over” Karen said warmly.

“Whatever you did, it worked” she commented

“I just sang to her” Peter said as he headed upstairs.

The shower was refreshing and he realised that he’d had nearly three hours of quality sleep.

He grabbed an apple and a yogurt out of the fridge and filled a flask with coffee.

” Are you slimming?” asked Karen, laughing

“Nope, just couldn’t be bothered to make some toast.”

Peter kissed Damita and Karen and grabbed his car keys and headed out to the car.

” I’ll pop home at lunchtime, I’ve got a split shift” he said.

” Great, I’ll see you then, byee” Karen replied smiling, the sleep had done her good.

Peter arrived at a new service users house, Tom Arthur, Louise was already there.

“So have you met Mr Arthur” said Louise as she locked her car.

“No, have you?”

“No” She replied

“Oh well, this seems to be the story of our lives, new people who we know so little about”

“Well its not surprsing really with the national shortage of carers” said Peter

“Oh lets not talk about that today, lets just get on with the job” Louise said.

“You look tired” Peter remarked

“Yep, I need a change from all of this” she said

“I’ve done it for too long, anyhow lets just get on with it.”

“And about time too” said a tall thin man who Peter assumed was Tom Arthur.

“Oh Mr Arthur we were told 8am”

“ He’s in there” said the young man pointing to a room nearby.

“Right I’m off, see you Dad”

The next minute the tall man had pushed pass them and walked off down the street.

Louise looked at Peter and he exchanged her look of confusion.

Peter entered the room where the tall man had indicated. The curtains were pulled and sitting in a chair in the darkness was a figure. The room smelt dreadful.

Louise opened the curtains whilst Peter leant over the person.

” Mr Arthur, I’m Peter and this is Louise, your carers”

There was no response.

Peter touched Mr Arthur, he felt cold

“Oh my God” said Louise.

As daylight shone on Mr Arthur it was obvious that he had been dead for sometime.

Peter dialled 999 whilst Louise rang Joy.

## Chapter 4

” I’ve tried to encourage her” said Joy

“But she is so low, finding Mr Arthur like that she told me was the last straw. I really don’t know how we will manage without her, Louise is such a good worker. You can’t have a chat with her can you Peter?”

Peter felt for Joy. He too had found the experience horrible. They had had to stay with Mr Arthur until the Police arrived who had fortunately let them leave, but there was no way that they could visit any more service users that day and so Joy had to find replacement carers at short notice.

Peter wondered about the young man who had told them where Mr Arthur was. The brief time that they saw him didn’t indicate that he was anything but a young man.

Later in the day the Police had interviewed Peter at the local station and he had given a full account of what happened including mentioning the young man.

Damita seemed to have settled down at night which helped both Karen and Peter but over the next few days Peter worried about Mr Arthur and the young man.

He also missed Louise. He had talked to her on the phone but she was adamant that she couldn’t return and was considering a new career. She promised to keep in touch with Peter.

“I’m proud of you” said Mum, as she cuddle Damita

“You’ve come such a long way since the young man who lost his Granny and worried about all sorts of things” Peter laughed

“What’s funny?” Mum asked

“I still worry” Peter replied.

“But it doesn’t overwhelm you, like it used to”

“That’s true, maybe its just age!”

“I don’t think so, because there are loads of people of all ages who can’t cope and as an outsider you can look at them and their lives and think, why, when there are people who do cope who have in some cases very traumatic things that they have had to cope with.”

“Oh its partly the nurture/ nature debate but its also AERO. I really believe that if you address the elements of AERO in your life it helps you cope with so much more.” Peter replied.

Later that day Peter thought about his discussion with Mum and started to think deeply about the four elements of AERO.

“You are very deep in thought” said Karen having returned from placing Damita in her cot.

“Dami is settling much better” she exclaimed, beaming

Peter smiled. He had a good life and was enjoying his little family. He loved seeing Mum and Dad but he especially loved just the three of them snuggled up together.

“Why don’t you teach people about AERO” said Karen.

” How and where?” Peter queried.

“Oh, I don’t know, perhaps its something that Louise could take a lead in and you could just help here plan it”

Peter hadn’t thought about that. He had wondered how Louise was managing. She had never really talked about her family. Peter knew that she was married, but didn’t even know whether she had any children. In fact he didn’t know how old she was. There just had never been any time to get to know each other, it had been just a rush from one service user to the next. their energies had been placed totally on the needs of the service users, which in lots of ways was good, but it felt strange to know so little about her after all this time.

Peter thought about time and how a few minutes could seem like forever and yet a few years could speed by and make you wonder what you had actually done in that time. Sometimes Peter would think that he had done hardly anything but then at other times he would think of his thirty year old

self who mourned the loss of his girlfriend Helen to the nearly thirty five year old man and father who had completely changed his life and had even considered living in another country.

They hadn't been to Spain since Karen was six months pregnant. It was time they took a break.

They would have to get Damita a passport.

"You are so trapped in your thoughts today" Karen commented

"Its time we got a passport for Damita and had a trip to Spain" she said.

Peter laughed

"Whats up" Karen commented with a concerned look on her face.

"I was just thinking the same, I'll talk to Joy about taking a week off"

"Can't we make it two?" Karen pleaded

"Perhaps" said Peter, but he thought that it was unlikely given all the work pressures.



## Chapter 5

The local newspaper's front page was entitled "Man dead whilst son carries on his life."

Peter's phone rang, it was Joy.

"I had the Police on the phone" she said

"Its Mr Arthur's son, they said that he won't talk to them unless a carer is present, which the police thought was a strange request but wondered whether this would be possible and he also asked for a man, you couldn't do it could you?" She asked.

Peter agreed but wasn't sure. He knew nothing about the young man, not even his name.

Joy told him that it was at 2pm today and that she would cover his caseload as she wasn't sure how long it would be for. She said that she would email him all of the details.

"That's strange" said Karen

"Obviously the guy doesn't trust solicitors, do you think that he has a learning disability?" she asked

"Haven't a clue, I didn't see him for more than a few seconds" Peter replied.

"Have you got time to look after Dami while I pop to the shops?" Karen asked

"Well if you go soon, Yes" Peter replied

He had worked out that it would take him about half an hour to get to the Police station. He had thought that he was going to have a chilled day as he wasn't working until mid afternoon, but now his plans had been dashed. He was slightly annoyed, but then thought how silly he was compared to the situation. Mum was coming around to visit this afternoon and so Karen would have some company, not that she needed it as she was coping amazingly with Damita, but it was still early days. Peter could have insisted on taking paternity leave but he knew what pressure this would put on Joy and so instead she had reduced his caseload. Joy had always been a good employer.

Peter decided to park at stafford railway station and walk across town to the police station. He paid for four hours as he didn't know how long the interview would take. Joy had agreed to reimburse him.

He had never been into a police station and realised what a sheltered life he had led.

The Duty Sergeant took his name and told him to wait for someone to come and get him. He hadn't asked him for any identification, but Peter always carried his agency card with him. He sat for about ten minutes, looking frequently at the clock facing him and then an officer arrived dressed in plain clothes and so Peter assumed that he was a detective.

"Thanks for coming" The detective said, introducing himself as DI Cook.

"This is a strange case" he said as they walked to the interview room.

"The son has refused a Solicitor and at this stage we don't even know whether he is involved in his fathers death, its just the early normal interview, but he told us that he had things to say but that he just didn't trust a Solicitor.

Peter wondered what he was going into, he had no experience of this kind of thing.

They entered the interview room and he recognised the young man, even though he'd only seen him for those few seconds.

"I'd like everything recorded" said the young man, who Peter found was called Tom

Peter thought that he sounded a little too pushy but didn't say anything. Joy had told him in her email not to say anything unless asked and so Peter was prepared to listen to whatever Tom or the police had to say and hopefully not feel that he wanted to take either side. His natural introversion helped with this even though he had realised recently and especially since Damita was born that he wasn't as introverted as he had always thought that he had been.

He prepared to listen to Tom's tale, but what Tom said was more than he had expected.

” I have an older sister”Tom said

“She was lucky to get away, she went to Uni and left me in the clutches of my parents.”

Warning bells rang in Peter’s head as he listened to the way that Tom talked.

The interview finished fifty minutes later and during that time Peter had heard a tale of an upbringing that was so different to his own.

Tom’s sister was ten years older than him and left when she went to Uni at nineteen and rarely returned. Tom who was thirty five had stayed at home because at the age of fifteen he was diagnosed with epilepsy and ADHD and it was felt that he wouldn’t manage at University and struggled to conform to school.

He said that his Mum died when he was seventeen. She had done everything for his Father who was very controlling and would never let anyone into the house.

Tom had a part time job, but when the boss found out about his epilepsy he had told him to leave.

His Dad blamed Tom for losing his job.

When the Detective asked him about the days before they found his Dad Tom said that for about a year they had lived separate lives and rarely talked to each other. A month before his sister had mentioned to him that she was going to get some carers for his Dad but never told him anymore until Peter and Louise arrived. His sister hadn’t visited for over a year.

He told DI Cook that he and his Dad had argued a few weeks before and instead of making up with his Dad as he had always previously done he decided that this time his Dad would have to take the initiative.

Peter found it hard listening to Tom’s story.

Tom and Peter left the police station together.

“Thank you for coming” said Tom

“Thats Ok” Peter said, really not knowing what else to say.

“Can I give you this” Tom said, taking a leaflet from his pocket and handing it to Peter.

“Feel free to share it with anyone” Tom said.

“Ok, Thanks” Peter replied, yet again not knowing what to say.

Peter walked back to the car and felt tears welling up in his eyes.

## Chapter 6

It was lovely getting away. Joy had compromised and so they had ten days.

It had been much later than they had originally hoped for, Damita was nearly six months old and so much had happened over those six months.

They had decided to put Ed's house on the market and found a house in Gnosall that had a much better garden which they could enclose to keep Damita safe. So far everything was going ok with the sales.

The flight to Malaga had been uneventful and the collection of their luggage [which Peter never liked] and now they were on their way to Frigiliana in a taxi.

"Do you know I love the mansion" said Karen, "but in lots of ways I would much rather be in a smaller house near the beach in Nerja"

"Well lets sell then" said Peter

"You really want to?"

"Yes"

There was a beautiful sunset as they passed Nerja and climbed up towards Frigiliana.

"It is beautiful" said Karen

"So you want to change your mind now?" Peter laughed

"No, because we can come up here anytime, I want whatever you want" Karen replied

"And I want whatever you want" Peter said smiling

"Oh" Karen gasped

"So lets toss the coin" Peter said

"Ok"

"Heads we sell and buy in Nerja, tails we keep the mansion"

Karen laughed,

The coin said heads.

They took their luggage and the push chair in and Damita gurgled as if she knew she was at home.

They had a nice meal at a small restaurant in Frigiliana while Damita slept in the push chair and then they walked back to the mansion. Peter felt calm and satisfied that he had everything that he wanted in his life and enjoyed pushing Damita on the way home.

All three of them slept beautifully that night. Damita had settled into good patterns and Karen had started talking about going back to work.

Peter awoke just before 7am and crept out of bed. Maria had done some shopping for them and so Peter poured himself a glass of orange juice and sat out on the large balcony that looked out towards the sea. He thought of Granny and what she would think of him and felt a moment of sadness that she hadn't reached a hundred.

It was mid September, the sun was just rising and the air felt fresh and cool. He knew that by midday it was likely to be the mid or late twenties, fortunately the house was cool.

He popped to the kitchen to get a top up of his juice. He would wait until Karen rose to have his breakfast. Sitting on the table was a smallish booklet. Peter picked it up and realised that it was the booklet that Mr Arthur's son had given him several months before. The police had never contacted Peter again and he wondered what had happened to the son.

He took the booklet and his orange juice to the balcony, made himself comfy and started to read.

The title was 'Tuesdays child' written by Grace Fawkes,

Peter laughed, he hadn't noticed before the name of the author.

The day wasn't as hot as it could have been and so they were able to get the bus and go down to Nerja to take Damita for her first trip in the sea.

Haughton was such a long way from the sea that they hadn't yet taken a risk with the unpredictable weather. One day they would take Damita to Aberdovey and go on the wonderful coastal train ride

but this would be when she was older and able to enjoy it.

After having a little paddle in the Nerja sea they decided to pop to sea if Manuel was in his shop. They arrived to find it shut up and so headed for the nearby bar he wasn't there either.

One of the waiters in the bar who spoke English recognised Peter and Karen and asked them what they would like to drink. Karen settled on an apple juice whilst Peter had a beer. The waiter went over to Damita's push chair and bent down to say hello to him. Damita burst into tears. The waiter sang her a little song and she stopped crying and began to smile.

"When she's older I'll teach her lots of local songs" said the waiter.

"That would be nice" said Karen

"Have you seen Manuel today?" asked Peter

"No, we haven't seen him for awhile, someone said that he had gone on holiday, but they weren't sure to where, if he comes in we'll tell him that you have been looking for him"

The next few days were lovely and lazy. They seemed to eat, sleep and play with Damita.

"So do you still want to sell the house?" Asked Karen

"Yes, unless you've changed your mind, by the way why did you put that pamphlet in my bag?"

Peter asked.

"Oh, I forgot" said Karen

Peter laughed

"My memory's been rubbish recently. I brought it for me to read, was it any good?"

"Yes, I suppose so if you have the time to think about such things" Peter replied smiling.

Suddenly it was the last day of their holiday and early in the afternoon Peter's mobile rang. It was a number he didn't recognise. He answered the phone and recognised the spanish accent just as Manuel said his name. They agreed to meet up in the bar for tapas.

Manuel looked glowing, as they approached him.

"I've been in Barcelona" he said. I found an old school friend who moved there many years ago and stayed with him. We had a lovely time talking about the old days"

"We want to sell the mansion and buy a smaller place in Nerja" Peter said

"Oh I can understand" Manuel replied "It is rather large"

"Yes" said Peter laughing

"Will you help us?"

"Yes of course" said Manuel smiling

Damita started to cry.

"I'll take you back home" Manuel said

"You should have a car here, it would make it much easier for you, I could run it occasionally when you aren't here to make sure that its ok. When you sell the mansion you will have plenty of money to buy one. I don't think that you will have a problem selling it. it would make a fantastic bed and breakfast place"

Peter hadn't thought about that and was glad that he hadn't as he knew that Nerja was a nice place to visit, but that his home was in Gnosall or at least it would be as long as the sale went through Ok.

## Chapter 7

The flight had been delayed and so they arrived home about six hours late. Peter was glad that he wasn't starting back at work the following day. It was Joy that suggested leaving it a day.

"You never know what flights are like" she had remarked.

Mum had put all of their post on the hall table. Peter decided to leave it for later. They had a quick drink and then went off to bed pulling the curtains on the way as dawn was breaking.

Peter woke from an intense dream. He had been transported to a different time, but within seconds he couldn't remember any of it. Both Karen and Damita were fast asleep. He listened to them quietly murmuring and felt a warm contented feeling.

He looked at the clock, it was just after 1pm. He decided to just lie and ponder the rest of the day.

Peter had been for a walk, taking Damita in the pushchair and found Karen curled up reading.

"Did you know" she said

"That in 1922 there were only 3 female MP's"

"No" said Peter lifting Damita out of the push chair

"I wonder how many there are now?" Karen said.

Peter was more interested in getting on with the day than talking about female MP's.

Over the next few hours he was in charge of Damita [which he was quite happy about] whilst Karen did her research about female MP's.

She told him that until the late 80s there was less than 5% of MP's who were female.

Peter was half interested, he liked seeing Karen get enthusiastic about it all.

"So would you like to be an MP?" he asked her as he made them a sandwich.

"I'm not sure" she replied

"Why"

"Yes in some ways I'd like to try to do something to change things for the better, but I wouldn't want to be away from you and Damita"

"Surely male MP's must feel the same" Peter said.

"I hope so" Karen replied.

The conversation finished there as Mum and Dad popped in to see how their trip had gone and to play with Damita.

"Oh look!" exclaimed Mum

"She's sitting up"

They were all excited to see that Damita could now sit without being supported.

"She'll soon be on the go" Dad said smiling

"And I'll be back at work" Karen added.

"What will you do?" asked Mum

"Caring for now, I think, but I'd like to start doing some media stuff as well, but we'll see how it goes and I think its time Peter thought about some engineering"

Peter made no comment, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

He enjoyed his time at home and didn't want work to over take his life.

## Chapter 8

“I could really do with your help on this one!” Frazer asked.

His engineering business was booming and he had told Peter that on several occasions he had become a little overwhelmed by it all. One day he asked sounding desperate.

“It wouldn’t take you long and I’ve got it on a good rate, what do you think?”

“Whats the deadline?”

“A month” Frazer replied.

“And is that fixed?”

“Pretty much so yep”

“I’ll have a think and let you know tonight” Peter replied.

Peter chatted to Karen about it before he went back to his evening service users.

“I think you should do it, then you’ll know whether it’s what you want to do again, the fact that it’s all online and by zoom helps” she said.

“Ok, I’ll do it” Peter said to Frazer.

“That’s great, I’ll send the details over to you in the morning and if there’s anything unclear you can give me a buzz”

Peter’s old excited, but nervousness self began to reappear. “I can do it” he said to himself and he knew he could.

Fortunately currently all the service users that Peter had were fairly straight forward and he was caring for most of them on his own.

He missed Louise and wondered how she was, but knew that she was quite a private person.

After the Arthur incident Joy had began to put less pressure on Peter, in fact she had talked to him about whether he would be interested in the training of carers more and doing less direct work.

He’d told her that he would think about it after he finished the work for Frazer. Joy had given Peter more afternoon and evening shifts so that he could concentrate on Frazer’s work in the morning and be at home with Damita.

“I rang Joy today and said about doing a few mornings” Karen said

“Oh! are you sure?” Peter asked looking concerned.

“Yes, I need to get back doing something, Dami is 8 months now and she likes her time with her Dad, but I won’t start until you’ve finished Frazer’s project,”

” I was reading that 1922 pamphlet again the other day again and thought it was no wonder that women didn’t try to be MP’s. Most women didn’t even have the vote then, you know. We all think that women got the vote in 1918, but in fact it was only a minority, the rich privileged ones.”

“So you’re getting more interested then!” Peter laughed.

“In some ways yes, but what it shows is how ridiculous the current structure is and in particular having all the Government departments, well most of them in London. Its bad enough getting there now, can you imagine what it would have been like in 1922, Oh and I forgot to say, your Mum said she’d like to look after Dami on a regular basis if we were happy with that and apparently your Dad was asking too. I wish my parents had the chance ” she said soulfully.

Peter held her closely to him and whispered ” I wish they had too and maybe it’s time you called my parents Mum and Dad ”

“I’d like that, if they were ok with it” Karen replied with a smile and a tear in her eye.

“I’ll ask them later but must get off to do my bedtime round” Peter said.

Peter had four service users to settle for the night, all of them were men and three out of four had lost their wives within the last couple of years.

” I don’t really need you” George Smyth said

“But I do look forward to you coming”

George was ninety three and had had a few falls and so it was felt that it would be best if he could have some support particularly in the morning and at bedtime.

He had slept upstairs, but after the falls the family encouraged him to sleep downstairs and had a shower and toilet put in so he didn’t have to go upstairs at all.

“The trouble with living downstairs is that there’s always something upstairs that I want but I promised my kids that I would not go upstairs on my own. They said that if I kept falling over that I would probably have to go into a home and I just don’t want that.”

In lots of ways George was very capable it was really only his wobbly legs and so Peter’s main tasks included encouraging George to use a walking frame.

“I hate it you know” said George referring to the walking frame.

“I know, but really its the best for you, it gives you that extra support that you need”

“I know..... how long can you stay today?”George asked.

“Not long I’m afraid as I have three more people to help”

“Thats a shame I’d really like to talk to you more”

Peter didn’t know what to say. He found that nearly all of his service users main problem was isolation.

When he got home he started talking to Karen about it as she gave Damita a bath.

“ Talk to me later” she said

“This is Dami’s time”

Peter agreed and played with Dami whilst Karen sorted out some washing.

Damita laughed at Peter pulling funny faces and blowing bubbles.

Peter then lifted her out of the bath and dried her.

He sang her a song whilst he put on her nappy and her baby grow. It was all so much easier now she was able to sit up and beginning to be more mobile.

” I know we should put Dami to bed earlier but I don’t think that it matters a couple of nights a week” Karen said

Peter loved that time of day and so began to realise that he wanted to be at home at those times so maybe he would have to think seriously about limiting his time as a carer. He decided to take Joy’s offer of being a trainer.

## Chapter 9

Damita was now eleven months old and Peter and Karen were thinking about what to do for her birthday. Karen had been back at work for a few weeks and Peter had successfully completed the project for Frazer.

One day when Peter was shopping with Damita in the Co-op in Gnosall he got a message to say that they could complete on the Gnosall house the following Friday. All the surveys and negotiations had gone on for months and they had wondered whether it would ever happen.

A few minutes later he spied Louise in the opposite aisle. He approached her and she beamed at him. She was wearing the Co-op uniform.

“So you are working here!” Peter exclaimed.

“Yes, and this is your little one, wow she has grown since the last time I saw her.” Louise commented looking towards Damita.

“Well she’ll be one in three weeks time” Peter replied.

“Wow doesn’t time fly”

“It sure does, I miss working with you!” Peter exclaimed.

“Are you happy here?”

“It’s fine for now, but I suppose I’m looking for a greater challenge”

Peter remembered that the 1922 pamphlet was still in the shopping bag from when his Mum had given it him back. He pulled it out and handed it to Louise.

“What’s this?” she asked

“Take it home and have a read, just trust me, I think that you’ll find it interesting”

“Ok” she said without any further hesitation she took it, said her goodbyes and walked away.

“Keep in touch” Peter asked.

” Yes I will” and with that she had left the aisle and headed for the back of the store.

“Oh well, little Miss, we better start heading home” Peter said to Damita who jabbered a reply.

“So how’s your day been” said Peter as Karen sat down.

“Oh fine, nothing particularly exciting or anything”

“What do you fancy for tea?”

” Oh I really don’t mind”

“What about a nice salad?”

“Yes fine”

“What’s up”

“Nothing, I’m just tired, that’s all”

Peter went into the kitchen and left Karen with Damita who was sitting on the floor playing with a couple of teddies.

Suddenly Karen came rushing into the kitchen looking very excited.

“She just said Mum mum” said Karen with tears in her eyes.

Peter put down the knife that he was holding and although he had sticky hands he still hugged Karen tightly and they danced up and down with excitement.

The phone rang, it was Louise.

“What are you doing tomorrow?” she asked

“Working until about eight, why?”

” I need to talk with you, can I come round”

Peter looked across at Karen and whispered Louise name, Karen smiled positively



“Ok” Peter said to Louise  
“I’ll be home by 8.30 and Karen will be here anyhow”

The rest of the evening was taken by Damita trying to tell them things.

They were both excited and so Peter forgot his tiredness.

They decided to have an early night and Peter drifted off and only awoke to the morning alarm.

He looked at his phone where he saw a message from Frazer.

“How’s it going?” It said

Peter replied that he should hit the deadlines and couldn’t write anymore as Damita awoke and was crying. He went to her room and picked her up out of the cot.

“Its alright, Daddy’s here” he said

“Mum mum mum” she said

Peter laughed and said “Da Da Da” and suddenly Damita copied him.

Karen had left early and so he couldn’t tell her.

## Chapter 10

Louise was sitting on the settee with Damita on her lap when Peter entered the living room.

"She's lovely" She said.

"She's been trying to tell me all sorts of things and it doesn't look long before she'll be walking"

Louise was always like this, she didn't need to do the hellos and how are yous that so many people needed to do. Peter knew that's why he had always felt comfortable with her.

"Karen's just making a cup of tea"

Karen entered, put the two mugs on the coffee table and gave Peter a hug.

"You're early" she said.

"Yes, I got a message to say that Mary MacDonald's daughter was visiting and so we didn't need to visit her tonight"

"Do you want a cuppa?"

"No, I'm fine for now"

"Ok I'll leave you to talk and change Damita" Karen said

Louise handed Damita to Karen and waved to her as they left the room.

"Yes she's a lovely child" Louise said

"You and Karen have done really well"

"I think we're just lucky" Peter said, smiling

"Anyhow" Karen continued.

"I wanted to talk about the pamphlet, I assume that you've read it!"

"Yes, that's why I thought that you would be interested"

"Yes, I'm more than interested, to think that she wrote that in 1922!"

Peter told Louise where he got the pamphlet from but he didn't know why Tom Arthur had it.

"I'd love to ask him" Louise said

They discussed the content.

Grace Fawkes, the author was angry, she said that she was twenty three years old and went to try to vote but was turned away because she was too young.

She had spoken to some suffragettes when she was younger but her Dad had told her to keep away from them. After the Great war finished she learnt that votes had been won and so she wanted to vote. She'd been told by the police constable that voting wasn't for the likes of her, but as she left she saw some young drunken men who laughed at her who had just been to vote. She was so angry that she decided to try to do something about it and so spent some of her savings getting her small pamphlet printed. It was the local vicar's wife who had helped her, but it was her ideas that had amazed Louise and made her want to find out more about her.

"Well maybe Tom Arthur might know who she was, but I'm not sure whether he lives there anymore as it was a council house?"

"I wonder if Joy knows anymore about their situation" Peter queried

"I can ask her if you like?"

"Yes that would be great, anyhow I better go and let you get on with bedtime. I've copied the leaflet and so you keep the original"

"Ok" said Peter as he walked to the front door behind Louise.

He shut the door as she left and headed upstairs.

"That was a short visit" said Karen

"Well it was a bit late" Peter said

"And I'm starving"

"I left you some lasagne if you want it" Karen said as she lay a sleepy Damita in her cot.

"It can wait a bit" Peter said

He often missed bedtime and so wanted to stay and watch his daughter drift off to sleep.

"You go" he said.

Karen smiled and left father and daughter together. Peter sang to Damita and within a few seconds she drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter 11

“Hello is that Peter” said a voice that Peter didn’t recognise.

“This is Tom Arthur, I wondered whether you ever read the pamphlet I gave you?”

Peter told him he had and they agreed to meet up the following day when Peter had a day off work.

“Why don’t you take Louise with you?” Karen suggested, just as she was leaving for work.

“Great minds think alike” Peter said smiling.

It was a beautiful sunny morning and only five days until Damita’s birthday which was on May day.

They had decided just to have Mum and Dad and themselves and have a trip to the West Midlands Safari park, both Karen and Peter had booked the day off work.

Damita liked the next door neighbour’s cat and feeding the ducks with her grandparents down by the canal and so they thought that she would enjoy the variety of animals at the safari park.

Fortunately the move from Haughton to Gnosall had gone smoothly, although both Peter and Karen shed a few tears as they left Ed’s house.

Life had to move on and with that changes. Peter thought back to all of the changes in his life over the last six years and on balance most of them were good. He realised that AERO was effecting him. He had more aspirations, not only for himself, but for Damita too and helping her to be brave was one of them. She would have to face some fierce people in her life and so facing some fierce animals in a few days time was a good starting point.

He had also come to realise that encouragement didn’t just come from others, but also from within yourself, telling yourself that you can do things and praising yourself when you’ve managed to do them.

Peter thought of the many people who never faced reality and in some cases spent years trying to avoid it, it was as if they thought that someone would sort everything for them. He’d heard too many people moaning about the state of the country and saying that the government should do something about whatever the topic was, but the truth was that change for the better would only come if people contributed what they could to that change. Suddenly he realised that he was beginning to be political and he too didn’t like the state of the UK democracy the same as Grace Fawkes hadn’t in 1922. ” What had changed?” he thought

“Ok women could vote, the same as men from the age now of 18, but what did that vote hidden amongst millions actually mean. He hadn’t tried to change anything for the masses and like most people had felt powerless, but should he think like that. Should he use the skills that he had to change something for the better and suddenly it dawned on him that he had to go back to engineering, but in a way that helped the masses not the few. He had heard about the developments of JJ66, the wheelchair bed, but he hadn’t actually seen one and thought perhaps he could help with that or something like it that could help a lot of people.

That was the openness that he wanted to contribute towards. He wanted to help people with ideas make them happen. He was luckier than many, both Ed and Granny had given him enough money to be able to get a job that was low pay and still be able to do all of the things that he wanted to. If they sold the mansion in Nerja, which they were considering they would have enough money to work part time and could get more involved in amazing inventions like JJ66.”

This was all swirling around his head and today he would be meeting with Tom Arthur, but first he had to get Damita dressed and prepare her breakfast as Karen had already left for work.

It was 7.30 am and Peter entered his daughter’s bedroom. Damita was sitting up in bed playing with her Teddy. She saw Peter, pulled herself up holding the sides of the cot and said “Da da”

Peter smiled, he unclipped the side of the cot and lifted his daughter out. He loved his first morning hug, it brought a great sense of hope and purpose to his life. He felt so honoured to be a significant person in this young child’s life. He would hope never to take anything for granted. He knew that he

wasn't perfect and never would be. He, like everyone else would go through a variety of emotions and events in life but he hoped that most of the time that he could appreciate the world that he had been born into and contribute positively to that world.

## Chapter 12

Peter met Tom Arthur in the Beaver cafe, nobody seemed to know why it was called that. Tom was sitting on a table for two on the far side and had a cuppa in front of him. He rose as he saw top.

"Can I get you something?" Tom asked, as Peter approached.

"No that's alright, much better just to do our own thing" Peter remarked.

Peter headed to the drinks counter and asked for a pot of tea.

"What sort would you like?" asked the sales assistant.

"Oh just the ordinary sort" Peter said.

He paid his dues and then headed back towards Tom.

The waitress brought over a tray with his pot of tea, cup, milk and a biscuit.

"So what did you think of the pamphlet?" asked Tom.

"I found it really interesting and full of passion."

"Well, the author was my Gran" said Tom

"But I was quite small when she died and didn't know about the pamphlet until I went through some of Dad's things and with the name being different to mine I didn't initially make the connection. When I found it, I was rather emotional and especially after what had happened to Dad. You must think that I was very heartless? but me and Dad had such a blazing row a few days before, that this time I decided, as I said to you that I would wait for Dad to apologise, oh and you know the rest. You see me and Dad had always lived together, I'm not saying that I haven't had a few girlfriends, but there was never the right one and so we just stayed living together as it was convenient for my work and sharing the bills helped. When we rowed we generally avoided each other as much as possible, but before it was always me that made up and of course I now regret not doing so again" Tom said with a tears in his eyes.

"Yes, its hard" Peter commented, not really knowing what to say.

"Oh and the Police suspected me at the beginning, but what reason would I have? Its Ok now though and now the funeral is over I can get on with life, although the council want the house back, They say that its just too big for me. They have offered me a flat, but it's some way from my work and so I have turned the offer down. Anyhow you don't want to hear all of my troubles. I got you here to talk about Gran's pamphlet, you see I think she said a lot of things that are just the same now and wondered whether there was anything I could do, or anyone I could give her pamphlet to who like you might take it seriously"

"Why did you give it to me in the first place?" asked Peter.

"Because you treated me so well when you supported me at the Police station. They didn't seem to understand why at my age that I was still living with my Dad"

"How old are you? said Peter

"Forty nine, why?"

"No reason, except that I thought that you were a lot younger. I was just wondering about your Gran with her being born in 1899 thats all."

"Well Dad was born in 1937 but he did have an older brother but he died several years ago. In fact it was when I was looking through Dad's stuff that I found Gran's marriage certificate and of course it had her maiden name on it and that's how I made the link"

Peter and Tom chatted for another half an hour and then Peter said that he had to go as his wife had to go to work and he had his baby to look after.

"I hope you don't mind" Peter said

"But I gave the pamphlet to a friend of mine to read and she is really interested. I told her I was meeting you today and I think that she'd be very interested in meeting you and finding out more about your Gran. She was the other carer who came to the house with me and was so upset that she has given up caring all together and although has a job, is looking for something different in her life. The pamphlet sparked a new interest in her and she would like to see if perhaps some of your Gran's ideas she could bring into practice"

"Wow" said Tom

“That would be amazing, yes, I’d definately like to meet her”

” So is it Ok if I give her your number” Peter said as he got up to leave.

” Of course” Tom replied and thanked Peter for coming. ” Oh and I found this too amongst Dads things” said Tom, handing him another leaflet.

Peter put the leaflet in his pocker, wished Tom well and left.

It had been a very interesting meeting, but Peter felt that he had enough things on his plate for the foreseeable future and so hoped that Louise could turn the spark into a flame and laughed in relation to Grace being born as a Fawkes.

When Peter got home Karen was ready to go to work.

“Dami’s had her lunch and is in her cot having a snooze. She only went off a few minutes ago and so you may get a bit of time. You’ll have to tell me about your meeting later as I’ve got to go.”

Karen kissed Peter and rushed out of the door and into the car. Peter waved to her, but she didn’t respond. She’d left all the dishes to wash up and so Peter placed them in the dishwasher and loaded a tablet and switched it on. Karen was a lovely person, but she wasn’t the best at housework, ” but then why should she!” Peter thought.

He popped upstairs to peep in at Damita who was well settled, with a contented look on her face.

Back in the kitchen he made himself a sandwich and a cup of tea, sat down and remembered the leaflet in his pocket. He pulled it out and started to read.

He couldn’t believe what he was reading. The leaflet was entitled ‘Unemployment Benefit’ and was from ‘Ministry of Labour’ dated March 1937. Of course the rates appeared low and without working out inflation Peter realised that it would be hard to know what they were worth now but what Peter noticed was that women’s rates were lower than men even when they were 16 years old, when boys received 6 shillings a week but girls only received 5 shillings a week. He also saw that agricultural workers received less money than what was called ‘the general scheme’.

With this information and Grace Fawkes pamphlet written in 1922 Peter started to think about the injustices that still existed today.

He sent Louise a message to tell her about the meeting with Tom and that he had given him another leaflet that might be of interest to her.

Peter wanted to help, but could he?, could anyone?

The baby monitor was switched on and Peter could hear Damita stirring. Thoughts of action were suppressed by his current reality.

## Chapter 13

” They’re struggling” said Frazer

“They need a heap of cash, its so frustrating”

Peter listened to his friend, who like himself was leaning away from purely engineering for money to engineering for the good of people and sounded angry.

“Can’t you reduce your hours?” Frazer asked.

Peter replied that he would try.

That evening he talked to Karen about it and she agreed with Frazer.

“I’m not going to increase mine” she said

” I really want to go back to the media” she continued

“I just think that I will be doing something more purposeful. I won’t give up completely because I know how much carers are desperately needed, but they’ve offered me two days a week in Manchester. What do you think?”

“What would that mean in terms of Dami?” Peter asked.

“Well I could go early each day but they offered to put me up somewhere one night a week, but I’m really not sure as she is still so small, but it would be less knackerin”

Damita was now 15 months old and was walking. Peter’s parents were looking after her a couple of short days a week and this helped him concentrate on the bits of engineering that Frazer sent him. He had told Frazer that he would only take on local projects as he didn’t feel ready to be away from Damita and so had mixed feelings about Karen being away but he shouldn’t stop her going for one night a week. He knew that if it was in reverse she wouldn’t stop him.

“When would you start?” Peter asked Karen

“They asked if I could start next week”

“Oh right” said Peter, slightly panicking at the thought of her being away so soon. He liked his family life, but things always had to change depending on circumstances and it could be worse and so he decided that he would have to support Karen and hope that the two days would be enough for her.

“I won’t want to do more away from home” she said

“I’d miss you and Dami too much”

Peter smiled and hoped that she would always feel this way.

Joy was a little disappointed when Karen asked to change her days but understood why and when Peter said he’d like to cut his hours too she told him that she was surprised that he had stayed as long as he had, but also said that maybe his engineering would help create devices that would help cut down the need for so many carers such as JJ66 the wheelchair bed that she had heard through the grapevine was hopefully going into production soon.

Peter kissed Damita and gave Karen a hug as he went off for his evening shift. Well they called it that but at 3.30pm it didn’t feel like that.

Simon Carpenter liked to have an early shower and needed two people as he was very unsteady on his feet. He had Parkinsons and lived with his son who could manage most things . It had been agreed that he would get help to have a shower once a week and Peter had been given this task.

Luke Carpenter was a quiet chap who worked from home and so was able to help his father.

He and his wife had bought a house next door to Luke’s father a few years before when luckily it came up for sale and so they could pop in several times a day to check on him, but Sally didn’t feel that she could deal with his personal care and so they had requested the help of a male carer which they paid for privately.

Simon could be unpredictable and so Peter would never know whether he would co-operate or not.

Today was a good day and both Simon and Luke were in good spirits.

“Remember my mate Pete” said Luke as Peter came into the living room.

They had decided to use this approach rather than call Peter a carer, Peter didn't mind as he felt it should be what the family were comfortable with.

The tasks were successfully completed and Peter managed to have a half an hour break until he had to visit his next service user and so stopped in a layby to eat a sandwich which he had made at home.

He checked his phone and there was a message from Louise.

"We're making some progress" she said and told Peter to give her a ring sometime soon.

He replied that he'd try her tomorrow.

There was a message from Karen asking him to buy some nappies if he got a chance

He replied "OK"

He finished his sandwich and smiled "nappies and missions" he thought would make a good title for a book. He laughed at the idea.

The rest of his visits went without any issues and so he arrived home tired, but satisfied that the day had gone ok.

Peter was a Realist, not a Pessimist or an Optimist, just a Realist and had become even more aware of it since the days when he first spoke to Chloe Kingdom about the AERO model which seemed so long ago. His life in Surrey seemed like a distant past and to think that at the time he thought that was where he would always be.

He hadn't seen much of Chloe or Mike and Doreen and suddenly felt guilty.

He got home just before nine, Damita was fast asleep and Karen was reading. He gave her a kiss on the top of her head and went into the kitchen and decided to ring Doreen.

"Oh Peter, so lovely to hear from you" she said and shouted to Mike that Peter was on the phone.

He chatted to them both over the speaker. They were at their caravan, but said that as soon as they got back home they would fix to meet up but that Peter should remind them as both of their memories weren't that good these days.

"How's Chloe Peter asked?"

"Oh haven't you heard, she's moved away apparently she met this guy on the internet and has moved to Spain. It was all very sudden but she said that she is happy, in fact you know that place you have I'm sure that she's living somewhere near there. I'll look in the address book when I get home" Doreen said.

"How was your shift?" asked Karen

"Fine, nothing to report"

Peter decided not to tell her that Simon Carpenter was rather smelly. Peter laughed when he thought about it, but then thought he shouldn't really.



## Chapter 14

Peter messaged Louise before he went to work and she said that she would pop round to his around 9pm.

It had been a lovely sunny September day and Peter had wished that they lived nearer the seaside. He managed to let Damita play in the paddling pool before he had to get ready to go to work. It was arranged that Mum would look after her on the first evening when Karen was away and Dad was doing the second as she was likely to arrive home quite late. This would allow Peter time to carry on working for Joy in the afternoon and evenings and be with Damita in the mornings whilst Karen was working.

Mum arrived half an hour before Peter had to go and Damita was happy playing with her when Peter got ready to leave.

“Oh do you remember Louise, who I worked with, well she is coming around about 9pm to talk about the pamphlet” Peter said

“Ok” Mum acknowledged

“I can settle Dami and stay on if you need me”

“That would be great” said Peter as he wasn’t sure how Damita would be not seeing Karen before bedtime.

Peter had hoped for an easy time at work but unfortunately the second visit took longer than usual and so when he arrived at his final visit he was greeted by an angry relative.

“What time do you call this!” David Grey shouted as Peter arrived.

“I’m sorry Mr Grey but my last visit took much longer than usual”

“Well I’ve been waiting to go home and Dad is in a terrible state and I don’t know what to do with him, I’m fed up, I think he should be in a home, but the authorities don’t think that he’s bad enough and it just pisses me off, who the hell do they think that they are to decide what’s bad enough!”

Peter tried to pacify Mr Grey but it was no good he wasn’t having any of it.

“And I suppose you only do this because it’s the only job you can get” he said glaring at Peter.

Peter had had enough he wasn’t going to shout back but he was going to tell Mr Grey the truth.

“Actually You’re very wrong there” he said calmly

“I do this because I want to”

“I don’t believe you, who would choose to do this?”

“Well the truth is, I did and sometimes I wonder why. I am actually an engineer by training, graduated from Cambridge and worked for a good company for ten years and then decided I wanted to do something different”

“Well then you must be mad to give up such a good job for this!” Mr Grey exclaimed and left.

Peter felt wounded, was this the way that most people felt he wondered and if so it was not surprising that bosses like Joy had such difficulty recruiting people. Maybe Frazer and Joy were right he should be working more on creating gadgets that help people to be more independent.

Marcus Grey was hovering in the hall way looking lost he was just wearing underpants.

“Where am I” he said

“I’ve lost my Mummy”

“Don’t worry” said Peter who had never seen Marcus in this state before. He knew that he had dementia but never knew that it was this bad.

He took Marcus’s hand and led him to the bathroom and told him to sit on the toilet. His pants were completely soiled with splatterings of poo on his hands and back.

Peter went to the bedroom to collect some clothes and David Grey appeared behind him. He had tears streaming down his face.

“I’m so sorry” he said

“I know that it’s not your fault, but it’s just all too much, I just can’t cope anymore. He sat down on his father’s bed whose sheets were badly soiled and sobbed.

Peter sat next to him, put an arm around him and David Grey carried on sobbing.

After a few minutes David let go of Peter and repeated how sorry he was.

Peter accepted the apology, but said that he needed to help his Dad.

“Can I stay” said David

“Of course you can” Peter replied as he walked towards the bathroom with David following him like a lost lamb.

In the bathroom Marcus continued to sit on the toilet staring into thin air.

David said ” What can I do?”

“Make us all a cup of tea might be a good idea”

Peter knew that he couldn’t concentrate on both men at the same time and so decided to clean up Marcus.

“I want my Mummy” Marcus said

“Don’t worry” Peter said

“She asked me to help you”

“Oh thats Ok then” Marcus said smiling

“I expect that she’s gone to work”

“So what did you do?” said Louise when Peter arrived home half an hour late.

“Oh I got his son to ring for an emergency doctor. It was obvious that they could no longer manage. If the son hadn’t been there I would have had to wait for ages”

“Its too much, things just have to change” said Louise.

Damita was fast asleep and so Mum said that she would go.

Peter gave his Mum a hug and thought of Marcus who wanted his Mum, he felt sad for him and just hoped that he would never be like him, a man that lived in a nice house, but in a state of complete loss of both his physical and mental faculties. He completely understood his sons reactions but if he hadn’t returned he would have thought of him as a cold distant person, not the son who just couldn’t cope anymore. He agreed with Louise something had to be done about it all and he knew that he had to be part of that process he couldn’t just ignore it all like so many people did. He had to be part of the change. He had to push for the AERO effect, he had to wake up people to their joint responsibility and now was the time.

“So” Louise said, “Grace Fawkes said a lot about the state of the country and wanted to try to do something to change things. She was so angry about not being able to vote. She didn’t realise that she couldn’t and she said that the policeman that turned her away from the polling station treated her as if she was dirt. but the main thing was that she tried by writing the pamphlet”

Peter told Louise about the meeting he had with Tom Arthur and how keen he was to help. He also told her about the 1937 leaflet that contained the rates of unemployment benefit. He handed it to her and her face went red.

“To think that this was 15 years after Grace had written her pamphlet and even now certain men get paid so much more than women for the same job, but how can we change things?”

“I think we have to do it by writing our story” said Peter

“And the stories of so many people who have tried”

He talked about how innocent he had been about life until he had met Helen. He had good parents who cared about him and still did. He had nearly everything that he wanted in life and especially after finding Karen waitressing. Oh he would have liked a sibling, but he had other family members and friends. He talked about how the different people he had worked with since he was a carer and how he, like Louise had thought of giving up. but that it was his Gran who had helped him be brave and more courageous to control his fears about so many things. It was her that created his

magnificent journey where he had learnt so much and although being a paid carer was in a sense giving back for all that he had been given in life, he felt that he had to do more. He had to help create a society along the AERO principles. All the coincidences that he had had over the last few years had led him to today with Marcus wanting his Mummy and David crying out for help.

“I think that the son today will help too” Peter said

“I hope so” said Louise supportively.

” But can we think of some concrete large scale change that we can try to do, something that will engage the masses. So many people protest, but how many do and I don’t mean climbing up trees to stop motorways being built, although at the time it had some impact. I mean something that is simple and understandable, something that just makes sense and something that is workable”

Peter went to bed thinking about what Louise had said, but didn’t know the answer.

Karen had called to tell him how she was getting on and to see what he had been up to.

Damita was sleeping peacefully. “He was so lucky” Peter thought as he drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter 15

“It was amazing being back in Manchester, but tiring too” Karen said, as she sipped her cup of tea. “But its nice being home, how did your meeting go with Louise?”

“Well we talked a lot, but didn’t really come up with a plan. We began to think about other people that we could get to join us. I was actually thinking of Frazer as well as Tom Arthur and a guy I met the other day whose Dad was totally confused, but we need people who are involved with different types of people and different things as well, so I was also thinking of Chloe”

“But firstly we need ideas, we need to think about how our democracy can be different and by different it needs to be better, there’s no point changing something and it just makes it worse” said Karen.

Peter laughed and Karen asked what he was laughing about. He said that it was the AERO effect and they both decided that was the roots of the new democracy, of course money needed to still be considered, but what was needed mostly was to look at Aspirations as a whole for everyone.

“I think that people also need to know that Encouragement isn’t just about other people encouraging you, its about you encouraging yourself” Karen said.

“You are a prime example of that” she continued and said about the whole time she had known him how he had pushed himself to do things even though at times he was scared or doubtful.

They remembered sharing reading the book ‘Feel the fear and do it anyway’

They were just about to talk about reality when their reality cried from the bedroom. Damita was awake and so their discussion would have to wait for another time, but Peter knew that he couldn’t let that other time go on and on for too long, there were too many parts of society creaking under avoidance. The reality was that it just had to change, even if it seemed scary.

The next day Peter met with Joy to talk about how he could be key in the training of carers.

“Well I have an idea” said Peter

“Fire away” said Joy smiling

She liked Peter’s ideas they helped her to keep going because she so often felt like just giving it all up and going back to the accountancy career that she had been in many years before. She had never intended to be in caring, like so many people she came into it just through family circumstances.

“I was thinking that we could centre the training all around AERO” he said

“Because everything is AERO really. Without the Aspiration you’d never become a carer in the first place, but with so much negativity you certainly need encouragement and by getting that from other people you begin to realise that most of the time you are doing as good a job as you can given the circumstances that you find yourself in, which of course is the reality and the openness comes with what is both possible in the time you have and what is essential.”

“Yes you’re absolutely right” Joy said.

“You give me the encouragement to carry on ” she said.

Peter never realised that he had and they talked about several occasions when both of them had wanted to give up and because both of them had a previous career which they had been successful in they knew that with minimal retraining they could go back to that career.

They talked about people who didn’t have that option, but also about people like both Peter and Karen who enjoyed being carers but also wanted their other career.

“If only we could create a society where people did both” Joy exclaimed.

Anyhow they had to concentrate on their current reality which was the training, amazingly they had had several new carers and so this gave them the chance to bring in a new, more enlightened form of training. Of course they would still have to teach the caring skills, the safety knowledge and rules and regulations, but who said that they couldn’t be taught in a more fun way.

They decided to meet up in a week’s time to share what ideas they had thought of and who best to involve in giving the training.

Later that evening Peter was talking to Frazer on the phone about the latest project that he had sent

him and Peter suddenly asked him whether he would be interested in helping change the UK democracy.

“Most people would say that it’s impossible” Peter said

“But I don’t agree with them. I think that if we use AERO as a starting point we will find the answers to how we can change it. So what do you say, will you be part of this evolution?”

“Yes, of course. How can I not be, you and I have always lived AERO even before we knew of its existence, we have always encouraged each other and pushed each other, so how could I not be. As you’ve said to me before when I’ve got overwhelmed, its about keeping the balance and although I’ve never been a paid carer I’ve always been proud of you doing a job that so many people just never choose to do. You’ve often said its partly because the way that work is structured that people can’t do a combination and often only end up being carers because something happens within their own family and they have to. There are probably plenty of sixth formers who could combine their studies with a bit of caring and certainly university students”

Karen hovered by the door. “Your daughter is looking for some Dad time” she exclaimed.

Peter said his goodbyes to Frazer and went to play with Damita. In fact the three of them played together, with Karen being away two days a week and their shifts they were getting less time together.

That night as they went to bed Karen said that she wasn’t sure about carrying on with her two days in Manchester. She missed Peter and Damita too much.

“How can MP’s leave their children all week! to go to London” she said sadly.

“I don’t know, I couldn’t” Peter replied

“And did you see that MP’s claim for heating and lighting in their second homes, thats just crazy, its really time that a new structure is thought of, something that is much more democratic and accessible to the voters.”

## Chapter 16

The next week Karen gave in her notice and because she had only been there a short time she only had to give a month.

“They didn’t say anything, but I think that they reckon that I’m mad”

“Well I don’t think that you are, in fact I think you could perhaps produce your own programmes. We could buy some equipment that you might need and we could convert the garage into a studio for you. Don’t forget selling the mansion in Spain has released quite a lot of money and we don’t need to buy another place there straight away, we can rethink what we want”

“Well its your money to do with anyhow” Karen said

“Well I don’t see it that way”

“But in reality it is”

“Well it wouldn’t be if we got married” Peter said tentatively

“Would you like to?” she asked

“Yes I think I would” said Peter smiling

“But would you?” he said shyly

“Yes” Karen said

” Well then lets”

They laughed and talked about how they had felt and that neither of them had brought the topic up in case the other said no.

“We should always talk about everything that bothers us” Karen said

“Not just bothers” said Peter laughing.

“Yes talk about lots of things and how we can try to improve things, can you imagine what we could do with our backgrounds and our experience of caring” Karen said talking passionately.

“It sounds like you want to get involved too, but the issue is how? how can we change things for the better?” Peter exclaimed.

He went off to work that afternoon with this thought in his head and then it came to him that each person he thought of who could help could take the AERO philosophy and see what they came up with.

His first visit was on his own to George Thomas who was as bright as a button but struggled through chronic arthritis. Some days he would manage with Peter’s help, others he was just either chair or bed bound.

Peter enjoyed his visits to George because he felt appreciated, George never took anything for granted and had told Peter that if he, that is George was in a moany mood that Peter should remind him of all the good things that he had in life. His wife had died four years before and it was after her death that his arthritis had worsened and so George had decided that it must be partly linked to emotion rather than completely physical. He had recently started using Chinese medicine which had been suggested to him by a friend and was keeping a record of how he felt. He said that his GP was cynical about it, but he had told them that at 93 he could do what he liked.

Peter let himself in and found George in the kitchen.

“I managed to get my own breakfast today” George said when he saw Peter entering. He wasn’t a great one for bothering about hellos.

“That’s brilliant” said Peter

“Yep, I’m really proud of myself, oh and I’ve been reading that book you gave me about AERO and although it was started in a school, it makes complete sense for anyone”

“I think so too” said Peter but then talked to George about what he was struggling with and noticed that he was not wearing any socks.

“So you’re still struggling with getting your socks on!” Peter exclaimed.

” Yes, an absolute bloody nuisance. I asked Mark to buy me some fluffy slippers and said that I didn’t care whether they were pink women’s ones as long as they were warm and he tried but they don’t seem to make fluffy slippers for size 11” George said laughing.

"It doesn't matter so much now, but when the winter comes on it will be a real nuisance, perhaps I should write to Clarkes!" he said.

Peter was amazed how much better George seemed. They talked about the Chinese medicine and how much it seemed to be helping.

"I'll be able to go out dancing soon and perhaps find a new lady in my life, I'm sure that Emily wouldn't mind" George said.

Peter suddenly felt a pang of sadness when he mentioned the name Emily and as he left he had flash backs of the last few years, but then he had to get his wits about him as the next service user was the opposite to George and would moan about everything and everyone. Peter didn't dare ask him how he was because that was a sure way to start him off.

"You only seem to work in the afternoon and evening" Giles Connor said.

"What do you do the rest of the day?"

"I look after my daughter and when she's sleeping do some other work"

"Oh what kind of work?"

Giles seemed to be in a much better mood than usual and so Peter told him about the engineering.

"I never got a chance to do two different jobs" Giles said

Giles was 76 and had had a serious car accident just before his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. He had told Peter that he had had a good life, but then suddenly everything changed, after his accident his wife couldn't cope and left him and went to live in Sunderland with her sister. They didn't have any children and had done most things together and so he found himself alone most of the time.

"It gives me so much time to think about things, too much time" Giles had told Peter on his second visit.

"I hate being trapped in one room, just waiting for the next visit, radio and TV after a time become tedious. I used to be an outside person and so that makes it even more frustrating. I know that I'm lucky having my religion and get weekly visits from the vicar, but for me that just isn't enough. I'm 76 not 96. I could live another twenty years but the thought of being just as I am now terrifies me"

Peter had never had Giles open up to him so much before and he felt for him.

"Are you into politics?" Peter asked

"I used to be, but nowadays I just can't see the point. I have a postal vote and do vote. Why do you ask?"

"Because I and a few people I know are thinking of trying to look at how we could change our democracy and just because you are in one room doesn't mean that you couldn't be involved. Oh and also there is an invention called JJ66 which is a wheelchair bed that hopefully can get into production soon which would mean that people don't need to be trapped in their living rooms or bedrooms"

"Do you mean that this JJ66 could actually help someone like me get out?" Giles asked

"Yes, absolutely and because the inventor is making it a people's project and doesn't want any money for herself hopefully it will be available for everyone." Peter said excitedly and the idea of helping it happen flashed through his head.

"Count me in with all of it" Giles said.

"I have some cash to spare and no kids to give it to and so it would be great to contribute to something that can help lots of people.

Peter went away feeling enthused having expected to feel a little deflated and as he drove to his last service user he thought of how powerful the AERO effect was. He had assumed that Giles would be negative, but in fact through Open discussion Giles had been the opposite. The only problem with

JJ66 for Giles would be that he would need someone to push it as it wasn't planned to be motorised but then if Giles could approach members of his church maybe he would find more people who would help him or he could pay someone to help him.

Peter's positive mood was deflated when he let himself into Charles Wright's house and found him collapsed and unconscious on the kitchen floor. He wasn't wearing his alarm cord and so Peter didn't know how long that he had been there. Peter immediately checked his airways, assessed that he was still breathing and went to the bedroom to collect a pillow and blanket and then called for an ambulance.

Peter was asked whether Charles was breathing and when he told the controller that he was his heart sunk when they told him the time wait was several hours. There was no contingency plan for this kind of situation especially when it was the last service user. It seemed like carers were not expected to have a life of their own. He rang Mum, who was looking after Damita to say that he didn't know when he would be home. He wondered what people did who didn't have the backup that he had, he knew of one carer who had been forced to wait eight hours for an ambulance. He hoped that it wouldn't be that long.



## Chapter 17

Damita was starting to say a few more words . It was the middle of October and Karen was back home.

“I think I’d rather work with children” Karen said when she and Peter discussed what she should do next. She hadn’t made any firm promises to return to caring and so decided to see if there were any part time school jobs.

“You could volunteer in a school and then see if any jobs come up” Mum said one day when she was getting Damita ready to go for a walk near the canal. They liked to feed the ducks together.

“That’s a good idea” Karen replied and so while they were out she started to look up the local schools on her laptop. She wondered whether to go for secondary or primary and then thought that perhaps a secondary school might like her to come and do some filming with some of the students. Peter had locked himself away in the spare bedroom [which they had turned into an office] as he was doing some work for Frazer and so Karen knew not to disturb him.

The next day Karen emailed a couple of schools offering to come and volunteer. She then went into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. The doorbell rang and she went to open it and found Louise excited on the doorstep.

“Oh didn’t Peter tell you I was coming” Louise said anxiously.

“No, he must have forgotten, he’s been so busy recently”

“Oh I can come back another time if you like, it was just that we were going to share some democracy ideas.”

“No, come on in I’m very happy to listen to your ideas” said Karen encouraging Louise to enter the house.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, of course, I told Peter a few weeks ago that I would be interested. I was just finishing my job in Manchester and decided not to go back to caring. In fact I’ve been looking at some volunteering in schools and maybe some job will materialise there. Dami has gone out with her Granny and so it’s a good time. I was just making a cuppa that’s if you’d like one!”

“Yes that would be great” said Louise, as they headed for the kitchen. She took off her coat and hung it on the back of a chair.

Peter entered the room looking surprised and embarrassed all muddled up together.

“I heard the doorbell and suddenly realised that I’d forgotten to tell Karen that you were coming Louise. I’ve been so involved in my engineering work, sorry”

“No worries” said Louise smiling.

Louise got a folder out of her bag and opened it she had printed off a lot of detail and drawn some diagrams.

“I did some detective work” she said and told Peter and Louise about the current structure of the country with the King at the top.

“We are supposed to be a democracy” she said

“But every time the King opens parliament he talks about ‘My Government’

Well surely the word ‘My’ means something that belongs to you otherwise wouldn’t it be ‘Our’ government.”

“Well you could say that, but you might say ‘My house’ but then you might rent it and so it technically belongs to somebody else.” said Peter

“Ok, but did you know that we only have about twenty six government departments plus a similar amount of secondary departments some of which are just historical and so my idea was why couldn’t we share those government departments between our 650 MP’s”

The discussion carried on with both Louise and Karen thinking creatively, but Peter putting the spanner in the works.

Damita and Mum returned to find a discussion in full swing.

“Blimey its like a debating chamber in here” said Mum laughing as she took Damita’s coat off.

“Aren’t you working tonight?” she asked Peter

“No, I’ve taken some time owing me because I need to get Frazer’s project finished”

“Anyhow what were you talking about?” Mum asked.

Karen told her about Louise’s ideas and Mum thought that they were very possible.

Peter abandoned the women and went back to his work.

## Chapter 18

Peter emailed the finished project to Frazer. He suddenly felt more relaxed and could now look forward to spending some more quality time with his family.

He had stupidly agreed to work that afternoon, but he had the morning to enjoy with Karen and Damita.

In a couple of weeks time it would be bonfire night and Peter was looking forward to taking Damita to a fireworks display. She was too young the year before.

Karen had met with Louise and a few other people to discuss their ideas about how the UK democracy could change and Peter was becoming less skeptical. He could see some of the ideas working, but also knew that it could take a long time for people to realise that things could change. He sat in the kitchen and drank a cup of coffee. It was only just after seven but he felt wide awake. Karen walked in looking sleepy.

“Are you Ok?” Peter asked.

“Yes, I just need a coffee ” she said and went over and snuggled next to Peter.

“You were up late chatting to Louise, its a good job that we offered her a bed for the night!”

“Yes I wouldn’t have wanted to send her home at that hour” said Louise yawning. Peter loved her yawn.

“Why? what time were you talking til?”

“Oh, I don’t know, about two, I think, there was so much to say, so much to plan. I really want to do it, I really want to work towards changing our democracy and I know that it must be boring to you, but I can’t help it. I just feel so inspired and I am so glad that there isn’t going to be a general election for awhile because that gives us time to find out more and work around all the old rules and customs”

Peter loved this inspired Karen, she had always been full of life and positive about most things, but now she seemed to have more purpose. She, like him never really knew before what she wanted to do, but now it was obvious.

“You know when Grace Fawkes went to try to vote there were only 3 female MP’s and recently there were 225 but I wouldn’t want to be an MP. I don’t think that its fair to either you or Damita to be living away. I think that’s one thing that never gets talked about, the impact on children who’s parents are MP’s, not just them being away from home a lot of the time, but also in terms of security. How can you be an ordinary kid when the press might be watching what you do just because of who’s your Mum or Dad, or in a few cases both”

Peter listened to Karen and agreed with most of what she said, but then he thought that there were several jobs that were high profile and could affect children.

Peter remembered a social worker telling him that she once went to a planning meeting for a prisoner who was being let out on parole to the village where she lived and how this prisoner had made death threats towards a previous social worker. She said that it was the only time in her career that she had refused to take on a case because the police couldn’t guarantee protection for her or any family members and with her children being well known in the local community she just couldn’t take on this risk and also said that she told her manager that he shouldn’t too, besides her children needed to be free. She thought of the poor royal children. They couldn’t just hang out around someone’s house and get told off for coming home too late or tiddly when they were older.

Peter was now working three full days rather than afternoon and evenings and so he got ready to go off to his morning visits. Most of them were older people but he had also recently been given a younger person with dementia. He was only a couple of years older than him and he admitted to Joy that he found it hard. It made him realise how much he had in his own life.

He also had a man in his early 50’s with terminal brain cancer who was going down hill rapidly physically and within a few weeks of diagnosis was bedbound. His wife was a deputy head teacher of a secondary school with two teenage children, a girl of 13 and a boy of 15. She had taken

indefinite leave from her job to care for her husband but couldn't manage on her own, It had been agreed that Peter would arrive after the children had gone to school. Peter knocked at the door and Sarah, the thirteen year old daughter opened the door. "Oh, no school today" said Peter, who had met Sarah a couple of times before. Sarah didn't respond and just let Peter in. He found Jane, her Mum in floods of tears in the kitchen. "Oh sorry" she said wiping her tears away and blowing her nose. "Its just, I don't think Luke knows me anymore" she said. "Sarah wouldn't go to school, she wanted to look after us and Dan went off in a real mood and I've had a call from school saying that he's punched some kid in the playground. Its all too much Peter, I just can't manage anymore. Its just not fair, why did this have to happen to Luke, why to such a lovely man. It never seems to happen to shitheads, its always the lovely men." She burst into tears and Peter sat next to her and put his arm around her. Sarah walked into the kitchen and just screamed. "Mum what the hell are you doing" and marched out. There was a knock on the door and Peter went to the door. It was a woman who said that she was the next door neighbour. "Is everything all right" said this elderly woman. Jane stood behind Peter and the elderly woman passed Peter and put her arms around her. "Come her love" she said Peter went through to Luke who was trying to tell him something. He had a look of sadness in his eyes and tears ran down his face. "You do know Jane, don't you?" Peter said holding Luke's hand Luke squeezed Peter's hand "Squeeze once for yes and twice for no" Peter asked "Am I a cat?" Peter asked smiling Luke squeezed twice. Peter asked Luke several other questions and Luke began to smile. Peter shouted through to Jane who came rushing into the living room. Peter asked Luke a couple of more questions and it was obvious that he could understand. "Sit next to him" Peter suggested to Jane Jane sat on the bed and Luke tried to cuddle her.

"Oh my" said Mum when Peter told her that evening and what about the daughter? "She came down and said she was sorry to me" said Peter and gave the next door neighbour who was called Betty a hug. "Oh dear its all so sad" said Mum "Yes and this is why I must get involved in helping JJ66 the wheelchair bed into production. I have told you about it, haven't I?" Peter asked Mum said that he hadn't, but when she heard, she said how marvelous it would be.

A few weeks went by and each day Peter saw Luke become even more dependent. He saw very little of the children and Jane was just about coping with the wonderful support of Betty. One evening Peter got a phone call from Joy to say that Luke had died . Peter sobbed, for him and his family. He thought of all of them but knew that the way that society was arranged that he couldn't help. He wondered how Jane would manage going back to her job at school and how the two children would manage. He knew that the waiting lists for support were so long, but thought how marvelous Betty the next door neighbour was.

Mum rang too to say that both she and Dad wanted to be involved in the meetings for the new democracy.

## Chapter 19

“I can’t believe that ”said Arthur

“That’s ridiculous”

He was talking about the fact that MP’s not only got allowances for second homes, but also for feeding their children in the second home.

“Surely that can’t be true” he exclaimed.

” What’s wrong with taking shopping with you from one home to the other or having two fridge freezers, they don’t cost thousands of pounds, its bloody ridiculous”

Peter laughed. He liked Arthur, he just said what he thought, but he also had some good positive ideas, he wasn’t just an old moaner like so many people that Peter had come across.

“Oh and I wonder how much it cost for Liz Truss and Boris to fly up to curtsy and bow in front of the Queen?” Betty said [who since Luke died wanted to join the group bringing Jane , Sarah and Dan along who she had adopted]

“All ages are welcome” wrote Karen in the local newspaper, when she advertised the meeting, a couple of weeks before.

About 60 people had turned up at the Methodist hall in Gnosall.

Karen was feeling very nervous but knew that she had to overcome that feeling. Peter sat in the audience. He had said that he would help in the background but he wouldn’t take a leading role.

Karen introduced Chloe who was going to present some ideas to the audience.

There were a couple of local journalists who had come along which was why Karen was nervous Peter realised. In the interval he planned to try to have a chat with them.

” Thank you everyone for coming along” Karen said

“I hope you realise that this meeting is only to share some ideas and hopefully we can go from there but it just feels like the right time to look at how we can improve our democracy. A hundred years ago a young woman called Grace Fawkes went to a polling station to vote but was turned away. She wrote about her frustrations but in those days there wasn’t the media that we have today. You would think that it would be easier today to get your ideas across to people in positions of power but it really isn’t and I and several other people here want to try to do something positive to change things. I will hand you over to Chloe who will share some ideas of how we could improve our democratic structure.”

There were cheers from the audience as Karen left the stage and headed for the empty seat next to Peter. She sat down and he whispered in her ear “you were brilliant”. He then kissed her gently on her cheek. She snuggled up to him and together they listened to Chloe’s presentation.

Chloe first talked about AERO as a philosophy. She said that without Aspirations it was hard to change anything in life but that you also need the encouragement from others to continue.

She said that no longer could we live in a cloud cuckoo world, everyone needed to understand the realities of being part of being British and that’s why the meeting had been called to create Openness.

Peter headed to the kitchen where the cups and saucers were already laid out and the Urn was bubbling away ready to make teas and coffees.

The silent audience suddenly cheered and Peter heard Karen’s voice saying that refreshments were served for a half an hour interval.

Peter opened the serving hatch and the audience lined up chatting positively.

The teas, coffees and squashes were drunk and the biscuits eaten and Peter stood with Betty drying the cups and saucers whilst she washed.

”That went well” said Betty smiling.

” Your Karen looked a bit nervous, but she managed and that’s all that mattered”

Peter liked Betty’s praise and felt that there was hope in the AERO message that people would begin to praise rather than moan. He knew that he sometimes thought negatively, but he tried not to. Suddenly he realised that he had forgotten to speak to the two journalists. ” Bugger” he thought. Betty said that she could finish up and so Peter was able to head towards one of them who was speaking to Chloe, he wondered where the other one was, but was desperate for the toilet before it all started again and so headed in that direction.

As he left the toilet Peter recognised the other journalist who looked as though he was about to leave. He cut across a different way and so was able to stop him by the front door.

“Oh do you have to rush off?” Peter asked him.

“I thought everything had been said” the Journalist replied.

“Well its not just about saying things need to change ” Peter commented, surprised at how brave he suddenly was.

“Its also about How they can be changed, surely you want to hear that!” he exclaimed.

## Chapter 20

“Mummy did it” said Karen to Damita as she hugged her. Peter’s parents had both babysat whilst they were at the meeting.

“So it went well then?” asked Dad

“Yes and we had a couple of local journalists. One was going to leave after the coffee break but Peter managed to get him to stay”

They told Mum and Dad that there were about 60 people there, most were local but there were a few who were from further away they thought. They had made the mistake of not getting details of everyone and so they weren’t sure who was there.

Karen said that Chloe explained AERO well and that afterwards they split people into smaller groups and put forward the idea of getting rid of parliament and replacing it with the existing departments being split between the 650 MP’s.

“Of course the logistics would have to be worked out” Karen said

“But in principle it could work with maybe two extra departments, one the Department for Crises and the other the Department for creativity and innovation.”

Peter listened to Karen full of enthusiasm and thought about whether this could really happen. Could they try to change the out dated British democratic system and what would King Charles think of the ideas. Peter had said at the meeting that he felt that it was important that he should be told about the ideas right at the beginning. He also had said that he felt that although the party system excluded lots of people that it would have to continue, well at least initially until a better form of election could be created.

Damita was getting restless and so Peter said that he would take her to the park whilst Karen had a bit of peace and quiet. He thanked Mum and Dad for their help and got Damita ready to go out.

Mum and Dad waved goodbye from the car and Karen waved goodbye.

“We won’t be long” said Peter

“I think we should have take away tonight” he added.

Karen nodded agreement.

Peter pushed Damita along the Gnosall streets through the allotments and towards the park, She chatted away to him acting as though she hadn’t seen him for days, not just a few hours.

They got to the swings and a group of children were playing on their own. They were about 10 years old.

One of the children went to sit on a bench and got out a mobile phone , whilst the others played on the slide and swing.

Peter walked towards the bench and asked the child if it was Ok for he and Damita to share the bench.

“Hope you’re not a paedo” the boy said grinning.

Peter was horrified.

The takeaway arrived and Dami made a real mess of the noodles [they had chosen Chinese but had to leave hers to cool for a little first, putting some of the chow mein on a small plate for her with some prawn crackers.] They had tried Damita in a high chair but found that she missed being near the table and so found a way of tying her to an ordinary chair so that she was safe with a couple of cushions underneath her to get to the height of the table. Besides making the mess Damita asked for more. Peter loved the fact that she was willing to try everything, there was very little that she rejected.

Later that night Peter recalled the incident in the park with the boy to Karen when Damita was

tucked up in her cot.

“What!” she exclaimed

“And he was primary age?”

“Yes” Peter replied sadly.

“Thats just nuts, it just shows that we have to do something, we have to get a new democracy, its crazy to think that children think like that, or maybe they don’t, but to say that, is just awful”

Peter agreed, but in some ways the comment from the child had burst the bubble of hope that had been created by the meeting and his negative, can’t do doubts came tumbling from his head into his stomach. He felt a churning feeling, a feeling that it was all hopeless, that nothing could be changed.

“Are you Ok?” said Karen

“Just a little tired” Peter said not wanting to burst her bubble too.

“Oh by the way, remember the journalist that you persuaded to stay, he wasn’t a local, he was from The independent, he phoned to say that he would like to meet up tomorrow if that was possible. He was staying with friends who had told him about the meeting and it was you that made him want to stay and find out more” he told me.

“I’m working tomorrow” Peter said.

“Well I’m not” Karen replied

“I could ask Mum or Dad to have Dami”she said

“Ok, but be careful”

Karen laughed reminding Peter that it was the world that she had trained in, even if it wasn’t specifically political news.



## Chapter 21

Peter took Damita to his parents house and then headed off to work. He wondered how Karen was getting on with the journalist. He would have liked to have been there but couldn't let either the service users or Joy down.

Joy had told him how she was continually struggling to find anyone to be a carer and that she had been to a conference recently and been told about the national shortage. Peter didn't really want to carry on for ever as a carer but he just didn't know how he could ever give it up.

His first two service users were moaning about everyone and everything and Peter felt his energy being drained. The third was more positive.

"I love having you come to help me get changed" he said

"I don't think that there are many young men like you who are willing to help old boys like me"

Peter smiled, he knew that Gerald generally felt grateful but also liked to be as independent as he could.

"I bet you get loads of moany old people" Gerald said.

"A few" Peter smiled, but didn't want to share the truth.

"I don't know what the future generation are going to do" Gerald announced anxiously.

"What do you think we should do?"

"Do you really want to know?" said Peter

"Yes, if you have positive, constructive ideas, I really would" Gerald replied assertively.

Peter starting talking about creating a give back society where everyone who was helped gave something back. He then carried on talking about getting rid of the current structure and replacing it with the departments idea.

"But what if there was a war or a crisis like when we had Covid?" Gerald asked.

"That's why we would have the department for crises. I think that if every department had a chair and deputy chair person then the deputy chairs would always be on call to meet together but would still have their direct links with their department."

"So you would divide each department by the 650 MP's he asked?"

"Yes , roughly, of course there would be some departments proprtionately a lot bigger than others, but don't forget these are only rough ideas"

"So you would no longer have a Prime Minister and Government or parliament" Gerald queried

"Exactly" Peter said.

Gerald wanted to know more and more but Peter needed to get to his next service user.

"I can't wait to know more" said Gerald

As Peter left he thought of Gerald who spent most of his life in one room because he had very limited mobility, a man who boosted him every time that he visited. A man who listened to ideas rather than dismissing them.

He wondered how Karen was getting on with the journalist. He had one more visit and then he could go via Mum and Dads to collect Damita. She was the future, would she live in the same chaotic democracy that we had, or would some of the ideas come into fruition to give her and everyone a better life. Peter knew that it was up to him and everyone to make things better.

Damita was playing happily with Dad in their back garden. They had bought a swing and small slide especially for her. She was talking a lot more. Dad was playing his guitar to her and she was singing along. Peter popped into the kitchen to chat with Mum. Lovely cooking smells came from the kitchen. Peter had been lucky to get an earlier shift.

"Would you like to stay for tea?" Mum asked as she saw him.

"Better not " Peter said

"Ok, another time soon then" Mum asked

"Yes, that would be lovely but I think I should go and see how Karen got on and she said that she

was cooking something.

“I told a service user today about the ideas of how our democracy could be changed and he was really interested Mum, it gave me a buzz, it gave me some hope, that there was some point to it all.” Mum smiled and told Peter what a lovely day that they had had with Damita.

“So what’s happening to the wedding plans?” she asked

“Oh I don’t know, there seems to be so much at the moment going on that I don’t think that we can make any plans, but it will happen Mum, don’t you worry about that”

“Oh I’m not worried at all” she said

“My son has come a long way since he set off on his journey” she smiled

“I certainly have” Peter smiled back

“And although at times it has been scary, in so many ways I am so grateful to Granny for pushing me and making it happen and that’s probably why I am so keen to make all of this happen. It has to, things have to change.”

Dad came in followed by Damita

“Time to go home” he said

Damita clung to his leg, she loved being with him. The same as Peter had always loved being with Granny.

“Yes time to go and find out what Mummy’s been doing” Peter said and detached his daughter from Dad’s leg , picked up her coat and carried her to the car, whilst Dad followed with the pushchair and Mum wiped her hands and followed too.

After hugs and kisses Peter placed Damita in the car seat, got in the car and drove home.

Within a few minutes they were home.

They entered the house to find a stranger talking with Karen. Peter quickly recognised him as the Journalist from the Independent.

“We’ve had a great chat and James is willing to write an article” Karen said

“And so I invited him for tea”

“Hi” said James smiling.

“Oh I’m not from the London Independent I’m from the free Independent, we try to be as open as we can about everything, what we write and how we are funded and we are based from home, we don’t have a physical office and everything is online” he said.

It was nearly midnight when James left. Peter had taken over Damita’s bedtime routine with Karen popping up for a few minutes, fortunately Damita settled straight away and so Peter was able to join the conversation by eight.

“You have a lovely little girl!” said James as he left.

“Yes we’re very lucky” said Peter.

## Chapter 22

The article appeared on 31<sup>st</sup> October. James had written accurately the thoughts of the members of the action group. Karen was over the moon. Peter was just relieved. He read the article to Gerald who had continued to take an interest and who had managed to get out of his room a couple of times.

“What’s the point of having money unless it gives you a better quality of life!” he exclaimed one day to Peter.

The action group had met again and shared more ideas. A couple of Solicitors had come to join the group and with their help and some local law Professors they were looking at how practically the democratic structure could change.

“I think we need a referendum” Karen said one day in one of the meetings.

One of the Solicitors said that this would be difficult to put into practice as it would have to be parliament passing legislation for a referendum.

“But its possible surely?” asked Gerald

“Yes” said Francis [one of the Solicitors].

“How could it happen?” Asked Peter, who was concerned at his own feelings of hopelessness. He didn’t want to feel like that, but to him it felt like a mamoth, impossible task.

“Well to start with I think we would have to get 100.000 people to sign a petition so that it is debated in parliament, the wording would have to be very carefully written.”

“Surely we can work that out between us” said Karen.

“Well I’m willing to have a go” Chloe said enthusiastically

“We can use AERO as the base for change, To be trully democratic we need to give all the people in the UK a chance to aspire, to learn, not only to encourage others, but also to have courage themselves, to live in a world of reality, not the current chaotic delusion attitude that ‘ someone will do it’ and to have the openness that we have tried to create here in this meeting” she continued.

“But mostly a ‘can do’ attitude” said Karen.

” But what age could people vote?” asked Peter

“Eighteen of course!”

“There’s no of course” said Peter

“Remember how Grace Fawkes felt when she couldn’t vote” he continued laughing.

“I thought you were serious” Karen remarked later poking Peter in the ribs fondly.

“Well children will need to be involved, but the smaller the MP groups, the more chance that children with good ideas will be heard. I bet there are lots of ways that they can contribute and one idea I have had is that instead of child benefit being paid to parents it could be paid into a fund for children to receive on their eighteenth birthday to help them in future life”

Peter loved this time of positive debates and more and more people were getting involved.

He felt that it was an amazing time to be alive.

Karen had been involved in some TV interviews, along with some other members of the action group and they had even let King Charles know about all of it.

One day Peter went to a planning meeting at Chloe’s house with the aim of developing some training to get AERO into all Staffordshire schools.

“Wouldn’t it be great if we could get AERO into all schools in the UK ” she said

“And then every child could be involved in a trully democractic society”

Peter grinned, could this really happen he wondered, could we freshen up the staleness caused by a

so out of date system and structure?.

“What are you thinking” Karen asked and he told her.

“Yes it can and yes we can” she said triumphantly.

As the fireworks shot across the sky on 5<sup>th</sup> November, bewitching music played and Peter remembered the photo of the great wall of china with the man emptying the bin and realised that they could achieve change. He knew that everyone really wanted it and to make everyone really matter, with a give back society.

The man emptying the bin had inspired in Peter the idea that Britain could be great again, where everyone this time contributed to making it happen.

There was no hiding anymore, the AERO words could help create a true democracy that was the dream of many.

And the bright lights of the rockets and sparklers lit up the dark sky.

Agnes Wallace Fawkes 5/11/22

Peter picks up a book on a train which he takes home. The book and the loss of his beloved Grandmother causes his life to change forever.

The author hopes that through reading Tuesdays child yours will too. The aim of writing Tuesdays Child is to help create a more positive, creative, give back UK and eventually a new democracy.

She hopes that you will share this free book with everyone.

In collaboration with [www.aero4all.net](http://www.aero4all.net)

5/11/22

