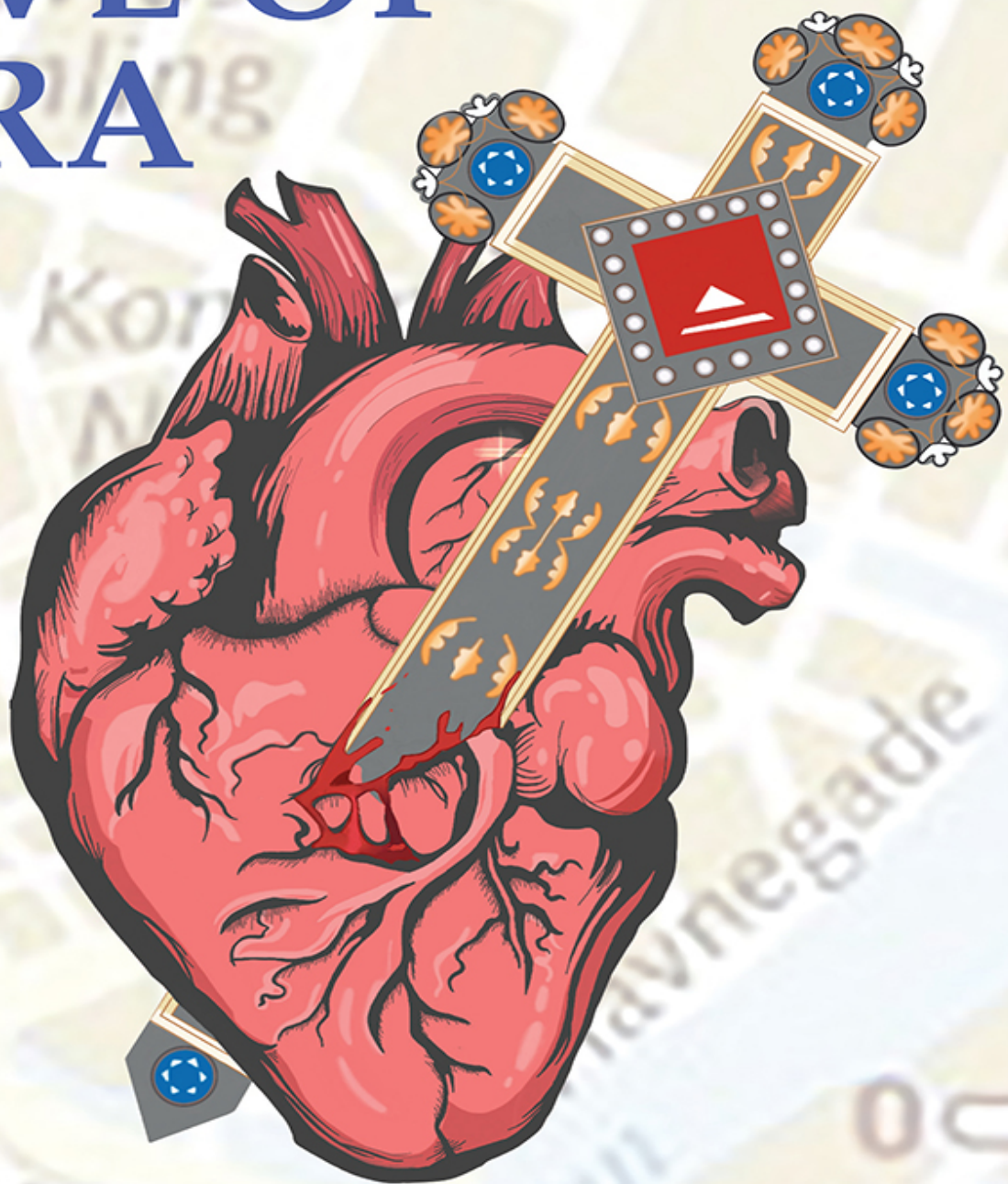


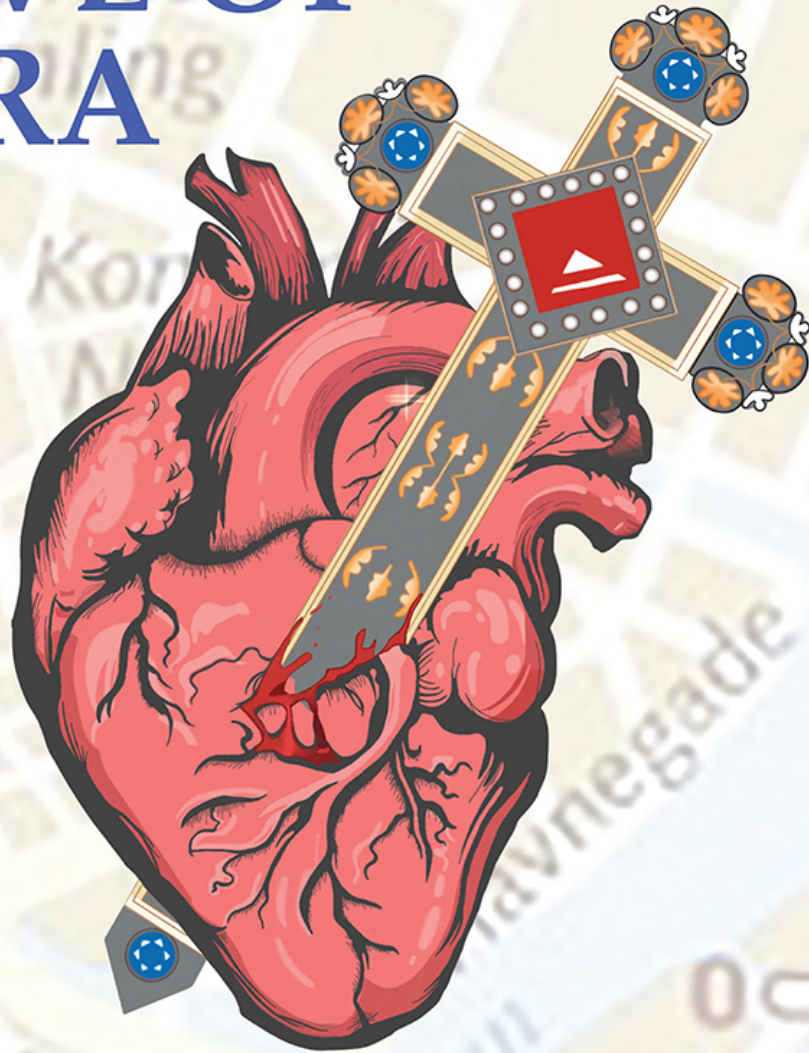
# FOR THE LOVE OF SARA



# C.K.LEE



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So let us vow a friendship beyond friendship and meet again  
beyond the stars.

**Li Po**

# PROLOGUE

The pain was no longer intense. A heavy boot crashed into the side of his face and he could hear bone splinter. It echoed around the empty chamber of his head. His head was swollen like a ripe melon, one eye was completely closed. Through the half closed slit of the other eye he could make out the shape of the attacker.

They had flipped her onto her front and splayed her legs into a wishbone. The larger of the two men was kneeling on her arms, pressing her head onto the cold tiles of the church floor. His spade-like hands were tearing at her buttocks. The other man was crazed with excitement. Saliva dripped from the side of his mouth. He shifted on his knees to get a better position between her thighs. Her sobs were quiet now, more like a child's whimper. Then she screamed a scream so loud as to wake every tormented soul in Hell as her attacker forced the full length of his organ into her. That's when Grant blacked out.



# CHAPTER 1

A thin chink of sunlight broke through the heavy drape curtain making a triangle of light on the nude on the wall. It was only a print, but a limited edition print. Grant had often wondered who she was. It's how he imagined Helen of Troy might have looked. But why were all Greek goddesses portrayed as tall and willowy with long golden tresses when all the Greek women he had met were small, dark and invariably had a moustache? He smiled and thought about getting up.

It was 5.36 according to the radio alarm perched on a shelf under the picture. The plane was not due to take off until ten and all the packing had been done. Jill had seen to that. In her own inimitable way everything had been packed the night before, only the toilet bags to be included. Toilet bags, what an unfortunate term, sanitary bags? No, that was even worse.

He wondered if any of the children were up. The youngest two had still been awake when he and Jill had eventually gone to bed. They were so excited. It was to be their first time on a plane. Emma and Tim, the elder two, were old hands at flying.

“Don’t worry, Ben,” Tim had chided his younger brother. “If we do crash, you probably won’t feel a thing.”

There was no sound from the bedroom next door, so he guessed the children must still be asleep. He propped himself up on one elbow and looked down in to the face of his wife. She was beginning to show her age, but was still an attractive woman. The four children had taken their toll on her 41 year-old body. Her breasts were now spread to either side of her chest. Her nipples were flat, like huge pimples. There were crow’s feet around the corner of her eyes, those oh so blue, blue eyes. The skin, once rosy pink was now tightly drawn over her high cheekbones and had a slightly yellow hue.

Their lovemaking the night before had not been earth shattering. Sex had become more of a routine for her, but remained a hungry need for Grant. Even when they had married twenty years ago it was never that good. He had never found the right button to turn her on. It didn’t seem to bother her, but it bothered Grant. Maybe if she had made love to someone else? But she never had. They met as teenagers and married four years later, their virginity a wedding gift to each other.

Maybe she should have had someone else. Maybe she will meet someone on this holiday – drink too much sangria and cop off with a couple of waiters. His hand wandered to his groin. Thinking of her with other men had always given him an erection. He was just about to take one of her exposed nipples in his mouth when he heard the bedroom door open. He pulled the duvet over her just as Ben poked his head around the door.

“Is it time to get up yet?” he asked.

Jill opened her eyes.

“What time is it?” She yawned and stretched leaving the duvet in danger of falling. She snuggled it close.

“Is anyone else up?”

“No only me,” said Ben. “Here mum, I had a dream last night and in it the plane did crash and it did hurt, not like Tim said.”

“And where did they bury the survivors?” Grant joked.

“Don’t be silly dad, they don’t bury survivors. I’m getting up,” and with that he disappeared round the door.

“That’s funny,” said Grant, putting his hand under the duvet, around his wife’s waist. I was about to do the same thing just before he came in.” Jill removed his hand, not amused. “I think you need a shower,” she said clutching the duvet tightly, “preferably a cold one.”

## CHAPTER 2

In Yorkshire the sun was peeping above Boulsworth Hill, 1700ft up in the Pennines. Sara blinked as her mother pulled the curtains apart, flooding the room with light. The walls were covered in posters. James Dean looked down on her. How often had she imagined his strong arms around her. How often had he whisked her away from the village on the back of his Harley-Davidson. How many times had she wished there were boys in the village like James Dean, not just the spotty jobs who hung around her.

She had only had one boyfriend, Jeff, who worked at the stables where she kept her pony. Sara was crazy about horses and rode as often as she could. Jeff and his family were new to the village. They had moved from Hong Kong where his father had been in banking. Jeff told fascinating stories about life in the former colony. He was like a breath of fresh air from Wadsworth Moor in an environment in which Sara was becoming increasingly bored. None of the village lads had been further than Bradford, let alone Beijing. The other thing Sara liked about Jeff was that he never tried anything on with her when they were alone. The village boys were always trying to grope her. She had once been foolish enough to let Adam Cochrane, the local gang leader, kiss her. The next day it was all around the village that she was “easy”.

She visited the stables every day, mucking out in exchange for free board and keep for the pony her father had brought her – the day he had died.

It was to have been the happiest day of her life. She had nagged her parents to buy her the 14-year-old black and tan pony. The riding school no longer wanted it. She was convinced they were going to sell it to the slaughter house over at Harrowgate. It wouldn't have been the first time that old horses from the stables had been picked up by the knacker's van. Sara couldn't bear the thought of Scout sharing the same fate. With love and attention he would be good for a few years yet, besides, Sara had been riding him for six years. Her mother had said she couldn't have her own horse, but she had managed to sweet-talk her father. She could always get around him. When he dropped her off at the stables on the morning of her fifteenth birthday and told her Scout was officially hers, she thought he was the most marvellous man in the world.

She had stayed at the stables to groom him. On the drive home, her father's car was struck by an articulated lorry. He was dead on arrival at Bradford General Hospital. Multiple head injuries they said. Just as well he had been killed outright. If he had survived the crash he would have been a vegetable.

Far from being in a dream-like haze, Sara could remember every detail of that dreadful day. She remembered getting a lift home from Susie, one of the stable hands. She remembered the police cars outside the home and the look on the face of Mrs Jenkins their next door neighbour, how she looked away as Sara got out of the car. At first she thought they might have been burgled. There had been

several break-ins around the village. Many people thought Adam Cochrane was behind them.

“You stay away from that lad,” her father had told her.

It was not until she saw the look on the policewoman’s face as she entered the hall. Then she heard her mother’s sobs coming from the front room. Then everything went into slow motion. Her mother looked up. Her voice seemed slurred.

“Sara, its Daddy, he’s dead.” It was five words that collapsed her world. Then everything speeded up. She rushed at her mother, fists clenched and pounded at her.

“He’s not dead, he’s not,” she screamed, sobbing, angry, frustrated. It was her uncle Alan who moved in to grip her arms and pull her away.

“Get off me,” she hissed. “Don’t touch me. Don’t ever touch me.” And with that she turned and with tears staining her face ran upstairs to her bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

Alan put a comforting arm around his sister-in-law. “She’ll come round, Liz. She’s in shock. I guess we all are.”

In her room, Sara sat huddled up in a ball. Through eyes blurred with tears, she looked at the small photograph she kept on her bedside table, a picture of her father as a child. People always said how much alike they looked. If it hadn’t been for Scout, he would still be alive. It was only because he had taken her to see that stupid pony he was dead. It was Scout’s fault. I hate him, I hate him. She sobbed again. It wasn’t the pony’s fault, it was her fault. If she hadn’t kept nagging him to buy Scout, he would be alive now. If only she



hadn't gone to the stables. It was her fault. Then the sobs came again.

It was some time later that she fell asleep, curled in a ball, her long blonde hair matted to her tear-soaked cheek. She was on the back of Adam Cochrane's motor bike outside the phone box on the village green. Jeff was standing nearby eating Chinese take-away out of an aluminium carton using chopsticks. Adam was grinning.

"Hold on tight," Adam told her.

She gripped him tightly around his waist. He revved the bike. Now it was her father standing there eating Chinese.

"You stay away from that lad," he warned her again, but it was too late. Adam throttled the accelerator and let out the clutch. The powerful bike reared up and Sara had to cling on as they roared away. She tried to look round Adam's shoulder, but the wind in her face was too strong so she snuggled close to his back and watched the hedgerows speed past. A mixture of fear and excitement made her stomach tingle. The bike showed no sign of slowing. Adam ignored the give way sign at the crossroads and made a mad whoop as they sped across. Then the bike slowed enough for Sara to look over Adam's shoulder. They were in Featherbed Lane leading to the stables. In the middle of the road ahead, Sara saw her father sitting astride Scout. Adam accelerated towards them. She could see the look of terror in the pony's eye as the machine bore down on them.

"No, stop," she screamed.

She was shaken awake by her mother.

“Sara, Sara, it’s all right. You are having a bad dream. Wake up.” Her mother cradled her in her arms.

“Everything will be all right, I promise.”

She heard the words, but didn’t believe them. Nothing would ever be right again.

She remembered every detail of the funeral. Her mother wore a black crocheted dress which Sara thought was too short. Crocus and daffodils decorated the lush green carpet of the cemetery lawn. Yellow roses adorned the coffin. She remembered how pale the mourners looked – many of them strangers to her. She remembered how cold it seemed inside the church as the congregation sang All Things Bright and Beautiful. A shaft of sunlight came through the stained glass windows and shone directly onto the coffin. She remembered the whispered words of the relatives back at the house for the wake, the egg and cress bridge rolls, the candlesticks and condolences.

When everyone had left, Sara went to her bedroom and sobbed. She wanted her mother to come and comfort her, to share in this terrible grief, but she didn’t come and Sara cried alone.

It had been six months since the accident. Accident, what bloody accident? It was no accident. God had made it happen. It was his fault.

The insurance money on the life assurance had come through and her mother had decided they needed a holiday and that they should go to Spain.

“It will be nice, just the two of us,” Sara had told her mother.

“Well there won’t just be two of us, Sara, “said her mother, “your uncle Alan will be joining us.”

Alan was her father’s older brother. A thick set man in his late forties, he had been a frequent visitor to the house both before and after her father’s death. He was a sombre man, unlike his late brother. Sara could not remember seeing him smile or hearing him laugh.

“He’s taking care of things for us,” her mother said. “He’s only thinking of us. He’s very fond of you, Sara.” And Sara knew just how fond of her he was.

She stretched and pulled down the duvet using her feet, scrunching up her toes, working the cover down until it was a bundle at the bottom of her bed. She lay there in her Marks and Sparks pyjamas before swinging her legs over the side of the bed. She looked at herself in the pine framed mirror opposite the bed. Her hair had grown again. She had it cut short after the funeral because she couldn’t bear the thought of her father not brushing it for her the way he had done every night before she went to bed. She ran her hands over her bosom and felt her nipples stiffen slightly. A picture of Jeff flashed into her mind. Her hands settled on her waist and she closed her eyes imaging they were Jeff’s hands.

“Come on Dolly Daydream.”

She opened her eyes with a start as her mother brushed past to make the bed.

“Alan’s picking us up in an hour, and you’re nowhere near packed.”

Alan? Alan? Whatever happened to Uncle Alan?

# CHAPTER 3

The holiday was going well. The hotel and apartments were excellent and the location ideal for the children – near the beach with no busy roads to cross. Within minutes of arriving all four children were in the swimming pool leaving Grant and Jill to unpack.

Grant was a partner in a successful London advertising agency. He worked hard and this was his first holiday in three years and, how he needed it. Two weeks away from clients, the office and commuting with only sun, sea, sand and sex to look forward to.

Their apartment was small for a family of six; two double bedrooms, a living room and kitchen combined and a bathroom with no window, just an extractor fan that must have exceeded every EU noise regulation. The patio was spacious and overlooked the larger of two swimming pools. Grant had already rearranged the furniture in the apartment. The pine dining table and chairs were relocated to the patio meaning that meals would be al fresco, creating more space inside which would be much needed when it came to making up the bed settee.

It had been left to the children to sort out the sleeping arrangements. Nobody wanted to sleep with Sally because

she snored. In the end, Tim drew the short straw. Emma would have preferred a bedroom to herself, but that was Emma all over. Perhaps you have to make allowances for teenaged girls. It is a funny age for young ladies, as Grant was about to find out.

Grant felt the early effects of the Spanish sun on his pale English skin as he stepped under the shower. A tingling sensation swept his body as the powerful jet of water crashed over him. The children had already changed and gone down to the hotel leaving Jill and Grant alone. He emerged naked from the bathroom, dripping puddles onto the marble floor. He was a powerfully built man, over six feet tall and weighed fourteen stones. Jill was in her dressing gown, a light-weight chocolate coloured wrap-around she had bought especially for the holiday. Underneath Grant could see the lace of her white brassiere. He walked across to her and slid his hands around her waist, then up to cup her breasts. She straightened up and stiffened recoiling from his advance. He persisted and nuzzled her neck, his hands kneading her breasts, needing her breasts.

“Not now, Grant, the children might come back,” she said struggling free from his grasp. “Besides, you’re soaking wet.”

He let go and went to the bedroom to get dressed.

“Ah well,” he thought to himself. “Maybe it’s going to be sun, sea sand and no sex.”

When he emerged from the bedroom he heard the shower running. Jill was in the bathroom. Normally he would have been tempted to join her, but in view of her earlier reticence, he didn’t bother.

“I’ll see you down there,” he called out. “Don’t forget to bring the key.”

He descended two flights of stairs and walked past the swimming pool which was now empty. A row of sun loungers stood sentinel over the liquid blue waters. In the sandpit next to the diving pool a handful of children still played, oblivious to the drop in temperature.

The thirty or so white metal tables outside the hotel bar were mostly empty. Inside, children engaged in musical games organised by the children’s club entertainer Yolande, a plump Spanish girl employed by the hotel for the season.

Grant walked through the lobby and had to swerve to avoid a stampede of children playing chase – Ben and Sally among them. He walked through the carved oak double doors into the bar. He ordered a large beer and took it through the sliding glass doors onto the patio.

The air was cool against his skin. He wore a plum coloured short sleeved silk shirt over a pair of C&A white casual cotton trousers. On his feet he wore a pair of red Pringle golfing socks and Reebok trainers.

He looked around at his fellow holidaymakers. He noticed a pretty dark haired woman wearing a tight low cut red chiffon dress sitting at a table near the end of the bar. She looked Spanish, not just because of her olive skin, but there was something about her eyes. She caught his gaze and he immediately turned away. When he looked back she had been joined by a swarthy looking companion.

He sipped his beer and was looking across to the apartments trying to make out which one was theirs when



he saw Jill. She was wearing a plain blue cotton dress with a white jacket over the top matched by white sandals. She spotted him on the patio and came across to join him. She smiled, none of the frostiness from before.

“What would you like to drink?” Grant asked his wife.

“White wine will be fine,” she replied, “or something with lemonade. Have you seen the children?”

“All except Emma,” he replied, leaving his chair. “But she’s here somewhere.”

Grant got a white wine and another beer for himself and went back outside. The evening had taken on a degree of stillness. Crickets sang in the hedgerows surrounding the diving pool. They sipped their drinks and Jill shuddered slightly.

“Do you want to go inside?” asked Grant. “It’s a bit chilly.”

“I wouldn’t mind,” replied his wife. “Bingo is about to start.”

It was Grant’s turn to shudder.

Bingo came and went. Jill didn’t win and Grant didn’t play. Emma re-appeared. She had made friends with a group of youngsters led by a boy who looked about eighteen.

“Is it all right if I go up to the twins’ room?” she asked breathlessly having run across the dancefloor.

“Who are the twins and where is their room?” asked Grant.

“They are here with their nan and grandad staying in the hotel, but they have got to be in bed by eleven,” said

Emma.

“If it’s okay with mum, it’s okay with me,” said Grant. “Just be careful.”

The disco was in full swing and the lambada was playing. A snake of youngsters crossed the dancefloor with Emma second in the line. With hands held high above their heads like olive pickers, they gyrated across the floor.

“I bet he fancies himself,” said Grant pointing out the big lad in the front. He was the leader and wherever he went, they all followed – except one. She was a tall girl with long blonde hair. She wore blue trousers and a plain white t-shirt. Her movements were different to the rest. She seemed uncoordinated, awkward even.

It was the first time he had seen her. It was not to be the last.

# CHAPTER 4

It was too hot in the disco and besides, Craig was getting on Sara's nerves. Why the others looked up to him she didn't know, maybe because he was older than the rest. She left the dance floor and went into the lobby to the video games machine. It was one of the early Space Invaders. They had one just like it in the fish and chip shop in the village. Sara reached into her pocket and pulled out a coin. She put it into the machine and pressed Player One. She was up to 27,000 before she lost her first life and that was only because Craig had jogged her arm as he had come past with the Conga chain. Her concentration went and she lost her second life with only the addition of 3000 points. Her last was wiped out by a bomb. 39,000. Way below her best.

She walked over to the hotel reception desk and looked through the postcards. She wanted to send one to Jeff, but they were all too boring – the market at Ciudadela, a donkey on a beach, a plate of lobster soup, oh yeah, he'd really think I was a dork if I sent him that, she thought.

She walked out of the front reception into the street. Next door to the hotel was a car hire agency where "Uncle" Alan had hired a car that afternoon. He had taken her mother out for dinner. Sara had pretended to feel unwell to avoid going. The truth was she felt she would be in the way. They had

been spending a lot of time together since her father's death.

She walked down the side of the hotel smelling the sweet hibiscus and oleander bushes. She walked over to the diving pool and sat on the springboard gazing down into the dark depths of the deep end. It was hypnotic staring at water. She suddenly shivered and her arms and neck became covered in goose pimples. It was getting cold. She decided not to wait up for her mother, but have an early night instead.

It was gone one o'clock when she heard the key in the door. They were back. She heard giggling. It was her mother and she sounded tiddly. Sara propped herself up on one elbow craning her neck to listen.

"Shush," she heard her mother whisper. "Stop it, you'll wake Sara. Let me check that she is asleep."

She heard Alan grumble something then heard the extractor fan in the bathroom. She dived back under the covers and shut her eyes as her mother opened the bedroom door. She couldn't see her, but she felt her come across to the single bed where Sara slept. She wished they were not sharing a room. She wanted to be on her own, needed her privacy.

Her mother moved to the other bed and sat down heavily. She took off her blouse and tossed it on the floor. Next she stood up and fumbled with the zip of her skirt. It must have caught the lining and got stuck. She obviously tugged it too hard and Sara heard a rip, followed by a curse. The skirt fell to the floor and her mother stepped out of it. She stood with her back to Sara in just her black bra and panties. Then she went across to the chair in the corner and reached for her dressing gown. She put it on and did up the sash as she

went out of the bedroom and back into the lounge. The voices were muffled. Sara pulled back the covers and hopped out of bed, crossing to the door. She put her ear to it, but all she could hear was her own heartbeat. She twisted the doorknob and opened the door the merest fraction. The lounge was in darkness but a chink of light through the balcony curtains gave enough light for Sara to see the room was deserted. The door to Alan's bedroom was slightly ajar, although there was no light on. Her heart was beating even faster now and she thought about going back to the bedroom, but she couldn't. She had to know if anything was going on. She owed it to her father to find out.

She was just feet away from the door, trembling in her short cotton nightie. Just as she was about to push open the door a voice called: "Sara, what are you doing?"

It was her mother coming out of the bathroom.

"Don't go in there, dear. Alan is probably sleeping. I think he's had a little too much to drink. Sara, are you ok?"

"Erh, yes, I guess so," said Sara. "I guess I'm just a bit disorientated, being in a new place. You know?"

Her mother led her back to their bedroom and closed the door behind them. Sara climbed in to bed and her mother bent down and kissed her gently on the forehead. Then she climbed into her own bed.

"Goodnight, Sara," she whispered.

"Goodnight mother," she replied, then added; "you did love daddy, didn't you?"

Her mother sat up. "Of course I did darling. Now get to sleep." She couldn't see her daughter's face in the shadows. She couldn't see the single tear that trickled down her cheek and onto the pillow.



# CHAPTER 5

The sun streamed in through the patio doors. Grant opened his eyes and blinked in the bright sunlight. Jill was still asleep next to him. She lay face down, the white bra cutting in to her freckled back. She hadn't bothered taking it off the night before – and neither had he.

He got out of bed and walked out onto the patio. The tiles were already hot. He was still naked, but the balcony was high enough to hide his modesty from any neighbours. It was just before six and not a soul was about. The pool below looked cold but inviting so he decided to go for an early morning swim to wake his body up.

He tiptoed into the bedroom where Tim and Sally were fast asleep, and rummaged through the wardrobe for a pair of swimming trunks. He slipped them on, found a towel and stopped only for a swig of mineral water before making his way downstairs.

The first decision of the day was which pool to use. The one nearest the apartment was large but shallow, whereas the diving pool near the hotel was smaller, deeper and therefore probably colder. He chose the latter. Dropping his towel by the side, he plunged headfirst into the deep end. The cold

water was a shock to the system and he hit the surface gasping for air.

“What’s it like?” asked a female voice coming from behind. He swivelled to see where it was coming from. She was sitting on the spring board, her knees pulled up to her chest. She wore a plain black swimsuit with a Speedo logo on the hip. Her legs were very long and very white, her arms freckled. At first he didn’t recognise her as the girl from the disco.

“It’s cold, but once you’re in....”

“It’s not too bad,” she laughed at finishing his sentence.

“Is it deep?” she added.

Grant put his hands above his head and submerged so he was standing on the bottom before pushing back up to the surface.

“OK,” she said, and slipped off the board into the water like a seal. Grant waited for her to reappear, but she didn’t. He turned in the water to look around the pool. Nothing. Before his mind even began to think she might be drowning, the water directly in front of him erupted and she surfaced and burst out laughing.

“You are right, it is cold,” she gasped. “It’s a good job you’re not a brass monkey.” Then she sprinted off to the other end doing a racing crawl, tumble-turned and disappeared again. He turned trying to track her position under water. She was an excellent swimmer for sure. He floated on his back and looked up at the clear blue sky. Again she burst to the surface next to him, half submerging him with the wake.

“Hi, I’m Sara. You must be Grant, Emma’s dad. I saw you in the disco last night, eyeing up that Spanish woman.”

“I’ll have you know I am a happily married man,” he said, trying to sound affronted.

She laughed again and swam across on her back to the side of the pool, when there, she levered herself out of the pool leaving a trail of water behind her. She walked over to the springboard where she had left her towel, picked it up and wrapped it around her shoulders. She headed back past the sand pits to the apartments. He watched her go. She stopped and looked back over her shoulder.

“See you later,” she called, walking off.

What a precocious young lady, thought Grant.

# CHAPTER 6

He swam fifty lengths of the pool before getting out to dry himself. By the time he got back to the apartment Jill was up and dressed in pink shorts and a pink and white striped t-shirt. The children were still asleep.

“Enjoy your swim?” asked Jill, milking two mugs for their tea.

“A bit cold, but yes, it was nice once you get in.” He thought of how Sara had finished that sentence for him. He was going to tell Jill about seeing her in the pool, but didn’t. Then he wondered why not.

“Can you pop to the shops to get some milk for breakfast if the children want cereal,” asked his wife. “We only have enough for our tea.”

“Sure,” said Grant. “I’ll check out that car hire place next to the hotel and see what vehicles they have available.”

The supermarket was almost empty. Grant bought a large container of milk, a loaf of bread and some butter and a box of cornflakes. The car hire shop was closed, but it had a large selection of cars on offer according to the photos in the window. He would return later when they opened.