

Man's Last Song

S E V E N

BIRTHDAY PARTY

Whenever it rains, the sky opens right up. Drizzles are rare these days.

Rhea does not mind a downpour. It is the best fix for a muggy day. Paradoxically, a big storm gets things properly wet, and flushes out the lugubrious moisture.

She closes the piano lid. It lies there like a coffin, black and shiny, with a few copper nails. "That's it," she says, giving it a gentle tap, then gets up.

She takes out a brand new diary, and starts writing. After a few words, she pauses to marvel at the handwriting. Hand written words are so quaint.

Entry One: 13 June 2090: Big rain.

This is my first diary. I rarely wrote in the old days. Nobody did. Everyone used keyboards. It feels weird to see my hand twirling out words, like a toddler watching his own first steps.

Don't think Song will come in this torrent. Thunder is pealing next to me, not the sky. I can barely start counting after a blinding flash. The lightning rods have mostly rusted away, but this is a low-rise surrounded by tall trees and apartments. I hope I'm well protected if nature actually works this way.

I just played the piano for the last time. Tchaikovsky's Number One. I thought it might go well with the storm, but it did not. I know I have lost whatever I had for music. Maybe I never had it. I feel strangely relieved, like having signed the papers for an overdue divorce. Could this be just another symptom of pregnancy? How many symptoms am I suppose to have?

I've played the piano all my life without a purpose. They all said I was a natural, probably because of Gong Gong. But whether I was truly gifted or not, I never bothered to find out. I had no reason to.

The job of music was to kill time. Looking back, it seems we hated time, as if we had too much of it. We were always looking for expensive ways to "kill" it. Shopping; travelling; Geneva; ballet; pottery; movies; parties; internet; piano.... Everything was to *kill* time. Yet we were afraid of dying.

Time is now precious. I've been wishing to do something different, something more meaningful; that would leave a trail, a signpost for the future. For my baby.

A journal like this is perhaps a start.

Okay...

We had a birthday dinner, the day before yesterday, just us two. At first I expected Ma and John too. It was after all John who reminded us of Song's birthday. We all depend on his calendar for festivals and anniversaries. But the birthday boy preferred a small party, as if it was possible to have a big one. It was his birthday, so.

He made beggar chicken. The best. The aroma must have reached Guji's on the other side of the ravine. After having ignored each other all these years, I wonder if I should renew attempt to make contact. Maybe I can bribe her into being friendly with a chicken. It'd be so nice to have a neighbourhood girlfriend.

I made Salade Niçoise à la Stone-Age topped with chicken breast. He arrived in good mood and it got better after a bottle of Gong Gong's Chateau d'Yquem 2062. He was chatty and animated, talking about reviving his father's windmill project, so that we can have some electricity one day. That was the second time he has mentioned it lately. I wonder if he was serious.

We talked about Ma and Sashti. We often do. There's no one else to gossip about. We are forever puzzled why these soul mates who love each other live miles apart. Love is strange... like ours I suppose.

He kept asking if I was okay, which vexed me a little. I know I look tired these days. Of course I do. I wanted to use the opportunity to tell him but didn't. He would think me crazy, I know. I should wait till my tummy is 100% obvious. Then I'll just say, "Yes, I'm tired. Very tired," when he asks again.

Then we made love. It was beautiful, but felt a bit strange towards the end. I think we tried too hard. I enjoyed him more when we simply held each other afterwards, me pressing my ear against his chest, listening to his heart.

His mood swung from one extreme to the other in the morning. He woke up cheerful, then turned gloomy without reason, as if possessed. I pumped his blood-sugar up with three eggs and a stack of potato pancakes but it didn't work. He was beyond first-aid.

Good thing men don't menstruate. They would be more impossible if they did.

* * *

"What are you doing Mama?"

"Grinding the chopper Sweetie."

"Why?"

"To defend ourselves."

"What's 'defend'?"

"To stop people making us into what we don't want to be."

"Who's doing that?"

"Them. They came back."

"They scare me, Mama."

"That's right. They scared you and Tommy away twice. Enough is enough."

"Don't worry, Mama. We'll always come back."

"Always?"

"Ya."

"Promise?"

"Pinky promise! How do you defend us with that, Mama?"

"If they come again, I'll chop them up! up! up!"

"Can I chop too?"

"No, not for kids."

"Please! Mama! Just once."

"No. Only I can chop."

"Why are they so bad?"

"Because they don't know what they're doing, but think they do."

WHAT IS LOVE

From now on, Rhea nods determinedly to herself, she will write everything down, everyday. After the first few entries, she's become haphazard with her diary, and soon lost track of the date. She should ask John to make her a calendar, too. He would be delighted, she knows.

She must leave her footprints in time, make herself visible to the future. Music comes and goes, leaving no trace. Writing is different. Perhaps it kills time too, but preserves it at the same time. Her journal is a time-morgue. Moments frozen on paper can be retrieved later, savoured in reminiscence. What's done is done. But what's written on the spur of a moment can be thoughtfully reviewed later. Life on paper is given a second chance, to become sensible, like history books. We always write for the future, for their consumption. The future needs to know where it came from.

She rereads what she has written so far. Just a few pages, but enough to offer a glimpse of her own mind as if someone else's. It seems at once narcissistic and voyeuristic, also reflective and fulfilling. Her life preserved in literary formaldehyde.

She leaves the diary on top of the piano, hoping that he might get curious...

Entry Nine: 27 June 2090: Nice day.

I've been given a five-year calendar by John. What a wonderful man. I must remember to check everyday off – EVERYDAY – from now on.

I estimate that I'm due end of December. Sagittarius?

We had a good (lively anyway) chat about love today. Love is not something we normally talk about. Musicians talk music. Sportsmen talk sports. Fishermen talk fish. But lovers shouldn't talk love unless

it's other people's. It's too risky to examine the mystery. Does that mean we're no longer lovers? I hope not.

I was the one who brought up the subject, but I did not intend to turn it into a philosophical debate, dissecting love like a mental disorder.

I asked, a bit out of the blue I admit, whether he loved me. Of course baby, he said. (If I heard others calling their spouse, *baby*, I'd puke. Pet names may not be love, but are only tolerable because of it. I can't wait till he calls me Mum.) Anyway, I asked if he knew what love is. He replied "No," curt and categorical. I said, annoyed, "So you love me without knowing what it is?"

"That's right," he said.

He did not notice my irritation, although he did have a passable explanation. He said love is to be felt, not known. It's unknowable, like happiness, or a bad mood, or premenstrual syndromes, ha ha. Say you're happy one day because of the weather, a good meal, a nice chat. But repeating the same things later may not reproduce that wonderful feeling. Why? When you're happy, you just are, even though you don't know what happiness is, or what causes it. No?

Very intellectual. Downright unromantic. Utterly fallacious. He spends too much time with Ma. No doubt.

I interrogated him further. What about love as a selfless state of the mind? An unconditional feeling for the persons you love? What about love-inspired sacrifices?

He said he wasn't so sure about love being unconditional. If it is – he actually said this – then what's the big deal? It occurs by mere chance, and is sustained arbitrarily. If my love for him is *unconditional*, he exclaimed, touching his own heart unnecessarily, then he should be allowed to take it for granted, and abuse it if he wishes. It won't matter. Unconditional love should be there no matter what, unchanging regardless, like gravity, he said. "How could something that blind be precious? How could mindless devotion inspire poetry?"

He compared love to gravity. I felt like crying.

"Only if love *is* unconditional, which I don't think it is..." he attempted to clarify with more fuddle duddle, grinning sheepishly. I told him I did not wish to talk about it anymore. He said, "*Hey hey hey*. I didn't start it, you did."

So what.

* * *

"What's love, Ma?" asks Song.

"What?"

"You heard me, Guru Ma. What is love?"

"I'm a Daoist for Chrissake. Do you know how long I've worked on purging love, hate, expectation, disappointment, happiness and sadness and so on, from this illusory existence? You're contaminating my spirit with your question, Grasshopper."

"Let me put it differently then. Do you love Sashti?"

"*What?!*"

"Can you at least say pardon?"

"Of course I do," says Ma. "Why?"

"What is love, then?"

"I don't know, although sometimes I think I do, but not often."

"I got into trouble with Rhea for saying something like that."

"So you should."

* * *

Sashti taught yoga part-time at the gym where Ma had just become a member, joining Tai-chi and yoga classes that he could easily have taught. He was newly back to Hong Kong, and thought he might find like-minded people there. But most members just wanted to lose weight. Some were also seeking part-time enlightenment on a special monthly package of HK\$680, including a free drink at the Om Bar. The yogis whispered, the body-builders guffawed. All quite friendly and jolly, but mentally unlike Ma.

Sashti had the kind of body curves that gave yoga a good name. Ma saw her in the hallway, and followed her to *Yoga for Beginners* in a trance.

"Very good." She towered over his upside-down face. "Beginner?"

He had doubled up into a perfect utanasana, head between knees, showing off. He felt the heat of her knees on his face, and swallowed against gravity. Embarrassed, he dropped his gaze to look up at her, but was blocked by his own bum.

He had found his like-minded person.

Sashti was born in Hong Kong to Indian parents. The family moved to London when she was thirteen. She had returned alone to do

her post-doctorate in biochemistry at the University of Hong Kong, and be away from her parents.

She was a brilliant chemist. Her research on the degradation characteristics of polymers was supported by a generous grant, and she taught yoga in the evening for a few extra bucks. Most important of all, she was cynical. "Biochemical research is fully controlled by vested interests, supervised by committees who think a Periodic Table is something you fold away after each meal."

"What's your specialty?"

"Cut and paste. *Managing a One Experiment Many Papers* show." She took a sip of gin and tonic. "Just one way of making a living I guess, like theft and prostitution."

That was in 2056. They were in love three hours later, and kind of married a year later.

They shared many things: hobbies, writers, music, outlook, as well as, in Sashti's words, attitude problems. A couple destined to live happily ever after. Well, they did, still do really, but separately for the past ten years. Just before Ma started work on the hanging garden, Sashti told him she wanted to move to Repulse Bay. "When?" he asked. "I'll come check it out with you." The rest was operational. They never discussed why, as if the reasons were too obvious for discussion.

"They've always been soul-mates, but not lovers in the conventional sense," Song once speculated to Rhea.

"What makes you say that?"

"They never torment each other. Don't even argue."

"I suppose you're right."

Ma and Sashti had too much harmony. Two independent soul-mates with no kids might as well live apart after twenty years. Since neither small-talked, they eventually ran out of things to say, and drifted out of each other's sight. Living apart actually gave them the distance to see each other again.

* * *

"Do you think you two might still be living together if you had kids?" Rhea asked Sashti. They were at her beach-side villa in Repulse Bay, not far from Rhea's old family castle, making salad. The guys were preparing beggar's chicken and a giant cod in the garden.

"Why? To maintain a family setting for middle-aged offspring?" Sashti smiled teasingly. "Neither of us wanted kids actually, though it turned out not to be an option. You know, ironically, I was named after the Hindu goddess of fertility."

"Really? Is that what Sashti means? Bless me then!"

"You want kids?" She sounded surprised, then changed her tone. "I guess most women do. I'm just weird. There's a broken spring in my biology." She stopped slicing the tomato and turned to Rhea. "Not too late?"

"Don't think so." Rhea answered as if she had been waiting for the question. "Never."

Sashti raised her thin curvy eyebrows incredulously, then smiled warmly.

Entry Ten: 30 June 2090: Windy.

Very unmotivated. He's fixing the front window, broken by a branch last night, using a pane from next door. Don't feel like writing. No one's curious about my secret thoughts anyway. I thought about the old man he saw two weeks ago. It's not so much about him, although I do pity the poor fellow. It's the chance of something similar happening to us. Song can leave here one day and not return, and I might never find out why.

It also made me think of Guji. Haven't caught a fleeting glimpse of her for a long time. I wonder if she's still alive, or if she's moved again. Does anyone ever check on her? What does she do all day? Perhaps I'll be like her one day? No, I won't. I'll have a son. I think he's a boy. Maybe we should go pay her a proper visit one day soon?

Can't stop thinking about love. Must have been the chat the other day, or pregnancy again? I am unusually sentimental. Is this to prepare myself for love, big and unqualified, like gravity?

Going to Ma's for dinner tonight. Don't really feel like socialising but I guess I will. The walk would do us good, me and the little one.

Entry Eleven: 2 July 2090: Breezy and pleasant evening.

Ma gave a surprising discourse on love last night; it's such an unlikely topic for him. Timely though. It was inspiring and annoying as usual, but I found the premise of love being an extension of self particularly

relevant in my situation. He would be flattered if he knows I'm recording his *lecture* before I forget it.

* * *

The four of us were having an after-dinner drink in his garden (I had soya milk). Ma had been at Sashti's for a couple of days, and just returned in the afternoon. John started it. The big guy is evidently just as curious about this odd couple as we are. It was the usual question. "Why aren't you guys living together, at least in the same area? You're too old to run a marathon every time you want to see your wife, for Chrissake."

"We need space." Ma smiled cheekily.

"Like," I said, "twenty-five kilometres?"

"It's nothing when there's love, my young lady." He could be infuriatingly patronising. But somehow I wasn't infuriated because it was Ma, and because he called me *young lady* with unmistakable sincerity.

"So Ma Shi Fu knows what love is! Great. Can you enlighten us then?" I had him trapped. I threw Song a glance, remembering our chat a few days ago.

Ma thought for a moment, then said, "We (excluding himself, I assume) talk too much and think too little about love, making it unnecessarily perplexing. Left alone, love would be one of the most natural attributes of a social animal like humankind.

"The over-glorified man-woman love, for example, is fundamentally *eros* – a basic animal instinct that doesn't need sweetening with poetry. It happens naturally, often by chance – " he looked at Song and me "– like you guys." We gave a synchronised shrug. He grinned. "Men and women are attracted to each other instinctively, like cats in heat. But unlike cats, civilised humans are uncomfortable with their nature. We need a reason for everything we do. Love is one such rationalisation. It idealises an innate desire that shouldn't require moral or intellectual justification, changing its true face as a result."

He paused to regard his audience.

I gave him a mmm-hmm look.

He continued, "In that sense, romantic love is a condition initiated by the genitals, then spread to the heart." He swept his hands up from his tummy to the chest, discreetly missing the starting point.

Song and John laughed, boosting his spirits.

"Hey," he added. "Don't forget! For millions of years, men and women met mostly by wild chance. They bumped into each other and?" He looked at the boys, inviting an answer.

"Sniffed at each other's butt!" John shouted like a school-boy. Song giggled, slapping his own thigh. The boys were having a good time discussing love. I suppose that was a positive step forward in evolution.

Ma complimented – or insulted – John by saying he would make a good *Homo erectus*. I remarked that they both would. Song protested with a neglected face, "What about me?"

Ma resumed. "As we became more *civilised* –" he said it with unmistakable contempt "– sex became controlled through marriage arranged by family elders for expedient reasons, or later on, registered by civil servants and stored in a Government database. Not long ago, things became even more spurious when love came to be regarded as a moral prerequisite for sex, as if our animal nature could be redesigned at will. It's like saying we won't eat unless there's healthy food on the table, or we won't even feel hungry unless the vitamin content on our dinner-plate is perfectly balanced."

"I don't feel hungry unless there's good food on the table," John said.

Ma noticed my questioning eyes instead, and clarified that he wasn't agreeing or disagreeing with what he'd described. He was merely stating what he had observed to be the way of modern civilisation. "Before the last couple of centuries, the majority of humans did not pretend to be in love before they screwed. Duty and family interests were the most common foreplay preceding legitimate intercourse. The awkward association of impalpable love and a carnal relationship is historically speaking a recent fad. That's all I'm saying."

"If *eros* is primitive love, so romantically animal, are there higher levels? If yes, what are they? What about love for children? And you still haven't defined love, Professor!" I said, a bit sarcastic. I knew Ma wouldn't mind.

"Wow! I'll need another drink to get into all that, my young lady." Song jumped up to pour him one.

"Thank you, Grasshopper." He took a mouthful as if he could quench thirst with cognac, and swallowed hard with a gratified grimace. "Yes, one love, many levels, all fundamentally the same. In

my humble opinion, what we vaguely call love is an extension of self, or projection of one's existence – an expected trait of all social animals."

"Oh no... Philosophy." John muttered loudly, tapping his forehead.

Ma bobbed to him and said, "Zoology." Then turned back to me. "First and foremost of this projection is *eros*, as I've just mentioned. It biologically extends one's genes – through sex, of course. But other attributes can be projected as well. Parents, for example, are infamous for subconsciously wanting to pass ambitions and anxieties on to their kids. Some try to recapture lost opportunities in life through their children, hoping that they will undo the regrets of the previous generation. If these projections are love," he raised his fingers to bracket himself in quotation marks, "then yes: sympathy, encouragement, nurturing, desire, sacrifice, possessiveness, pressure, support and so on can all be interpreted as love. *Eros*, by comparison, is relatively pure, simple, honest, and pleasurable."

"Sounds like your favourite Shi Fu." Song sniggered.

Ma smiled. "Parental love is probably the next easiest to understand, after *eros*, because it serves to protect our gene carriers – the children. Other glorified *love-forms* are more questionable. Zealous nationalists, racists, and religious fanatics, for example, sacrificed their own lives and murdered others to serve a notional purpose, or whatever principles they were stuck with for the time being. Was that love? I'm not sure, but those who benefited from their sacrifice would say yes. Don't forget, most people who effusively eulogised martyrs were themselves very much alive and in power, probably due to the encouraged death of their *brave young men and women*."

"In short, basic love is instinctual, like hunger or thirst. It's innate, entirely natural to social animals, whether insect or human. No need to make a big glittering deal out of it. *Civilised* love, on the other hand, is artificial, often entwined with delusions. That's why it's impossible to define."

"What about a wider love for humanity – like Jesus's – or environmentalists' love for beasts and bugs or the natural environment in general?" asked John.

"They are just a tiny step up from the patriots or devout martyrs aren't they? The idea of Jesus of Nazareth promoting *universal love* was a post-Ascension fantasy anyway. Jesus' original messages of

peace and forgiveness were directed at his own brutal and unforgiving world, with a racial focus on his tribesmen the Chosen Ones only. You can't blame him. He didn't know much about the rest of his Dad's secondary creatures, did he?

"And those who sincerely respected the environment as a whole were indeed projecting our existence onto a wider plane. Preserving the environment was good for long-term survival. Very sensible, yes, but nothing outlandishly noble about it." He paused, then added, "I haven't met many environmentalists who truly loved the environment, though."

"So, love beyond *eros* isn't necessarily a positive development of the human spirit in your view." I tried to stop him from wandering too far.

"Not to me. Like most things, love could be *good* only when given and taken in sensible and balanced measures. Otherwise, it could turn destructive. While so-called *love* from an enlightened person can be liberating and enriching, blind passion from a fool is annoying at best, murderous at worst. Fervid love chokes us when happening, and pains us with regrets when dead. It's an incredible cause of suffering.

"Truly great love is actually not something that catches the fancy of pallid sugary poets. Ultimate love has no preference; it appears impartial and impassive –"

"Like gravity!" Song nearly jumped.

"Gravity?" Ma was puzzled by Song's sudden burst of enthusiasm. "I suppose that's one way of putting it; a big background force that holds things together. When all is one and one is all, there's neither distinction nor favouritism. This is love at the highest level, attainable through enlightenment, not instinct or faculty, therefore, *Aiya*, not really the thing for us average humans."

John applauded. "Well said Monk Ma. Everything you've said is probably not true, and I now have less idea what love is than an hour ago, but you've made it sound great."

"Thank you." He bowed.

I actually found most of what he said made sense, but something was missing. Men don't seem able to feel the full power of love the way we women do, even on an instinctual level. It's a genetic defect, congenital deficiency. They either follow their erectus instincts and are unbearably basic, or think too much about it. Brain and penis are both

wrong organs to seek love. Unfortunately, feminine feelings are no match for rationality in a debate of words, especially with Ma.

Instead of challenging his premise, I asked the question which interested me most. "What about our love for children. You haven't said anything about that yet."

"No? Thought I did. Didn't I say parental love is the easiest to understand? Okay, children carry our genes and project it into the future. They serve to keep basic love alive in a relationship, thereby prolonging it. Not that I have any personal experience, but I believe our instinctive love for kids is much stronger and more durable than that for spouses. Our mates are just interim *vehicles*. (How can I not love the way he turns beautiful things into existentialist gizmos?) *Eros* is tenuous and vulnerable, attenuated by time. Kids galvanise a couple's emotional and social bond, and give it a future dimension." Then he added an important afterthought. "Most people probably don't know the true force of instinctive love until they become parents."

"I agree, fully agree. And that includes you." I pointed an emphatic finger at him.

"Of course. That includes all of us childless people here."

I smiled. Just you wait and see, I thought.

I turned to Song. He had been staring at me without my knowing it, smiling like a kid. He had no idea what was in my mind, but enjoyed the discussion and company. Me too. I needed to talk about it.

I love him I love him. I can't explain why, nor need to. I just do, with all my instincts, and much more.

* * *

"Do you love me, Mama?"

"Of course, Sweetie."

"Tommy too?"

"Of course, Tommy too."

"What's love, Mama?"

"Love is everything."

"Good and bad?"

"Only good, Sweetie. Love's always good. Love's the best. There's nothing like love."

"How do you love us, Mama?"

"I care about you all the time; I worry about you every minute of the day, every second of the night; I want to be with you always; I won't

let anyone hurt you, or get near you, or take you away from me. I'll kill anyone who tries to take you away from me. I'll do anything for you two. I'll never, never, leave you and Tommy. Forever and ever."

"Forever and ever?"

"Yes Sweetie. Every minute of forever and ever."

"Until we die?"

"Don't say bad things Sweetie! Spit and wipe your mouth!"

"What if we disappear and never come back?"

"You won't! You're saying bad things again!"

"No! Mama. Just pretend, please!"

"Pretend what?"

"Pretend we've disappeared."

"I'll just die."

"Yeah! I love you too, Mama."

ANNUNCIATION

Entry Fifteen: 5 July 2009: Disastrous.

I finally told him after breakfast.

I couldn't hold it in any longer. It came out just like that, as if involuntarily. "Haven't you the slightest idea that I'm pregnant?"

He gaped at me as if someone had just dragged him out of bed at three in the morning. I waited, smiling. He then said in a serious voice, "You're kidding." We sank into a moment of awkward silence. An explosive mixture of sadness, disappointment and humiliation flushed through me. I wanted to slap him. I exaggerated my smile instead.

I had been right. He thought I had gone nuts, and, more infuriatingly, suffering from menopausal delusions. He and his menopause and andropause. I had much better reasons to question his sanity than he had to question mine.

He then asked, "Did you test with a kit?" I said, "Of course. But darling, you know, unlike spam, these kits are hard to find. The market for them vanished decades ago." The one and only I found at Manning's, stuck behind a shelf in a store room, expired eighteen years ago. It had dried up completely. Whatever chemical there was inside had turned into a faint stain. Didn't even smell anymore.

Besides a hint of sarcasm, I was still trying hard to be charming, patient, and understanding. I expected him to doubt me. But...! His reaction upset me nonetheless. I took a deep breath, and explained how I knew I was pregnant the best I could. But he seemed as thick as cowhide lantern, impossible to enlighten. He didn't appear to know the basic biology of pregnancy. Not surprising. He had never seen a real baby in his entire life. Babies and pregnancy had never been a topic of concern to him or his father's survival game. Survival to boys is a

man's game. To appease his intellectual vanity, I even tried to explain from a philosophical angle, blah, blah, blah.

In the end, he said, "OK, if you insist. How are you going to give birth?"

If I insist!

"How?" I remained calm even at this point. "Like all women before me."

"What if it's stuck?"

"What do you mean stuck?"

"Stuck, you know. Stuck."

"Cut me up if you have to."

"Alive?"

"If that's what it would take to save the baby."

He suddenly seemed truly angry. He said I was crazy, and accused me of grossing him out with violence.

I told him to fuck off, and he did.

I hate him. He hurts me so much when I need him most. I never thought I could hate him but I do. I never want to see him again unless he apologises. No! Not even then.

Let him watch. For million of years, women gave birth without their men. We're back to the Stone Age now. We're savages. I'll do it without him. I'll have the baby delivered myself. Come to think of it, it'd be easier without his dumb distractions.

Maybe I'll move to Sashti's. She'll understand right away. She would be able to help. Maybe I'll even go tell Guji. She's a woman after all. I'm sure the news of a baby would bring her out of her lonesome curse.

I'm crying again as I write. Good. I'd cry all I need to, then do some breathing exercise to calm down. I shouldn't let myself get upset. I can feel my heart racing right now. That's not good.

Getting rid of him is a good thing. One more cry, then a new beginning.

TIGER

Out in Yuen Long, solitude has no recourse.

When there were jails, even a prisoner in solitary confinement had the hope or knowledge that his punitive solitude might end one day. The outside world was only a brick wall away. He could hear the guards chatting, doing their job. They depended on his incarceration for a living. They had to serve and feed him regularly. They had to be nearby, attentive, in order to monitor, torture, toy with him. They were there for him, because of him. The prisoner was keeping his guards confined just the same, on possibly more intolerable terms because it was a job; they had the choice to leave, but could not.

A lighthouse keeper's job was lonely. He was far away from people, but would occasionally visit town for provisions or breaks. At night, he could see the faint glow of a familiar place in the sky. He could visualise people living their congested lives over there, in a land he knew. Ships sailed past. Sailors and passengers were sweating, labouring, resting, eating, looking his way, curious if there was a keeper on duty, and what he might be doing at that moment.

A shipwreck victim marooned on the cartoonists' single-palm island might appear stuck in a situation similar to Huan's; yet there is one big difference. The forlorn survivor would spend his days looking out to sea, craning his neck longer, hoping for rescue. One day, perhaps even later today, his loneliness would end. There would be welcome-home champagne, and a lifetime right to tell his story over and over again.

Unlike them, Huan's solitary confinement is voluntary, absolute, endless, till death.

* * *

Solitude has given him a more prominent role in his own life. He daydreams freely, ranging over boundless territories. He talks to himself without worrying about being overheard, or what others might think. He laughs at his own jokes. Ironically, he is in much better shape than he's been for a while. Is it the agreeable diet of freshwater fish, frogs (and one vole so far), wild fruits and vegetables? Or the healthful effect of relaxing into his death position?

His stopover is looking permanent. A few days' rest has turned into three months – ninety five days actually, with a potential error of two. On two occasions, he was not sure if he had missed marking the time chart in the morning, so he did it in the evening anyway, knowing that he might have duplicated. He has since made it a habit to mark the day first thing every morning, before emptying his brittle old bladder. He realises how silly and pointless it is, but can't help it. He will start a new sheet in a few days. One hundred days per sheet.

A hundred days – believe it or not.

In spite of his high spirits, he does not seem to have the energy to cross the border, as he originally planned. It looks like Yuen Long is where he will die.

He wakes before sunrise. A good long sleep is rare at his age. When it occasionally happens, he feels sluggish and limp rather than well rested. Young people wake up from a good sleep rejuvenated. He wakes up from deep slumber feeling like a disturbed corpse.

After breakfast, he takes a walk through the field to the village. The round trip takes an hour. Sometimes he continues all the way to the ghostly town centre, which is twice the distance, to scrounge for stuff. Must keep those legs fit. Might need them to find a good roof to jump off in case he needs to. He does not intend to commit suicide; not at all. But the natural course of things can become unbearable. He might need to self-administer euthanasia for humane reasons.

When death arrives, he hopes it will be in his sleep. He has experimented focusing his mind on terrible things before sleeping, hoping to induce a nightmare. Dying of a heart attack in a bad dream would be a nice clean way out. Death is the final thing Song Huan still tries to manage in this life.

There are chores after the morning walk. Pruning fruit trees, gathering vegetables, collecting firewood, making jam, getting water, fixing leaks around the house, doing laundry. Sometimes – not often –

he eats a small lunch. Then he naps. In the late afternoon, he might fish, bathe in the stream, or set up snares for pigeons and voles.

After dinner, his mind would drift.

Most days, he sits back to listen to the frogs and insects, and to reminisce. He indulges in the happiest years, replaying them over and over. He is in Shanghai or Finland, or at home with Sari and Song, chatting, cooking, doing dishes, reading sitting next to them, walking up the Peak, sharing a stupid joke. Nothing exhilarating. Just plain and simple contentment, the felicity of not wishing for anything else.

Sometimes, to his surprise, he would be at work, figuring things out, feeling accomplished or frustrated. Occasionally, bits and pieces of younger days would surface. He would see his mother, someone he has not thought of for many years. Maybe it is time to refresh his memory, in preparation for the reunion.

Other days he stays in the present, planning chores. Sometimes he rehearses contingencies in his head: a broken hip, a debilitating attack of flu, dengue fever, even a tiger attack. He plans what he can do to better the chance of surviving with minimum pain.

Every now and then, he daydreams about the final moment. If he knew he had one minute left, how should he spend it? Most likely, he would not be able to do anything physically. But if he does not panic, if his mind remains sound, what should he occupy it with for the next sixty seconds, while he's still a human on Earth? What impression would he like to take with him when crossing the big divide?

On a starry night or moonlit evening, he might stray off the planet. He would sit at the cockpit of the expanding universe, rushing towards a starless infinity, penetrating an endless space. Stars explode into sight – one, two, ten, a hundred, millions, billions. They pop up out of nowhere and multiply endlessly at a dazzling rate, like a firework that keeps flaring, layer after layer. These are neighbouring universes, also expanding, rushing for infinity; a celestial stampede. Huan tries to catch up with the front runner, but cannot. He does not know which way to look. Without the encumbering body, he can travel faster than light, breaking all physical limitations. *Just imagine*. But still he cannot reach the end. Infinity is out of bounds even for the imagination, too far even for ghosts.

He comes home to the Milky Way. Sari has been waiting. "Hei muru, what took you so long!" She takes his hand for a tour of the heavens. Sometimes she looks twenty-five – her age when they met.

Sometimes she looks forty-eight – her age when she died. He is always an old man in his seventies, looking even older than in real life, exhausted from the cosmic flight. She is like his daughter, even granddaughter. He tries but cannot visualise himself younger, or Sari older.

* * *

Song Huan cannot make himself young again in his dreams, but can still be adventurous.

He has crossed the border, walking towards the hinterland of Guangdong province. For centuries, this was one of the most fertile lands of China, supplying fragrant rice and organic vegetables to millions. Not too long ago, lush green fields were smothered by dusty grey factories, turning into miles and miles of square concrete blocks – a grey Wall of China. Tonnes and tonnes of stuff were churned out from it day and night. Stuff the world wanted but did not need. The eighth pair of sneakers for Johnny, Daddy's 36th polka-dotted tie, Jane's third i-Pod, water bottles with blinking caps. It was a junk yard in reverse, taking in useful resources, cranking out junk.

The world depended on affordable throw-away items to keep its economy expanding, to keep inflation down and the Christmas spirit up. Millions of workers' pay-cheques depended on people throwing stuff out. Now that the rice fields were producing golf balls and running shoes, the people needed money to import rice. This was the inside of a global economic engine. It looked and smelled like the inside of an engine.

Some factories are green again. Trees have reclaimed the world's last industrial heartland, turning assembly lines of i-Dreams and Virtual Sneakers into Angkor Wat.

Huan expected to see more people this side of the border, but has not seen a soul. He is leaving the city centre. The grey wall is changing hue, shedding dust. The setting sun imposes a coat of orange over the emerald jungle he is about to enter. The freshness of moss and sweetness of wild fruits fill his nose. Apple, guava, lychee, papaya, mandarin, water melon, banana as well as exotic species he does not recognise. Finally, he is in the place he had in mind when he left home long, long ago.

There is a waterfall nearby. The sound of it invigorates him. Perching at the top watching water plunging off is an ancient pine – a Hospitality Pine – just like in old paintings. It has witnessed the incessant flow for millennia. It has watched the world beyond change from green to grey, grey to brown, then back to green.

Huan is exhausted, but happy and peaceful. He lies down next to the bank, listening to the water, feeling the mist landing on his face, gently refreshing him.

Before long, he is fast asleep.

Something is sniffing his head. He keeps his eyes closed and body still. He breathes as evenly as he can, but his heart pumps fear all over. His temples thud.

How stupid of me to fall asleep in strange territory.

All of a sudden, it licks the crown of his head.

A big tongue. Strong, steady slurps.

A tiger? Oh shit. This is near where the Shenzhen zoo was.

Don't move. Stay calm. Let it lick. Maybe it will find his wizened head flaky and distasteful, and go away after a little sampling.

More likely, it will eat his face afterwards.

What does he want to think of now, now that there's only a minute or two left?

He cannot think of anything.

Instead, he dozes off again.

* * *

He drifts in and out of sleep. Every time he comes out of it, he blearily senses the tiger nearby. Its breath, carnivorous and raw, reeking of undigested blood, is upon his face.

Finally, he feels awake. It is still dark. He must have slept the whole night. It's about 4.30, his biological alarm says. The tiger is still around, he knows. But why hasn't it eaten him?

Early birds are singing. Where is he?

He opens his eyes a crack. Everything looks blurry but familiar. Isn't this the hut in Yuen Long? So it was just a dream? But the unmistakable stench of a beast is in the air, right here. He can faintly hear its breath. Shenzhen might have been a dream, but the tiger is not.

Huan stays motionless, and waits for light.

An hour feels like eternity when one waits in bed. Every cell in his body aches to twitch. At long last, the first glow of dawn seeps

through the windows, gradually increasing in intensity. God is slowly turning up the dimmer. The warbling of birds reaches a crescendo.

He opens his eyes gently, reminding himself not to panic if a tiger's face is against his. Only the ceiling. Gingerly, he turns his head to the side, and sees it sitting two metres from the bed.

The chow chow notices him waking, and stands up, alert, spotty tongue hanging slightly out. Its tail is lifted, wagging hesitantly from side to side, pausing after each swipe.

"Hey doggie," Huan says in a coarse morning voice. "You scared me. I thought you were a tiger."

In reply, its tail swipes three times. One, pause, two, three. Tentative and noncommittal, but clearly not hostile.

Huan slowly sticks one hand out, gesturing it to come closer. "Come on, good boy. Hungry?"

It comes closer, and lets Huan pat its thick and scruffy coat, sticky like cotton-candy. "Good boy. Or are you a girl? Don't have a pack to join?"

The dog seems relaxed now. It comes right against the bed, wagging vigorously, inviting him to continue patting.

"Had enough of freedom? Wanna be a pet again?" The dog seems to agree. "Wow, you need a bath!"

"What should I call you?" He pushes himself up like a rusty robot. His bones creak in unison. "*Tiger*, of course! Yeah! Good! Come Tiger, let's make breakfast!"

LONELY AWAKENING

Melody lay in bed with the worst migraine she had ever had. She wanted to find a wet towel to cover her head, but could not summon the energy to get up. She slipped her T-shirt off and placed it over her eyes instead. Light was everywhere, stabbing, gnawing.

She breathed with mouth wide open, moaning long and deep. The pain was excruciating. Some single-minded madness was slashing up her inside savagely. Here! Here! Here! Here! Her brain twitched and convulsed, unaware of anything but pain – a sharp searing pain that darted from front to back, then to the front again, then the crown, poking for a weak spot to crack open. It aimed to kill.

Big teardrops rolled down her cheeks. They were cold.

* * *

She woke up, emerging from a dark abyss of lost time, and was surprised. I'm still alive? She noticed the damp T-shirt next to her. Her mouth was dry, her tongue stuck to the roof. Her lips were chapped and flaky. She wondered how long it had been.

So quiet. The music had stopped.

The kids!
Sweetie?
Tommy?
Sweetie!!!

* * *

"Sweetie!
"Tommy!
"Oh no...

"No... no... no...."

* * *

She sits on the parapet wall where Sweetie and Tommy first appeared; music was playing then. She's not sad. Sadness had been promptly taken over by rage, an intense rage that scorched every organ. Kidney, stomach, liver, heart.

Then the rage died out, burnt no more.

The night is dark. A weak yellow light flickers in the distance. She stares at it, zooming in mentally with a vampiric flutter. Rhea, the other woman, the other lonely woman, is sitting there, watching the reflection of a candle in the window. Then the vision dissolves, replaced by darkness, the darkness that engulfs her.

The night is dead quiet.

She wonders why God is doing this to her, robbing her of a self-containing love and happiness that bother nobody. What has she done wrong? What pleasure can He possibly get from teasing her until she breaks?

"What!" She screams, looking up towards Heaven.

The moon glows behind a veil of clouds, hiding.

"Cowards! You're all cowards!"

She wants to smoke, but has no cigarettes.

She starts to sing instead, her voice deep and brittle tonight.

*From the far side of the ravine
blows a gentle wind.
Sweeping over the silver moon
Sailing across the purple sea
It's come a long long way
to be in your dream.*

*Sleep O baby sleep
Only when you dream, I can come in
Only when you dream, everything's real
When the sun comes up
We'll disappear
Like the wind, gone, gone
Blowing beyond
Never to be seen.*

She freezes, listening intently to her own voice resonating in her head, hoping it might rekindle the music, followed by Sweetie and Tommy. "Come on Mozart." But there is only silence. It's deafening. She shudders.

She looks down at the darkness underneath, so dense and bottomless, and plunges in.

In her flight through the warm moist air, Melody hears the sibilance of wind passing through her once silky long hair, and the gentle flapping of her favourite purple dress.

O SOLE MIO

Song trudges down Old Peak Path without his the staff he takes when walking. He has left it at Rhea's when leaving in a hurry.

"If I slip and kill myself, it'd be all her fault." The thought of Rhea bearing the guilt for the rest of her life gives him a tinge of satisfaction. When passing the bend where he encountered the old man, he wonders what has become of him, and is tempted to check. Then he walks on. Better just let him be.

He has been replaying the fight with Rhea in his head over and over again, discovering more and more regrets. He could have been more patient and sensitive. Perhaps he was a bit petulant and unnecessarily retaliatory. He should simply have said less. Why was he so unforgiving, even mean and harsh, to someone he loves so dearly? Was it menopause clashing with andropause? He wonders how many women had mistaken menopause for pregnancy. Not many, he concludes. Most women died before the menopause until recent centuries; then they stopped getting pregnant.

Come to think of it, the same folly would have been comical rather than vexing earlier on in their relationship. He would have taken the news with humour instead of exasperation. Is this how love matures?

Rhea may be being ridiculous but her delusion is excusable, and her reasoning sound. Why couldn't he just play along, and let her discover the difference between pregnancy and menopause in due course? Why was he so gung-ho about proving her wrong right away? Why couldn't he shut up and wait? Was he subconsciously threatened by the idea of a baby, even as a remote possibility?

He plods on.

When he reaches Robinson Road, he continues downhill. He does not feel like going home yet.

* * *

Where did it go wrong?

They were chatting after breakfast. Song leafed through the calendar from John, asking why she wanted one.

"Because I'm pregnant." She looked at him, a big smile on her face.

"*Mmm Hmm.*" He sensed that it was not just a weird joke, but did not know how to react.

"I am." She repeated, still looking at him with the same exaggerated charm and happy face. "Maybe approaching the end of my first trimester."

"You're sure?" Song sat bolt upright, giving the impression that he was only starting to pay attention. He said the first thing that came to mind, "Have you checked with one of those kits from the pharmacy?"

"Of course, but darling, these things expired long ago." She sounded sarcastic. "By the way, I'm a woman. I can tell I'm pregnant without consulting chemical indicators."

"You sure it's not the menopause?"

"What?" She seemed shocked and offended by his reasonable speculation.

He tried to clarify. "I mean, it could be the menopause, you know. Don't they have similar symptoms, like no more periods?"

"Song, I don't believe you!"

A silly argument had started, deteriorating quickly. The news was more than a surprise to Song; he found it ludicrous, outrageous. His first reaction was indignation. Rhea is forty-eight. Even in the bygone fertile world, women rarely became pregnant with their first baby at this age. Furthermore, even if it were true, he told Rhea, why would they want to bring a new life to a dead end? To grow up all by itself? To be the only person on Earth, wandering aimlessly all day engaged in soliloquy?

She turned a furious red, but quickly calmed down to a bit of philosophy. She cautioned against speculating too much about the future. "Doesn't Ma call us *Post-Modern Savages*?" she said. "He's got a point there. We're now savages. We need to rely on instincts – not hypothesis and wordy intellectualism. Remember your *Homo erectus*? They wouldn't have become *Homo sapiens* if our primeval ancestors had wondered whether it was a good thing to have kids, because a million dreadful fates awaited them. If they had thought about it, they

would have realised that the chance of us large monkeys with stubby toes surviving in the brutal world was pitifully slim. "What's the point?" they would have asked.

"But NO!" she nearly hollered. "Our ancestors were real men and women. They just went ahead and did it. Their duty was to reproduce, as much as they could, and leave the future to the future.

"Who do you think we are?" she stood up and asked, like a lawyer in court. "Some kind of god, responsible for planning the future of mankind? Had you lived in the tenth century, and been blessed with the knowledge that Song Sung now has, would you have decided against having kids because mankind might die out a thousand years later? Would you?"

Song said he might have, if he had had that vision.

"Well," Rhea said, discharging a lungful of exasperation. "Song, humans have known for quite a while that, one day, we'll all be dried up by the expanding sun. So why live today, since all lives will be incinerated? Because it's our instinct to carry on, to keep the species going!

"Fine, for a while there were far too many of us; but we're now leftovers of a dying race on its last breath. There's no time for contemplation. We can't afford it. Turn on your instincts. Imagine yourself the very first man, serial number 001. You don't even know you'll grow old and die sometime in your twenties. You have no idea. Just live, a minute at a time, one day at a time, and make babies at every opportunity."

Maybe she *is* pregnant, Song thought. How else could she become so impossibly eloquent and aggressive all at once? There's got to be some hormone with a monstrous molecular structure behind all this.

"Dream!" Rhea resumed.

"Pardon?" Song was dreaming about hormones, wondering how they might look.

"I said dream," Rhea repeated, this time softly. "Dreams make us a different animal. Dreams make us special. They are above rationality and irrationality. Dreams allow us to ignore statistics and achieve the unlikely, even the so-thought impossible. Dreams help us to challenge destiny, redefine fate."

"Wow!" Song smiled slyly, trying to tone down his amazement. "Nightmares are dreams too."

Rhea paused and looked away.

"Rhea," Song said to her back. They had dropped their pet names for this present conversation. "But there's something called judgement. Assuming that you are pregnant – Okay, correction, since you are pregnant – we're going to be parents. As parents, we love our kid, and want it to be happy. But to the best of my judgement, it will have a pretty miserable life. What do you say to that, Mum?"

"Were you listening?" retorted Rhea. "In the post-modern world, it's not felicitous niceties like happiness, job satisfaction, a wonderful marriage and a good pension that we care for. It's survival. Survival of self. Survival of the species. Nothing else!"

"You once said you don't know what happiness is. How do you plan happiness for your kid if you don't know what it is, huh? You're still thinking too much, or refusing to switch from thinking to acting. You're totally out of context, and out of time for that matter. Come back to here and now! Forget history! Forget the future! Quit analysing! Quit weighing one impossible outcome against another! Look at us Song, the way we are – now!"

Rhea then realised she might have sounded too personal and critical. She softened her voice to plea. "Come on Baby, I know what's happening. I'm not crazy. Trust me. You must. We have a baby coming. Let's focus on that."

He was thinking. A technical concern entered his mind. "Okay, if you insist. How are you going to give birth?"

"How? Like all the women before me."

Song inexplicably found that answer unreasonable. "What if it's stuck?" he asked.

"Cut me up if you have to."

"Alive?"

"If that's what it'll take."

Song could not believe his ears. The idea stabbed him like an electric shock. It saddened him for a split second, then provoked him with a sense of violence he had never experienced before. Blood rushed to his head. "You're gross." – He sounded icy cold. – "And insane."

She burst into tears, and told him to fuck off.

He turned to leave, forgetting the favourite staff he took with him when walking.

* * *

Song slouches on John's bollard at Queen's Pier. His anger has ebbed away. Remorse has taken over. She was right, whether she's pregnant or not. He does spend too much time thinking and talking inconsequentially rather than acting.

Why wouldn't he be like this, though? He has never had to do anything about most things!

His father told him it's a tough world, so, be tough son. But in what way? He's strong, He could run two marathons a day if he had to. But physical strength and stamina have turned out to be much less critical than Huan had anticipated. With knowledge, durable leftovers, food, shelter, and clothing are reasonably easy to come by. The wind and rain are no more threatening than before. The animals are only just beginning to learn to be wild again. In fact, as John once noted, there are not even any bad guys to worry about any more. With nothing to gain or lose, villains have become extinct.

Song's life is much easier than his father had imagined. An excessive past had left him with a surplus of nearly everything; and a terminal future has relieved him of the anxious preparation. Compared with past generations, he is practically worry-free. His duty to himself and others is to live for today. He does not even need meditation.

He was often told how wonderfully different and lovable he was for a Generation-Zeder. Even at the age of forty-two, he remains somewhat unworldly. How can he not? He has never faced any pressure to grow up, whether into a tough caveman, an ambitious middle-class urbanite, or anyone else in particular. He has never had any real responsibility. He does not know the burden of a mortgage, a career, family, children. Up until now, all that has been required of him is to live – eat, drink, bullshit, sleep. Do a few chores. Make love if available. Tough life, huh?

His biggest test supposedly awaits him in the future. To be alone when everyone else has died; if everyone else indeed dies ahead of him. Then he must wait courageously for his turn, and die mankind's last hero. No one has ever expected more from him. No one has ever expected anything from him.

Except Rhea.

When she moved out of Shek O, she expected to move in with him. His mild panic perplexed them both. When he suggested a separate house in the same neighbourhood to give each other more space, she moved to the Peak instead. She was disappointed, but did not show it.

"Fine. Good idea. I think I'd pick a house on the Peak instead." The issue of cohabitation had not been mentioned since.

This morning she did it again, much more shockingly this time, expecting him to become a father.

He has been praised and sympathised with for having the admirable courage to live a life without future. *Poor Song*. It suddenly dawns on him that living without the burden of history or anxiety for the future is freedom – *real* freedom! No wonder the world was full of rapturous eschatologists.

Continuity and expectation bring nothing but headache. People looked at history, and got aggravated by events that had long become irrelevant. They then wasted today stockpiling for an unknowable tomorrow, then waited anxiously for it to materialise.

Song has been free of this fettering cycle since birth, until just now. Rhea's news of pregnancy, illusory or otherwise, was an affront. For the first time, he was forced to face today and plan for tomorrow. She forced him to face a totally different life, an alien life which brings back burdens and responsibilities. It was an assault on the free rein he has always enjoyed.

What about Rhea? She's a Generation-Zeder too, though at the front end of it, and spoiled by a super-wealthy upbringing.

She's a woman. That why!

Gender makes a big difference under the circumstances. Basic biology like menstruation keeps women in touch with their raw bloody instincts. Rhea has evolved unaware, way ahead of Song, becoming fitter for survival, for long-term survival of the species – the overwhelming goal of all living things.

With pregnancy – or the illusion of it – her instincts have resurfaced, covering all the stains of civilisation. She has completed her transformation. She is a full-fledged post-modern savage now. Her life is no longer distracted by interpretation. No nonsense. For the future's sake, she doesn't care whether there is a future or not.

But may be there is!

Looking back, his own birth was statistically impossible; it happened. His surviving the first year was unlikely; it also happened. Meeting Rhea was a one in a million chance event; and it happened as if by design. According to Ma, the appearance of humanity itself was infinitely unlikely, but it happened, didn't it?

So, what is impossible?

Nothing seems impossible if he stops analysing. What has he got to lose anyway? Maybe they are destined to rekindle the human race, restarting it from scratch? Rhea's only forty-eight, much younger than many child-bearing geriatrics in the Bible.

But... Rhea is no mythical figure. She's forty-eight after all, living in a world with neither medical assistance nor guardian angels. What is her chance of surviving a first pregnancy?

What if...

He is captivated by the frantic aquatic community around the sunken barge. Hundreds of fish mill about, searching for food, searching for mates, playing out their roles in nature. Unthinking. Searching.

That's it. No more what ifs...

All of a sudden, he hears a baby crying. It rings in his head the same way he used to hear his mother calling him to dinner, years after she had died. Was it a real cry? He holds his breath to listen. Water splashes against the pier. Could have been a sea-gull.

Just like the fish... No more what ifs...

Rhea is right. I have not been a good caveman. Not even a bad one. Not even a fish.

His mind drifts to Rhea's breasts. They did seem fuller recently. Is that because of pregnancy? Or just her getting fat? Or menopause. *Who cares!* Time will tell. No more what ifs. No more menopause.

In the last couple of hours, since the *idea* of a baby entered his head, his perception of life has made quantum leaps in all directions. "Wow, powerful stuff." He takes a deep breath. "I have great responsibilities ahead, perhaps." Better be strong! He might be a Father Abraham figure to a congested world two thousand years from now.

He turns towards the Old Peak Path. Many silly questions line up for his attention. Should Rhea move to Robinson Road to live with me? That should have happened years ago. Yes, with or without a baby. I'll propose to her.

But Baby Song the Second would grow up all alone...

No it won't. He recalls Rhea's words when they first met. There'll be someone else. And they'll meet, somehow, just like us. What if they finally meet against all odds, and discover each other to be of the same sex? What's this *what if* again!

Perhaps they should move to Kowloon, and be connected to the mainland?

What about a name? "Now this is more than silly," he mutters with a silly smile. He goes through a few options anyway. Xing can suit a boy or girl in Chinese. It can mean star, or *spark*. A spark of hope; a pilot light for the next civilisation? What about a Finnish name instead. Jari? Satu?

But what if it's just the menopause? That means we're not going to have a baby after all. He can't help feeling slightly disappointed. Nah. She's right. She must know. And no more *what ifs*, remember?

As he climbs the path, he feels a rejuvenating lightness, and starts to sing his favourite song.

*Che bella cosa e' na jurnata 'e sole,
n'aria serena doppo na tempesta!
Pe' ll'aria fresca pare già na festa
Che bella cosa e' na jurnata 'e sole!*

...

O sole mio...

- END -