

'if we die today the soft wind will
blow away our footprints in the sand ...

and when the wind has gone who shall tell the
timelessness that once we walked this way in the
dawn of time'

!Xam poem

PREFACE

Most of us fear the unknown. When we are anxious we do not see clearly. I hope that The Giant Puzzle will assist you in putting some of the pieces together, that the picture will become somewhat clearer, and that you will be able to make the right decisions.

Sometimes a puzzle is quite complex, and it may take time to see the total picture. You have to find your own answers. Do not make hasty decisions.

I would like to thank all of those who have shared their personal trauma with me over the years, and who have thus made this book possible.

Many of the circumstances referred to may not be relevant to your particular situation. The intention is to provide a

before. But perhaps The Giant Puzzle starts from different corners and with different pieces.

Be very careful not to read only part of the book, as it might distort your view.

The Giant Puzzle will not be appropriate reading if serious psychological deviation is a factor. However, always refrain from labeling any person with a 'psychiatric diagnosis' without the guidance of a qualified psychiatrist or psychologist. Apparent 'abnormality' under strained circumstances may be quite normal. Indeed, 'normality' under strained circumstances may be rather abnormal.

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To my very special friends, Fanie and Patricia Swanepoel, who read the pamphlet that preceded *The Giant Puzzle*, and who encouraged me to turn it into a book. Without their enthusiasm the pieces would not have come together.

To my wife (my ongoing affair), who revealed the unseen world to me, who introduced me to Carl Jung, who accepted me, and who assisted with the proofreading and editing. Also to each of my four children. Thank you. I love each one of you in a special way.

To my lifelong friend, Maré Mouton of Icon Communications, who immediately understood the script, who helped to visualise everything, and who remained a

throughout, and to Magda who came to our rescue. You are the greatest.

John Kehoe's Mind Power inspired the chapter about the unseen facts (go to www.kehoe-mindpower.com). I found inspiration in Ride the Wild Tiger by Ruth Tearle (go to www.changedesigns.co.za). Reading A Biography of Carl Gustav Jung by Frank McLynn (Transworld Publishers, 1996) may have sensitized me. The Secret Diary of God by Koos Kombuis (go to www.zebrapress.co.za) provided a view from the very top. Gail Sheehy's Pathfinders and Passages first made me aware of life's ongoing cycles and, Defending the Caveman by Rob Becker reminded me about our tribal footprints.

Due to a lifelong inclination to wipe out my memory (if I had one, I cannot remember), I may have been inspired by others as well, or may even have borrowed from others without realising it. If so, I beg forgiveness and undertake to acknowledge the fact the moment this is pointed out to me. If this is insufficient I can only say, as my good friend Andrew Roos would have done: 'Hang my asseblief.'

Finally I have to say 'thank you for the music' to Frank Sinatra, Paul Simon, Beethoven, Mick Jagger, Patsy Cline, Abba and others. Over the past decade music has played an important role in my own life. Much to my own surprise I managed to compose and to write a number of songs. Or so I thought until I voiced my frustration about a dry period in songwriting with my very good friend, Loit Sols, who focuses on KoiSan music and is becoming a renowned South African musician, poet and philosopher. He calmly informed me that nobody has ever composed music or written the lyrics of a song. 'The songs are out there' he said. 'We just have to find them.' Perhaps the same applies to writing a book. And perhaps it also applies to happiness.

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1

Meeting myself

Feelings of emptiness fill me. I fluctuate between anxiety, guilt, and depression. It paralyzes me. How long has it been? Days? Weeks? Months? I do not know. The appointment with the lawyer was for ten.

Should I not have cancelled?

But I have already done so twice.

The arm of the reception chair I am sitting on is broken, and my elbow keeps slipping off. I want to get up. I want to run. But I can't.

The receptionist's telephone rings madly.

Through the door I notice two ornaments on a corner cabinet in the adjoining room.

2

Meeting our lawyer

A man enters the reception area. He seems hesitant. 'Is 'vacant' the right word?' He wears a tie, but the top button of his shirt is undone. My heart sinks. He doesn't look like lawyer. More like a confused musician?

'You must be waiting for me? Come through please.'

I replace the magazine and gather my documents. An enthusiastic friend who recently broke up with a partner

encouraged me to make the appointment, and provided unsolicited advice. 'Prepare for the meeting. Briefly write down your own understanding of the legal relationship, and take it along, together with any contracts you may have entered into. Also take your latest pay slip.'

When I made the appointment I explained briefly what it was about, and the lawyer requested that I also prepare a list of our assets and liabilities, and of our monthly expenses. I tried to do so, but stopped halfway.

I am frightened.

We enter a room with papers on the desk and on the floor. I realise that the ornaments on the corner cabinet are two miniature clay dwarves. The one dwarf looks angry, and is holding onto a toy trumpet. The other dwarf has a delicate violin in his hands, and seems friendly. I notice a piece of scrap paper and a short pencil on the cabinet, next to the dwarves.

The walls of the office are off-white. In the corner with the cabinet it seems shadowy, and quite dark.

I gaze at myself and at the room, from the outside. The room is certainly not very tidy. On the side table a wrist-watch with a broken strap waits for a new battery, and there is an empty Panado container next to the watch.

'Excuse me,' the lawyer says. 'Excuse me. Would you like a cup of tea or coffee? Please take a seat.'

I wake up. I do not know which of the three chairs to take. 'Take any chair,' he says.

I wish he would help me to take the right chair. He gives no indication at all.

‘Which is yours?’ I ask. ‘It makes no difference. It really doesn’t matter. I have no preference,’ he says.

I sit down, and he takes the chair next to me. Then he closes the door with his left foot, while writing in a file with a pale blue cover.

He remains distant, absent, as he writes down my details. He writes my surname, followed by my initials, in the top right hand corner of the file. Then he writes the words, relationship issue, just below my name.

He looks up. The vacant look is gone. He now appears friendly, present. The swimming objects in my hazy dream separate. The wrist-watch with the broken strap and the empty Panado container come back into focus.

The two dwarves are both staring at me.

I realise that I do not know this man at all, and that he is waiting for my attention.

‘Did the receptionist explain the fee structure to you? Unfortunately we have to talk about these things. We charge on a time basis. We cannot really predict the costs in advance.’

He appears apologetic. Shy?

I confirm that the fees were explained to me. I go on to explain. ‘I am only here to find out about my rights. I would like to pay for the consultation and then think about things.’

‘Good’ he says. ‘But it may take a while. This is an important discussion.’

I nod. ‘Yes, I understand. Your secretary has explained that I should allow at least an hour to an hour and a half, and I’ve

budgeted for the fees. Can I settle your account before I leave? I really do not want you to send an account to my home address.'

'I understand,' he says. 'We'll keep it confidential.'

3

Getting acquainted

He looks up, appearing relaxed. Friendly? He really doesn't resemble a lawyer.

The angry dwarf looks at me intently.

'We can go about the consultation in one of two ways,' the lawyer says. 'I can ask you a number of formal questions, or I can sit back and let you tell me what it is all about. I wonder. Perhaps it will be easier if I first work through my list of questions. Otherwise I may forget.'

'It will also give us a chance to get to know each other a little better. But please remind me to let you talk once I have finished.'

The tea lady walks in and he takes the tray. I bump my leg against the leg of the table, and the tea spills all over the tray.

'Don't worry, don't worry, it happens all the time,' he says, and picks up the phone to organize some more tea. Then he puts down his pen.

The friendly dwarf is now also looking directly at me. In sympathy?

'I would like you to know that in these matters we are not really acting as lawyers. These are not really legal matters. They are "people matters". We must try to identify the real problem. Sometimes it's just a matter of finding the correct solution. The solution could be to finally terminate the relationship. But there may also be other solutions.'

The tension subsides, but does not go away.

The angry dwarf lifts his right eyebrow. Is the dwarf questioning the lawyer?

Removing a few myths

He rests his chin in his left hand. The friendly dwarf is playing on the miniature violin in a strange, slow motion, making no sound at all.

‘Perhaps we can see better from “the other side”,’ he says. ‘And perhaps we can remove some of the myths that may be troubling you.’

‘The stories around the legal issues in these matters are often exaggerated. In essence there may not be much difference between a lawyer and the man who occasionally repairs your lawnmower. Your lawnmower is an uncomplicated piece of machinery. You will probably not have any real anxieties when it goes in for repair. You will expect it to be fixed,’ he says.

The angry dwarf now blows on the toy trumpet. I hear music, but it is completely false, sounding more like a stuttering engine. The friendly dwarf seems upset and indicates that the angry dwarf should stop immediately.

I turn my attention to the lawyer.

‘Judges are not priests,’ he says. ‘They usually do not sit in moral judgment in these matters. They often assist to steer these cases into settlement discussions. The result is that even the most difficult people are frequently persuaded to settle out of court. It is most unlikely that there will ever be a real “court case”.’

The angry dwarf gives a thumbs-up sign. I experience mild relief, but the anxiety remains.

‘Think of a lawyer as a man in an overall,’ he says. ‘It will be his responsibility to fix the legal problem, not yours. But I do understand that for you all of this is very difficult. No

termination of an ongoing relationship is ever easy, regardless of whether it is a marital or any other personal relationship.'

He has raised his voice slightly and I sense a degree of agitation. 'The outcry by some against easy divorce, for example, is insensitive, and complete and utter nonsense. No person with the slightest emotional depth has ever divorced easily. These superficial and sanctimonious statements assume that an interpersonal relationship is a mere legal issue, disregarding the emotional element, which is what it is really about.' His eyes flash momentarily. 'Have these people never lost a partner or a friend?'

My attention slips. I visualise a courtroom. The angry dwarf comes into focus. 'Is there a little wooden hammer in his hand? Is he a judge? The objects in the room distort and the dwarf fades out of focus.

The lawyer must have noticed something.

'I realise that you may be quite anxious,' he says. 'I would like to help you. Someone may repeatedly have been pressing your fear button or your guilt button. It may have been your partner, a friend, or any other person.

'It may even have been you yourself. It may help if you visualise these buttons as real buttons, and if you also visualise releasing them. If you practice this enough, it may just work. There is an important difference between listening to your conscience, and suffering from anxiety.

'We sometimes also forget that we are part of the Universe, and that the seasons do not change because we have erred or sinned. They simply change. When you leave your home on a cold winter's day and the wind blows ice-cold raindrops into your face, you would never ask yourself: 'How have I sinned?' or 'How did my partner sin?' You would probably simply say

to yourself: 'This is winter — it is really very cold'. At the same time you'll know for sure that the cold will go away and that summer will return.'

The trembling within me seems to subside, though not completely.

Now for a difficult one

I still feel like a spectator.

On the corner cabinet the scene has changed. The dwarves are engaged in a serious discussion. The facial expression of the friendly one has changed. He is looking upset and not at all friendly. The angry one looks even angrier than before. I wonder what their names are.

The lawyer asks me a whole host of questions, but steers away from the reasons for me being here. My full names, my partner's full names. When did the relationship start? Was it ever formalised in one way or another? What is my personal understanding of the legal relationship? What sort of work does my partner do? What work do I do? More or less how

much do we each earn? Do we have children? What assets do we have between us? Can I make a rough estimate as to the values?

I answer the questions mechanically.

‘Don’t worry about exact details and values,’ he says. ‘I just need to form a very broad view at this stage.’

He writes as I provide him with the details. I can see that he is working from a typed list of questions. Then he puts it aside. I try to read the questions upside down. The last question is typed in bold, but has not been answered...

‘Now for the difficult question. Why are you here?’

The friendly dwarf shakes his head, repeatedly. Has the angry one shaken a fist at me?

I seem to have entered a dream. I again have the feeling of not being inside the room. What are the dwarves going to do?

I am aware of listening to silence.

‘I really don’t know whether I should carry on or not,’ I say. ‘I just want to find out about my rights.’

He looks pensive. ‘I wonder,’ he says. ‘Perhaps we shouldn’t ask whether you wish to proceed. Perhaps you should rather ask: “What is my own vision, understanding and definition of the relationship. Am I still within such a relationship?”’

I feel slightly uncomfortable. Have I made the right choice with this lawyer?

The friendly dwarf still looks upset, but the angry one is now smiling, winking at me. Have they changed roles? Or have

they changed places without me noticing? I struggle to work it out.

‘Of course I am still within the relationship. That is why I am consulting you. If the relationship no longer existed, I certainly would have had little need for a lawyer.’

He nods. ‘I understand how you feel. But remember that everybody has their own personal visions and definitions of their relationships. And everybody has their own requirements, values, limits, hopes, and norms. Yours could be much different from those of your friends, brother or sister, or even your own parents or church.’

I pluck up some courage. ‘I would really like to talk about the legal consequences,’ I say.

‘We’ll come to that’ he says, and reverts to his line of discussion.

‘Relationships and life have many peaks and valleys. Many circumstances contribute to these. Mid-life crises, seven-year itches, thirteen-year ditches, empty-nest syndromes, financial crises, pressure on the relationship as a result of interference by in-laws or friends, infatuation with others, liquor-related problems, drug-related problems, the side-effects of medicine, simple fatigue, long periods without holidays, intense projects at work, stress at work, moving house, changing a job, post-natal or other depressions, and many other factors, to name but a few.’

I feel frustrated. He is not telling me anything that I do not know already. I can read about this in any magazine. Perhaps I should leave. As I am about to get up I realise that the trembling within my body has stopped. Maybe I should see this through. But when will he give me legal advice?

‘Affairs also sometimes play a role in these matters,’ he says. ‘But on occasion affairs are merely symptoms of other causes and factors.’

The two dwarves have now moved into the dark corner, and it is difficult to see them, and even more difficult to decide which is the friendly one and which is the angry one.

The lawyer resumes talking.

‘The issue is not what others, including your friends, advisors and family say or would have done. The important issue is: What are your own circumstances? And what are your own limits, values, requirements and wishes?’

‘To make the right decision, we must try to rid you as far as possible of tension and anxiety. And to do this, we must remove the myths and help you to understand life, yourself and your situation better.’

I notice that the angry dwarf is holding onto the friendly one’s forearm, with both hands. The friendly one is attempting to pull away. If the angry one were to let go, they will both slip and fall. The friendly one suddenly stops pulling. I am relieved that the calamity has been averted for the moment.

‘It’s not important that you make a decision today, or even tomorrow,’ the lawyer says. ‘It is much more important that you should accept that you are certainly going to survive, whatever happens, and that from now on your life can only improve. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, wrong with you as a person.’

‘Forget what others have said. Discard any repeated criticism by your partner or others. These remarks are mostly

Both dwarves are smiling at me, looking like identical twins. They are separate, but they are also entangled. It is very confusing.

The dwarves have turned their backs on us. They walk away from the dark corner, towards the off-white wall. I am glad that they are not heading for the dark corner. Again I wonder about their names.

The lawyer carries on in the same vein. 'It is normal for any relationship to be extremely strained on occasions. As I've said before, there is nothing unusual about your situation.'

If only he knew what has already happened. I find myself shifting around in my chair at the thought of having to discuss it all. Fortunately he has not noticed.

'A separation or temporary affair, and in the case of some people a permanent affair, may be quite normal, and does not have to reflect badly on either of you,' he says. 'In some cultures polygamy is an accepted practice.'

'However, whether you are prepared to accept any particular conduct depends upon your own limits, values and definition of the relationship, and your own personal requirements.'

'You have to create your own boundaries.'

The friendly dwarf now has the short pencil in his left hand, and is furiously drawing lines on the piece of scrap paper. The angry dwarf grabs an eraser from nowhere, and erases the lines as the friendly one is drawing them. I wonder which of them will win.

I try to concentrate. The dwarves have been distracting me. This is a costly exercise. Why did the lawyer allow the dwarves into my consultation?

He appears to be unaware of my thoughts.

'I sometimes speculate that when man was made, millions of years ago, the average life expectancy of at least one of the

partners was relatively short,' he says. 'Not long after the relationship commenced a dinosaur may have trampled one of the partners, and thus terminated the relationship within a much shorter period than the average duration of modern ongoing relationships. The high incidence of trauma in modern ongoing relationships that first seemed perfect, may be the result of our extended life expectancy, and not of any fault on the part of those within these relationships. Perhaps our own programming, millions of years ago, has been such that, on average, it may simply not be normal for any intimate relationship to last for a lifetime without some kind of strain or interruption. It would be interesting to find out what the anthropologists have to say about this,' he says. 'Rock-art often depicts elephants and lions.'

There must be something seriously wrong with this man. What on earth is the relevance of rock-art when we are discussing my situation?

'Even the apparent long and enduring relationships may not be what they seem,' he says. 'It may well be that many of these happy couples are over the years repeatedly terminating their relationships in private, and again re-entering into new relationships in private. Is this not perhaps the true meaning of the "ups and downs" often referred to by those in these relationships?

'If this is so, it means that interruptions of an intimate relationship cannot really be avoided by any couple, married or otherwise, and that you are perfectly normal,' he says.

'These situations may be rather similar to the changing of seasons. Do you ever feel bad or inferior because summer changes into winter? Does winter not prepare the earth for spring? Do you ever doubt that summer will come again?'

I imagine the dwarves in a thunderstorm, but become aware that calm has set in on the corner cabinet. Soft rain appears

to be falling around them. In the background I hear the lawyer talking.

‘Think of life over a period of a million years. Then think of your own situation against the million years. Then think of all the people that have found themselves in similar situations over the last million years. Were they all bad or inferior? Did they all remain unhappy? Certainly not.’

The dwarves now look older, wizened. The faces of my parents and the parents of my partner flash through my mind.

‘The fact that you or your partner may have an affair, or that you may feel your relationship is falling apart for other reasons, does not mean that you are bad, unattractive, not good enough or inadequate in some other way.’

‘Look at some of the most beautiful, the most sensual, the prettiest, the sexiest, most intelligent, most successful, most sparkling, most charming and most caring people all over the world. Many of them have been in similar situations. So clearly a breakdown, or even an affair by either you or your partner, does not have to reflect adversely on you. It often happens for reasons unrelated to you or your partner as individuals.’

‘For example, it may have come about because either of you came from an environment where this has happened, or because your relationship (not you) does not work at the moment, or because either of you are in a phase where there is a special need to prove yourself, or because one of you simply fell in love with another person, and would have done so regardless of being in a relationship with the most beautiful, intelligent and worthy person in the world.’

‘But, what about respect?’ I say. ‘Don’t we need mutual respect?’

‘Yes, we do,’ he says. ‘But respect can be retrieved. It is mostly discovered with introspection. We are more forgiving and respectful when we discover our own shortcomings.’

‘All of this does not mean that you have to accept conduct that is unacceptable to you. You owe it to your own self-esteem, and to your partner, to put your foot down when necessary.. But remember that nobody can escape making mistakes. Distinguish clearly between a clear line for the future, and forgiveness for the past. Without interpersonal understanding no relationship can work. After every termination of an intimate relationship, a restructured relationship is required. Even formally divorced people are in a restructured relationship. You will therefore need understanding for each other, whether or not you become reconciled.’

‘How can one remain in a relationship after betrayal?’ I ask.

‘I do not like the word betrayal,’ he says. ‘It has a judgmental content. Even if you were a perfectionist, consistency in being a perfectionist would require an understanding of your own limitations and the limitations of others.’

I look at the dwarves. Both are standing motionless, expressionless. I try to find cracks in the clay figures, but see nothing from the outside. They are, however standing rather close to the dark corner.

The lawyer sighs, appearing momentarily despondent. ‘Perfectionists don’t really exist,’ he says. ‘Perfectionism is in itself an imperfect state of our own imperfect minds.’

Is he now talking to himself?

Affairs

'What about affairs?' I ask.

He gazes through the window. For a while he says nothing. Then he takes a deep breath.

The friendly dwarf looks me straight in the eye. The angry one looks down.

I cannot hold back my curiosity any more. 'Who are they,' I ask, pointing at the two little dwarves. 'What are their names?'

He shrugs his shoulders. 'The twins have always been around. The friendly one is called Gemi and the angry one is Ni. They stick around, regardless of our star signs. Sometimes the one is male and the other one female. Then the other way round. On other occasions both are male, or both are female. There are times when it seems that they are married. Then again it seems as if they merely live together. I am not quite sure about their sexual orientation, or the legal context of their relationship. But does it really matter?'

He reflects for a moment, and seems to have lost his thread. 'Perhaps time does not exist' he suddenly says, out of the blue.

What made him talk about time? This might explain the wrist-watch without the battery though.

He proceeds with his philosophy about time.

'If time did not exist, we might all have been born simultaneously. And in that event none of us would have been born under only one star sign. Then all of us would belong to the entire Universe, and share in all the different star signs. In that case all of us would be Gemini. Just like the dwarves.

'They are naughty little creatures, forever fighting each other. Sometimes the friendly one is the naughty one. But let's not worry about them. Let's continue,' he says.

'The strange thing about affairs is that even those involved would mostly prefer a single, happy relationship.'

The past six months flash through my mind. If only we could turn back time.

The lawyer keeps talking.

‘Sometimes an outsider drifts into the “mind-pool” of one of the partners. While the intervention lasts it may appear quite impossible to save the relationship. But a miraculous turnaround may follow once the affair is terminated.’

I wonder to myself. Do miracles happen? At the same time I again become acutely aware of the dwarves. Am I cracking up?

His voice interrupts my introspection. ‘There may be ongoing jealousy after an affair has been terminated, and this really complicates the relationship. I have come across people who feel extremely guilty and inferior about their own jealousy. And I have also come across others who are extremely annoyed because their partners or ex-partners are jealous.’

I think of my own emotions over the past six months, feeling uncomfortable. Over the shoulder of the lawyer I can see that the complexion of the friendly dwarf has turned pale green. Did I imagine it? The dwarf’s complexion has now turned back to the original healthy pink.

The lawyer seems oblivious to the two supporting actors on the corner cabinet.

‘These reactions do not really make sense if one considers jealousy carefully. I do not think anybody should ever feel guilty about being jealous of a partner, and I do not think anybody has reason to be upset about the jealousy of a partner. What is wrong with jealousy? Is it not perfectly normal? And is it not quite flattering? And does it not show commitment? Why do we only show some of our natural feelings, and not others?’

The friendly dwarf suddenly attacks the angry one physically, tearing frantically at his hair.

I feel like intervening. Still the background voice drones on.

‘On the other hand, if jealousy becomes a real problem it may become necessary to deal with it. It could stem from a justifiable feeling of insecurity. The insecurity could have more than one cause. It could come from past hurt that may have to be discussed, and that could be resolved with the assistance of a good counsellor. It may also be that the jealous partner is intuitively reading actual thoughts of infidelity in the sub-conscious mind of the other partner. Then, mere counselling will not help. In such a case the other partner may have to make a renewed commitment of loyalty and total emotional honesty. If such a commitment is made, the jealous partner may soon “read” the mind of the other partner differently. This may bring about the required feeling of security, and may contribute tremendously to addressing the problem of jealousy.’

As he talks, the dwarves walk away from the dark corner. I notice that the angry one lingers at first, but then he seems to collect all his strength, and leaves the corner.

I find it strange that the lawyer has not noticed it. He seems to be in a world of his own, talking to himself.

‘We need to remember that flirtation has forever been part of normal social play. There is a great difference between a man or a woman who enjoys flirting, and one who is involved in an affair. In a sense, light flirtations are healthy, and if your partner does so openly, it might be an indication of honesty and the absence of an affair. Almost like the angry dwarf, who would seldom take you by surprise.’

The dwarves are now playing ring-a-ring-a-rosy on top of the corner cabinet. Laughing and shouting.

The lawyer is unperturbed.

'In a funny way you can enjoy the repeated victory when your partner manages to attract others, or is attracted to others, but remains loyal and involved with you. You must be careful not to take lighthearted and open playfulness too seriously, but can intervene if your instincts warn you that it is something more. Try to distinguish between an over-reaction on your part, and genuine cause for concern.'

The dwarves are still playing on the corner cabinet, jumping and skipping in cheerful merriment. I find all of this very strange, and do not know what to make of it. I notice that the complexions of both are healthy, pinkish, like little children. Right now I would rather talk to them than to the lawyer.

I force myself to focus on what the lawyer is saying.

'Depending on your own emotions, you could consider accepting some mild flirting. If your partner is naturally playful in an innocent way, it cannot really harm you. Your "permission" is unlikely to cause an affair. Playfulness is bound to happen when you are not there, regardless of any permission. Through permission you could create innocent space and remove feelings of imprisonment on the part of your partner. This may considerably rejuvenate your own relationship.'

I find myself wondering: Does he not understand human nature? Perhaps he does, but I doubt it that he understands my relationship.

The lawyer looks at me, and pauses for a moment. Has he read my mind? Then he carries on.

'If you give permission you may remove some of the excitement of the flirtation, and thus bring it to an end. On the other hand, your partner may be exploiting your unselfish nature. If you find the flirting humiliating, get it into the open. Talk about it. Or shout and scream and perform if you have

to. Otherwise, how will your partner know how you feel? However, if you still love your partner, remember at the same time to state positively that you are still so much in love that you can't help feeling jealous.'

I wish flirtation was my problem.

The dwarves have stopped playing, and are now looking rather serious.

'Do not forget that an affair is completely different from a light flirtation,' the lawyer says. 'An affair is often ongoing and intense, and sometimes not so playful. Indeed, it is a relationship with its own moral obligations. This is why it is often so difficult to terminate an affair. The emotional dynamics of the termination of an affair can be quite similar to a formal divorce. It can be extremely difficult, and with similar traumatic consequences.'

I look at the dwarves, and cannot believe what I am now seeing. The angry one has lit a pipe and is smoking away. The friendly one has put his right hand in front of his mouth, and is waving the smoke away with his left hand. Is this not a smoke-free zone?

The lawyer disregards the transgression of the law. But as he carries on, I realise that he must have noticed.

'The partner in the affair may sometimes be similar to a smoker who would prefer to feel healthy and exhilarated, but who cannot let go of smoking for a mere three weeks to achieve this. Smoking clouds the lungs and the atmosphere around us, may annoy those who do not smoke, may be bad for the health of the smoker and those around him, and has negative social consequences. Affairs may cloud the mind, and may have similar negative consequences. The smoker often hates being addicted, but the smoking simply continues. The answer may lie in recognising the addiction,

and seeking help to break free from the addiction. But there may also be cases where this is simply not attainable.'

Perhaps he understands more than I realised. I feel somewhat more confident. 'How can the addiction of an affair be broken,' I hear myself saying.

'There are available techniques and experts who can assist,' the lawyer says. 'It is mostly necessary for an addicted person either to honestly face up to the consequences, or to be confronted quite directly with the consequences. Addicted people are generally inclined to become crafty manipulators, so as to retain the habit. This does not mean that they are bad. They are simply trying to find the easy way out while the addiction lasts.

'While the addiction endures, they have an instinctive ability to find reasons why it should not be given up, and even to make their true partners feel guilty about it. Until they are finally confronted with having to make a choice, they would often find it impossible to give up the addiction. Until then they have the best of both worlds, and there is therefore not a real need for them to adjust.

'The addicted person has to make an own decision. But those affected can help by refusing to accept the consequences of the addiction, and by insisting that a choice be made. Once the decision has been made, the cure may follow.

'Perseverance for a number of weeks may change a smoker's entire life. The same may apply with perseverance in terminating an affair. But in both cases it will, for a period, be very difficult to kick the habit. Remember that is well known that smokers frequently have to make several attempts before finally giving up smoking. A fall back into an addictive habit therefore does not mean that it will not eventually be given up. But of course, if it takes too long the other partner may

give up hope, and it may mean the end of the “legitimate” relationship.

‘There are also cases where the relationship with the third party has over time become so entrenched that it has in effect become the “legitimate” and most suitable long-term relationship. Then this may have to be accepted.’

I suddenly experience immense anger. At the same time I feel a little uncomfortable. Of late I have been smoking the odd cigarette, and there is an unopened packet in my bag. I hope it does not slip out. To my relief he changes tack.

‘If the mind-pool is tranquil, it will reflect a perfect and clear picture of one’s partner. However, if a third party enters the mind-pool, ripples will always appear on the surface, and the reflections of the faithful partner may become quite distorted. This will happen regardless of whether the affair is sexual or just emotional.

‘Fortunately, just like water, the mind may calm down completely once a temporary intervention has ceased. The reflections on the surface of the mind-pool may then again become clear and undisturbed. This may happen suddenly or gradually, depending on the extent of past turmoil. But of course, in some cases, it may not happen at all.’

I suddenly feel ice cold, and realize that the trembling has returned.

‘Listen to your own instincts, and be wary of the judgment of your friends and family in respect of your partner or in respect of the third party,’ the lawyer says. ‘Their judgment is likely to be driven by sympathy for you, and may be wrong.’

The friendly dwarf is now walking away from the angry dwarf. I wonder if the angry dwarf will follow. The angry dwarf looks puzzled, somewhat less than confident. It is quite clear that

he did not expect the friendly dwarf to walk away, and that he is in two minds. Then the friendly dwarf turns around again.

The lawyer must have noticed that my attention has slipped. He patiently waits for me to focus on our discussion. Then he talks again.

‘The partner in an affair often feels immense guilt towards both the remaining partner and the third party’. The partner in the affair is faced with conflicting commitments, each with a moral content. The enormous dilemma is that the feelings of guilt cannot be discussed with the other partner. Or can they?’

I experience a feeling of alarm.

He carries on.

‘If the partner involved in the affair should conclude that it may be better for the third party’ to be freed from the complications of the affair, it may help to ease the feeling of guilt towards the third party. Of course, if you are angry and aggressive towards the third party, a suggestion to this effect will not be sincere, and will therefore not be very persuasive. It may therefore help for you to develop empathy for the third party, difficult as it may seem. Only then will you be able to have meaningful communication with your partner in relation to the third party, and be able to make a sincere suggestion that it would also be better for the third party that the affair is terminated.

‘At the same time we have to accept that it is not always possible to restore a relationship. If the relationship with the third party was truly written in the stars, the realisation may have to set in that the affair is the only relationship that can last. Then the affair may have become the “moral” relationship.’

I experience a sinking feeling.

‘Such a realisation is bound to be painful, and it may be quite difficult to live with consequent negative feelings,’ the lawyer says.

‘Negative feelings are harmful, and more so to the one harboring these feelings, than to those against whom they are harbored. You may be able to cure negative feelings if you were to realise that a sensitive person with high morals may find it more difficult to break out of a relationship or out of an affair, than an insensitive person without morals.

‘It may help you to know that the third party may also be suffering tremendously. It is never easy to be the third party in a relationship. Their own friends, family and social circles frequently turn their lives into utter misery. Most third parties would prefer uncomplicated relationships, and most of them take tremendous strain once the affair is out in the open. They frequently suffer (privately) from immense feelings of guilt towards the partner left behind, and towards the children, and have deep anxieties about the future of their own relationship (the affair), knowing full well that if ‘their’ partner has done it once, it may happen again, with them on the receiving end.

‘Sometimes they find it difficult to verbalise all of this, and their insecurity may manifest in anger, just like your own.’

I notice that for the first time the two dwarves are now communicating quietly, talking things through. The lawyer pays no attention to them. He looks at me, and I am forced to switch my attention back to him.

‘Never forget that an affair by your partner does not mean that you are not good enough or attractive enough. An affair has no bearing at all on the attraction of the partner left behind.’

I break my silence. 'What about my emotions? What about all the years? What about our solemn promises to each other?'

The lawyer now looks empathetic.

'I realise that all of this can be very hurtful,' he says. In essence a new relationship is always required once an affair has come about. The question to be asked by the partner involved in the affair is not: "Should I terminate the relationship with my partner or should I reconcile?" The question to be asked is: "Should I enter into a permanent relationship with my partner, or should I enter into a permanent relationship with my affair"? Both will be solemn relationships. Both will be new and exciting, although it may often be easier and better to give up the affair, particularly if there are children.

'Sometimes the partner involved in an affair is hoping desperately for the other partner to forgive him or her, or to fight back for him or her. Indeed, a person may well have become involved in an affair because he or she feels emotionally insecure. A clear refusal to let go may be all that is needed to remove these feelings, and to restore the original relationship.

'Whatever the case may be, it would mostly be better to face up to the realities sooner or later, and to bring matters to a head. Most people find it extremely difficult to live with both relationships.'

The two dwarves are now standing together again. The angry dwarf looks very sad. Will their relationship continue?

The wasted years

'But what about all the years that are gone?' I ask. 'I have wasted so many years.'

He smiles. 'I understand your question. But it may not be true. You may have wasted nothing. You retain your memories. Imagine, if time does not exist, the years behind you are not gone.'

Both dwarves are shaking their heads in disbelief.

'There is no reason why you should not cherish the good memories for the rest of your life.'

'Many of us had school sweethearts whom we never married. However, we retain these good memories for a lifetime. The school days and school relationships are never wasted. In exactly the same way the many years of any personal relationship, marital or otherwise, and even a relationship ending in a final termination, are never wasted.'

He goes quiet for a long while, and I have the feeling that he is thinking deeply, and has completely forgotten about me. Then he becomes present again, and our eyes meet. He now speaks softly and with tangible empathy.

'Perhaps no love ever dies, regardless of the 'death' of what we see and experience. Perhaps all love continues timelessly as perfect energy within the Universe, independent of the people within whom the love sprang up. If so, the termination of a relationship merely sets this perfect energy free forever, much in the same way as our souls may be finally set free when we die one day. Your struggle has not been wasted. Perhaps no relationship ever breaks down. Perhaps all that ever happens is that people break free from unhappiness, in some or other way.'

My partner has changed

My mind wanders back over the past few months.

‘My partner has changed altogether,’ I explain. ‘I am dealing with a totally different person from the one I originally fell in love with.’

He softly taps on the table with his one hand, thinking.

The angry dwarf is now combing his hair, and I notice that he has completely changed his hairstyle. He is looking rather silly. Wait a minute. He is now looking rather nice. He seems to feel quite good about himself. Is he experiencing a

temporary midlife crisis? Or has he changed forever? Or has he perhaps discovered himself for the very first time?

I become vaguely aware of the lawyer's voice.

'Are you quite sure your partner has changed? It could be a mere reaction to a prevailing set of circumstances. It could also be that you are responding to a prevailing set of circumstances, and are therefore interpreting your partner differently for the moment.

'Have you ever been to a school reunion? One of the most amazing things I experience at these reunions is that I sometimes at first do not recognise some of my school friends. After a while, as the pretence drops away, the same old "souls" come rushing at me through their eyes. As the contact between the souls become stronger as the evening wears on, they start looking more familiar, and towards the end of the evening, when all the interpersonal tension is gone, they look quite similar to many years ago.

Sometimes, when we are under tension for whatever reason, our souls do not really make contact. A curtain drops between us. But the curtain may be a delicate cobweb that needs to be blown away. Strangely enough, an intense release of emotions (and this can happen through interpersonal conflict, the value of which should never be underestimated, though there are also other ways, such as simply caving in to emotions and crying) can sweep away cobwebs to the extent that a person who appeared different again becomes the "old" person. Is this not what happens at school reunions, as the evening wears on?'

I think of my last school reunion, and for a fleeting second I am seventeen again and far away from the lawyer's office. If only I could be seventeen again. The face of the static wrist-watch stares at me. What if the lawyer is right? What if time

does not exist? Then I am still seventeen, or whatever age I may wish to choose. Then time will never run out.

The lawyer's voice terminates my dream.

'At the same time it is of course true that over time all people change to a lesser or greater extent. But is this not also true of everything else around us? Is the only certainty in this world not perhaps the expected, and unexpected, ongoing changes around us? Or am I missing something?' he says, questioning himself for the first time.

The dwarves seem to agree enthusiastically that he is missing something. They both point at the lawyer, shaking their heads and laughing.

He pretends not to be affected. 'There may be some benefit to be had from possible changes in your partner. Try for a moment to think of your partner as the identical twin of the person you originally married. Then try to visualize 'them' as two entirely separate people who just look alike. Almost like those clay dwarves on the corner cabinet. They look very alike, but they are separate and have totally different personalities.'

I am heartened by his recognition of the dwarves. But he seems to treat them like ordinary ornaments. He is clearly not on the same wave-length as the dwarves and me.

'Perhaps you could allow yourself the opportunity to fall in love with your "stranger", with this identical twin of your partner. If the twin senses your positive inclinations, it may bring back your original partner, or positive facets of personality of the twin. Do you remember the old Frank Sinatra song, Strangers in the Night? Was it not meant to be a love song? Do we not all need to be loved? Even when we sometimes do not feel very loved or lovable? Perhaps, just perhaps, your own inner twin can be let out. There may be

exciting prospects when two strangers meet. At the same time neither of them will have to meet new family, both of them will know many of the other's likes and dislikes, and both of them may be able to achieve peaks in their relationship much quicker and with much less effort.'

I visualise Sinatra's two strangers, drifting past each other. Will they remain strangers in the night?

He sighs again, now looking mildly depressed, more like a lawyer. 'On the other hand, we do have to accept that either of you may find it impossible to fall in love. If this is indeed the case, it is fine. You do not have any moral obligation to fall in love with strangers. Splitting your stranger partner from your original partner in your own mind may possibly make it easier for you to accept that your original partner no longer exists, if that really is the case, and to say goodbye to the stranger whom you never really loved. Only you will know and understand your own reality.'

I notice that both dwarves seem to gaze into the distance. Gazing into the past or into the future? Both seem quite happy and content for the moment. Both are now, again, looking rather similar.

My mind wanders into the past and into the future. I see myself in our early years of togetherness, and then again sitting in a garden in the late afternoon sun, with children playing round.

He must have noticed this. 'You will and may retain the memories of the original good times, for the rest of your life. Just like your memories of a school sweetheart. Your good memories are never wasted. Get out of the present. Consider the distant past; consider also the distant future.'

Family and friends

My thoughts are muddled. I force myself to turn my attention back to the lawyer. 'How will I explain all of this to my parents, family and friends?' I ask. 'They are so caring, and so concerned.'

He nods. 'Perhaps we should try to understand their reactions somewhat better.'

The angry dwarf is now pulling faces, and the friendly one is encouraging him. Are they teaming up against me?

'One of the biggest problems is that loving family members and friends often regard these relationships as bridal affairs. They forget that they are also tribal affairs. When people really get together, they have to leave their former tribes. They have to give birth to a new and unique tribe. Loving in-laws understandably often find it very difficult to adjust to this. Loving parents suffer a major loss whenever a child becomes involved in an ongoing relationship, and may understandably miss the structure of the old parent-child relationship that may be changing forever. Likewise, brothers and sisters often miss the old family order, where they might have had a special relationship with you. This may be why family reunions, and even funerals, often culminate in disputes after a few days. And this may also be at the root of the many jokes around in-laws.'

I find it difficult to accept. He is questioning the only people that have been standing by me. How can he do it?

'The intervening third party can be a loving parent, or even an own child, or a good friend, brother, sister, demanding boss or project. Unacceptable intervention may involve too much

sapping of time and attention. If we take this example to the extreme, the death of a family member or friend or child may have a major impact on your relationship. If you pull the cornerstone or even a single brick out of a wall, the entire wall can become dangerously unstable. Death of a loved one could throw the emotional life of one of the partners into complete disarray for an extended period. But it may come right again over time, sometimes after a period of mourning that may last as long as four years or more. All of these external factors can put the relationship under strain, without any reflection on you or your partner.'

Perhaps he has a point, I think. But I cannot reject my loved ones. They are all I have right now. What kind of person is this lawyer? Does he not feel guilty? He now sounds just like my partner.

'Of course you can have a good relationship with your family members,' he says. 'And of course they love you, and you love them. Adjusting the structure does not amount to rejection. On the contrary, your relationship with your family, and their respect for you, may improve if you draw clear lines, improve your relationship with your partner, and become happy again. But they have to respect your relationship with your partner, and also, if that is your decision, the termination of your relationship.'

I wonder if the dwarves have many friends, and whether they only come out at night. I wonder if the lawyer has any friends. I would prefer it if he left this topic, but he continues.

'Friends and family sometimes overlook the reality that what works for them may not work for you, and that you should be allowed total freedom in handling your own relationship. You are entitled to do so without interference and advice from those who, even though they are well-meaning, have personal agendas of which they themselves may be blissfully and innocently unaware.'

The friendly dwarf is now teasing the angry one. I wonder which one was born first, and whether they have brothers or sisters.

Ongoing conflicts

I look at the lawyer. 'I hear everything you say. But my partner and I seem to be unable to agree on anything. Everybody has been noticing it. We simply cannot see eye to eye any longer. I feel so tired. I do not have the energy for another dispute.'

I notice that the friendly dwarf is shouting (silently) and screaming (silently) at the angry one. The angry dwarf is becoming extremely annoyed, but then suddenly bursts out in silent laughter. His laughter is quite infectious. I experience immense relief, and now find myself on the verge of laughter. What would the lawyer think if I were to burst out laughing?

'The two of you may well be unable to agree on anything right now. Perhaps you should break away for a few days to get a more distant perspective. The solution to relationship disputes is sometimes to rest, and sometimes for the partners to simply open their eyes.'

He waits for a moment.

‘Yes, you may well be very different. And yes, you may well never be able to agree on certain issues. But is this not to be expected? Is it not perhaps completely normal? Does it really matter that much? Would you not expect that a person who grew up separately from you might have different priorities, viewpoints, and requirements? And would you not normally expect that a new tribe would have a new culture altogether, a little or totally different from the family culture in which you grew up?’

‘Think back to when you first met. Was it not perhaps the differences that you found interesting? Perhaps it was. Perhaps not. Only you will know whether your relationship really is at an end.’

He stretches, and puts his hands behind his head. I notice that he is looking tired. Then he regains his focus.

‘I would like to tell you a simple, but true story. I once saw a lovely lady of about sixty-seven who wanted to finally separate from her seventy-two-year-old husband. When I inquired into the matter, it turned out that she was most upset because he had promised ten years earlier to change a blue wash-basin to a white wash-basin, and never did so. He, on the other hand, was equally upset because she had made such a fuss about it. Both were seething. I did not know how to help them. In desperation I asked them what their attitudes would have been when they originally got together.’

‘I at first thought my question had done the trick, but not quite. I found myself tensing up, as I really did not believe that they should get divorced.’

‘With a lot of luck I made the right connection immediately thereafter, when I told the lovely old lady that she was missing something. She glared at me, wanting to know what I was implying. I told her that she has forgotten that she is not

married to one of her friends, but to her husband. 'If you had been married to your friend, there probably would have been no problem, as your friend would probably have felt as strongly about changing the wash-basin' I told her. 'But do you want to be married to your friend or to your husband?' I asked her.

'She went totally quiet, and I could almost feel the anger subsiding.

'I then turned to the old man and told him that he was also missing something. He was rather taken aback, as he was about to gloat in what he had thought was a little victory. "What am I missing?" he asked, glaring at me. "You are missing that you are not married to one of your friends," I told him. "If you had been married to one of your buddies, he would probably not have minded the wash-basin. But do you want to be married to him, or to your wife?"'

He looked a little sheepish, but regained his dignity, and I could feel that the anger was leaving him as well.

'The lovely lady had quite simply forgotten that the colour of wash-basins was not really something that would ever have interested her partner, and that this was of no concern to her at the time when they got married. And her partner had likewise forgotten that decoration was always important to her, and that he really preferred pleasing her.

'They buried the hatchet, and resumed their 50-year relationship. A few days later he changed the wash-basin without being asked to do so.'

I look at him in silence. Then I speak. 'I am not so sure that you are right. It is a beautiful story, but our problems are deep-seated and ongoing. So many of our friends share the same interests and priorities. Why do we have so much conflict?

The friendly dwarf nods in understanding, but the angry one shakes his head vehemently. At the moment there is no harmony between them.

The lawyer closes his eyes, thinking for a moment. Then he opens them again. 'Perhaps it is a complete myth that your friends share the same interests and the same priorities.

'Perhaps they have private conflict that no-one knows about. Perhaps they privately get it out into the open between them, and so resolve their conflicts. Or perhaps they simply understand better that they are different, do not focus on their differences and disputes, accept each other with their differences and disputes, and therefore appear not to have different interests and outlooks. When you take a photograph the edges may not be so sharp if you do not focus too intently, and the photograph may ultimately appear much softer.'

For some or other reason I think of our family album. I feel the emotion welling up. At the same time I notice that the two dwarves are now pretending to pose for a photograph. Are they trying to ridicule the lawyer, or me?

The water is too cold

I shake my head. 'I'm sorry,' I say. 'I find all of this very difficult. My partner does not want to accept me. It is not the other way round.'

The lawyer and both dwarves appear very sympathetic.

'You may be right,' he says. 'But perhaps we should think of it as though you and your partner are in a single bath. The water was warm when you got in, but has become much too cold. Either of you can open the hot-water tap. If neither does so, both of you will get out, sooner or later.'

Does it matter which one opens the tap? It may simply be extra hot water that is required. Your entire experience, and

your partner's entire experience, may change if you were to add some hot water. Your partner might stop shivering, might relax, and the situation may become so pleasurable for both of you, that your partner might be the one who next turns on the hot water.'

For some or other silly reason I think of a broken geyser, and wonder how he thinks I should add hot water when the geyser does not work.

He seems to have again read my thoughts. 'Hot water may be obtained in different forms,' he says. 'Sometimes only the words "I'm sorry, I was wrong," are required. 'However, it may not be a good idea to admit a wrong if you do not really mean it. It may intuitively be experienced as insincere.

'Be careful about mixing your signals. If you feel that you were wrong, it may be best to admit this without any qualification if you can.'

He has now clearly arrived on favoured terrain. He speaks with conviction and passion.

'Also be careful about saying "I was wrong, but..." The moment you attempt to explain a wrong on your part, your partner may hear only the justification and not the confession. The result is that you yourself may have destroyed the benefit of your admission. It is sometimes better to allow your partner to justify your error. It is quite astounding how natural it is for people to become forgiving once you have made an unqualified admission. But only do so with sincerity.'

I imagine him in a courtroom. I have heard about so-called "silent arguments". Where a lawyer merely prods the judge, and allows the judge to think spontaneously about the argument - apparently sometimes with much better end-results. In my mind I question the sincerity of these

strategies. But perhaps we are all insincere to a lesser or greater extent?

My mind wanders, and I think of the latest soap operas on TV. I would much prefer more silent arguing by those smooth lawyers that are forever adorning the screen. I wonder if this lawyer has ever argued in silence. I suppose he would find it rather difficult. He has been doing most of the talking today. In fact, had it not been for the dwarves, I would probably have left by now.

He carries on.

‘Helping your partner out of the cold water may require determined action on your part. You may have to make an appointment with a counsellor or medical doctor. Or you may have to arrange for admission to an alcohol or drug addiction center if this is the problem. Society encourages alcoholism. And unfortunately some medical doctors prescribe sleeping tablets or tranquilisers as a routine prescription.

‘There are multitudes of people addicted to alcohol and prescription drugs in ordinary society. These addictions sometimes have negative consequences on the emotional communication and sex lives of the people involved.

‘It is very difficult to break such an addiction and expert advice and assistance is required before changing a prescription regime. Consider obtaining a second medical opinion. Doctors, like lawyers, make mistakes. So do friends who encourage the use of alcohol where there are adverse consequences for others.’

I think about my partner’s reactions. What would happen if I were to drag everything out into the open?

The lawyer has clearly read my mind this time. Is there some or other unholy alliance between him and the dwarves?

'You may have to suppress your fear of the reactions of others, and force yourself to be absolutely honest when expressing your emotions and feelings. You may see this as risky, but frequently we have to take risks to gain something; and you may be pleasantly surprised by the result.'

The two dwarves are now both dangling over the edge of the corner cabinet, in a clear pretence of taking enormous personal risk. I shudder at the thought of the little clay figures hitting the floor, ending up in many scattered pieces of clay. How would we fit the pieces together? Then I notice with relief that the cabinet has a protruding edge forming a small foothold, just below their little clay feet.

The lawyer lowers his voice, and seems to speak kindly.

'I do of course realise that you have been in the cold for quite some time. You would not have entered this office were this not the case. I also realise that your emotional reserves may be so depleted that you may right now be unable to help the two of you out of the cold. There is nothing sinful about being tired, whether physically or emotionally. If you can't carry on, it is good. You have your own personal limits, values, tolerances, requirements and reserves, and these may differ dramatically from those of others. Even from those of your parents, friends, advisors, and partner. But do not make a hasty decision. Do not decide unless you are absolutely sure. Consider taking a break.

'Do not use another person's limits and values, or another family culture (even the family culture of your parents), to determine what is acceptable or tolerable to you. In the same way as the Italian and the British cultures may differ, family cultures differ. You have formed your own tribe and therefore have your own tribal culture. If you do break away to rest for a while, it may be best to go where family or friends will not constantly be offering advice. One of the most dangerous

approaches when you find yourself in relationship trauma is
to take legal or emotional advice (as oppose204. -0. s emotional

The unseen facts

'I would like to talk to you about the unseen facts,' he says.

I somehow realise that he has no intention of talking about dwarves right now.

'There are simple techniques that you can follow to open your mind to positive things. Close your eyes once a day for about fifteen minutes. Repeatedly tell yourself: "I am OK," or "I am beautiful," or "I am clever," or "I will survive," or whatever your fear or self-doubt issue may be, and regardless of whether you readily believe what you say.

'Do not tell yourself anything negative, and do not use any negative word. Just articulate the positive repeatedly, in a relaxed manner, and try to gently believe what you say, without fighting yourself, and without focusing on any logical facts or physical issues.'

I notice that the angry dwarf is talking to himself. 'I am nice, I am nice,' he says silently but repeatedly. I become aware that his facial expression is changing, that softness has now come over him.

'The truth is that the Universe consists not only of what you can see, touch and feel, but rather that powerful unseen facts (powerful energies) exist in the world of the unconscious, and

via your thoughts. These unseen facts are as real as those you can see with your own eyes and feel with your own hands. The energy locked up in the unseen facts is as real as electricity.

'Your own beliefs about yourself, your beauty and intelligence, and so on, are mostly based on what you have heard in the past. This might have included many negatives. If you hear something different, your own beliefs about yourself will change, because the unseen facts will be changing, releasing powerful energy.

'Do not worry if you do not immediately experience a positive reaction.

'Do this once a day for at least fifteen minutes, for about two months. Your subconscious mind will pick up all of this, register it, and remember it; and your entire self-image and life are likely to move in a positive direction. Furthermore, all of this may bring an entirely new dimension into your relationship.'

The dwarves are now energetically hugging each other. For a moment I thought they were trying to suffocate one another.

Verbal abuse

I am exhausted.

‘All of what you have said may sound good to others,’ I say. ‘But I’m afraid that I simply can no longer handle the ongoing shouting, screaming, criticism and abuse.’

‘I understand, I really understand,’ he says.

The angry dwarf is looking very dejected. I have noticed that the friendly one was talking to the angry one, but I could not make out what he was saying. It was clearly quite hurtful. I wonder if he will recover from whatever it was. The friendly one is now standing away from the other dwarf, more towards the corner, and seems to be slapping its own face. I find this behavior rather strange for a friendly dwarf.

'If your partner is repeatedly critical and abusive, it may be due to a number of things,' the lawyer says.

'Your partner may be abusive by nature. You may be able to assess this by asking yourself whether your partner was abusive from inception.

'However, it may also be that your partner is involved in a physical or spiritual affair with somebody else, or that your partner is in some or other deep turmoil not related to you at all.

'Your partner may wish to break out of the abusive pattern, but may simply not know how to go about it, and may be criticising you out of sheer desperation with these circumstances, unrelated to you.

'The abusiveness may, unbeknown to both of you, relate to your partner's physical health. It may also be related to psychological circumstances, and these may not be purely psychological. The relationship between the psyche and the body is intense. A low blood-sugar level, or low hormonal levels, or lack of adrenaline when needed, may bring on immense fatigue or irritability. It may manifest as anger against you, whilst in fact it has nothing to do with you or with the relationship.

'It may also stem from a subconscious realisation that you have lost your love or respect for your partner, in which event healthy introspection on your part may be of help.

'The most important thing to bear in mind is that repeated criticism and abuse by a partner is mostly unjustified and untrue. When your partner needs to get rid of internal frustration, for whatever reason, you may be the closest and most convenient container available.

‘But always remember that if you were to keep the lid on a container, and somebody then threw rubbish at it, the rubbish would fall on the ground without affecting the container. Instead of becoming a rubbish bin it will remain an uncontaminated container. If the container moves, the rubbish will be left behind.

‘You can do the same with abuse. You can teach yourself to recognise abuse whenever it comes your way. You can decide that it simply is not true. You can also decide to keep the lid on when rubbish is thrown at you, and it will then probably not affect you, or at least affect you to a much lesser extent. And you may even on occasions consider throwing the rubbish back at your partner. At the same time, do not forget to consider the healthy introspection that I have suggested.’

I am rather surprised to hear this advice. Don’t lawyers normally help their clients to obtain court orders to stop abuse? How can he suggest that I also respond with abuse? How could my friend have referred me to this lawyer?

He must have sensed my rebellion. He expands.

‘Bear in mind that it can sometimes be regarded as the ultimate compliment if your partner criticises you, or shouts and screams at you,’ he says. ‘It may be an indication that you are the only person to be trusted with your partner’s emotions or state of ill health. Naturally you have your own limits and values. And naturally you are entitled to draw a line, and put on the lid when required. But your own line and that of another person may be completely different.

‘What is unacceptable verbal abuse to one of your friends may be something you can handle, and what someone else is prepared to accept may be unacceptable verbal abuse to you. Be very careful of the advice of friends in this respect. Believe it or not, even abuse is relative to the people involved.’

He continues on the theme of abuse.

‘Have you ever watched an Italian movie?’ he asks. ‘Then you will know what I am referring to.’

The angry dwarf adopts the stance of an opera singer, and I think I am hearing an excerpt from La Traviata booming from the corner cabinet.

‘But I am not Italian,’ I say.

‘You misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with Italians, and you do not have to be Italian. They naturally also have their own limits. Nobody has a license to be abusive to another. However, none of us are perfect, and sometimes we are just too tired, and something has to give.’

‘I may be able to help you to temporarily handle abuse,’ he says. ‘My children suffered under a most abusive schoolteacher, and I had to make a plan. I taught them an old Afrikaans song about ducklings. I changed the words to:

‘Two little ducklings, together they play
See how the words are sliding away’

‘I taught them to look the teacher straight in the eye during the abusive episode and to silently and repeatedly sing Ducklings in their minds, until the teacher stopped shouting and screaming. They told me they were no longer so affected by the hurtful words.’

‘Verbal abuse can be neutralised in the short term by actively deciding not to take it seriously, and many couples afterwards laugh about an interpersonal (verbally) “abusive” episode. This is what I mean when I refer to Italians.’

‘But we are all different,’ I say. ‘I may be more sensitive than your children.’ (I almost suggested that lawyers cannot have sensitive children, but managed to cut myself short.)

He seems to agree (not with the thoughts about his children, I hope.)

‘Decide for yourself what your limits and values are, and draw your own boundaries,’ he says. ‘Compare your situation to that of an animal lover. Some animal lovers will keep on nursing a dog or a cat until its final, natural demise. Others will be unable to do so, and may ask the vet to put it down. Some will finally terminate their relationship by reason of a certain type of abuse. Others will live with it and laugh about it. It depends on you and your own limits. Not those of others.’

He is now on a roll. This must be his pet subject.

‘For couples Ducklings may not work. For couples it may be better to get it all out in the open, to talk about it, and possibly even scream about it. One cannot deal with what is not in the open. One cannot defend oneself without being accused. One cannot seek forgiveness without confessing. And one cannot grant forgiveness without understanding and knowing what to forgive.’

‘How can you encourage people to behave in an uncivilised manner?’ I ask. ‘Is this not perhaps a little irresponsible?’

‘I don’t think so,’ he says. ‘What is civilisation? Is it clever and civilised to live with pretence and to hide your true self? Why do we sometimes encourage children to behave like pretentious adults? Why are small children so happy and spontaneous? Why are they able to throw tantrums, to cry and to laugh, until one day they behave like some or other pretentious role model, who is in turn trying to behave like another pretentious role model? Why do we not accept that

each child is a perfect fit for him—or herself, and a perfect misfit for anybody else? Why is there such a high divorce rate in the so-called civil societies? Why does civilisation have court cases? Why does civilisation make war? Would it not have been much better if civilised people were to shout and scream and throw tantrums on a daily basis? Perhaps we could have avoided quite a few wars in the process.'

The lawyer seems carried away. Has he ever thought about the rate of murder if civilised norms were to go? I don't think so. And I always thought lawyers were supposed to be civilised. On the other hand, I wonder. What would the statistics on violence be if society had no rules against shouting and screaming and tantrums? And how would these compare to the known statistics in the civilised wars of civilised societies? Perhaps nothing in civilisation is what it seems to be. Perhaps civilisation is per definition not civilised. If this is so, I may have to reconsider the lawyer's theory around polygamy. Is it really my partner's infidelity that made me feel rejected, or is it civilisation's pretence that monogamous relationships are the only acceptable relationships that made me believe that I was being rejected? Doesn't the high divorce rate demonstrate that the civilised monogamous marriages are far from civilised? Perhaps I have no need at all to feel rejected. Perhaps my partner has simply been struggling with the uncivilised structure of monogamous marriages. I shall have to think deep and hard about my own boundaries. But the mere fact that I now realise that I have been good enough all along already helps. Of course, the lawyer did say that I should draw my own line. But I now realise that whilst I do have my own boundaries, it does not mean there is anything wrong with me if my partner has a taste for a few 'extras'. I can quite simply refuse to accept it without taking any blame for it.

I notice that the dwarves are now rolling around on top of the corner cabinet. Which one will be my role model? With a little bit of clay and lots of patience I may be able to make a third

dwarf that looks like me. I relax for a moment and think to myself: Perhaps the third dwarf could be my role model.

As my thoughts wander, I seem to hear Paul Simon's voice singing Call me Al somewhere in the distance, fading away at times:

‘...He says, Why am I soft in the middle now?
...Now that my role-mode is...Gone...gone...’

Paul Simon's voice finally fades away. I see the lawyer sitting across from me. I vaguely remember that we were talking about shouting and screaming, and about pretence. I experience an immense tension between my memory of the soulful singing, and the stark reality of the lawyer's office around me.

‘But what about all the negative consequences of shouting and screaming?’ I ask.

‘I think I can answer you up to a point,’ he says. It strikes me that he is talking softly. Could shouting and screaming also be ‘soft in the middle’?

‘Shouting and screaming (and even apparent verbal abuse) may, strangely enough, have positive consequences. Many couples experience great release and intense feelings of love after a shouting match followed by an apology. But you are of course entitled to your own limits, values and self-respect. And if it doesn't work for you, well, then it doesn't.’

I have the feeling that he has given up on this one. But no; he is looking quite determined. I try to imagine him shouting and screaming. Maybe he is a passionate and romantic person behind his façade of philosophy. Maybe the stress of legal practice sometimes becomes too much for him.

I realise to my surprise that I have, for the first time in months, been focusing on another person's emotions. I want to laugh as I register that I am analysing my lawyer's emotional life. Then I want to cry again.

His voice drones on. He really seems interested in the subject of shouting and screaming. Is it because lawyers may not scream in court?

'Take into account that some psychologists suggest that when somebody is shouting at you, it may in effect be your own emotions that are running through the other person. If it is viewed from this perspective, you cannot be cross if your partner shouts at you. Then you are a single unit, the entire pressure becomes too much, and the entire unit (including you) releases pressure when your partner is screaming.

'The Italians, French and South Americans may possibly shout and scream more easily than members of some other cultures. It may simply mean that they've given themselves permission to get their problems out in the open. It does not mean that they will tolerate abusive behavior. But why should we hold back our emotions and anger when we can let it out, when it is healthy to do so, when it also benefits our partners, and when entire and age-old cultures regard it as being acceptable?'

I wonder to myself. Is he talking to me or is he talking to himself? I never talked about shouting and screaming. Or did I?

'The belief that it harms children when parents shout and scream at each other may be true on occasion, but not always. If your child has never experienced it, he or she may have an enormous fright should it happen in a future relationship. The child may then also become inclined to bottle up everything, which may not support emotionally honest and lasting future relationships.

‘Perhaps it is not so bad to demonstrate to a child that parents can make up and be happy after a shouting match. Perhaps the pretentious and controlled personalities of parents are one of the real causes of the breakdown of their own relationships, and of similar breakdowns in subsequent generations.’

He again seems a little carried away. Then he takes a deep breath, and in contrast with his own philosophy takes back his personal control.

‘The question naturally remains: what are your own limits and values? And even more important, what are the limits, values, and sensitivities of your partner? And how is everything affecting the children? Is it unacceptable abuse, bearing in mind your respective personalities and cultural structures? Is it really just a good relationship squabble with its own benefits? Is it a case of letting off steam, or are you breaking down another person? Can your partner recover? Can the children recover? Are the children showing ongoing behavioral disorders? What is your own definition of an acceptable relationship? What is your partner’s definition?’

‘Remember that your definition need not be based on how your parents, brothers, sisters, or friends acted and reacted. You have formed a new tribe, with new leaders and a new tribal culture.’

To my surprise I notice that the two dwarves have taken the opportunity of my daydreaming interlude a few moments ago to dress up. They must have moved into the dark corner whilst doing so, as I did not see them change clothes. Both are now smartly dressed, and are sitting down at a small oval table. There is a leather briefcase next to the angry one, and a laptop next to the friendly one. To my surprise they are talking seriously, clearly working away at solving some or other problem through discussion. Could it be that these

'uniforms' assisted them to calm down? Could it be that 'pretence' is a positive structure, enabling the dwarves to focus on the true problem, without being distracted by too much emotion? Perhaps the lawyer is totally wrong about shouting and screaming. Or perhaps controlled discussion could be right on some occasions, and shouting and screaming on other occasions? I really do not know what the right answer is. Perhaps there is no answer. Perhaps everything just happens to us, and we cannot shout or scream or talk it right? Perhaps the stars determine everything?

The lawyer is very calm now.

'Cure of relationship disputes does not have to mean change in either you or your partner,' he says. It could mean a better understanding of each other, more acceptance of each other, simple acceptance on your part. It could simply require ongoing communication in whatever form. It may require an emotional explosion to clear all the cobwebs between the two of you. But on occasion it could also mean a necessary final termination of the relationship.'

I interrupt him. 'If shouting and screaming are acceptable, why do lawyers obtain orders to stop it?'

He sighs. 'Of course there are situations where it goes too far. Where it becomes obsessive or addictive or where physical abuse occurs. If the children are showing ongoing behavioral disorders, matters may be getting out of hand, and have to be addressed. Then it may be necessary to obtain a restraining order. Unfortunately there is a downside to these proceedings. Often the parties experience it as having "gone public" on an emotional level, even though these proceedings are normally held in camera (privately and confidentially). Accordingly a psychological point of no return and an ongoing acrimonious relationship frequently follow these proceedings. Perhaps there are common-sense alternatives to restraining orders. Counselling may bring a better end result.'

Another alternative is for the parties simply to take a break, to separate, whether temporarily or permanently. The cycle of tension is often broken by a separation or by acceptance of the inevitable, and it often terminates the abusive behavior without requiring a restraining order. The chances of reconciliation or of obtaining an amicable termination of the relationship and a reasonable subsequent relationship, optimising the lives of those around you such as children and friends, may then be better. But alas, there are cases where a restraining order is the only solution. Sometimes it is what is needed to break the tension.'

A naughty look appears on his face. 'It is also possible to view these legal proceedings as structured episodes of necessary shouting and screaming.'

Sex

'We no longer sleep in the same bed. Is this not a clear indication that our relationship has come to an end?'

I notice that both dwarves are giggling mischievously. They now seem to be best of friends again. What are they up to?

The lawyer looks shy again. Almost similar to the embarrassed look he had on his face when he discussed his fees.

'Much has been written and said about sex, and I am a little scared to go there,' he says. 'But perhaps I have learnt a few things over the years that could be of help.'

'Perhaps sex is the music of the body and the soul. You could think of it like this. The two of you may sometimes favour different music. You may prefer tender classical music and your partner may prefer wild rock music, or the other way round.'

The friendly dwarf is now playing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on the delicate violin. He first plays sensitively, and then works up to a dramatic silent crescendo. He bows theatrically. To my surprise the angry dwarf was listening attentively, clearly enjoying the sensitive music. To me he did not look like a classical music type of dwarf.

The friendly dwarf has bent almost double. As he slowly comes upright, the angry dwarf adopts the stance of a rock star. He lifts his right arm in classic Jagger style, pointing with his hand (into nothing or into the future?). As he does so his entire body goes into rhythmic movement, pelvis gyrating, first slowly and then faster. The voice of Michael Bublé silently echoes 'Fever!' across the room. Where did it come from?

I immediately look at the lawyer, who must have been deafened by Bublé's opening phrases. But he has clearly heard nothing, and just keeps on talking.

'Even music lovers go through periods when they do not listen to music. At the same time I am sure that both of you sometimes listen to each other's favourite music.

'Perhaps you need to find out and talk more about each other's 'musical' preferences.

'The triggers in sex are mostly not logical. The simplest of adjustments may revive your sex life. Silly as it may sound, a particular fragrance in perfume or after-shave lotion, an early hint of sex, or a particular type of lingerie or bedclothes, may make a great difference.'

Out of the corner of my eye I notice that both dwarves are now in stitches. Their giggling has dwarfed the music, and I can now barely hear it. To my shock I notice that they are performing ridiculous, exaggerated, erotic movements, clearly mocking the lawyer, who is still talking seriously and with intensity. Fortunately they have moved towards the dark corner. I am starting to feel most embarrassed, and hope he has not noticed it. My mind wanders back to our sexual drought.

'I think there is a complete lack of sexual attraction. A friend once told me that this "antenna" is the best measure of a final emotional breakdown.'

The lawyer shakes his head, but also seems to look a bit confused. 'There may be something wrong with your friend's antenna' he says, looking quite vacant again.

In my mind's eye I suddenly picture my friend with a waving and extending chrome antenna. I want to laugh out loud and have to bite on my teeth. My momentary mirth swings to a feeling of anger towards the man sitting across me. He is making a mockery of my misery, I think to myself. Then I realise with guarded relief that the humorous vision had come from me, and that he seems to be dead serious.

'A music system will not play without electrical current,' he says. 'Your sex life could also be depressed as a result of hormonal levels that may be too low or in imbalance, or because either of you are otherwise not healthy, or because either of you are simply depressed. If you have difficulties in your sex life you should immediately consult a medical doctor, and if needs be, suggest diplomatically that your partner does the same. Consider asking for a referral to a specialist physician. Find out about the effects on your sex life of any medication either of you or your partner may be taking. Unbeknown to you, either of you may have been reducing your sexual desire through prescribed or other medication.'

'Healthy exercise, a mere short walk after work each day, could contribute to your sex life and your relationship.'

I again see movement in the corner. The angry dwarf is furiously marching up and down the top of the corner cabinet, using the short pencil as a walking stick. The friendly one is still giggling away. The lawyer is looking as serious (and as confused) as before. I again fear that I may start laughing. What is wrong with me?

The lawyer pretends to be oblivious to the show business on the corner cabinet. For a man who dislikes pretence, he is quite good at hiding his own discomfort. Or has he really not noticed the performance? I wonder if he is shortsighted.

‘The one may prefer lace, and the other may prefer silk, or jeans, or boots, or whatever. Have you ever talked about these ‘silly’ things? Perhaps you should. Find out, and try to please, subject to your own norms and limitations.

‘Also think about creating the right opportunities. But do not stop with thinking. Your partner cannot read your mind. You could send out powerful signals by going into action, by giving subtle clues, or whatever. Ask questions. Find out what triggers your partner. Remember that sexual problems and dysfunction are sometimes rooted in rejection fears. By taking open action towards sex, you reassure your partner that there will not be rejection. By taking action a few hours or even days in advance, you trigger the subconscious and allow it to wander around in sexual thoughts for a while, with potentially exciting results.’

Perhaps he has a point after all. The friendly dwarf is now lighting a romantic candle in the dark corner behind them. The entire atmosphere in the corner has changed. In the flickering shadows the dwarves are now looking quite different, almost eerie. Both seem quite excited about this new experience.

‘If there are reasons why you are unable to have sex, try to explain the situation to your partner. Tell your partner in so many words that “tonight I am so exhausted” (or whatever the specific reason is) “that I cannot have sex, but let’s make a special plan for tomorrow night,” rather than simply hint subtly that you don’t want sex.

‘If you only hint, if you do not explain and if you do not make it clear that you still want sex tomorrow night, your partner

might interpret it as rejection, and may not register that there is a specific unrelated reason.

‘The fact that your partner’s reactions may appear illogical is not important. Sex relates to our basic and instinctive subconscious, where the rational is not important. It also relates most directly to our hormonal levels. It is quite logical to be both logical and illogical about sex.’

(Can you believe it? He does understand something about it after all. Perhaps he is just very shy behind that façade of confidence?)

‘If you think hard enough you may remember how it worked originally. If you combine this by talking about your “silly” likes and dislikes, and by demonstrating that you are taking steps towards sex and looking forward to having sex, you may rediscover the recipe.’

(He is still talking. Do lawyers really believe that words can cure everything? What about the romance? The dwarves clearly understand more about it than the lawyer. Instead of rationalising everything, he should have watched the friendly one light the candle.)

I notice that the dwarves are still making funny movements. I cannot quite make out what they are doing, and pretend not to see them. They are trying hard to break my concentration. I should rather ignore them altogether. They are enjoying the attention too much right now.

‘Sex brings about physical relaxation and stress relief that may be better than any tranquiliser or sleeping tablet, or than going to gym or even to a psychologist day after day.’

‘Within an intimate relationship apparent perversity may not be what it seems. It may simply be an exciting fictitious

adventure, with no bearing on reality or on society, and with no negative consequences.'

My mind wanders, and our eyes meet. The vacant look is gone, and I know for sure that he has read my thoughts.

He suddenly smiles. 'One of the greatest comedians in this country says there is no such thing as dirty language. He maintains that any word is a mere collection of different sounds, and it only becomes dirty because some fool decided that the particular collection is dirty, thus depriving others from the often enjoyable utterance of the particular sound collection.

Our eyes have lost contact, and I notice that he is in a different world. 'I wonder what would happen if I should use the Dutch word for cats towards some of my colleagues in our Roman-Dutch courts,' he mutters to himself.

This man is really a little strange. On the other hand, it is an interesting theory. My partner and I have both been putting a number of sound collections to good use over the past few weeks. On occasions it has been rather enjoyable. And a few of these have already lost their previous unacceptable connotations.

But his priorities are little upside down. How can you have sex without romance? Or perhaps he is right. Perhaps different people prefer different spices? Why can't I enjoy any word as I please? Who has the right to ban my laughter around a particular collection of sounds? And why can't I enjoy a certain type of fantasy? Who decided this? Who brainwashed

(Is he afraid of me? Or is he afraid of himself? I wonder what my parents and all these teachers did behind closed doors And who told them what is right and what is wrong in bed? And who in turn told whoever had told them?)

'Never forget that within your own intimate relationships you have complete and boundless freedom from society's rules and pretences, limited only by your own personal limits and sensitivities, and those of your partner. Sex without romance and the excitement of exploring the unknown territories of the soul, may be like music without any contrast.'

(Funny. I never thought that people that fantasise are exploring territories of the soul. A rather explicit scene flashes through my mind. I suppose I could call it a fantasy, or I could call it kinky. If I use the one collection of sounds it could be negative, and if I use the other collection, it is positive)

The two dwarves have stopped their exaggerated erotic movements and are now both pretending to be quite angelic, but with their little mouths pouting. The angry one is somewhat less successful in this pretence.

16

Religion

My mind wanders and for some or other reason it turns to religion.

‘What you have said may make sense, but we all have our own principles and beliefs. What about religion?’

The lawyer becomes very intense. ‘I am so glad you have asked this question,’ he says.

I wonder to myself, are dwarves religious?

‘In essence I do not think all of this has anything to do with current law, or even current religious ceremonies. Our current

laws did not exist a thousand years ago, nor did our ceremonies. Nor, for that matter, did our churches exist in their present form.

‘For example, historic religious prohibition of divorce could never have meant you should not go to the local court or use the current divorce laws, as the local court and these laws quite simply did not exist when these prohibitions were first instituted. They must have had something else in mind, something of deeper and universal significance. They possibly intended positively that one should love one’s partner, and that one should not terminate the true relationship, in other words the fulfilling love relationship.

‘However, this sometimes happens long before anybody has seen a lawyer. So, in some cases, the true termination has been finally concluded long before a lawyer is consulted. In other instances the true termination is not concluded with the legal termination, and the true relationship remains, and carries on thereafter, sometimes with extra bliss.

‘We must look at your own situation, understanding, and limits. And we must look deeper than the surface, the law, and even the church. We must look at the true essence of things in terms of your own experience, values, definitions, and requirements.

‘Perhaps the true answer is that ongoing intimate relationships are special ongoing bonds with many ups and downs, and that these are not legal issues. If this relationship still exists, despite its ups and downs, you are still within it. If it does not, what you are frightened of may already have occurred. Then you cannot “sin” through confirming the termination in a firm and final manner. What you feel anxious and guilty about may already be behind you, not in front of you. You may then already have become “divorced” or you may then already have finally split up, in the true essence of things.

‘The real question is therefore not: “Should I finally terminate?” but rather: “Have we already finally terminated, and, if so, can we and do we both want to re-enter into a new relationship?”’

‘Insofar as I am aware, there has never been a religious commandment that one should “re-marry,” or re-enter into any similar relationship. If therefore you do not do so, you are probably not sinning.

‘However, do not forget that the ordinary laws of physical science do not apply in the emotional life. Commitment creates positive energy out of absolutely nothing. Any artist will tell you that after he made a decision to create a work of art (sometimes without realising it), energy and the work of art followed. Any businessman will tell you that the passion for his project grew tremendously after he made the decision to embark on the project.

‘But if either of you decide not to make the commitment, or if either is unable to do so for whatever reason, you may not have to terminate anything. What you fear may already be behind you, not in front of you.’

The lawyer's explanation echoes with distorted feedback, much like a badly-tuned sound system.

Can it be true that our solemn promises to each other were mere meaningless rituals?

Baroque music plays softly in the background, and I recognise Mendelssohn's Wedding March. The facial expressions of both dwarves have changed to ethereal happiness. Both are floating above the corner cabinet in timeless weightlessness.

My focus distorts, and I have difficulty seeing the outlines of the dwarves. Are they still floating? I seem to hear Patsy Cline singing

Crazy. Are the dwarves harmonising with her? The words “I’m crazy for trying and crazy for crying and I’m crazy for loving you” hang in air, just like the dwarves did a few seconds ago.

Scenes of priests in sacred rituals, of mad artists, nutty scientists, crazy composers, poets talking to themselves, mumbling rabbis and chanting imams race through my mind in bizarre succession. The image of an ancient shaman dancing for rain takes over. The shaman disappears, and a hyperactive rock singer enters the picture. The rock singer makes way for an evangelist who runs up and down in evangelical fervour, much like the rock singer. A starry-eyed couple solemnly taking vows follow him.

Are they all crazy?

Perhaps they are all dreaming that something exists out there when it doesn’t.

Or perhaps the lawyer is the crazy one. Perhaps he is missing something that is out there. Wherever ‘there’ may be.

The dwarves come back into focus. I notice that their little feet are now touching the corner cabinet, and I feel depressed.

Perhaps a state of trance is needed to open the gateways of the Universe, to gain access to the perfect energy out there. Perhaps this is why mad musicians discover fragments of perfect beauty, existence and knowledge denied to others. Perhaps ritual can bring on a trance. Perhaps the only true logic is to be found in the rejection of logic.

Children

‘What about the children?’

He closes his eyes, resting his chin in both hands. Then he looks up. His facial expression has changed. He looks extremely serious.

I look at the corner cabinet and notice that the two little dwarves have disappeared. I experience an immediate sadness. For some or other reason I fear they will never return. I really hope I am wrong. But perhaps it is better. They seem to have taken over my mind. I still need to get important advice. Perhaps he will now turn to more practical issues. After all, I am paying for his time, regardless of whether he believes that time exists. Come to think of it, it is quite convenient for a lawyer to have a watch without a battery, and to deny the existence of time.

He talks methodically.

‘Children are most important in these situations.

‘I have often heard people, including experts, suggest that a couple should not stay together merely for the sake of the children. These statements are sometimes correct, but not always. It may be highly dangerous to adopt these statements without careful consideration of your own circumstances.

‘Couples stay together for a variety of reasons. Doing so for the sake of the children may be one of a number of reasons for staying together. You may not even recognize the other reasons. Taken together, this reason (staying together for the sake of the children) and the other reasons (which you may not even register) may constitute a good, solid, overall motivation. Over time the relationship may improve and even renew itself altogether. And of course this will be the best outcome for all concerned, especially the children.’

‘But how can we remain together if there is no love left?’ I ask.

He thinks carefully, then answers.

‘A wise man once told me there is no such thing as a single motivation in anything that we do. The human mind is simply too complex. Another wise man told me, shortly after I myself got married, that only if I were to ban the words divorce and final breakdown from my vocabulary, could I make my relationship work. Let me tell you a story.

‘Once upon a time a young man and a young woman were shipwrecked on an island. They did not know each other, and they had nothing in common. They had nowhere else to go, and there were no other people on the island. They did not like each other at first. They were forced to live on the island, and to gather food together. They did not understand each other’s language and were unable to talk. And they were unable to leave. They could not divorce or split up. The words

divorce and splitting up did not form part of the island vocabulary. One night they fell in love, and they lived happily ever after.'

I bite my tongue just in time. I almost said: 'What about the cannibals?' For some or other reason, I realise that it may be better not to talk about cannibals right now.

'Who knows what will happen if you both accept that you are simply unable to cross this ocean,' he says. 'A firm and joint decision to stay together for the sake of the children may release tremendous energy. It could be the very catalyst both of you need to resolve your problems.'

He reflects for a moment, then continues.

'However, it is sometimes "written in the stars" that you cannot stay together. This may be the case where the children show ongoing behavioral disorders related to your relationship, and where these patterns deteriorate, or simply do not improve. But remember that a perfect environment for children is seldom achieved, that life is full of knocks, and that many successful and balanced people were strengthened by traumatic struggles.

'Family therapy may solve the behavioral problems, and therapy by the entire family may be a much lighter burden, and of much shorter duration, than the consequence of permanently losing family life.

'If it does turn out that a termination of the relationship can not be avoided, it is really important that we remove a few of the myths around the burden of the children, and that we help you to optimise your children's circumstances as soon as possible.

'Believe it or not, there is such a thing as a successful termination of an ongoing, intimate relationship. If one can

see it through with a minimum of damage to the children, one has achieved something to be very proud of.

‘A parent who changes ongoing unhappiness to ongoing happiness, in whatever way (and sometimes even through the final termination of the relationship between the parents), may thus reveal the inherent potential to become happy that most of us carry within ourselves. It may help the child one day to be assertive instead of accepting ongoing abuse and battering. And it may even help to save the future relationships of the child, or, if the child cannot achieve that, to help the child to get through a necessary termination of a future relationship.

‘The suggestion that the non-custodian parent will lose the child is seldom true. Most children leave home at some or other stage. While this may be a painful exercise for parents, few would believe they are losing their children in the process. The children will only be lost if the personal contact and relationship with them is destroyed. And this may well depend only on you.

‘In many of these matters optimal and relaxed arrangements concerning the children can soon be implemented. Many parents even find that their relationships with the children improve dramatically, and that they spend more quality time with them afterwards.

Your children may well have friends with parents who are no longer together, and may be more familiar with the situation than you realise. If you are firm with them, and if you and your partner do not cry on their little shoulders, they may recover much sooner than you expect.

‘An objective statistical study may possibly (though not necessarily) find an equal number of unhappy pairs of eyes in the average school among those children whose parents are

still together, compared with those whose parents have terminated their relationship.

'It may be the unhappiness, the stress, the anxiety, the uncertainty about the future, concern about the future of the parent, the feeling of rejection, the playing off of children between parents, the sometimes cruel request that the child should choose between parents, and negative legal disputes that add to the pain and the scars of the children.

'Children are inclined to grieve for their parents. Parents contribute to this by dramatising their own grief and by using (abusing) the child as a kind of therapist or, even worse, as a tool to punish the other parent. This is simply not fair. The child should not have to carry the parent's burden. It is not the child's relationship issue. The children should also not be used as a therapist to either parent.

'Do not forget that children have an amazing ability to adapt. And watch out for manipulation by your own children. Sometimes they instinctively exploit your sympathy, and even create additional conflict between you and your partner, for personal gain. A mere glance at street children reveals the incredible resilience and reserves of small children in unhappy circumstances, and also their massive and instinctive manipulative potential.

'Children can become extremely confused when they are exposed to relationship trauma. They sometimes find it extremely difficult to understand that both parents are suffering in different ways, regardless of the apparent cause of the unhappiness, and that the apparent 'cause' is often a consequence of a multitude of circumstances. They may sometimes be inclined to empathise with the parent who demonstrates pain and innocence, and may develop extremely negative feelings towards the other parent.

‘The child must be taught to fully forgive both parents. This can only be achieved with complete honesty, and by explaining to the child that it is not necessary to declare either parent guilty, that it is really the relationship that does not work, that it happens to the very best of people (much like the best of children would sometimes over time change their friends), that this does not mean that a particular parent has to be blamed, that both parents would have preferred it different, and that both are finding it equally difficult and painful.

‘You should never forget that to have a positive self-image, your child needs a positive parent image in respect of both parents. If you were to destroy your partner’s parent image with your child, you may be abusing and molesting your own child. This may be the case regardless of whether your partner was, in your own view, the cause of the unhappiness. This form of child abuse can be as bad as the sexual molestation of a child. Where there is conduct in your partner that is unacceptable, you should consider identifying the relevant conduct as unacceptable, without destroying your partner’s entire image. The best may be to explain that we all have shortcomings, and that the particular conduct is the shortcoming of your partner, in the same way as your child has other shortcomings.

‘Never suggest to your child that your partner was the cause of the breakdown. Quite apart from the fact that it will probably not be true (breakdowns of relationships happen for a multitude of reasons, and the ultimate cause is often a consequence of prior factors), it will in effect require the child to choose between parents.

‘Seriously consider solving custody issues with the assistance of an independent psychologist or an independent mediator. Such a mediator can also be of great assistance in solving the entire dispute, as both parties are normally more inclined to trust an independent mediator than opposing lawyers. If the

child is reassured about your ability to survive and to overcome your own grief, the child feels better and recovers sooner. If the child realises that he or she is not a cause of the breakdown, that he or she is not being rejected, that he or she does not have to make any choices between parents, and that both parents will ultimately be happy and content, the entire experience will be softer and easier for the child.'

I experience a deep guilt.

'I am feeling quite guilty about the children,' I say. 'I think I have made some terrible mistakes.'

He sighs. 'Haven't we all?' he says. 'I also suffer from feelings of guilt. But I was fortunate to have an opportunity to raise this with a clinical psychologist. He showed me that I was comparing myself to some or other non-existent role model that I should rather accept my past mistakes as confirmation that I have never been perfect, forgive myself and focus on avoiding similar occurrences. I clearly remember him saying: "You are not God. Would it not be rather arrogant to compare yourself to God?"

'This advice brought immense relief, and afterwards I felt much better. I eventually decided that all parents should from time to time sincerely apologise to their children. I have done so to my own children (and still have to do so from time to time), and the relationship between us is very good. I would also like to believe that my children realise, as a result of everything, that I am far from perfect, and that this realisation will help with their own self-acceptance throughout life.'

The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the emotional truth?

'I do not know how to explain it, but it is as though my partner does not hear what I am saying, and as though I do not hear what my partner says. How do I deal with it?'

'You may be absolutely right,' he says. 'It may be that you are both suffering from one of the worst diseases of our time. In South Africa we still have shared telephone lines in some distant farming areas. I call this disease 'plaaslyn-siekte' (farm telephone syndrome). We all suffer from it from time to time. It may be that the two of you are like four people talking simultaneously on one shared telephone line.'

Each of you may be saying one thing with his or her mouth, and another with his or her souls. Each of you may therefore be hearing as many as four voices talking simultaneously, without realising it. This could be quite confusing.

'We fall into this trap because we tend to forget that our hidden feelings are also 'talking' all the time, and that those we talk to are also "hearing" our hidden feelings all the time.

'The world of the unconscious and our feelings are as real as the physical world. Because we cannot see this world we often prefer to deny it. In our attempt to be rational, realistic, diplomatic, and cultured, we, often out of fear, deny the existence and the "loud" silent voices of our feelings.

'Many of these fears may be completely unfounded. Have you ever wondered why most of us like spontaneous people? Is it not perhaps because we can hear clearly what they are saying? Is it not because they do not talk over crossed lines? Is it not because it is simply easier and more relaxing to listen to them? Is it not because they are quite simply emotionally honest?'

'You may have a point,' I say. 'But my problem is that I am an introvert. It is not so easy to change one's personality.'

'You are absolutely right,' he responds. 'In fact, it is mostly impossible to change one's personality. But there is a great difference between changing your personality, and being emotionally honest.

'Emotional honesty, like other forms of honesty, starts with the decision to be honest and the decision not to allow the fear of adverse consequences to override your honesty.

'Most of us have lied on occasion. And most of us would concede that when we lied we did so because we feared the consequences of the truth. And most of us have on occasion

experienced the tremendous relief of facing up to the truth, and then finding that we were able to handle the consequences. In fact, can you remember a single occasion when you came out with the truth and could not handle the consequences?

'The same applies to emotional honesty. We are not emotionally dishonest because we are introverts or diplomats. We are emotionally dishonest because we are afraid. The best approach may be to ask yourself: what is the worst that can happen? To remain in the enduring pain of unhappiness, or to face up to the temporary pain of dealing with my partner's responses to my emotional honesty?

'You may be pleasantly surprised by your partner's responses. Think of the crossed telephone line and the irritation when you cannot hear what the caller is saying. Then think of the feeling of relief and relaxation when the voice of the caller suddenly comes through loud and clear. Give it a try. Perhaps your partner will not hear immediately. Perhaps your partner will not immediately believe what you are saying. Your partner may even state in so many words: "I cannot believe what I'm hearing!" So what? The worst that can happen is that the true problem gets out in the open, and that you will both be given an opportunity to adjust to it. This adjustment may be a termination of the relationship, or reconciliation. But would it not be better to deal with the problem rather than to pretend it is not there?

'Would it not be better to say how you feel, and to hear how your partner feels, rather than to live together in separation? And is there not perhaps a distinct possibility that both of you will experience tremendous relief when the line gets clear, and that this will inject new and positive energy into your relationship? And will it not be better for the children if the ongoing tension is broken?'

He reflects for a moment. 'Perhaps I should qualify everything. Perhaps I am wrong. Nothing is ever absolute. Consider saying to yourself: "Let me speak the truth, the emotional truth, and nothing but the emotional truth. Let me only consider withholding it to prevent hurt to another, and certainly not if it is being withheld to continue with dishonesty. If I do withhold it, let me take back my honesty by finally and decisively removing the cause of my dishonesty."' "

19

Everything is going wrong

'It feels as though everything is going wrong. Our relationship is non-existent, our finances are in a terrible state, I had a motor vehicle accident, and one of our children is on drugs. I do not know what will happen next.'

'I'm really sorry to hear about all of this,' he says. 'I do not know what to say to you. All I can do is to offer my genuine sympathy and understanding. I know it is not easy.'

'I would like to try and help a little bit by pointing out that these occurrences may not be related. It may feel like a pattern, but that may not be the case.'

'When we walk down life's path we sometimes get hurt repeatedly, and in short succession. In our minds we tend to link up these episodes, and we consequently sometimes artificially convince ourselves that they are related, even when this is not at all the case. We forget that we also have long periods when things go well. These better times are likely to return. I think there may be a beautiful waterfall, a lovely sunset, and a protective shady tree somewhere down your path. But I understand that right now you cannot see it, and that it is really difficult for you at present. It may help if you make a list of the smallest things that work for you every day, just to help you to understand everything a little better.'

20

A few practical questions

My mind drifts back to my realities.

‘I have listened to you,’ I say. ‘I have heard a lot and I have to go and think about it all. But I have few practical questions.’

‘Of course. That is why you are here. Go ahead.’

‘Will I lose my home?’

‘No. You will not lose your home. Though you may possibly lose the house that you are living in. It may simply not be affordable to keep the house if the relationship should finally come to an end. But bear in mind that this may, in a strange way, have a positive effect. It may be easier to start a new chapter in a different environment. And you may find that a smaller house and smaller plot may be cosier, with much more warmth. Your neighbours may be closer, and may be friendlier. You may be closer to the children’s schools. You may be able to decorate it quite cheaply to your own personal taste and requirements. It may be more of a home than the house you are living in right now. Perhaps you should drive around and do some “window shopping” to visualise what an alternative smaller residence may look like. Most of us fear the unknown. Once you have a better idea, your anxieties may lift considerably, and you will be able to make better decisions.’

‘I hear you. But I am also concerned about other practical issues. What will happen if I take up employment or change my employment to achieve a personal income or a better personal income? Will it not have a negative impact on alimony issues?’

‘I think you must form a bird’s-eye view,’ he says. ‘Might it not be better to use extra income from an appreciative employer to contribute to the required needs, than to have ongoing financial issues with a disgruntled ex-partner? And

might it not be very good for you to get into circulation in the employment market, to meet new people, and to form new friendships and associations?’

‘Should I not hide away some of my assets?’

‘Certainly not. They are bound to be uncovered in the event of legal proceedings. Think again about the subconscious communication between people. The reality is that people cannot successfully lie to each other. Your partner may not know exactly what you are lying about, but will sense it; and it will simply result in ongoing distrust, seemingly without good reason, but in reality because your subconscious is screaming out the truth. This distrust will in all likelihood bring on legal conflict, and the additional legal costs may absorb all the “benefits” of hiding assets. Furthermore, if you lie about your assets, you will, instead of walking over to a positive phase in your life, lock yourself up in an emotional prison for the rest of your life. When we lie we betray ourselves more than we betray others. The personal emotional imprisonment that follows dishonesty is frequently worse than the possible adverse financial consequences arising from honesty.’

‘What about hiding an affair?’

‘The same applies. You will lock yourself up in your own mind, forever. Face up to it. Deal with it. Resolve it one way or another. Make yourself honest, either by giving it up, or by getting it out in the open.’

‘I see, I see. But tell me, what will happen if either of us were to leave, and to reside separately. Will the judge not see it as desertion?’

‘I have already explained that these matters are mostly settled out of court. It is quite unlikely that a judge will ever have to pass judgment on either of you. In any event, once you have consulted a lawyer, no judge is likely to hold it against you

should you decide to leave or, for that matter, should you from then onwards form or maintain a relationship with a third party. And the same goes for your partner. The judge will most probably regard it as a consequence and not a cause of the breakdown, and will therefore probably regard it as being of little or no relevance.

‘However, you need to ask yourself whether you really want to terminate the relationship, and you need to consider the position of the children before upping and leaving. You should not make hasty decisions. If you were to leave them in the care of your partner, or should you not make proper arrangements, or should you disorientate them unnecessarily, it might create the wrong impression that you have abandoned them or that you are not taking proper care of them. Legally you may also need the consent of your partner before relocating minor children.

‘You also need to bear in mind that in practice it can be difficult to sort out household goods once you have taken up separate residences. It would therefore be best to come to an agreement in respect of the children and the household goods before you take up separate residences.

‘The most important aspect to bear in mind in regard to living away from your partner is that you may possibly run the risk of publicly and emotionally confirming a final breakdown by leaving, and may then find it most difficult to restore your previous home. The decision should therefore not be taken lightly or hastily.

‘On the other hand, distance, rest and a separation may help a couple again to realise that they love each other and wish to be together. Follow your instincts in this regard. But wait for very clear guidance from your instincts before you take this step.’

21

Money, money, money

‘What do I do about money?’

He smiles.

I suddenly hear the words of the Abba song:

‘Money money money...
...In a rich man’s world...’

It cannot be the dwarves. Or could it?

‘I think it would help if you were to get a better understanding of how you are spending your money. I shall provide you with an example of a family budget, which you can use to work out fairly accurately how you and your partner are spending your money, and how much each of the family members costs on a monthly basis. I shall also provide you with an example of a balance sheet which you can put to similar use.

'The financial clarity could help you and your partner to understand your own finances better, to make adjustments where required, and to resolve financial disputes. If you were to sit down with your partner and agree on the figures (you can compromise in respect of each separate item by writing down your and your partner's suggestions, and then agreeing on a reasonable figure in between), it may resolve many disputes and help you to understand each other better.

'Remember that there are always two ways of finding the extra money you need. The one is to reduce your expenses. The other is to increase your income.

'Take a weekend off and think of creative ways of making money. Focus on what you like to do, and on your own natural talents. Focus on starting in a very small way, and doing one thing at a time. Then, just do it.

'It may be the start of a new small business or a new career, and may become a most rewarding exercise.

'It could also become a fresh and positive communication point between you and your partner, and improve your own self-esteem.

'Do not dwell on negatives or on becoming wealthy. Money has no inherent value. It is, quite simply, a tool like a pair of pliers. People who die with too much surplus funds have not budgeted very well. They can do nothing with the surplus funds, and have clearly been very bad financiers. The sad thing is that this applies to most middle-class and upper-class people in Western society. What a tragedy. Think of how they could have enjoyed the time spent on gathering funds they could never use.

'Instead of dreaming about becoming wealthy, rather focus on your own plans, and on putting them together in a small way, bit by bit in a solid and honest manner.

'Remember that very wealthy people are not necessarily happy. Indeed, many financial role models are unhappy people. The fact that some of them can never have enough may simply demonstrate their frantic insecurity over many years. At the same time there are many wealthy people who become wealthy because they are creative and energetic, who build businesses because they have a passion for something, who enjoy creating employment and better lifestyles for themselves and for others.

'Truly successful people are those who are in harmony with themselves and others, including their customers, and who use their wealth to help others. If you focus only on enriching yourself or your own family, you will bring too much stress into your life. This may affect you so negatively that you may again lose all the wealth through illness or premature death.

'Make it your goal to live in harmony with the Universe, and surround yourself with people who are good for you. But remember that these people will also have their difficult days and difficult times. Your partner may be a very good person who is simply currently in a difficult phase.

'If you focus on the "soul" of your enterprise or career, and apply good common sense principles, the money will probably follow by itself.'

Will I ever be happy again?

I feel emotional all over again, and very tired. He pushes a box of oversized tissues across the table.

'Can I organise another cup of tea, or perhaps a glass of water?' he asks.

I motion to get up, but take a tissue, attempting to compose myself. 'Just a glass of water please.'

He orders a glass of water on his telephone, and then he looks up.

'I think I understand,' he says.

I manage to compose myself. 'Tell me, will I ever be happy again?'

He now appears relaxed and very confident.

'You know, lawyers are very scared to give specific answers or to guarantee results. However, I really and firmly believe that you will be happy again. The most important reason why I am

'The decision may not be clear to you or to me in terms of proceeding or reconciliation. But the one clear decision you have made is to change the unhappiness.

'That is why I really and firmly believe that you are going to be happy, whatever your final decision may be. I say this with absolute confidence, having seen people like you, day after day and year after year.'

23

Six important questions

are prepared to change your definition. Only then decide whether you can re-enter the relationship and remain in the relationship

'Then there is a fourth question: "Does this person want to re-enter into an ongoing honest relationship with me?" When asking this question, you must not be disheartened by your current situation. It may change, and you should also give your partner a lot of time.

'Once you've answered this question, you must ask a fifth question: "Can this person re-enter into an ongoing honest relationship with me?" But when asking this question never ever forget that what may appear impossible today may be possible tomorrow, and that intimacy is also possible without sex.

'Then there is a sixth and final question, regardless of all your answers to the previous questions: "Should I, for my own sake or for the sake of another person (or people), for example my partner or the children, or because I have made a vow, or because I am prepared to carry on caring for my partner regardless of negative circumstances, remain in this relationship?" Only you can answer this question.'

Keeping yourself busy with masterful inactivity

I feel totally confused. I have heard so much. Nothing seems to make sense. The man across me is a total stranger. I have been feeling calm at times, but my mind is now once more in turmoil.

I look at him. 'I'm very sorry. I think you are confused and you have now also confused me. Right now nothing seems to make any sense. You are contradicting yourself all the time. I cannot find a logical answer. I don't know what to do.'

He smiles. 'Logic?' he says. 'Perhaps there is no such thing as logic. It may be our dismal attempt to trick ourselves into believing that we understand what we will never understand. Perhaps logic is just an intellectual drug.'

‘But I have to consider everything. So much is at stake. I cannot act on impulse.’

‘Why not? Life is not logical. Don’t try and reason things out. Rather wait and give yourself time. Rather trust your instincts. They are far more intelligent than the logical mind, and will provide you with a clear answer when required.’

‘I once had the misfortune of steering a 50-foot yacht onto a rock. Fortunately a big swell lifted us off immediately afterwards. I told the skipper-owner I hadn’t been sure whether I could go so close to the land, but that two experienced yachtsmen who were sitting on deck told me it would be fine. The skipper-owner looked at me in amazement and said: “When you are at sea you must trust your own instincts. When you are not sure, you must do absolutely nothing.”’

‘A wise client, who had spent a lifetime taking important decisions in the medical profession, echoed this when, a few years later, he suggested to me: “Let’s keep ourselves busy with masterful inactivity until we know the right answer.” Always remember this advice. But also bear in mind that ongoing indecision can drain you and your partner emotionally, and may be harmful to the children. At some or other stage you may have to make up your minds, firm up, put the negatives behind you, and take a direction.’

The river, the rapids, the sun and the bushes

'Before you go, I would like to tell you that I really understand how you feel. It is like being in a cold-water stream for too long. It is also a bit like drifting along in a river that runs too fast. The rapids are sometimes so frequent that you are simply swept along and cannot get out.

'Do you remember when you were a child and spent the entire day in the swimming pool, until you were blue and numb with cold?

'But do you also remember how you would eventually get out of the water and lie in the sun until the warmth slowly spread through your entire being? Sometimes the slabs next to the pool warmed you from underneath, and the late afternoon sun from above, until those velvet and mellow feelings finally returned.

'You know, even a fast river makes turns. And you know, where a river turns it is often a bit slower and shallower. Then it becomes possible to get hold of a friendly bush and to pull oneself out onto the riverbank. Sometimes only half your body is on the riverbank, and the rest is still in the river. But

the sun warms you, and that feeling of numbness gradually leaves your body.

‘As you feel better the strength returns to you. Only then you can decide, either to pull yourself out of the river or to wade back and to swim on in the same river.

‘Do not forget that the dry land outside a river can be as unpleasant as the cold water. And do not forget that the temperature of the water may well improve. Give yourself enough time, and consider carefully before deciding that the river is too cold. It may be a mere transient situation that may look completely different once you have rested awhile, or once some or other intervening factor has been terminated.

‘Your instincts will clearly tell you whether you should wade back into your river, or whether you should leave the water. However, you will only know once you have been pulled out of the river at least half way, once the sun has had sufficient time and opportunity to warm you.

‘The coldness of the water may not be real. When the sun is shining or after you have done some exercise, you might easily wade back into the same river and experience no cold at all. But on a colder day the very same water may feel ice cold. Make sure that it is not perhaps a depression within you or circumstances outside the relationship that makes the water feel cold. Once your depression has lifted or circumstances have changed, the water may become perfect again.

‘There are many friendly bushes alongside the river of life. They come in the form of a friend, a pastor, counsellor, therapist, a medical doctor, a lawyer and others. Anyone who is prepared to listen.

'Allow them to pull you out of the cold rapids. Then allow your strength to return until you can make the right decision. Then get out of the river or swim on in the same river.'

26

Let's stand on the moon

'Why don't we stand on the moon and look at life over a million years. Life may be a bit like a book, or the seasons of nature. It does not simply run from page one to the end without interruption. Or from January to December without changes. Life, like a book and like nature, normally runs from chapter to chapter, from season to season.

'Firstly there are nine months in your mother's womb. Then you are a toddler. Then you are at pre-school. Then primary

school, followed by high school. Then post-school. Then the first job. Then the second. Eventually retirement. Or summer, autumn, winter and spring. And then summer again.

‘There’s nothing abnormal about going through the chapters of life. There’s nothing abnormal about being in a crisis. There is, strangely enough, nothing abnormal about being within an unhappy relationship on occasion. Or about changing jobs. Or even about the breakdown of a relationship. Or about re-entering into a relationship with the same person, or perhaps eventually another person. Or about remaining independent.

‘Look at the trees. They’re changing all the time. Look at people. They change their jobs. These are also relationships. Nobody thinks there is anything wrong with you when you become unhappy in a job. Or with a tree when the colour of its leaves changes. Or when the same tree sprouts new leaves.

‘It happens to all of us. You are perfectly normal. You will survive.

‘There are solutions to most problems. You must just find the right solution for you. It could be either a termination of the relationship or reconciliation. Think about it. Trust your instincts. Allow the bushes to support you. Allow the sun to warm you. Give yourself time. Throw away negativity and accept the velvet feelings back into your life. Sometimes one becomes so numb one forgets what it is like to be on the riverbank and to accept the sun. But the sun is there. It really is there. Just look around you, at all the others who have finally left a river, and also at those who may have re-entered the same river and swum on, and at those who have entered a different river.’

The lawyer pauses for a long time, resting his chin in his hand, thinking. Then he slowly gathers his file, and motions

to get up. I realise that our meeting has come to an end, and in a strange way I am feeling both happy and sad.

He looks at me calmly: 'About the legal position and your rights. Perhaps we should not talk about these now.'

27

The giant puzzle

As I get up to leave, I notice that the time on the wrist-watch with the broken strap has not changed. I hear a distant voice singing, reaching out to me over more than a million years...

Life is a puzzle, a giant puzzle, just a puzzle
Now it is war, and then it is peace
Then it is winter, and then again summer
What is time? And what is eternity?
What is on the other side of the other side?
And what is on this side of this side?

All that I know, is that I do not know
All that I understand is that I do not understand.

But I do know, yes I do know
That I'm a piece, of this puzzle, crooked and skew

But I'm a perfect fit, I'm a perfect fit
For my own piece, of this puzzle

And you're a perfect fit, yes, you're a perfect fit
For your own piece, of this puzzle
This beautiful, lovely, incredible, gigantic puzzle.

Ever so slowly the room comes back into focus. I notice with relief that the two dwarves are back, and that although apparently similar, they do differ in various respects, both physically and emotionally. I realise that they only appear to be identical, but that they are not identical. I see that they are together, but also separate. I notice that each clay figure has different small cracks, but that each of them nevertheless remains intact. I also notice with amazement that each of the dwarves is within an own perfect cavity within the Universe, and that the Universe enfolds them perfectly but differently. I feel strangely excited when I realise that they remain safely inside their own cavities as they move around. That rather than them moving, the entire Universe is constantly moving and adjusting around them, thus creating a mere impression of movement and risk on their part.

I now again become aware of harmonious music, and recognise notes from both the toy trumpet and the miniature violin. The time on the watch has not changed at all. A feeling of contentment washes over me.

Post Scriptum

'Is there not a thing called love?

The lawyer hesitates for a moment. Then he looks up. His eyes are calm.

'Yes. There is a thing called love.'