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Prologue

Geneva, April

In a two-bedroom apartment just outside of Geneva overlooking the lovely lake, the telephone rang.

A beautiful petite young lady of obvious Asian background rushed in and picked up the phone. She didn't say anything; just listened. A male English voice on the other end of the line said three words: 'He is dead.' She heard a click and she slowly replaced the receiver. Then she kneeled and took the plug from the socket thus disconnecting the telephone.

Without haste but not wasting any time, she walked to the bedroom, changed into a pair of jeans, a thick sweater and sneakers, took a small suitcase and a backpack from the closet and filled it with all her clothing and belongings. Then she put on a pair of surgical gloves and started to clean the apartment very thoroughly. When she was finished she slowly and carefully looked around and checked again that nothing was left behind. Finally, she went to the kitchen and cleaned it up, leaving it spotless. Then she went again through the apartment and was satisfied that now it looked as if it had been uninhabited for quite some time. Next step was to take out the half-full waste bag from the bin, opening the fridge and dumping the few things that were in there into it. She placed it outside the apartment door, put on her jacket, geared up her backpack and with the suitcase in one hand, she opened the door with her other and stepped outside into the crisp Swiss air. All in all, not more than 3 hours had transpired since the telephone call, as if it had been rehearsed numerous times.

The waste was dumped in the waste container next to the apartment building together with the gloves and she walked to the bus stop where she took the bus to the airport/railway station of Geneva. During the ride she opened her cellphone took out the simcard and the battery and when she arrived at the station she put them in three different waste bins.

Inside the train-terminal she bought a one-way first-class ticket to Lausanne. In the close by Airport arrival hall she purchased a cellphone with a prepaid simcard and went back to the train station to wait for her train. When it arrived, she settled in comfortably and 40 minutes later on arrival in Lausanne she took a taxi to the center of Saint-Sulpice. From there she walked to a lovely little villa on the lake.

As soon as she had arrived she used the new cellphone to call a number in Australia:

‘Hello, I would like to speak to the daughter of James please.....When do you expect her back?.....Would you ask her to call this number as soon as you speak to her? It’s urgent. Thank you.’

After that she unpacked her suitcase and backpack, looked around the luxuriously furnished living room with appreciative eyes, took a bottle of white wine from the well-equipped fridge and sat down in one of the big armchairs. She took a sip and thought: That’s done. Mission accomplished. At least the first part. It’s a shame that James has died and I will really miss him.....more or less..., but at the same time I am glad that I can get on with my life as soon as I have followed all his instructions. He must have known that there was a chance that he would suffer a sudden death and had me well prepared for that. Now I only have to wait for the telephone call from Australia from his daughter, finalize the last part and then I can go back to my home country and my family. I hope she will be back soon and call.’

Chapter 1

Perth

On 16th January at 14.32 hours Ana Christina Emily's world was literally and figuratively turned upside down.

She opened the door to the house in Perth she grew up in and yelled:

'Jenny, I'm home!!'

She did two steps into the corridor, tripped over a pile of newspapers and magazines and fell flat on her face. Her heavy backpack pushed her even harder to the floor. Awkwardly she scrambled to a sitting position, shoved her old weather-beaten hat back in her neck and looked utterly confused around her as if to say: Who did that??

A bellow of laughter came from the door. A very handsome young man dressed in denim shorts and T-shirt wearing sturdy boots and a similar wide-brimmed hat as Ana stood leaning against the doorframe laughing his head off.

'Shut up you! I could have broken my neck! Stupid to put a pile of rubbish just inside the door! And stop laughing Greg! This is not funny!' Ana grumbled seriously pissed off.

'Oh, but it is funny!' Greg managed to say catching his breath, ' Actually it's hilarious! There you are, just back from more than four years crossing a whole Continent on a walkabout, climbing mountains, crossing desserts, taming horses, herding sheep, hunting with the Aborigines and never ever lost your footings. And then you take one step back into civilization and your own home and you're flat on your face!'

And he started laughing all over again.

Ana just frowned at him, but as she realized what he had said she started to giggle first and before long she was laughing with him.

At that moment a young-looking middle-aged woman came from the back of the house to see what all the noise was about. She looked at the situation and yelled: 'Ana!!', ran to her, fell on her knees and hugged her crying: 'Oh you're back, you're back, you're back. I'm so happy!'

Ana hugged her fiercely back and started crying too. Greg was looking at the scene from his vantage position, still standing in the open front door enjoying the obvious love between the two women; one young, lean and tanned from the life outdoors and the other a motherly figure with blond curly short hair and a friendly open face. They were sitting on the floor, talking at the same time while tears were running down their faces.

After a few minutes they both had to catch some breath and Greg took the opportunity to let them know that he was there by saying:

'Ladies, why don't you get off the floor and start talking one at a time so you can understand each other?'

Jenny looked up, cried 'Gregy!!', jumped to her feet and ran into his arms. 'Oh, darling, I did not notice. I am so glad to see you too. Safe and sound! Let me look at you. Wow, you look very healthy and mature and gorgeous!'

Suddenly she looked around and exclaimed:

'Oh, where are my brains! You must both be tired and hungry. Do come in Greg and close the door. Ana, get off the floor. Leave your backpacks here and come to the kitchen. I'll make you tea and biscuits and you can tell me all about what you two have been up to these last 4 years.'

And busily she more or less pushed them through the corridor to a spacy well-equipped kitchen. The open window, looking out on a flowery garden, allowed the fresh air and the sound of the numerous birds in. Together with the smell of tea and freshly baked biscuits it created a warm and cozy atmosphere.

With a contented sigh both Ana and Greg sat down at the large table, pleased to be back in this room, filled with happy memories. Jenny kept on talking about the house, the neighbors, the town, the local politics etc. while making the tea and preparing the biscuits.

When she was done and everyone was served she sat down and said:

‘Although I am dying to hear all about your adventures, first I want to know when you two will get married, because I am sure that by now you’ll have set a date.’

Ana looked at Greg, saw him nod and said calmly:

‘We’re not.’

Jenny looked puzzled and confused. ‘But you always looked like lovers and you have been together on this walkabout for four years! What happened?’

Ana smiled at her and said:

‘Nothing “happened”, Aunty. We love each other dearly but like brother and sister. When I first met Greg at High School I really had a crush on him the moment I saw him. However, when I had the nerve to tell him so, he kindly told me that he also loved me, but only as a sister, because he preferred boys. I was devastated, losing the love of my life and very, very sad..... for about two weeks. At 15 you obviously quickly recover from a heartbreaking experience. We discovered, however, that we were soul mates so we kept on seeing each other, and later

at Uni, studying together, going out together and soon found, that by doing so we killed two birds with one stone. By acting as a couple nobody would guess that Greg was gay (which was better not known in school then) and I was not bothered by other boys, in whom I was not interested. We could fully concentrate on our studies. Even Greg's parents and you and mother accepted the status quo', she grinned, 'It was very convenient.'

For a minute, it was quiet in the kitchen, while Jenny was digesting this information.

Suddenly she smiled and said:

'You certainly had everybody fooled there!! Cheeky things. Anyway, now that I know, it will be easier to tell you about me and your mother, Ana'

'Aunty, you don't need to tell us anything about your relation with Emily.' Greg said with a smile, 'We know about the love between the two of you. You did a good job hiding it for everybody, but to us it was obvious. The small things lovers do, you know.'

Openly relieved Jenny smiled but her face clouded over quickly and she heaved a big sigh.

'Now that that secret is out in the open, I need to tell you another one Ana. One that has been heavily on my mind ever since your mother 's sudden death 4 years ago,' she said. For a minute she sat there trying to compose herself. Then she continued:

'There is no easy way to tell it, so forgive me for my choice of words and the abruptness of this statement.'

Then she looked up and said: 'Ana darling, Emily was not your mother. Your real mother was her sister Ana, who died giving birth to you. Emily adopted you.'

Openmouthed Ana and Greg were looking at Jenny. Then Greg said: 'Could you say that again please, Aunty?'

Jenny did, then stood up and busied herself with making fresh cups of tea for all of them, sat down again, looked at Ana and said:

‘Maybe it’s better if I tell you the whole story from the start, as I heard it from Emily.’

Both Greg and Ana nodded dumbfounded.

‘Your father was James Bellcroft-Jones, an Englishman. In 1983 he came to Australia on business. One of his business partners, Emily’s father, invited him to the 21st birthday party of his youngest daughter Ana Fisher. It was love at first sight between the two and they were married within 6 months. They rented an apartment in the center of Perth and before long Ana was pregnant.

On 29th December 1985, after a very difficult pregnancy, you were prematurely born. Your heart stopped twice but you survived and when you took your first breath, your mother took her last. Your father James was devastated and although in his mind he knew that you were not to blame he emotionally did so. With the help of a nanny he struggled through the first six months of your life trying to cope with his loss and his new role as a father. He picked up his business again and was more away from home than appropriate for a single father, leaving everything to the nanny.

However, you were not a healthy and happy baby. Emily was sure, that the premature birth and of course the lack of a loving mother were the cause. The various nannies couldn’t deal with the problems and eventually your father came to Emily and asked her if she could take care of you. Of course, Emily agreed and you moved to her house. Her care and love for you quickly turned you into a lovely contented baby.’

Jenny stood up and poured more tea. Ana was sitting at the table completely motionless and with a

glazed look on her face, obviously still in shock and trying to absorb all this new information.

Greg, on whom this news did not have the same impact, said: 'Go on Jenny. This is obviously not the end of the story. What happened next? How come Ana does not know about her father?'

Jenny continued: 'Please remember, I was not there then. Emily told me all this later and asked me to tell you the whole history if anything would happen to her for James was never there. He sometimes was away weeks at a time on some sort of business of which Emily didn't know the nature. Shortly before your first birthday, he asked Emily to meet him at a notary public's office in Perth. There he told her that he had bought this house on Baufort Street. The deed was made up not in his, but in Emily's name, with the provision that if she should die, you would automatically inherit it. This house is yours Ana.

At the same time, they officially arranged your adoption by Emily. From that moment on you were Anna Christina Emily Fisher.'

Ana looked even more flabbergasted after these new pieces of information.

Jenny continued:

'Emily told me, that during their meeting at the notary public's office your father was very anxious, in a nervous state and did not look well at all. He regularly walked to the window and looked through the curtains to the street below. He made her promise to never reveal that he was Ana's father to anybody, only to Ana herself somewhere in the future.

That was the last time Emily saw James.

Shortly thereafter Emily found an envelope with 10,000 pounds in cash in her mailbox, with a note from James, saying that he had to go abroad for quite

some time and again warned not to reveal to anybody that he was your father. He instructed her to destroy the note and use the money for your education.

The next day Emily went to James' apartment to discuss the situation, but he was not there. The landlord told her that a couple of months ago James had paid a year's rent in advance and that he had not seen him since. On request of Emily they went to check the apartment and found the place virtually wrecked. All the books on the floor, all the cushions ripped open, the bed slit in pieces, all James' clothes ripped, shoes cut open etc. Of course, the police was warned but nothing new came of that.'

'That's weird,' interrupted Greg, 'and no sign of James? How about his toiletries, underwear etc.?'

'Emily told me that as far as could be established everything was still there but no sign of James.' said Jenny. 'Actually, Emily and the police assumed at that time, that James had been involved in some very shady deals. That would explain the sudden cash flow allowing him to buy this house and giving Emily this sizable amount of cash. They suspected that he had seriously pissed off some "business partners" and that they had, as the police put it: "taken care of him". Hence the breaking in and his disappearance. However, his body was never found.'

It was quiet for some time. They all were deep in thoughts. Ana had not said a word since Jenny dropped the Emily-was-not-your-mother bomb.

Now she looked up and said with a tiny voice: 'Why has mother not told me herself that she was not my mother. She should have said so a long time ago! I don't understand' Her voice trailed off and she withdrew in herself again, misty eyes looking in the distance without seeing anything.

'Oh darling', Jenny said, walking up to her and putting her arms around her. 'We discussed many

times, when would be the appropriate time to tell you. On your 12th birthday, your 18th, after graduation from High School? We did not know.'

'And what about my father? Mother told me he disappeared before my first birthday. Is that not true either?'

'Oh, darling. That is true, he indeed vanished. But the few times you asked after him, you didn't seem too much interested anyway. You didn't even ask his name. So, we didn't elaborate about the circumstances.

In the end Emily decided, that it would be better to tell you after you had finished your studies so as not to disturb you. So, we planned to inform you about all this after you finished University.

And then, Emily suffered her heart attack and died. And Greg's parents died. And you and Greg were in the hospital. And you were heartbroken. And I was too. And then I had to make all the funeral arrangements ...andand.'

Jenny's voice broke and she stopped talking. She looked so forlorn and sad that both Ana and Greg jumped up and hugged her, keeping her close.

They were all reliving that awful first week of January 2010 when Emily suffered her heart attack and was rushed to the intensive care. The call Ana received at Greg's house from Jenny to let her know what happened. Greg's parents insisting on driving the two of them to the hospital. The big truck that suddenly appeared on their part of the road in front of them and the collision, killing both Greg's parents and leaving Greg and Anna unconscious in the back seats with severe bruises and a concussion. And then Emily died without regaining consciousness, leaving Jenny, on her own, confronted with so much disaster all around her and no-one to turn to.

After a few minutes Jenny broke the silence and continued: 'And then after the funerals and your recovery, you and Greg were so lost that you went walkabout and I had not the heart to tell you all this, so I decided to keep it to myself until you were back.'

'Wow', Greg said, 'Poor Jenny. Having to cope with all this on your own! Chapeau Aunty, not many people would have been able to.'

Then he hugged Ana, kissed her sad face and said: 'Well Ace, quite a homecoming, don't you agree?'

Ana nodded with a faraway look in her eyes, obviously digesting all that info. They stood there for a minute and then Greg's legal training took over and he tuned to Jenny and said: 'There must have been photos of Ana's mother. And her father. Have you any idea?'

Instantly Ana came out of her trance and added: 'Yes, yes, there must be pictures. Certainly, those of their wedding?'

'I don't know.' Jenny said thoughtfully, 'But I seem to remember that there is a box with old photographs between Emily's stuff that I have put in the attic. Let me have a look!'

When Jenny came back she carried a shoebox that she put on the table. She took off the lid and from under photos of Ana at all ages she took out a small, obviously professional, album bound in white leather and gave it to Ana.

With some reverence she opened it and looked at the first couple of pictures in silence. Then she lifted her head with tears in her eyes and said in a hushed voice: 'I am the spitting image of my mother! It's like looking at some early pictures of myself. And I understand her falling in love with James: my father was handsome!' And she kept on turning pages of the wedding album.

The next half hour the three of them were going through all the old the pictures in the box.

Then Greg said: 'Great, we can now put faces to the names, but that does not mean that the whole situation is less confusing.

'Let me summarize what you told us so far Aunty. Maybe that'll make it clearer.

- 1) Ana's biological mother died giving birth to her.
- 2) Her father disappeared around her first birthday.
- 3) Emily and the police presumed that he was killed by some criminal characters, whom he was apparently involved with.
- 4) Before disappearing, he suddenly had so much cash, that he was able to buy this house, put it in the name of Emily and provided 10.000 Pounds in cash for her education.
- 5) At the same occasion he arranged the adoption of Ana by Emily, instructing her never to reveal the fact that James was Ana's father.
- 6) His apartment was ransacked, probably by the people responsible for his disappearance, obviously looking for something and also obviously not finding it.

Is there anything else Aunty? Have you any more surprises or is this all?'

'Only two more.' Jenny said. 'But this time I can speak from my own experience, because a month after the events around your first birthday I joined this household. Emily could not combine her work and her role as a mother without any help. So, she put in an ad for a housekeeper/babysit. I was twenty then, had been working in an office since school and was not particularly happy. When I saw the ad, I thought it would be a good change and went on the interview with Emily.

I fell head over heels in love with her, you and the house! So, I took up the role of taking care of you,

Emily and the house, so she could further concentrate on her job. Fortunately, Emily also fell in love with me within months and we were happy. We didn't have much money, but the house was paid for and on Emily's salary we managed.

The first surprise happened about three years after James' disappearance. Emily suddenly started to receive monthly checks of 3000 pounds each from a bank in Switzerland. She put it in the savings account for you Ana, together with the 10,000 received from James which she had converted into shares and started to correspond with the Swiss bank to try and find out where that money came from. However, they just informed Emily, that the owner of the bank account had given precise instructions as to the amount, the frequency of the checks and that under no circumstances they could reveal his identity.'

'Aha,' said Greg, 'so it was a man!'

'Yes,' Jenny responded, 'That's what Emily said also. Of course, we assumed now, that James was still alive, hiding somewhere in Europe and in this way taking care of you and Emily.'

Actually, we were very content with the situation, having our own family and enough money to live comfortably. We sent you to the Boarding School for Ladies, where you were taught everything a lady should know, then you finished your High School and after graduation you went to Perth University where you met Greg again and brought him home. Your studies went well and when you and Greg graduated our happiness was complete until that black day in 2010 when everything changed with the death of Emily and your parents, Greg.'

They were all quiet. Back on that disastrous day. The black thoughts combined with sunshine coming in through the open window, the happy sound of all

the birds in the garden, the smell of freshly baked cookies created an almost surreal atmosphere where the time stood still.

Then Jenny more or less shook herself back into today's reality and with a big smile, full of love, she looked at them both and continued:

'But that was four years ago and we have to go on with our lives! I am almost at the end of my story now, darlings. Just one more thing.

About three years after you two went walkabout, to be precise in April last year, I received a weird telephone call from Switzerland. A woman's voice with a French accent asked to speak to 'the daughter of James'. I said you were not there and that I didn't know when you would be back; that I wasn't able to reach you and that it could be weeks or months before you might call. Then she said: Please ask her to call this number as soon as she is back. It's very important. I said I would do so and without saying anything else the woman hung up. Here is the number Ana.'

She produced from her purse a slip of paper with a Swiss telephone number on it and put it on the table. Both Ana and Greg were looking at it without picking it up, as if it was a booby-trap.

'And she didn't give a name?' asked Greg.

'No.'

'And she asked for the daughter of James? Not Ana or Ana, the daughter of James?'

'Yes only 'the daughter of James'. Quite weird don't you think?'

'Very strange indeed,' Greg said deeply in thoughts.

But Jenny was not finished yet and she went on:

'However, a week later something happened that at least brought some light on the call.

A letter arrived from a law firm in England, addressed to you, Ana. Initially, I just wanted to put it on the pile of other mail for you to read when you returned. But, on a hunch I decided that I should open it to find out why an English lawyer would send a letter to you. They wrote that they had been appointed by the Court in Bath to act as the executors of the estate of the late James Bancroft-Jones. By going through his papers, they established that Ana Christina Emily Fisher in Perth was his only living relative and benefactor and they asked her to contact them.'

'Wow Ana!' Greg exclaimed. 'I'm so sorry for you! Finally finding out who your father is and within the hour losing him again!' Ana was just sitting there shaking her head in amazement.

'Yes, I'm sorry too, Ana!' Jenny said and continued.

'So, I called the Law Firm and explained that you went walkabout and could not be contacted. I enquired about the circumstances of James' death because he was only 53. Then they told me that he had been found dead at the bottom of the stairs at his house in Bath on 16 January 2013. At the inquest the Coroner concluded: Death by Accident. The law firm was appointed as his executor because the will was deposited at that law firm and there were no known relatives in England at the time of his death.

They claimed that James Belcroft-Jones had contacted them not long before his demise, leaving his sealed will with them plus the instruction that in case of his decease they should try to contact his daughter Ana in Australia, possibly on this address in Perth. They needed you, Ana, to contact them to open and read the will, sign over the estate etc.

We agreed that I would send an email every month to let them know you were still out and about, which I did. I hope I did well?’

Ana assured her that she had and Jenny smiled with relief and said:

‘I am sorry about your father though. Finally, we had confirmation that he left Australia alive and obviously had lived all that time in England and then this. Also, it certainly put the telephone call from Switzerland into perspective don’t you think? It was probably the bank and they needed instructions from you after the death of your father.’

‘Yes,’ Ana said, ‘That makes sense. And don’t be sorry Jenny. I have no feelings for that man anyway. Although the funny thing is, that during the walkabout I more or less had made up my mind to enquire about him, maybe even contact him and ask him why he had left us and never sent a word. Good timing, I must say!’ she grinned and continued: ‘But now that we’re on the subject, what do you remember about him, Aunty?’

‘Not that much really, darling. When your parents met and got married I hadn’t met Emily yet. And afterwards when we realized that what we felt for each other was genuine love, we were fully occupied with our problems and wishes because in those days a same sex relationship was an absolute no-no!

But Emily told me that she liked your father. When he met your mother he was very witty, friendly, wearing always a happy face and he adored your mother. When she died giving birth to you he turned into a very withdrawn man, almost anti-social. Never talked, no jokes, no happy face. That’s all I know.

But let me get the letters from the UK. Maybe there’s more information in there.’

She went out and came back with the envelopes that she gave to Ana. The contents of the letters from

the law firm Shark, Shark & Weston in Bath were as Emily had described. Also, it contained two open business class tickets to London and a bank check of £5,000 in the name of Ana for expenses with the request to Ana to contact them as soon as she had read this letter.

‘By the way, Ana,’ Jenny continued, ‘I don’t know if you recall the reading of Emily’s will? You were in an emotional low at that time and I would not be surprised if you didn’t.’

‘No,’ Ana said, ‘That period after the death of Mother and Greg’s parents is one big blur for me. It was not until weeks later, when we were at the Aboriginal tribe where Greg’s roots lay, that I slowly came back to this world. What did I miss?’

‘Well,’ Jenny said, ‘you must know that you are a very wealthy lady. Emily invested the 10,000 pounds she received from your father, in shares in Apple and Cisco Systems and now, twenty plus years later, they are worth a fortune.’

Ana shook her head in confusion and said: ‘Have you ever had that feeling that you are looking at yourself and the situation you’re in and that you are completely detached from it? That you feel that this is not happening to you; not really? That you are just a character in a novel? Well, I have that now! It’s utterly unreal and confusing and my brain is shouting: Overload! Overload! Stop the system!’

They were all silent and then Jenny said: ‘I understand darling. Enough is enough. So, let’s change the subject and please tell me all about your adventures!’

‘Good idea Aunty,’ Greg said, ‘here we go! When we started, we had no plans at all, except going to my grandmother’s tribe, going back to my roots so to speak. And Ana was still so down that she just followed me. We were warmly welcomed by