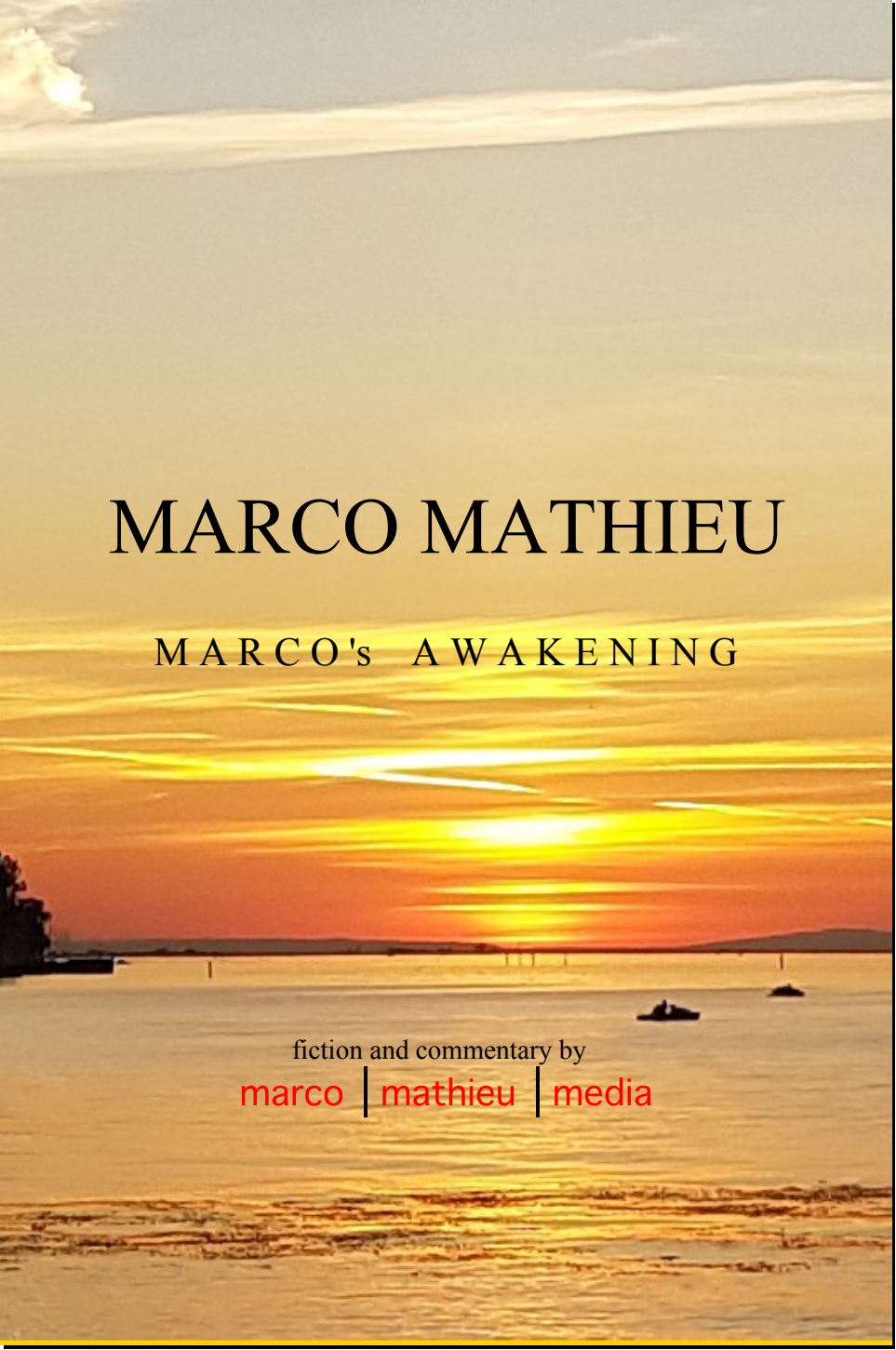


The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is a bright, glowing orb just above the horizon, casting a long, horizontal streak of light across the sky. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and pale blue. The water in the foreground is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky. In the distance, a few small boats are visible on the water, and a dark shoreline is visible on the left side.

MARCO MATHIEU

MARCO's AWAKENING

fiction and commentary by

marco | mathieu | media

This publication is a story of fiction, yet based on real life events. Specific names and characters presented are fictional. The thoughts and views expressed between the story line are those of Marco.

It has been “brewing” within 'marcomathieumedia' for several years with on-going hesitation, but also with strong encouragement that it be completed and published.

The story parallels Marco's story, and as such represents quite an emotional theme, and a tough text to sign-off on.

Finally, it is being published – on-line.

Introduction – Who is Marco?

Introduction

Who Is Marco?

Marco's *real self* lay predominantly dormant within his psyche – elements of identity which he did not wish to acknowledge, of which he was afraid, and rejected in favour of the person he lived, the one he knew and liked, the one known to his wife, son, family, colleagues, friends, and beyond.

Yet some 'thing' was in there. At times a voice, occasionally a jab of conscience. Marco refused to listen or respond, he fought every venture to communicate. “If I don't feed him, then he will be starved out of existence”, was Marco's approach.

We can name the inner character “marco, the submissive”; for so far he had been tamed, isolated, and incarcerated with little resistance - and needed to be kept that way for Marco to remain content and at ease with his well-established persona. Keeping this 'prisoner' quiet was best done by denying his existence, a tactic proven to work well for long periods during which marco remained submitted to silence, giving his host a false, yet comfortable, sense that he was, indeed, 'normal'. That is, he was able to live and behave as determined 'proper' by Church and Society.

Yet, on random occasions, over many years, marco would stir from an inert state to give jabs of self-consciousness – as if to say, "don't ignore me", and “do you not recognize me?” He was an inner evaluator of the societal drivers controlling brain

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and consequent behaviour - he would check how those external influences helped or diverted the natural emergence of Marco's true self.

Is he being brainwashed about 'good', what is 'right', and what is 'normal'; the way things 'should be', as dictated by culture, religion, and education?

Or is he accommodating the realities of the world with open acknowledgement of the realities of himself?

For decades, the ongoing conflict remained obscure – so heavily denied and with not an iota of suspicion from the outside world. Each time the 'prisoner' manifested presence through an internal voice or a doubted sentiment - he would be rejected without mercy. Marco truly believed that this intruder's ideas cannot possibly be valid, as they go against every expectation of what should be, and how to behave.

Marco's efforts to continue on a 'standardized' path, and to act as the majority of the world expected, were re-enforced as time went by; intrusions from the inside would be suppressed with even more determination.

Yet, of course, the reality which the 'inmate' represented continued to exist; marco continued to exist. And in subtle but powerful ways he controlled the subconscious; a part of the complex psyche of this one human being, struggling, as Marco put it, - “to manifest *who I am* against the pressures of *who I ought to be*.”

The power of social programming is, of course, what makes

Introduction – Who is Marco?

for 'civilization' which is a good thing — without it anarchy would prevail. Animals have their social programming also, humans do not have monopoly over the concept. So neither Marco, nor marco, would suggest for a moment that we reject all social and moral principles — that is *nihilism* and not what this story is about.

And neither is marco an *alter-ego*, a second person within, another *self*, one that is different – living perfectly in co-habitation where one's consciousness switches freely between them, and is comfortable exploiting either. An alter-ego might be excitingly refreshing; it can be unrestrained by conventions of the other ego — having other tastes and fetishes, or performing unusual feats of strength, endurance, compassion, benevolence, creativity, brilliance, dexterity, whatever.

No, not one of those, not an alter ego.

marco is the true self, the true spirit, the real ego, not an alter-ego .

As soon as the forcibly submissive marco emerged, able to show his head, raise his eyes, and be listened to, Marco openly acknowledged and then embraced him, crying real tears of disbelief that denial had been so strong and for so long.

marco had been crushed but not killed; he is very resilient !

The name Marco has connotations of 'war-like', perhaps the root word was Mars, the God of war in Greek mythology – both Marco and his spirit certainly deserve the appellation for having sustained such a brave fight ! But a fruitless fight of truth versus hypocrisy - one day, truth will always prevail; and

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this case is no exception.

Marco's story is about personal struggle and also of an immensely liberating, emergence of true self – of being able to live life as who and what he really is.

However, the tale must be told not in isolation and not without paying less than due respect and recognition to loved ones and those with whom he has already shared so many moments of joy and happiness and beautiful accomplishments over so many years.

Far from the extreme idea of nihilism – that humans are futile beings, that life is meaningless — throughout most of his time of denial Marco lived a happy, even if not completely genuine, life. He was always sociable, very fortunate to be employed doing what he loved to do, with sound finances, and blessed by a wonderful family.

It should also be realized that rejecting his true self for such a long time might have been a pre-condition for him still being here and healthy, to tell his tale.

So many homosexuals of his generation are not.

Does that indicate God's grace, guardian angel, fate, or a very generous share of good luck?

So, where to begin?

Not at the beginning, but preferably just before Marco welcomed his true self with open arms. Then we will 'look

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back' to find out how marco made his entrances, how Marco resisted, and the consequences of living not a double life — because marco was consistently rejected and denied — but not a sincere and honest one either.

And where to end?

Hardly where 'in-denial' life plans would have led. Rather, having embraced the revelations and taken on a transformed and liberated lifestyle. Also having made peace with those whose lives matter to Marco and which inevitably changed because of his own transformation.

Marco now embodies marco, and loves finally to be himself. He is not the same as before, he does not feel the same way as before. — The now complete Marco represents everything the guy-in-denial was not; and could never be.

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Chapter One:

Calm before the storm

Marco was seated at the kitchen table, his hands nervously rotating an almost empty coffee mug. He looked up into his wife's cold stare. His son, Sylvain, had just left on his bicycle for school, leaving the parents to handle continuing tensions of a long-time soured relationship. Are these about to become manifest again, triggered by some insignificant event or disagreement? Or will they remain masked by vocational busyness — disguised by the daily routine of a two-profession, upper middle class existence? Perhaps they will avoid confrontation one more time in order to retain family peace; something Marco wished for all of them, but especially for their only son entering critical teenage years.

Since so long, and so frequently, time spent alone with his wife put Marco in a state of anxiety, dreading the moment when a misplaced word would ignite memories of past conflagration or allusions of how reality should be compared with what they are living. His thoughts blur, spontaneity of conversation is gone, replaced with silence, or with vigilance about subject of discussion — even overly sensitive to minor details of vocabulary. There is no joy or sparkle anymore, will they crack this time? They surely must not go on like this, perhaps it should crack; artificially holding it all together is

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also wrong.

Marco's stare hardens to meet that of his wife and he is again hesitant to utter anything that could trigger an explosion. Why does he still love his wife? Yet he knows that he does – whatever that means. She is truly the most wonderfully valuable human being Marco has ever met, and appreciates her very much. She is very caring, concerned for the world. She has a non-discriminatory respect for all humanity, an absolute dedication to family and to high moral principles. She is open-minded and objective in most areas, while at the same time unbending in her defence of those higher level ideals.

Marco and Michaela's courtship was healthy and loving, caring for each other and having sexual enjoyment. They developed common activities like tennis, walking and skiing, and they brought together complementary interests in music, arts, and literature. Their upbringing, education, and profession were so very different. Overall, these characteristics provided both similarities and differences from which to learn from each other and grow together. At least that is how it was supposed to be, and how Marco hoped that it would be.

Yet, they had long sensed a fundamental flaw; a relational minute black hole – certainly existing but remaining unseen and undefined. It was all about the *base*, the underpinning of a relationship, the elemental understanding between two people. Michaela had wanted so badly to talk about it before they were married, and despite attempts to do so Marco had been unable

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to grasp this pivotal importance and to adequately address it. He pushed away the essentials of that discussion, just as he now knows he was pushing away his inner voice of truth and caution.

Already within their first years of marriage, it was clear that lack of truly open communication was preventing them from describing their problems.

Michaela had proposed counselling which they attended together, but at that early stage Marco had not become cognizant of the impending dangers, and continued to deny any deep-rooted fault-line of the relationship.

A second round of professional help, this time alone, was stopped about two years ago. Marco grew insistent that he was not sick, that any communications problem clearly took two to create, and that attending solo sessions was wasting both time and money. Nevertheless, their love life had slowed to a crawl before ceasing altogether; the relationship, if one could call it that, was held tenuously together by love for their son and the presence of a live-in au-pair. Both parents were deeply involved in work life, and Marco was frequently away on foreign business travel.

Marco moved the now empty mug in circles on the surface of the table, preparing to speak. He hated these moments, wished he could say something to penetrate the thick air and defuse the silence-shrouded tension, but only grunts and gurgles came out. His mind was racing — the thoughts of 15

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years together flashing past. He wanted to look away from the icy glare but knew that would only make things worse — in fact whatever he did or said now would be too late and inadequate. It is too late, it has been too late for several years, so why has he not addressed the problem? Marco honestly believed to have tried, yet clearly with no effect; at a certain point actually giving up while continuing to live a parallel existence from the same house.

It was travel and work that saved Marco's sanity while Sylvain and the au-pair saved the health of Michaela.

Many times on returning home, he entered the house with renewed energy, hoping for the chance to reinitialize the dynamics, to make amends, to contribute more to the family, to get closer to his wife and son. Invariably the plan would fail, the pancake would be as flat as ever; the gap widening.

Not surprisingly, hope is not enough — there has to be real action and substance to the energy — and long gone is any natural excitement and contagious pleasure. And if that isn't bad enough Sylvain, at 12 years old, is certainly not blind to the regular scenarios of passive superficiality — he must be hurting more than either parent.

Michaela stood, looking down onto the slowly, and infuriatingly, rotating mug — and the feeble sounds oozing incoherently from Marco's mouth as though still suffering from the Transient Ischaemic Attack he confronted a year earlier. She had already threatened to leave the family home to get

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away from an intolerable existence. Marco had assured her that if anyone left it would be him; Sylvain had much more need of his mother and that in no way would Marco accept the home to be broken more than necessary — mother and son should remain in the house. Yet, even after that discussion, life went on as usual. Today it will end differently.

Michaela's cold stare turned to a mix of rage and sadness; the words were those of command, the intonation was plea, the look declared finality.

“Get out. Leave us. Go away; stay away”.

Out of those few short phrases, Marco was most jolted by the word “us”; Marco had no quarrel with his son, yet separation implied 'us'— and 'you'.

That was a most devastating shock. Any hope for repairing cracks in the ideal family image was suddenly gone; remaining dreams of a harmonious and loving family were shattered by this rude confrontation to the sad reality. Living and propagating that particular hypocrisy was over.

Of course Marco knew only too well that Michaela was the driver of family unity. It was she who was sensitive and caring and insistent on prioritizing towards family activities: breakfast and dinner at table all together, winter and summer vacations, weekend outings, card and board games, children's birthday parties, visiting and inviting and integrating young friends. To her credit, above all, Michaela invested in these

Chapter One – Calm before the storm

family essentials while engaging profoundly, and successfully, in her own demanding professional pursuits.

Marco tried to console himself with stereotypical thoughts of the man bringing in a substantial revenue, placing disproportionate time and energy into 'providing' for the family in financial and material terms, and honestly believing he is right to leave the 'less tangible' (less materialistic) items in the more capable hands of his wife.

Marco was convinced that such prioritization had been a noble one, especially in the face of his company's rationalization – involving lay-offs and tighter requirements of performance in order to remain employed. For this, he was convinced he needed to work longer hours, travel more, and generally be more flexible — all at the expense of time and energy for his family. That lifestyle, driven by the determination to be successful at work, had become an addiction; and of course a convenient cover-up for all the ailments at home.

Yet, in reality, it was his wife, and son who gave him a sense to life. They embodied the very goals and aspirations that were fighting within to silence and eliminate marco. Life was fulfilling despite him, without him. The internal marco wasn't needed, he was the devil, he was the source of evil. If allowed to surface, he would destroy everything about the persona and the life that Marco so much wanted, and had come so far in

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bringing to fruition. Yet this devil had so far not emerged, Marco could not yet recognize him, and could not fight him directly – the 'intruder' was acting through the unconscious – diluting passion for Michaela, subtly coercing zealous sensuality into a bland mix of politeness, respect, and technicality.

Marco recently had contact with a woman going through a similar issue with her husband, and she uses a direct language which could have helped he and Michaela: her reaction to his passivity, or even avoidance of passionate sexual activity, is, "usually a wife has to tell her husband to get off her, that's enough now – later". A lack of play, pleasure, and passion removes the very essence — makes a relationship vulnerable, makes the intimacy that bonds couples together so fragile. Had Marco and Michaela addressed that more purposefully, they most certainly would have identified, much earlier, marco and what he stood for.

But, you see, Marco's rejection was so strong that even with the passion gone, he wanted so desperately to save the 'normality' of life. His conscious self was clear about these goals and motives – a very strong desire to protect and nurture the family unity. Yet denial totally blinded him to the reasons why fighting was futile; so many battles were being lost, the conflict would inevitably end in surrender.

Chapter Two – Leaving home

Chapter Two

Leaving Home

Marco was angry at his own failure as husband and father, while equally feeling hurt, even victimized, by the 'incomprehensible' reaction of Michaela.

One of the worst moments for Marco was telling his son that he would be going to live someplace else, that the frictions between his parents made it difficult for them to stay together, and that moving out would hopefully minimize any trauma for Sylvain and his mother. Oh, how Marco squirmed within himself for such an insipid announcement of the decision that has life-long repercussions on the whole family. And, yes, self-anger and situation of despair needed to be disguised; and it was completely out of the question to show at that moment any sign of accusation which could blemish the pristine mother-son relationship. Sylvain needed and deserved, in the midst of family turmoil, a solid anchor of trust, love, and as much continuity as the situation would allow. He also needed to know that both parents loved him and that they will always love him.

With reluctant agreement that Marco would leave the house as soon as he could find a place to live, he spent all of his free time over the following weeks in pursuit of a new 'home'. Marco is not a frequent mover, only twice in his whole life —

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firstly from his country of origin to Switzerland, then from an apartment to this little semi-detached house he bought when it was just a hole in the ground, before Michaela and he moved together. Stability has been Marco's preferred aim— so much in contrast to this latest reality.

In fact, they had both wanted to remain in the area, Michaela with her liberal profession was well established locally, and Marco's tenure seemed quite secure, and Sylvain's education would be so much better by remaining in the same cantonal system throughout his secondary schooling. So a few years ago they had decided to purchase a plot of land in the next village with the idea of building an individual house when the finances and times were right. They had so much good fortune, so much to be grateful for; why is it all now so screwed up?

Marco considered renting, wondering if that would be the best solution. Perhaps break-up will be temporary, he and Michaela could talk and find another way of still being together. Yet the more he mulled over that possibility, the more he became convinced that separation was going to be final — unsure of the marital or day-to-day relationship mode, but final.

So his focus shifted to purchase of a property. Of course the ideal would be a house, if his wife would keep their house, why should he have something less, after all it was 'his' house before they met. But no, Michaela has since injected as much capital as the initial downpayment, so in reality it was truly 'their' house.

Chapter Two – Leaving home

Marco was not opposed to the idea of a 'single' person living alone in a house. But then, when he had done that 15 years earlier, it was with the objective of meeting his future wife and being able to offer her a comfortable place to live, and to start a family. Now, what is the goal? Marco could, with difficulty, bring himself to imagine divorce; but not entering into another close relationship — living together a different hypocrisy while the two people he most loves and cherishes drift off into the turbid depths of his confused torment. Marco hung onto the fragile bonds remaining, like the tendons of his right arm which were torn apart while exercising with weights. That wound was now 'healing' naturally, without operation; 'healing' to give normal use of the arm, but never again to enjoy the power of the serves and swings required for a good tennis game. Will their torn relationship allow also that kind of healing? Perhaps remaining friends, without 'partnership'.

Marco's search thus shifted from houses to apartments under construction - his goal was to live not too far away, giving maximum opportunity to be present regularly and for Sylvain to 'pass by' whenever he could. A number of good alternatives were on the market, but with completion dates at least 6-9 months away; incompatible with the fact that the option of staying home for much longer was fast evaporating. The thought of hunting for an interim place to rent, with the cost of moving twice, and monthly rental charges eating into available capital, turned his quest further afield.

Eventually Marco opted for a show apartment, available

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immediately, in an otherwise-unfinished building about ten minutes drive away from the common home.

To finance the purchase, without resorting to untenably high mortgage levels, they agreed to sell their plot of land, probably a last symbolic pillar of hope for an idilic family life together (happy 2-income couple, 2 kids, 2 cars, cat, dog, individual house with garden and white picket fence!). They would legally transfer the existing house to Michaela, pay off most of its mortgage, and use the remaining capital to buy the apartment and even do some re-furbishment work on the house. All of this, Marco is pleased to recall, shows that they were still, despite the heat and tensions of the situation, able to remain rational and to handle their joint affairs in a civil, respectful, even friendly way.

Michaela and Sylvain took a vacation together, during which time Marco moved out his personal things so that when they returned there was little remaining material evidence of his existence. Marco's long-time hobbies had created quite some intricate 'installations' and so those were dismantled as well – some items which clearly would never 'fit' in the new place were actually broken up and disposed of. In retrospect, this 'forced cleaning' can be seen as a healthy exercise – but on the moment, and given the circumstances, it was a sad process; one which added to the overall pain and chagrin.

Chapter Three – Who are your friends?

Chapter3

Who are your friends?

Together, Michaela, Sylvain and Marco had all brought friends into the expanded family circle; so they became '*their*' friends, regardless of the initial attachment. Michaela's friends were from her previous workplace in international organizations, Marco's were primarily through work colleagues from a long history with the company, and Sylvain brought them into contact with parents of his school buddies and also with his teachers. In addition, there were family members from both sides with whom very good relationships were built and with whom there would be significant contact.

However, their experience with those representing the longest, and what were considered to be the deepest, friendships on Michaela's side have since brought her and Sylvain probably more disappointment and grief than the parent's own break-up.

Immediately after Marco left the family home, relationships suddenly soured between a few of those deepest 'friends' and Michaela. Those people seemed to take Marco's initial hurt and victimization as reason to begin blaming Michaela for the split; they took 'sides' and came down hard on her, and instead sympathized with Marco; even after Marco had cooled down and gone to them to explain that if they have separated it is

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because the relationship is broken and it takes two to make it break. Marco wanted to know why they would suddenly behave in that way without taking a little more distance and reflecting more carefully — especially considering that he had met and become friends with them *only* thanks to his wife.

Moreover, as both Michaela and Marco had lost their parents before they met, there were no real grandparents for Sylvain — and so these 'friends' had come to act for him as extended family, as grandparents, and more. They replaced the expanded circle which could not otherwise be provided.

It has been so hard for Sylvain to see the break up of his direct family and then for friends with 'family' roles to leave the boat as a result.

So hard, and so shitty; how can sane human beings turn away from a 12-year old innocent kid they have 'loved' so much?

Would these people have gone so far had Marco not aired his disappointment with Michaela's reaction? If he had not shown himself as victim of the situation? Was there something else going on, and this was an excuse? Naturally, Marco tried to broker reconciliation, but there was no going back — for the 'friend' relation and the trust had been irreparably shattered for Michaela to be receptive — and those 'friends' had turned deaf.

The heart and confidence of their twelve year-old was doubly fractured. Marco still lies at night, even now after many years, and cries tears of regret for what his son has had to learn the hard way about trust and friendship.

Chapter Three – Who are your friends?

And this experience made Michaela's and Marco's own attempts of rapprochement seem more insurmountable than ever.

So, where is the silver lining?

Well, there is almost always a positive side — this experience of challenge, and resulting consequences, has shown true colours in the sense of separating true friends from long-term yet uncommitted acquaintances.

Those who remained dear to both separated parents, refused to take sides, did not 'drop' either one — they provide strength particularly to Michaela and to Sylvain and comfort to Marco that his little family remain supported by the few and the genuine.

During many months Marco used to get up early and drive to the house to have breakfast with Michaela and Sylvain and to see Sylvain off, or take him to school.

Marco frequently would also be there early evening and to join with the family for dinner. Some days the rhythm would appear as if Marco were still living there; as if all remained as it was - except it wasn't. Michaela was clearly still looking for the key to their failure and wanting the cohesiveness of family to once again be the dominating force of all their energies. They both wanted it, but unless some magic door could be discovered they both knew that the chances were minimum and time was running out.

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Michaela encouraged Marco to again get help – she was convinced that *'they'* did not have a problem, it was *'he'* that had the problem and thus it was up to him to find it and fix it. Michaela still cared for Marco and their family enough to want this to happen. As for Marco, he was exhausted trying to find (even to fabricate) a reason for his lack of passion, for not having a different kind of energy to inject into their lives. Michaela had also received help so that she could in turn help Sylvain and had been given the name of a psychiatrist who might be useful for Marco to see. Marco went alone for a series of sessions - alone because Michaela was convinced the problem was his alone — even though she did agree to attend consultation with him a couple of times.

'His' psychiatrist did not habitually handle problems of couples, but did focus on the issue of communication. He didn't really buy into Michaela's conclusion that the problem be uniquely Marco's, rather he went into the direction that usually would have involved both parties. He used paper-based analyses of characteristic *'types'* or *'profiling'*, similar to the ones Marco had used while teaching management courses with his company. One proposal was to read *'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus'* with some advice and guidance as to how to handle conversations with the opposite sex who process and react differently.

But during all this time, Marco was thinking there had to be

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something missing from the analysis, or something that needed investigating more deeply; isn't that what psychiatrists dig for?

But to Marco each session seemed tame, without pressure, without energy for discovery. He remained his normal cynical self since the early sessions with psychiatrists - each one of them is in it for the long-term financial benefit. As far as can be seen, there is no sense of urgency, and there cannot be one. Marco's doctor admitted, "we are still in the discovery phase, only later can we define something on which to apply therapy; and that can take years"! At one point he did touch on sexual practices and delved into the couple's less-than-passionate sex life. As part of that line of investigation he had Marco complete another paper test which analysed tendencies of homosexuality or asexuality — the results showed no particularly valuable information in either direction. Perhaps the test would have 'revealed' something if the patient were not in complete rejection of such ideas — but then it is doubtful that the test would have been necessary. Given Marco's incredible level of denial it is not unlikely that his answers, to the somewhat simplistic questions, were less than genuine or accurate.

For five years Michaela and Marco lived apart while continuing to exercise their respective professions; she from her downtown office as well as from home — he from his new 'home office' apartment. During this time Sylvain grew into a young man, and the parents grew apart rather than together. Yet they still saw each other and Marco maintained a — regrettably

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inconsistent — presence during his son's last school years and finally his successful 'Maturité' examinations and subsequent graduation. Sylvain had seemingly come through this whole trauma much better than the parents; but not without Athena-like efforts from Michaela, and Sylvain's perseverance to get through school to follow his dreams.

Chapter 4

'Le Coup de Foudre'

Then, during one of those occasional meetings, Michaela suggested it be worth one more try to analyse Marco's problem using a doctor who had been recommended to her. Marco agreed to her proposal and promised that he would try hard to allow the sessions to be fruitful. There was so much energy coming from Michaela, despite the couple living apart and with odds against ever getting back together. She still believed somehow in her husband as a person, as a friend. She had been to see a psy herself, to help herself cope with the split, and to know how to handle Sylvain in the absence of his father, and to perhaps also help Marco in the process.

Michaela and Marco did meet together with this particular doctor once or twice, which probably helped him calibrate a level of collaboration or otherwise. However, for the most part Marco saw him alone, and the sessions felt to Marco as mundane and unhelpful as those with previous doctors. Each visit began with the obligatory minutes in his waiting room which was sparsely furnished, with curtains closed, and in need of a good clean and some paint. As he, like all the psy's Marco had met, was alone — no assistant nor secretary — the arrival routine was to ring the doorbell, enter, and to go directly to this gloomy space. For a couple of visits Marco would sheepishly put his head through the heavy curtains to be sure that the

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bright reality of day had not been turned off, and that real humans still walked by in the park outside. He soon learned to enter confidently, draw back the curtains and leave them like that as his contribution to the health and well-being of the next client. Otherwise anyone coming there with even a hint of depression would certainly be in need of the doctor's full-scale help by the time their session began.

The doctor was a short man with a short neck, his head disappearing partway into his shirt collar. Unlike other psy's Marco had experienced, this one appeared expressionless and tended to remain so throughout their sessions. He came to open the door of the waiting room (Marco called it the 'humbling incubator') with its dying plant and yellow ceiling light. He stood there, motionless, with his hand open for a shake, but with his elbow by his side. He probably mumbled the patient's name. It was a routine deserving of a '*Mr. Bean*' clip. Sometimes Marco questioned what he was doing there – “*who* has the 'communication problem' ?!”

Sessions were carefully timed. A brass clock was positioned as the official timekeeper well visible to doctor and patient. Time had begun during the forced reflection in the anti-room while the doctor examined his notes from the previous meeting to ensure he got names right and remembered key points of earlier conversation and his analysis. He announced how much time was remaining out of the 'one hour' he would bill; typically 40 minutes. It seemed so short to Marco because he reserved time at the end for assembling his notes ready for a

Chapter Four – 'Le coup de foudre'

next session. Either these guys have super-solid psyche's or they are each other's clients. How is it possible to work alone in such an environment each day for whatever number of hours, analysing so many broken relationships or confused minds, and acting like a zombie — without you, yourself, cracking ?

After confiding in this doctor during several sessions over a period of a few months, a remarkable incident occurred – not with the doctor, but with Michaela.

Marco had not met with her for about 3 weeks, which was not so uncommon but on this occasion it triggered something. Out of the blue she asked Marco if he had been seeing someone else — another man perhaps — "are you homosexual?"

What provoked that question at this stage, Marco does not know – but as most attempts had so far failed to find reasons for their screwed up relationship, he felt it would do no harm to suggest that line of analysis during his next appointment with the doctor.

The psychiatrist dismissed the subject of homosexuality from the conversation, but it is likely that this suggestion from Michaela diverted his basic direction. He certainly became more forward in questioning of sexual practices and what drivers Marco could identify with. Marco remembers distinctly the doctor's bravado in proposing that sex was for pleasure and that he and his wife had not derived the levels of sexual pleasure commensurate with a healthy relationship. Well, of course he was right — but was that cause or effect?

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Nevertheless, those few discussions, and particularly the remark from Michaela of "are you homosexual?" played havoc with Marco's sleep cycles for the coming week. Suddenly the notion of sexuality, and the direct confrontation with his personality, became the most overbearing influence on his thought patterns. His identity was in question, openly challenged by Michaela and placed in the tumble dryer by a psychiatrist, even if he had dismissed the subject for the time being.

Marco's immediate reaction was to reject it as pure speculation; and in any case, the test by the previous doctor several years ago had eliminated that hypothesis — Marco is 'clean' no?

While still in a state of deep denial, Marco was becoming so unsure of himself — wondering what was wrong with him, why he was unable to demonstrate the love he wanted to show, why he was unable even to talk about it coherently. He never considered himself to be 'sick', yet that interminable and incomprehensible series of sessions with psychiatrists over so many years were making him lose his self-assurance of that.

Marco could 'communicate' really well in his work, with friends, and with colleagues. His work involved giving seminars, presenting to large groups and leading meetings. But it is true he could not communicate with his family. There was a blockage towards intimate conversation. He was unable to identify where the inhibition came from — now of course it is

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clear. Marco thinks the unconscious cover-up was making it tough for any one of those doctors to make inroads into his 'case'.

Nevertheless, his disappointment remains that they did not uncover 'marco in hibernation'. Probably more disappointing is his own lack of ability to see his true self, to recall those childhood and youthful feelings and to admit the realities; but the power of his own determination and society's pressure had created an unbelievable crust to crack.

And, without Michaela's questions ("have you been with someone else? another man? are you homosexual?") how much longer would the denial have gone on? Did Michaela already know, or strongly suspect? After all, she was the one pushing him to see all those psy's; she really wanted to help him find the block to their family happiness — and her concern continued long after the decision to live apart.

In response to Michaela's question and the subsequent discussions with 'Marco's psychiatrist', he decided to delve into the world of homosexuality by means of the internet — making it possible to discover so much within just a few hours. Why hadn't he looked before? Most likely his rejection of anything outside of a standard heterosexual world never allowed even the idea of going there.

As Marco searched the world-wide-web, his first steps were cautious, with a sense of guilt, even shame. Within minutes, the pace accelerated. He marvelled at the breadth of information,

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just as on most topics, nothing hidden. He could have (should have) done this a long time ago.

Little by little, images of the 'gay life-style', and the 'gay sub-culture', began to open up through his web browser. Despite a level of hesitancy to admit it, there was nonetheless a real and rapidly growing affinity – he liked what he saw.

'*YouTube*', where he had hardly ever been before, showed him so many gay guys telling their lives, and especially sharing '*coming-out*' stories. Then he found channels that had uploaded TV soaps about the life of gays – one which he started to follow from its very first posted episode right up until he was eagerly awaiting the next one to be uploaded. Call him a dumb romantic but it was just what was needed. Let us not forget that a good part of his previous imagination of the gay scene had 'abnormal' and less-than-attractive connotations.

What was quickly becoming clear is that being gay or straight are both completely 'normal'. We can say that heterosexuality is clearly the 'standard', but it is no more 'normal' than being gay. Just think for a moment of the question, “is it 'normal' to be gay?” The answer, technically is “no, of course not” - there are an estimated 5-10% of the population who are gay, far from the percentage required for them to fit into a definition of 'normal', meaning usual, average or typical. But then respond to a different question: “is it 'normal' that about 5-10% of the population will be gay?”. The answer is clearly “yes”.

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As comparison, right-handedness is more 'standard', but both right-handedness and left-handedness are completely 'normal'. Interestingly, about 8-15% of a population will be left-handed; yet only during the 20th century was it no longer considered abnormal and something to be corrected. It is the way we are created, and part (only a part) of who we are. Being gay is the way Marco was created and only now does he *begin* to accept it. Why cannot society accept it as they now accept that the earth goes round the sun, that slavery should not be tolerated, that black skin is only black skin, and those who write with their left hand should continue to do so?

Videos on YouTube gave Marco 'fast-track education', and something he desperately needed – fast-track self-confidence to accept the idea of being gay. But he wasn't gay, he had had no sexual desires or feelings for men since his youth – and everyone has those, it's just a normal experimental phase that young men go through; no?

Nevertheless, he was seeing men around him in a different light. From simple appreciation of a good body, it was now the warmth of a facial expression and the overall cuteness which was grabbing his attention. Changes were taking place, but he still 'wasn't gay'. Sure, he is learning more about homosexuals and their lifestyle, more than he ever allowed himself to do before – learning to appreciate how common it is for two men to be so tender and loving each of the other – learning about genuine fears of aggression, of rejection by one's own family,

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and so frequently and strongly by one's church.

Yes, by one's own family and by one's own church.

Just two years earlier Marco's church had taken its members through a one-year process to decide if they should accept blessing of same-sex legal partnerships. Michaela and Marco had briefly discussed it and came to the conclusion that *not doing so* would be contrary to their shared principles of human rights and support of minority groups. The final decision was a large majority 'yes', but the process was far from easy, and the church did lose some members who felt strongly against it. Michaela was so clear and outspoken at that time, that excluding homosexuals in this way would be totally non-Christian. Of course she is right, and that is a whole new theme Marco would need to face later. In the meantime, he now marvels at his own supportive, yet not very energetic, participation in that whole exercise. He did attend the various discussion groups that were set up, and learned the key biblical references which are interpreted and used so forcibly to justify homophobia. Yet, at no time did he feel more than simply supportive of the gay cause; and surprised at, and disappointed with, those who were not. In retrospect, his restrained, mostly observer, status within the whole debate, was clearly a part of his deep, so deep, denial.

Now, his 'technical' awareness about being homosexual is

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increasing and in parallel he is finding his sexual sensitivity toward other men being released also. One Saturday, late afternoon, he attends a small social gathering upwards of 20 people. A man comes in whom Marco recognizes but has not yet met. He has a kind, welcoming smile, even a slight blush, as his eyes greet others. He sits behind Marco who turns around; they shake hands. Through just that contact Marco feels friendship and something much more – a new sensation. His name is Clément. After the meeting there is general discussion and Marco eases his way over to where Clément and the man he came in with are just about to leave. Unsure how not to lose this opportunity, Marco asked him if he would be available for a drink or dinner. He says that he and his friend are going to a nearby Japanese restaurant, and that Marco would be most welcome to join them.

Marco's assumption, is that Clément is gay – why should he even think that? Of course Marco *wants* him to be gay because he is looking for more clues to his own identity; plus he's looking for a safe space. In addition, with Marco's earlier feelings about him, he *clearly must be* gay.

In the restaurant they share enough to break the ice and to feel at ease in each other's company; Marco learns that both Clément and his friend are studying at the university; Clément is working on a Masters degree and is active in social work. His tenderness and warmth radiate constantly as if he knows already that Marco need his support – he encourages speaking openly and makes assurances of his confidence. Soon, Marco

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is laying out his story and describing his current uncertainties, doubts, and discoveries as if they had known each other for years. From what Marco remembers nothing was being held back, and to speak about himself like this is a first ever, and it clearly feels wonderful. Clément was so reassuring, and at the same time very practical; he knew the local gay organizations, and worked with a team of gay people for one of his projects.

Next day is Sunday. After church Marco sees Clément with a relaxed group of guys – there is an air of freshness and 'joie de vivre' about them. He walks over and joins in their conversation. He was trembling with anticipation at what he would say, how he would say it, he had no other reason to be there other than to get closer, to be with Clément. Gentleness and warmth continued to radiate from him; his welcoming smile gave Marco permission to merge into his magnetism. Finally he knew – he had a crush on him! He kissed him.

From one brief passage of time until the next, Marco was no longer himself. He switched from one 'state' to another. Neither his feelings nor behaviour were recognizable as those he thought to be his own. He had somehow transitioned, like going through a magic barrier, the sound barrier, the light barrier, the 'big-bang' of a new personal creation.

Until that moment, all was speculation, all was hypothesis.

In that moment the world changed. Words cannot adequately express the clarity, the certainty, the knowing.

In one stunning moment of lust and attraction

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Within mind-blowing seconds of sweaty realization . . .

All his defences of denial and rejection were dropped; his true self had burst through and taken over its rightful place.

He, 'marco', had not simply won the fight, and the battle, and the war – it was now clear that Marco *is* and *was always* marco!

After so many years of being suppressed, of being squashed, of being imprisoned . . . Marco's real identity had been released.

At the side of him stands clear evidence of his homosexuality.

Little marco was right; he knew all the time who Marco really was. Marco should have listened rather than silencing - accepted rather than rejecting, but he didn't; and now he needs to evaluate the consequences.

What is so astounding is the amount of time between leaving the family home and the moment when Marco's real self burst out of oblivion. It is as if he had been caged up as in a medieval *oubliette* and genuinely forgotten; his very existence was rejected and denied to an extreme.

And although marco burst forth so quickly in that Sunday group gathering, he clearly had been aroused from his deep sleep over those recent weeks through the numerous proposals, discussions and internet findings. Marco's curiosity had become insatiable around an idea which he knew was '*an idea whose time had now come*'. He knew that his denial and rejection

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defences were finally off guard, they were in fact gone. Marco described the feeling as, “a welcoming space, a need for truth, a desire to know, a need to *be*; to be *me*.”

The force which marco represented flowed like a river into Marco's brain, through his veins; his heart beat stronger, his breathing became deeper, and his body lighter.

'Liberation' is the word which best describes the incredible sensation of being relieved of a life-time cover-up, the weight of a deep oppression lifted from the shoulders, the unconscious stress of living as someone he is not – and not being able to live as the someone he really is.

It is likely that Marco's defences came down because they no longer served their purpose. They had enabled the goal of building a family, keeping a good job, and living the straight 'normal' life which was the pre-requisite. Now that the family life is broken, there is every reason to find his real self and to live freely as who he is, and to allow his family to do so as well. The big regret is, why did this breakthrough have to wait until so late?

Marco's greatest realization is that trying to live something he is not, cannot work – it takes enormous effort to be something or someone we are not, and we cannot maintain such illusion over the long term, we cannot show passion when we don't have it or fail to develop it. This can be true for some marriages, not only arranged marital relationships, or for those who didn't find the right job or profession, and definitely true

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for a closeted homosexual trying desperately to create the elements of a straight lifestyle.

Our societies are coming around but deep-rooted phobias remain, and continue to cause so much hurt and destruction as homosexuals hide in the closet, deny who they are, and live a big hypocrisy. Yet it is only a matter of time until the real person inside will show up and speak out.

It did!

Marco regrets the pain caused to his family because he rejected his feelings from an early age and pushed them into a deep denial so he never felt like he was cheating. But by fighting marco, Marco cheated himself out of being his true self for so long, and made the disservice to his family.

So, Marco's long-time self-denial is over; there is no going-back on that. But the phase of '*coming-out*' must now begin – how to approach that? To whom does Marco turn? Who does he tell first? Is there anyone he should not tell? What will be the reaction?

Chapter 5

Forbidden Fruit

During early youth, Marco would not have heard specifically of 'homosexuality', and certainly the word 'gay' had not yet entered popular vocabulary with homosexual connotations. Nevertheless, in those times, of the 1960's, it was very clear that physical attraction to other boys was something to keep to one's self.

In view of his new realizations, Marco searched his memory for traces of male-attraction, despite such access being censored for decades. Gradually he has achieved sufficient recollection of feelings and experiences to reconstruct whole events. There are still periods of blanks, but with little marco's help, it is quite sure there will be further recall.

Here are some of those early warnings that Marco realizes helped push him into denial:

1. Before puberty:

Already at the age of ten, towards the end of his final year in primary school, Marco met a boy who lived about half way on his 20 minute walk home, but who did not attend the local primary school; so he was most certainly a little older. There had been no chance to discover if, or where, he went to school, despite being inquisitive during several encounters. Opposite where he lived was a long gravel and grass driveway lined on

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both sides by huge horse-chestnut trees whose tops had grown together forming a green, dark tunnel. Many of the kids would stop here on the way home to collect the fallen fruit, ready for the game of 'conkers' (played with the hard nut within the pithy outer covering). And it was into this driveway that Marco's new-found acquaintance wanted them to go, to be away from the main road, to embark on a little adventure. They did go a little way in, but became hesitant not knowing what they would find at the end, and who would see them. Unfortunately, someone had seen – not down the driveway, but while still at the main road. That someone started the 'grown-up chain reaction' – ending with Marco's parents having heard from his grandmother about the meeting ! According to the grandmother, "that boy is not clean" – "you must not go near him, not touch him, keep away."

But Marco liked the boy, there was a lot about him that was attractive - he was kind, he spoke softly, he had a sort of rarely-felt gentleness. Unlike most other boys, he also touched; not an aggressive push, nor a bullying shove, but a contact that made warmth and caring permeate Marco's body.

Was he 'unclean' because he wasn't like other boys, or did he really have a contagious illness? "He doesn't wash properly" was all that grandmother would volunteer.

It was difficult to avoid the two boys meeting because four times each day Marco walked past the other boy's house. On one occasion they met at the entrance to the 'conker drive' as it was colloquially known; and they ventured further inside than

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they had gone before. There was a connection between them which Marco had never before experienced – something intangible, unexplainable, yet pleasurable.

Marco was almost eleven, and not at all prepared for such sensations. The other boy might have been twelve – clean or not clean, Marco was out of his depth.

So, Marco did find ways to avoid him, and maybe grandmother was right. Even so, in trying to recall the early times of self-discovery, this boy (whose name he never knew) stands out as the first to make an indelible imprint on his mind, through gentle approach and sensual touch.

2. Secondary school years, where most self-discovery takes place.

Marco's school was a boys-only with a girls school adjoined, but separated by a very high wall. The only safe way to see into the girl school yard was by leaning out of windows on the upper floors. Otherwise a human pyramid from the boy's yard below to see over the wall could also work, but was a forbidden act. School rules even forbade contact with members of the girls' school at all during term time. Naturally enough, as boys moved up to 3rd, 4th and 5th years, there was increasing eagerness for end of term freedom to meet girls openly.

Yet, Marco's attraction to the opposite sex had not emerged – he was no doubt saved from ridicule and suspicion by the very institutional rules and separation that perturbed most of his fellow students.

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Instead, he was very content to admire so many maturing male bodies – over 1000 of them forcibly paraded in close proximity through gym classes, swimming lessons, and changing rooms at innumerable compulsory sports activities. Marco was not yet sexually attracted, simply an enthusiast of athletic and muscular perfection that was developing all around.

One activity at school which did turn him on quite strongly, was the army cadet section which he joined because he liked the uniform and the equipment guys had to wear, and the drill they went through which brought extra discipline to which Marco responded well. Each time there was a 'field day', or a summer camp, he experienced his early sensations of getting horny; being in such close proximity with all those guys.

What Marco learnt very quickly was to 'look without looking' – to fix for more than a few seconds could invoke a reaction of, "what are you staring at boy?" None of those comments would indicate any reciprocative interest – any kind of same-sex attraction was a public no-no; homosexuality was a registered sickness, displays of homosexual behaviour remained criminally punishable by imprisonment. If he had shown signs, he would have been picked on as a minimum, expelled from the school at worst – probably with forced psychiatric treatment. At least Henry VIII's death penalty for homosexual acts had been abolished in 1861.

So, Marco consoled himself, and definitely fooled himself, by concentrating on the features of those wonderful bodies,

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even though he could not say anything and certainly not touch nor caress them.

3. Engineering college:

Secondary school ended for Marco at age 16, and he went directly into engineering college. There were always 99% males in those classes, in fact he recalls not a single female student during his four years of studies. He left home to go to work, joined male youth clubs, and co-shared a house with two other guys. All around him were tentatives at dating, at first sexual experiences, and from his mates a very keen interest to coach him in the same direction – wondering why Marco seemed so timid and reluctant to "get yourself a woman, because you'll just love it, it's just what you need!" One particular guy was really quite insistent and offered to help. Marco believes now that this was a first major opportunity missed, "His name was Chris and he was so cute!" He remembers how caring Chris was and that despite all Chris' offers of help to meet a woman, Marco would have preferred to date *him*. In today's environment, with the ability to be more open, he would have weakened, would have accepted Chris' 'help' and no doubt they would have become first boyfriends.

It became very clear to Marco that attraction to women was not his thing; there was decidedly nothing happening, which was the tough part because it seemed like he was asexual. That

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disturbed him, and frequently proved embarrassing. Yet, while he was very content to 'jerk off' with images of the most beautiful of male bodies, or guys in tight jeans and especially in leather clothes, he was not sufficiently forward to search out men with similar tendencies.

4. On probation:

In fact Marco was dead scared of consequences – of approaching straight guys in error and getting beaten up, or of being arrested and placed under observation by the courts' probationary forces. Such was the fate of a good friend – by no means physically attractive – Greg, member of a small club they both belonged to. They had no idea of Greg's orientation, and one day he announced that he was 'on probation' – yet even in that small group of so-called mates, they could not bring themselves to openly discuss his situation. What he had done, was 'dirty'; probably the same idea that Marco's grandmother had of the boy at the conker drive. Marco felt sick, not because of what he had done, but because they all, Greg's closest friends, concluded that his run-in with the police was none of their business, and understanding his nature-driven acts was to be regarded as taboo. At least Greg was not rejected; he continued to be a member of that little club, as though nothing had taken place - ignoring and denying. It was the safest, yet most cowardly, option. Marco now sees that they could have,

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and should have, been a true support to him – most likely the *only* support for **who** he really was. Unfortunately, in those times, the stigma of being associated with someone into dubious sexual practices was very real. This experience was confirming a really sad human weakness; that of dropping even one's own very close mates at a most crucial time through the pressure of social 'normalization' where visible homosexual emotions could lead to alienation – and even two people having the same inclinations would not necessarily guarantee mutual support either. It sucks.

5. NewYork:

At age 22, on a business trip to New York, Marco had a sexual experience with a colleague about 10 years older.

They had been to dinner and a couple of bars, and Marco was decidedly drunk; he doubts that the other guy could see the road either as he drove home. The last thing Marco remembers of the evening was getting out of the car at a red traffic light and crawling around on the street in the next lane. The driver managed somehow to get Marco back in the car and both of them into the king-size bed of Marco's hotel room. The following morning Marco awoke with a headache, the room rather disturbingly rotating, and he felt a hand masturbating his stiff dick and trying to get him to do the same in return.

The feeling as such was oh so good, yet Marco cringed at the idea that his bed fellow might be preparing for more than a mutual jerk-off.

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His defence mechanism took control – his reaction was that the instability of the room seemed good enough reason to reject the advances being made and so pretended to return to sleep; waiting for the hotel room to slow down and for he to be alone. He was not ready for this – or should he be?

The guy moved position, lent over, gave soft caresses and body kisses, slowly then more insistently. Was this going to be a major turning point in Marco's confrontation with his sexuality? His dick remained rock hard. His body rippled with warm excitement. If the room had been still, had his mind not been in hung-over confusion, would he have succumbed to these feelings? Could he possibly have remained so passive to this man's advances? If not, then he would know that these are his natural feelings – and that would change everything. Marco half dozed, waited, reconsidered, wondered if his friend would give up, become aggressive or angry. What impact for the rest of this New York business trip?

Bodily contact ceased, there was a long sigh of reluctant, annoyed resignation, causing just a little anxiety as to the next moves. But Marco's friend just quietly left the room.

He returned later in the day, as previously planned, to play host and guide to the big city. Again, many confused thoughts as to how this could now work; but neither of them brought up the subject again. Perhaps the colleague was scared it would become known about – in the company, or anywhere. At that time, US legislation was as tough if not tougher than that of

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England - they both could have been in deep shit. Marco felt weird, to say the least, that they spent that whole day sightseeing, taking the Staten Island ferry like all good tourists do, and then meeting again at work over the next few days — all without either of them openly recalling the affair.

Reject homosexuality!

The emerging picture was not a pretty one.

Attraction to the same sex was considered a psychiatric and psychological sickness, while entering into sexual acts — although completely consensual and natural to those doing it — were illegal and criminally punishable.

So, finding a partner and satisfying ones needs was an onerous occupation by means of the most creatively-disguised personal ads in newspapers, or the more perilous alternatives of hanging out in and around public toilets, meeting in parks, or cruising the most sleazy bars and clubs. Risk was real and omnipresent for any option, whether it were from the law, or from aggressors. And because activity was forced underground, because it often took place in less-than-desirable surroundings — the 'dirty' notion was persistently reinforced.

Marco refused to go underground for his pleasures. It seemed untenable to envisage a subversive existence, to not openly show his love to another human being, to not live with a person one loves, to lie about being celibate, or to be the eternal loner.

Yet being open or being caught would bring even worse

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punishment: to be hounded by police, to be ignored or abandoned by friends, to be rejected by family, discriminated against, harassed, beaten-up — to be discarded by society.

Marco made his decision:

ok, the answer is clear – he is not going to be homosexual! That is just a filthy mindset which has to be erased. The brain operates just like the computers he handles every day for his job, it has a memory which is read-write, all he has to do is to reprogram it to think 'straight'. Somehow his brain has been infiltrated with a virus, bad ideas and thoughts which trigger inappropriate sensations — but now he knows how 'dirty' and messed up his life will be as a result, so he is determined to change. Marco is responsible, Marco can be his own master – just as he trains customers to understand how computers work, he is going to locate his psyche and let it know that he has taken control again.

Fortunately Marco has an amazing aptitude to act dumb, to delay a reaction, weigh up pros and cons, to withhold taking a stand or making a commitment. Thus, so far he has not done anything stupid, he has not gotten into trouble, he has not been beaten up, he has not shared openly his feelings and his attractions, and he is still young enough to start afresh – with energy and determination – with focus and vision of a wonderful 'normal' future.

Chapter 6

Moving on to a new life

Work has always played a most meaningful portion of Marco's waking hours, not only as a means of generating revenue, but out of sheer interest and enjoyment of what he does. He finds that this alone provides major strength to overcome most other challenges, perhaps with the single exception of serious illness.

Success in his job brought many opportunities for promotion, for changes, for travel, for learning new skills and for adding meaning and pleasure. Marco considers himself very lucky as it also allowed him to begin a 'new life' - a transfer to Switzerland with new responsibilities, new challenges, and — a new social environment.

Marco is a healthy young guy with excellent vocational prospects and, God willing, the major part of his life before him.

His brain is now implanted with a bright vision of an international career with a great company, of meeting a wonderful woman with whom to share all he has to offer, of building a nice house, creating a warm home with a happy family. He and his wife will have many shared interests, travel to exciting places, have interesting friends, and their children will grow up with love surrounding them.

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Marco doesn't consider that to be anything out of the ordinary as a life vision — or set of basic life goals — it is what many people would aspire to achieve. It is surely missing any special consideration for giving back to the world, of contributing to a good cause, or making a difference; but as yet Marco has not learned how to express that except in small ways — like by being a good citizen and having respect for others.

So, the vision is a good one, under normal conditions a realistic one, yet Marco also is aware that all this is not going to happen next month or even next year; realization could take many springs. Also, while goals are good to have, details can be neither planned nor programmed. What we can do is to keep the end goal clear in mind, grab hold of opportunities as they occur — nurture relationships that seem 'right', where both tangible characteristics and 'chemistry' come together. And at all times remain flexible — there has to be space for 'give and take' in small things particularly, and in big things as well if the foundation is sound.

When the 'give and take' become too unbalanced, or if the foundation is unstable, then it might be better to agree to move on before two human beings hurt one another in some unnecessary way. Easy to rationalize, less easy to implement when the time comes.

Socializing in Switzerland:

Not being fluent in the language brings its own complications, so Marco's initial socializing was contained

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within an international setting where the common language is english. But Geneva is very international; so the range of possibilities is large.

He met friends through the company he works for, in other international companies, at the United Nations, within CERN¹, at international NGO's² and church organizations, and more. A wide choice of local bistros and cafés proved to be amazing places to meet for dinner. He had never been enamoured by the idea of just drinks at a pub', many of which were not yet serving food. He enjoys much more meeting for good discussion for a couple of hours over a meal and a few glasses of wine.

Marco soon fell in with groups of single young people. They ate out, met at each others' place, cooked dinners together, had fun. On one occasion they ended up at the home of two gays where 'she' cooked and washed up - Marco's first time meeting an openly gay couple. Naturally enough, the on-going ebb and flow of affinities re-designed and reformed these gatherings. As time went on Marco was happily surrounded by singles looking for a mate, singles who were likely to remain so, and by young couples setting out on their journeys of new experiences.

He wondered how quickly he could, himself, shift to that final category and also head towards his vision. Progress seemed slow, but it was care and caution that held back

1 CERN: European Nuclear Research Center

2 NGO: None-governmental organization

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youthful excitement and eagerness. Marco remained sexually timid and rarely became intimate, reserving those moments for an especially stimulating partner in the overall sense. He was not seduced by wild exuberance, heavy make-up, or what he called 'thinly extraverted' — making attempts to impress using superficial knowledge or constantly changing the subject. It did not seem reasonable to him to spend his limited instinctive attraction for the female package on one with which he could not imagine spending the rest of his life.

Rather, he was determined to remain selective, and wait — the right 'she' will come along, just be patient.

In those days Marco was not bad looking, no muscular body, not a film star physique by any means, but not ugly either. He had never been a gym rat, nor particularly fit, but always managed to keep slim and trim. This 'regular' look made for a first-level filter against the girls he would, anyway, not liked to have dated!

His ideal characteristics were not written down, nor even created definitively for use as a check-list at each encounter. There must be some degree of natural physical attraction, not necessarily in a sexual way. A kind face, and a well-proportioned body – not looking for a publicity model, but a body that is being looked after, through healthy eating and some exercise. Also, he refused the idea to be overpowered by a physique much taller or heavier than his!

And yet, however keenly he judged the physical aspects at

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that time, he was more deeply attentive to the intellectual and intangible. He would like his partner to be of calm and caring disposition, with a good degree of self-confidence, and open about her interests in life — without being a brag or a bore. And above all, he wanted her to share interests and be interested.

As Marco considered these wants and desires, he was reminded to look carefully at his own reflection.

How could he possibly be attractive to the woman who fits into those criteria? What is *she* looking for? How can he improve his own compatibility with *her* ideal life-long partner image?

In the winter months Marco and his entourage turned to skiing. He advanced with difficulty at first, but then discovered a learning approach called the 'inner game', which not so much 'taught' skiing as let you 'discover' skiing through the mind and through experimentation.

Auto brain-washing seemed to have become an addiction. Reprogramming his mind to be 'totally straight', or to 'ski out of the mind', the process is somehow similar, and perhaps the goals are somewhat complementary!

In fact the skiing worked really well; Marco can thoroughly recommend their methodology which he followed for two successive winters in Andermatt and in Zermatt; with significant improvement and much increased enjoyment – and

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many more socializing opportunities.

He took up tennis, encouraged by colleagues and the fact their employer had good arrangements with a local tennis club.

He joined a few friends for water skiing on the lake — even bought a small boat for the purpose — and finally jogging or running as a remnant of his only remaining school days sports activity.

Chapter 7

Michaela

After being in Switzerland for a few years, Marco's career was moving along very well, he had spent almost a year in California for his job, and was now traveling extensively as a result of moving out of technical assignments into a rather nice position of managing a small European business.

He had saved enough cash for a good deposit on a house, the construction of which was now complete and he had recently moved in.

Timing could not have been better when he met his wife-to-be; the first two major steps of his vision having been fulfilled — international career, and house with garden; now awaiting the perfect partner!

Today, he could write many glowing chapters about Michaela. Some of Marco's friends and colleagues were open-jaw with the news of their engagement — rightly so. It would have been vain for him to presume the match would work; her qualities went so much beyond the threshold of his dreams. He was to discover so much about her, and through her to discover so much goodness, patience, tolerance, and understanding.

Particularly now that they are apart and that their so-called 'bad' times can be viewed with full understanding as to why they developed; there is a retrospective clarity that eliminates

Chapter Seven – Michaela

any blame or doubt that Marco so blindly placed upon her. To the contrary, Michaela's comportment over those difficult times exemplified her foundational values.

“With a little help from my friends”:

Marco had known Michaela for several months, she had come to work for the same company. She helped him a couple of times and they hung out for coffee and such; initially nothing more than that, except that he found her interesting, she was clearly bright, yet modest, and single. Intelligence and blonde conjures up the proverbial oxymoron; but in this case the proverb is way off track. Marco was finding her increasingly attractive yet without detectable reciprocity, he did not take his feelings further.

Before construction on Marco's house was finally completed, Michaela disappeared from their company offices. He didn't know where, until some weeks later when he organized a house-warming evening and received a call from a long-time friend who was on the invite list. She asked him why Michaela was not invited and had she been forgotten? A kick which resulted in Michaela and he being 're-united' through the party. In fact, she had left work to begin university studies.

They began to date: concerts, walks, dinners, meeting each other's friends. Marco vividly remembers their first walk by the river close to her place, nervously they intertwined hands and felt pleasurable vibrations pass between their bodies. The next

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31st December she invited him with a few other friends to celebrate New Year at her warm and cosy studio. It was a modest little place, in an old village, under the roof of a converted stable. She had moved there from a larger, modern but anonymous, apartment — in order to find character.

As they grew to know each other, Marco became convinced that he had now met the person he wanted to be with — he would do his utmost to nurture the relationship so that she would feel the same way.

And she did — as they talked and planned together it seemed their views of the future were converging, their feelings for each other were becoming stronger; Michaela and Marco wanted each other.

The little studio where she was studying by day, became their home despite the new empty house just 15 minutes drive away. Much appeared to be so perfect for them, and yet Michaela recognized there were pieces missing from the puzzle; although Marco was far too starry-eyed and bushy-tailed to sense his innate limitations within this partnership. When they sat down one evening to venture into those depths, he was at a loss to fully appreciate what Michaela was describing. Nevertheless the word she used is tattooed on his brain - she was looking for the *base*.

She was not referring to the most frequently-used definitions of 'love bases' like in baseball – kiss, french kiss, fondle, fuck ! Her meaning was clearly more in the direction of 'foundation'

Chapter Seven – Michaela

or 'underpinning' of an enduring relationship.

Marco is usually ok with words and practical actions, even tangible intentions — but she would need to help him with that illusive '**base**'. Every individual item she described as being a part of it was easy to understand, but all of these were clearly not 'it' — not fully 'it'. Everything fitted into what they both wanted to create — yet he was unable to 'communicate' or even imagine the holistic nature of what Michaela was searching within him.

Marco's brain throbbed, and his heart ached. He felt powerless to avoid this fissure with the first woman with whom he really wanted to share his life. He would have done almost anything to unscramble the 'code'. What was preventing him from 'getting it' ?

Well, by now we all know that it was 'marco', in the depths of his psyche. He was unconscious to it, to *him*; but *his* presence was affecting behaviour and ability to feel what Michaela sensed so intensely.

Michaela proposed accepting professional help which they did with a psychiatrist named Hoffstetter who saw the couple together and then also separately. This tall, slender, man was a heavy smoker, used crutches to get around, and was clearly stretching the upper end of his time practicing his liberal profession. Michaela believed in him; Marco was not so sure, but nothing to do with the doctor's age or ailments.

In private, Hoffstetter asked Marco specific questions about

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masturbation and about the images in his mind while jerking off. He was embarrassed and refused to describe them, so the doctor did not insist further, perhaps he should have.

In retrospect, this doctor was most certainly very close to psyching Marco out; threatening his armour of denial, but he realizes now that it helped only to further strengthen his resistive forces against marco – in order to protect his 'normalized' life – and especially now his love for Michaela. Danger was constantly lurking in the background when on vacation at places like the '*Club Med*' where well-toned bodies of the sports 'GO's' (mainly male coaches³) were definitely a risky distraction; but the forces resisted.

marco was again silenced.

The sessions with doctor Hoffstetter could be taken as failure, because there was no breakthrough as such; yet those sessions did move the couple forward in terms of 'communicating'. They were forced to talk about problems, and when we say "they", it really was Marco in need of the outside attention to move beyond his comfort zone. The outcome was positive — but not sufficiently so.

Eventually, Michaela moved into the house with quite a bit of her furniture and everything she needed for her studies. She kept the studio, which was a good move on her part, because the time soon came when she would need it again.

Marco travelled during one week for his job and upon

3 French: "Gentils Organisateurs" !

Chapter Seven – Michaela

returning late on Friday, was surprised that Michaela was not in the house — but neither was any of her furniture, and none of her belongings; just a handwritten note saying she had moved back hoping that it will help them both. Her note said that it would be good to keep in touch and that Marco should call if he felt like it. Marco knew that Michaela's moving out is what he deserved, but to know that she had planned and done this gave him an enormous kick, and then all he could think about was the state in which she must be in right now; she did not deserve this. Her note thanked him for the time they had had together; a suggestion of an end to the relationship.

Marco phoned her studio and she answered with a quiet hesitancy which spoke volumes. He asked if he could join her immediately which she agreed to, as long as he would have something useful to say.

When he arrived at her studio, he found Michaela with her furniture placed or piled up just anywhere straight from the move; she was sitting amidst stacks of books and boxes. A woman friend and her had rented a small van and had moved the things by themselves. After unloading, the friend had returned the van, leaving Michaela alone and in the saddest of conditions — which Marco vowed he would never ever cause her to be in again.

Marco kept her note, which serves as a reminder that unfortunately important things did not change, and that clearly the '*base*' has not been established. And as the couple both now know, it never truly could have been.

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Marco's girlfriend had left a way open for him and so he took it. He re-started to date and to visit her in her studio. He went a number of times by motorbike, partly because he enjoyed motorcycling and partly because it was a gesture of humility to arrive on the two wheels of a lowly 250cc Suzuki rather than inside the BMW 525i which, along with the house, was his symbol of material success. When it came to leave at the end of the evening and it had started to pour with rain, the humility had even more sense of realism ! The circumstances made Marco feel younger, less conceited about work accomplishments and material gain, but nevertheless ecstatic to be dating, and so cool to be dating a student ! And Marco was very honest — so grateful to have a second chance to be dating *this* student.

Courtship culminated in engagement and finally marriage with a honeymoon in Barbados. Marco recalls that their luggage did not arrive, so they had to buy essentials like sun lotion, bathing gear, and simple clothes to wear around the hotel — obliged to remain on the beach and in the 'bridal suite' waiting for the next British Airways flight to bring their bags a few days later (the room of all newly-weds was referred to as the bridal suite by the staff). Once luggage arrived then Marco and Michaela rented an open buggy to visit the island and to find local restaurants in the evenings for savouring a wide variety of the island's speciality cuisine. A perfect relaxing time, being at ease and feeling so free and well together.

Chapter Seven – Michaela

Two years later they vacationed in California, two weeks of total leisure with no specific program - just touring the wine country and moving from one delightful Bed & Breakfast to the next.

They had long since discussed trying to have a child, and if not one of their own, a possible adoption; they had married late and so now they should decide, and act while they still can become reasonably-young parents. From the resulting date of birth of their son, they 'just know' that he was conceived out of love and tender encounter during one of many relaxing moments in Napa Valley !

Chapter 8

Coming-Out

Our life is a gift and we should live it to the full, according to our means and our convictions, and so long as our health and our environment permit us to do so. Along the way, we might take decisions freely as to how to live, other times we are driven or restricted by factors beyond our control.

We can easily choose to think of ourselves as a 'victim of circumstance' when things haven't gone as we would have liked or as we think they should have. It is easy to take on the victim role, it allows us to blame someone or something else for what happened, or needing to follow a path we would not otherwise have chosen. Yet we can genuinely *be* a 'victim of circumstance' and still choose *not* to be victimized – to *not have* such deep regrets that end in guilt, blame, anger, or self-condemnation, even depression.

Marco's level of denial has been so deep but, despite that, he can easily accumulate regrets on at least three accounts:

- that he chose to ignore early indicators and continued to live the hypocrisy of a 'standard' life;

- that he brought his wife and son into a situation which was built on a false pre-condition;

- that he placed significant blame on Michaela for their break-up, before becoming honest with himself and others.

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Yes, these are genuine regrets; but it will not do any good to let them fester. Nonetheless, they are to be taken seriously. Marco will continue to do what is needed for his family to suffer the least; knowing that the latest circumstances can no longer be changed. Regrets (as opposed to guilt, anger, blame, or worse) can be handled sensibly and objectively, with full consciousness and with a good conscience. Lives must go on being fully lived, and in this case likely to be even more fulfilled than before.

Out to himself:

To continue this phase of the story, Marco repeats his being 'liberated' from a mostly unconscious conflict that was the basis of his life for so long. He has ceased denying his homosexuality *to himself* just hours ago.⁴

At the same time he also sees relief for both he and Michaela because they will now have a clear, understandable, explanation as to why things turned out the way they have, which should remove all suspicion of other reasons or motives for a soured relationship. This is also 'liberation'.

The roughness of the journey which Marco and his family now have ahead of them will be dependent on how they handle regrets. The future will be best built on agreeing what cannot be changed and on retaining good memories even as new realities emerge.

4 Chapter 4

Marco's Awakening

Out to his first male 'crush':

At this point, Marco has '*come-out*' to himself, which is a critical first step, and also of course to Clément who helped him to acknowledge and accept the situation.

Clément is the only one with whom Marco has shared his discoveries — but he has not yet told him of his infatuation with him ! So, that evening Marco wrote his first ever male-to-male love letter:

“Dear Clément,

I ought not to have done what I did today, but my reaction was stronger than me. When I realized what had happened it was too late to take back or correct anything. I hope that you can forgive me or accept it as a sign of very deep friendship.

This fraction of a second remains etched on my brain, in my 18-year-old head. There is a fire that burns in my heart which, until now was incarcerated within a conformist body and spirit. What a beautiful sentiment, what liberation, what a magnificent sensation. And what a gift to have crossed paths with you so soon after the door of my prison was unlocked.

I would like to spend some quality moments with you, Clément, if you have even the smallest opening to my feelings. If not, I will always have the greatest respect for you and hope we can continue to talk.

If there were remaining doubts about my sexuality, they exist no more.”

Since that time, Clément has become a very good friend and confident to Marco. He reacted to the message in a way which was tender, caring and loving, just as Marco knew he would —

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because of the wonderful person he is.

The following day Clément texted assurance of his friendship but not yet knowing how to reply fully to the message. A few days later he sent Marco the most awesome response — a so-carefully-crafted rejection of sexual or physical reciprocity, yet declaring his love in a spiritual, intimate and intellectual sense, and acclaiming the powerful force with which Marco now affirms, “*who I am*”.

How privileged Marco was to be turned down in such embracing terms.

Clément denies he is gay - not attracted to men; yet to this day Marco remains unsure, and wonders if there is not a little bit of Clément hiding within this incredibly beautiful and otherwise declared straight package. Not surprisingly, Marco had fallen immediately into the problem of gay dating; how to know if a guy is gay or not?

However, this man was the sole target of the '*coup de foudre*', from which Marco continues to feel the after shock vibrations each time they meet. He is considerably younger than Marco, an unlikely match even if he were gay. Yet that did not enter Marco's mind as he was living elations of liberation and new-found youth. Despite his physical age, the brain was processing as though he was a kid in puberty again and the whole world of attractive men around him was suddenly his playground.

Yet, even with all that euphoria and support, Marco is again

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alone, without really knowing what to do next. So he turns once more to the internet and searches for 'gay chat forums'.

He entered his first chat room very cautiously as though being watched over his shoulder(!) The chat here was 'live', a list of logged-in user names at the side and each participant's comments appearing as they were entered. There did not seem to be a structure. Entries were short, many abbreviations were used, sometimes throw-aways crept in, crude language was frequent, perhaps some relevant comments were made — but to which subject? This truly 'chat' style was surely not going to allow decent exchange based on reflection or forethought.

And then a user named David typed a 'private' remark, simply “hello, Marco”; an invitation to become part of the action. But he was totally not ready to expose himself. “Do these people already know each other? What are they looking for? How do I react? I don't yet know the vocabulary and I have no experience to share with this group of gay men.”

He panicked and left the site — “sorry David, sorry guys”.

From the *Google* list of options he found a much more useful chat site, rather than a chat room, organized into broad subject areas, then specific '*threads*'. One of the categories was entitled '*Advice & Information*' with a specific thread labelled '*Late in life discovery*'. He read some of the existing posts and found the level to be solid, there were very few snide remarks and no obscenities. Guys were stating their issues or describing scenarios – potentially helpful responses were being posted.

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Marco took a chance and wrote a 30 line summary of his situation; he asked for comparisons or advice. To his amazement, within a few hours he had four extensive and valuable responses posted, from guys offering details of their own similar case, and giving suggestions. Within 3 days he had exchanged with several guys and found himself offering more and more details and clarification of his case to others, who themselves were looking for guidance.

One of the chat users and moderators was a woman who latched on to Marco's case with total tenacity as she was convinced her husband was in a very similar situation. Her reason for being on the chat site became so clear, she wanted to know how to get her husband to be honest with her. She figured it would be the best for all — relief for her, and the opportunity for them to become good friends. She said their sex had basically stopped and the passion from his side had never really been there. She was convinced her husband must be gay and that she envies Marco's wife – “who is about to get the explanation that she has been seeking for years, and to begin the process of healing.”

Another guy, who *came out* at age 50, had been married twice with 6 children and suddenly realized all his marital problems were his fault.

And so the revelations continued, and could have gone on longer, but after the fourth day Marco arranged to e-mail exchange one of the guys and also the woman, and to leave the

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chat site — with good feelings and grateful for having found it.

From these chats he very quickly received confirmation that he was certainly not alone. Over those 3-4 days the witness and counsel he received was substantial. He was warned against taking on a guilt complex, but — without exception — advice was to *come-out* as soon as possible to his wife, and to be honest with her. He was assured by their experiences that the news will probably be a relief to her (or she probably knows anyway). It was suggested to make particular effort to let his wife know that he still cares about her feelings and her well-being. Those who had learnt from their mistakes were insistent on letting his wife really know that, and also that the changes he is going through do not minimize or eradicate the great times they had in the past.

Well, their advice supported Marco's sentiments entirely while the insistence on saying things to his wife, rather than letting her make assumptions, was very good in Marco's case, because that is a trap he tended to fall into; that has been indeed a part of his communications problem.

The biggest surprise, quite a shock in fact, was the frequency of similar situations. Marco had imagined his case to be quite exceptional, particularly related to such deep level of denial, which even he had difficulty believing.

But not so.

Today, there are chats and even whole sites devoted to supporting wives whose husbands *come-out* as gay.

One of Marco's replies back to the chat site sums up and

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reiterates his consistent feelings:

“I do not wish this experience on anyone but I feel better to know that I am neither alone nor a lost case. Yes, I want to be decent to my wife, she is the best friend I've ever had in the world and I have hurt her enough.”

Once again, the world-wide-web on the internet has proven to be of great value in supplementing knowledge and awareness such that subsequent face-to-face encounters can be so much more meaningful - and that the process of discovery can be so much faster. Yes, we know there is a lot of crap on the internet, we have to be attentive and select well. Yet, Marco has good reason to be so happy that such broad connectivity is there and available.

| *'Coming-out'* stories abound online; on dedicated gay chat sites and increasingly on YouTube. The toughest are from young people struggling with their overall identity where the guy (or girl, but we have really only focussed on boys) is often scared as hell of telling his parents. Homophobia, in general, is an understandable phenomenon given our social and religious brainwashing, but when he reads of boys beaten by their father, or thrown out of the house in 'disgrace', even disowned; then Marco is torn between wanting to cry rivers and throwing up.

Ok, it's a shock to the parents, it's not what they expected, it doesn't fit their world — but it's their son for fuck's sake. Do they think for one moment that their son wanted to be gay? Of

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course he didn't — not as long as society rejects or marginalizes him; as long as he will be harassed, however subtly; as long as he will need to fight for basic rights so he can have fundamental pleasures and share his life with someone he grows to love and care for.

It is clear that the parent reaction in those cases is driven by family image, the neighbours, the work colleagues, the extended family, the church people . . . whoever. And all of that before the love for their son. It is a perfect example of promulgating negative religious teaching. Yet in the New Testament of the Bible, God's love comes through a father to welcome back his son after he leaves home and squanders everything. The father does this against all social expectations and the dramatic objections of his other son. In fact this father shows his love for both of them — above all else.

Marco doesn't know how his parents would have reacted had he *come-out* to them as a youth, when they were still alive. In any case, he really doesn't think the comparison is a fair one. They would have had extreme difficulty considering the environment of the day; the best they could have done would have been to tell their son that they love him, continue to support him in keeping it quiet, and helping him to keep an undercover existence. It would have been tough. It was tough for many.

Which is why there are so many 'straight-married' gays, fabricating a straight life because the open alternative was anything from difficult to hardly possible. With improving

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conditions for gays in many countries, for artificially-constructed relationships which have lost their shine, there is a way out; there is a '*coming-out*'. Hypocrisies are crumbling.

In fact it is not so different from what is happening with the divorce rate in general. In previous generations divorce was rare, and now with a more liberal society, those marriages that are running out of steam or passion or whatever, can be terminated without the same degree of stigma as before. Society has learned that keeping a marriage artificially alive, despite unpleasant difficulties between the couple, is not necessarily a good thing — not even (or maybe especially) for the kids; so acceptance of divorce is widespread and civil remarriage is usually no longer an issue either. Some Christian churches and some clergy still refuse to remarry divorcees; but they cannot, and should not, stop the civil process. At the same time divorcees can be homophobes – ironically driven by the same source material that condemns their own 'sin'!

Coming-out in our current era should be an easier and more positive experience since the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases in May 1990, and most countries within the European region have at least decriminalized homosexuality and consensual same-sex behaviour. However, stigma and discrimination against homosexuals still exist; and reports show continuing and widespread homophobia in Europe.⁵

5 World Health Organization report on HIV/AIDS May 2011

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Marco appreciates that his situation involves two very separate implications. One of them is the actual *coming out* which all openly-gay men have gone through in some way. The other is specific to being married and having a responsibility for a wife and son; a family. In Marco's specific case, the fundamental marriage damage has been done — it is fractured and he and his wife are living apart. If this were not the case then '*coming-out*' would be a veritable bombshell in its double force of simultaneously breaking a home and invoking the homosexual element. In no way does Marco minimize the seriousness of what he now needs to do, but he can be thankful that he is going for one barrel, not two.

Out to his Pastor:

"I need help, how should I? when should I? where should I? I turn to my Pastor."

An automatic reaction like this is, in itself, a huge privilege in today's world. Firstly, belonging to a welcoming community and knowing to be always accepted with open arms and open hearts. Secondly, having developed relationships of confidence and friendships with many members, as well as with the Pastor and her husband.

Marco's church is quite different from the traditional ones he knew from his childhood. The current Pastor knows both Marco and his wife. If there is any hope of reconciliation after his coming out, she will help them to make it possible.

So, rather than conclude his 'confessions' in the church

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office, they decide to place a 'Swiss-finish' on things by going to an old town restaurant for '*fondue au fromage*'. There, over the cheese fondue and white wine, Marco pours his heart out and feels much better for having done so — and starts building the confidence to open up to his wife as well, which of course the Pastor is encouraging him to do as soon as possible.

Out to his wife:

Marco's '*coming-out*' to his wife takes two steps. The first attempt at confession is hardly successful. He has come to the house with the specific goal of opening up and communicating with his wife in a way as probably never before. And even though they are standing in the same kitchen where most of their difficult conversations have taken place, he is eager that today's discussion will be different. Sylvain is just preparing to go to his Easter vacation job in the local supermarket, and as he leaves the house Marco says to Michaela that there is something important she should know. Of course he would like her to sit down but she says she doesn't have time — which makes him hesitate to insist with the plan; but after all this preparation he feels it now unreasonable to leave without telling her.

Finally, he speaks out; and says, “I now know that I am gay”.

He figured with that information she would then sit down and they would talk for at least a few minutes, but no; her

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schedule was tight and she could only criticize him for having told her in a rush, in wrong circumstances, and at the wrong time. It is so difficult for Marco not to fall back into a victim role again; this scenario is as though nothing has changed from the old times and he really wonders why he bothers to continue trying. They agree to meet the next day, but that also gets postponed and they finally meet on Saturday, four days later.

Marco does not recall exactly what occurred early on in that next discussion. It would have been pointless for him to argue about Michaela never having time and him always having to 'fit in' between her important agenda items; yet he was tempted to do so when, as expected, she continued to reprimand him for having announced something as significant as being homosexual, 'in a hurry'.

More constructively though, they managed to escape this confrontational trap and move their energies to the substance and implications of the situation. Particularly, Michaela elevated the conversation back to her fundamental principles upon which she is unbending. She has always been a protector of minorities and human rights in general; in her work she would invariably choose to defend cases of moral combat over more lucrative engagements. So, for Michaela, homosexuality is not something to be against, there is no shame, there is no basis for questioning or blame-setting. For her, being gay is a part of who and what a person is, and there is no way anyone can change it, so it must be accepted, handled, and embraced.

Marco and Michaela had little notion of how they would tell

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Sylvain, and no feeling to what his personal reaction would be. Thankfully he is living in an environment of tolerance – many languages, many colours, many religions, and most likely he already has gay school friends and knows others as well. Nevertheless, they made a careful plan:

Firstly, they would set a firm date, two weeks from now, where Marco would '*come-out*' to his son.

Secondly, they agreed that Michaela would be there.

Thirdly, in the interim two weeks, Michaela would seek guidance from her psy' for any special considerations they might want to take.

Fourthly, they decided to meet one more time before Easter.

Out to his son:

Easter Monday was a most beautiful day in all senses.

The sun was shining and it was warm. All three of the little family sat on the terrace of their house with cool drinks, the dog sleeping in the shade, and the trickling sound of the ornamental waterfall of the garden pond.

Marco was very nervous as to what words would finally emerge from his most-certainly over-prepared intentions. And more importantly he was nervous to know what reaction would come from Sylvain.

If he had been coming out to his dad, considering all the examples he had heard or read on the web he could handle that now. But so far, he had not come across examples of any dad

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coming out to his son!

Marco does not recall what he finally said, but it definitely included an emphasis on his deep denial, on his psychiatric visits with negative direct results from those sessions, and his recent breakthrough of self-discovery. Marco thinks that he mentioned learning via the web of so many others in similar circumstances. He knows for sure that he mentioned his positive feeling of having found an explanation for mum and dad's difficult relationship.

Sylvain listened quietly and then responded in a way that touched Marco deeply; almost as if Sylvain had reflected for some time on his words.

He started by saying that he will always love his dad, that this doesn't change anything.

He followed by imagining this to be a relief. Marco wondered if he could know or feel how big a relief this was — *wow*.

And finally, he suggested that, now this is over, dad could have a renewed link with the family; particularly a better relationship with mum.

Sylvain showed his love and his mature understanding, and gave Marco a break — he could not ask for more; he is so grateful and privileged.

Marco loves him dearly.

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Further out:

Marco will need to come out to other family members, to friends and to colleagues; and he will do so. But the most critical, and certainly the most challenging, episode is successfully accomplished.

He can now say, with assured support from his closest loved ones, that “*I am gay, and I am out*” – out of the closet, out of the hypocrisy, out of concern for how his wife and his son will accept him, or not.

When the time comes, when the opportunity arises, when the spirit drives him, other people will get to know – there is no reason to withhold, as he is perfectly ok with it. Yet, there is no need for any systematic broadcast.

In addition, if someone doesn't like it or approve of it, then that becomes *their* problem. Marco will not allow anyone to interfere with the energy of a lifetime he now feels to openly acknowledge and to face his new reality, to live fully now as his real self.

Chapter 9

marco's awakening

Marco's '*YouTube*' channel was created more than three months before he *came out*, so that he could not only watch, but also subscribe to users and comment on their videos. He could follow exchanges of comments with other subscribers; just like a chat.

He became itchy to upload his story — encouraged by the results achieved from so many on-line guys. Their sharing had been helpful to Marco who wanted desperately to relate his own experiences and perhaps eventually help others. He no longer owned a working video camera since his broke when Sylvain was eight years old, and was never replaced. So, instead, he produced an animation of text and photographs which became his first 'video' upload.⁶

That message is reproduced on the next page and represents the state of his story, at the point we are now in this book — a declaration of his real self, the regrets of the past, and many challenges yet exciting opportunities ahead. Particularly fascinating is how he will handle faith and homosexuality.

The post was public just days after *coming out*; a concise yet profound statement to anchor his sentiments lest they be distorted or erased by the sands of time, to provide an indelible marker, a reference, a base on which to build a new future.

6 Title: "Marco's Awakening".

Chapter Nine – Marco's awakening

marco's awakening . .

can marco also help wake up the world? marco has awakened, has become conscious

he is gay, has ceased denying

marco accepts his homosexuality

has come out to his wife and son . .

and will continue that journey

marco is a christian

and belongs to a gay-friendly church

marco is supported by his faith, his family and his friends

marco has no guilt around his sexuality, but . .

is devastated for the hurt caused to his wife by not awaking earlier in life

marco believes that:

The devil is in the denial . . faith is in living fully who we are. His family suffered for years.

marco struggles to link his situation and faith . . .

1. Sexual orientation is a gift from God; not something to be denied

2. If homosexuality were a 'cross to bear', then why would God encourage denial and cause pain to an innocent partner?

3. Marco's 'straight' family life may have kept him "standard", and safe from persecution in a homophobic world, but it is a cowardly option, and unfair on others.

Conclusion for faith and homosexuality is the following:

GOD HAS IT RIGHT . . . but in so many cases . . .

THE CHURCH GOT IT WRONG

So to recap where we are in the story: here is Marco, just having experienced his first male love crush with a younger man – breaking through what he describes as 'an incredibly long-lasting and impenetrable shield.' He has been in unconscious denial of his homosexuality for many years but now clearly sees how his true sexuality has been a barrier to a wholesome close heterosexual relationship.

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From his gay perspective, it is like a weight has been lifted – he feels younger, energetic, and free. As if his body is going through a new puberty.

From his straight perspective, he feels ashamed of what he has brought upon his wife and son — disappointed with himself for not responding to clues long ago, for rejecting reality.

He has received help from his Pastor and advice from those with similar experiences via internet chat sites, giving him the sense of urgency, and the courage, to *come out* to his wife and son. Above all, Marco wants his wife to know that the current changes in no way negate the great times they had together and that he continues to care for her feelings and well-being. He is grateful that his family has reacted so positively.

Marco's next step is to come to grips with what is ahead, which includes discovery, journeying through a transformation of identity, dreaming of new possibilities for the future, and doing tangible things in the present which will get him there.

Clément has become a close support and has provided contacts within the gay community. It is true that Marco knows very few openly-gay people; this is going to change quite soon ! But how does a shy 'new gay' get accepted into this world as yet unknown to him; into the gay 'sub-culture'? He learns of LGBT⁷ associations – and scans their websites for possible reasons to become involved. One of them has

7 (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender)

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organized a sub-group of 'C+H' – Christians+Homosexuals. Marco figures that he will have an excellent introduction to the gay community through the common trait of being Christian; and that such a connection will take away any apprehension of being the new kid.

In the meantime, he meets a fellow church member, Frank, to whom he tells his story. Frank invites him to one of Geneva's gay bars; tucked away in a side street not far from the railway station. The weather is fine and warm and so they sit on the bar's sidewalk terrace. 'Wall-to-wall gays' was Marco's first remark when he described the experience – he had never been in a gay bar, did not know what to expect, had never thought about it before. That evening there were only guys and the terrace was full to overflowing. Without his 'escort' Marco would not have been comfortable, would not have known what kind of subject to evoke – even so, he was still not at ease. They ordered drinks. The waiter was cute, and suitably not dressed for the warm evening. Frank was a regular and introduced Marco to guys as he greeted those he knew; even so, offering a handshake was not totally appropriate.

“So, Marco, how did you meet Frank?” Marco hesitated, not sure if the truth was the right answer in this setting – so the questioner gave his own reply, looking straight at Frank; “You just fucked him, right?” Marco's immediate reaction was an embarrassed smile, which of course gave sufficient confirmation and immediately placed him as the assumed '*bottom*' or even '*submissive*' in the relationship. Frank did not

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object, the conclusion stood, and conversations went off in different directions. As Frank moved around, Marco was cut off from his life support and quickly discovered he was not yet ready to hold his own. He motioned to Frank, who understood, and then left by himself.

A few days later, Marco entered the gay association premises for the 'C+H' meeting which was to be held in their café-bar. Jean-Paul, with his partner Thierry, run the group; both were already there along with a few early arrivals. Quick exchanges about which church each person attended were made while arranging bar stools and chairs in a circle for a dozen or so people. Marco began to feel at ease. Being a practicing Christian gave him right of passage here – his faith history proved initially more interesting than the details of his gay lifestyle; that would come later. Two pastors entered, one was a woman whom Marco recognized because she had preached at a local church, and later he would discover she was the ex-wife of a colleague – she had *come out* as being lesbian. Geneva might be a well-known international city, but it is a small city and joining just a couple of local social groups will demonstrate just how small it is !

As more participants arrived, Marco sized each one up – how cute? are they alone? do they make eye contact? Yes, there were matches, but one man in particular gave Marco a feeling that he, too, might be hunting. Eye contact was rather shifty, somewhat cautious, a little uneasy, perhaps shy? As the group

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formed and time came to sit around the circle, Marco chose a high bar stool rather than a chair, and manoeuvred it to about 100° from his target; he wanted to observe - and be noticed.

Marco was nervous about hunting, as a gay, clearly with intentions beyond an innocent chat. Yet he was also at ease because two pillars are in place here – two anchors of certainty: the christian faith, and the guys here are all gay. Whatever emerges, he will not make the same mistake as with Clément! No-one has perfect '*gaydar*' and here it is not essential.

Typical of most group discussions, it began with a round of formal introductions which, without the already-acquired common ground, could have been destabilizing. Marco's church was well known and the Pastors knew his Pastor – no secrets in Geneva!

Marco entered into the discussion led by Jean-Paul and the two pastors; yet paid more attention when the cute guy, dressed in all black, spoke up. Initially he had been rather quiet, but his interventions now showed careful reflection and were made with confidence. There was also sincerity in his contributions and he used his own situation to illustrate the points he was making. Marco wanted eagerly to dialogue with him, but pulled back when he figured that maybe he and the guy in black could discuss the subject later, together, just the two of them!

When it came time for the group to disband, Marco was certain of two things: his target was as interesting as it was physically attractive, and his cock was stirring. He walked over, announced his feelings and kissed the man in black, who

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didn't object. The guy began to explain how he felt depressed because he had recently lost his wife and was now alone. Marco didn't lie, but simply stated that perhaps they should chat because their situations had much in common.

A third pillar, three strong anchors.

They kissed again, intertwined in big hugs, and left together. Marco had come by train, the guy in black had a car and lived in France so they drove to his place for the night.

Marco was looking for love and companionship, and so was the man in black whose situation was very difficult as his wife had died just a few months earlier of cancer, after many years of illness and in need of close attention. He also has a single son of about the same age, as Sylvain. The man is Karim – from Algerian parents, born in France. Marco likes sun-tanned male bodies, so a dark-skinned North African is very welcome!

The two men's situations are quite different, Karim has led a shadow gay existence, while loving his wife and caring both for her and for their adopted son. Marco has rejected his homosexuality while loving his wife and son, yet not having allowed himself his natural sexual expression. So, here are these two – discovering each other and sharing their life's journeys, realizing how differently each has dealt with their real selves in facing the realities of a society where the marco's and the karim's have not been overly welcome. Both are going through a critical period; Marco is now *out* to himself, Karim

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has never auto-denied nor rejected his homosexuality – rather exploited it well; but always behind the closet doors.

Marco is so grateful these two guys met for his first real gay 'date'; to have so much in common and to be able to face together their decisions about *coming out* – Marco to those beyond his wife and son, Karim to his son and then to consider going further. Marco feels so liberated that his urge is to share his new-found energy with the world, but he also wants to respect and protect his wife and son. Karim wants to respect the memory of his wife which probably requires him never to be open within the circle of common family or friends. Both guys have created for themselves huge dilemmas – but there is more.

A second dilemma for Marco is about faith and homosexuality. If he had acknowledged his homosexuality as a young person, particularly in those times, he is sure he would have remained away from religion, would no doubt have had animosity towards the Church's teachings and doctrines, and would have joined the ranks of atheism. In fact, churches would have turned him away, he would have been rejected by them, as continues to be the case from many of them today. Some even call it excommunication. The most hypocritical stance is the church that says they “love the sinner but not the sin” – expecting a homosexual to abstain – in a similar way to demanding celibacy and abstinence from priests and then being surprised when sexual urges – urges of nature – get in the way.

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For priests, the way out is through a subterfuge relationship, either heterosexual or homosexual.

Marco had already reflected very deeply about this dilemma, over several weeks, and had come to the conclusions which he wrote down and shared in his very first 'public' message via *YouTube*. He decided that he does not have a problem with God and that God most certainly does not have a problem with him. Similarly, neither his Pastor nor the church to which he belongs have a problem — unlike so many churches which would persecute the 'sinner', and particularly so now that the 'sin' has been enacted.

Such churches might say that being homosexual or performing homosexual acts mean submitting to the devil; yet Marco believes just the opposite — that giving in to a lifetime of hypocrisy, by not admitting and accepting himself for what he is — that is where the devil comes in.

The devil is in the denial.

Marco has decided to follow his God-given instincts, his God-given sexual urges, and to enhance his faith by accepting, and living out, who he really is.

Any church, or any Christian, who cannot fully embrace a gay person – is being unfaithful to the teachings of Jesus (inclusion, love, welcoming those who are different). Marco's conclusion about faith and homosexuality is that, as nothing comes between him and God: *God has it right, only churches got it wrong*; 'churches' meaning the men (and increasingly women) who are influential towards religious institutions and

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their interpretation of what God and faith are all about.

Much of the problem lies with how stuck we are in the Old Testament traditions based on ancient laws and barbaric capital punishments. The proposal that 'a man lying with another man is an abomination'⁸ is one of those laws where both men should be put to death. But it sits alongside 'not eating shellfish'⁹, and 'not weaving mixed threads in your cloth'¹⁰. A rebellious son should be stoned to death.¹¹ Then we find that a daughter who gets raped in a town where she could (should) have called out for help¹², or 'those who commit adultery', is to execute both enactors. It seems that the streets should be full of all these law-breakers being stoned as is the scripture-prescribed punishment. Well, we would need to find considerable numbers of executioners, and finally only a very small percentage of those put to death would be gay (face your own 'sin' before you condemn others). Fortunately for us all, Jesus came along with far more reasonable and useful approaches to love one another. For God is love, and he blesses all true love.

Being born into this world into a christian environment, we of course '*have*' Jesus Christ. But what if we had been born into a Muslim family within a Muslim environment? Well, we would '*have*' Muhammad. And we would have not only the Qur'an, which condemns male homosexual acts, but moreover

8 Leviticus 20:13 Or detestable, depending on translation.

9 Leviticus 11:9-12 Anything in the seas & rivers not having fins & scales.

10 Leviticus 19:19, Deuteronomy.22:11

11 Deuteronomy 21:18-21 'all the men of the town should stone him to death'

12 Deuteronomy 22:24 'stone them to death'

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we would also have the Hadith in which the Prophet says to kill both who are engaged in such acts. Resulting from Hadith is the strict implementation of Sharia law; putting Hadith into practice. So, being born into a Christian or Muslim environment won't make us different individuals, won't change whether we are gay or not, and it won't change the God we worship — but we sure will be under big pressure to behave very differently; *coming out* is hardly an option. Sharia Law prevails still in many Muslim states and most recently newly-enacted in Brunei, including introduction of public stoning as a death sentence method for gay sex and adultery.

As Karim and Marco spent time together, they shared not only their bodies and their interests, but their respective complex passages through life so far. Karim could not live his true self as a homosexual Muslim - it was and remains an untenable concept. Because of that, Karim left the faith and converted to Christianity; an act which had extremely serious implications; it is a rare event and is considered blasphemy.

Yet, do we see the thread here?

How is it possible that a religion, or the society it influences can, 'with all good faith', disown a segment of its population — because of colour, because of origins, because of anything which is beyond an individual's control. Well, we cannot point a finger at Islam more than we can criticize many Christian

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churches. Origins are from the same scriptures and they propagate similar prejudices, and similar societal pressures. What has transpired, though, is that over time some have remained more entrenched than others.

Religion through religious institutions is a formidable transnational power, transcending boundaries and national governments: monarchies, dictatorships or democracies. Because of its influence, it was rejected, discouraged and persecuted by totalitarian communism, yet misused by the Nazis to glorify the state and state absolutism. Because of its influence it can be uplifting and inspiring. Yet because of its influence it is potentially totalitarian and stifling. Because of its influence, its institutions are under pressure from many sides; political and economical.

Marco has concluded that indeed the role of religious institutions is to be a spiritual guide and faith leader; to teach moral standards and encourage social harmony – yes, to be a balancing and stabilizing force to the extremes of generational 'progress', and modernity. Yet, he believes they equally have responsibility to integrate major evolutions of understanding into their doctrine, acknowledging discoveries about God's world and universe which humankind did not previously recognize (the earth does actually go round the sun). Scriptures might have been inspired by God, however they were actually written by men; and so it is understandable that they reference needs, laws and understandings of those times, and that

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misinterpretations across the ages can happen. More difficult to accept is propagating those misinterpretations or failing to reposition them; resulting in devastating consequences of stigmatization and marginalization of certain groups across history — such as blacks, slaves, women, and gays. And using them to justify horrific, inhumane treatment through persecution as in the slave trade or during apartheid.

Karim has read and re-read the Bible. Marco is no match for him in recalling what and where passages are to be found. However, the most powerful of all to Karim is the New Testament, the 'Gospels' which mean the 'good news' of Jesus Christ; so liberating, so refreshing, so inclusive. Yet, at the same time, it is not a give-away, nor a free passage; it requires a reciprocation of love, to share it with fellow human beings – a redistribution and reenforcement of Jesus' love through each of us – all the time. Their Pastors have told them, “it is a big responsibility to be a Christian”.

Marco adds that when a homosexual makes himself known and tries to continue with his faith, it is deceiving at least, and devastating at worst, that his own church and his so-called 'brothers and sisters in Christ' would refuse to extend acceptance and provide support.

That is very hard, especially for someone already a baptized member of what the Church itself calls the 'Body of Christ'; where all members of the faith are somehow connected — such that when one part of the body hurts, the fit and healthy part of

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the body takes care of it. Christianity is all about love, yes love, but really with the sense of solidarity; the notion of 'body' is no accident. Churches who themselves discard a part of their own body by preaching exclusion and discrimination, build societal phobias and encourage hate. They are, in Marco's words, “incredibly out of synch with true Christianity - and totally out of synch with what human spirituality in general, regardless of religion, is all about”.

The Church is built on the coming and the teaching of Jesus. Thus it fully, and unhesitatingly, embraces the example of Jesus when he ate with sinners, blessed the gentiles (non-Jews), and cured the sick regardless of their provenance or standing. Tolerance, understanding, and solidarity with all, is the key. “Love thy neighbour”, in the broad sense, and certainly all segments of Christianity – all parts of 'the body'.

So where did it all go wrong? Or was it always wrong and we are just fooling ourselves that reality can ever come close to that fundamental premise on which Christianity is founded? Or worse, that the Church has, paradoxically, become an inhibition to humanity getting to grips with its diversity?

Chapter 10

the next wave

Marco's associations with religion and the Church, both sadden and give him strength:

Sadness when ancient scripture is used to condone discriminatory behaviour; or for enticing hate against any particular group of humanity.

Sadness in interpretational fights over details of doctrine leading to fissures and splitting of denominations, while losing focus on the real essence.

Sadness with the propagation of historical sound bites - clearly contextual and having no place in the here and now.

Sadness when fundamentalism leads to, for example, conservative evangelicals creating simplistic propaganda, Jesus camps, and close-to-hysterical mass gatherings. Marco believes this is a kind of evil force, but sees large numbers latching on to it and connecting with it; populist politics and populist religion can feed each other

Sadness when the afterlife is preached as a compensation for the realities of harsh treatment and precarious living – this must be where the expression “religion is the opium of the people” comes from. Is this how Christianity spread over the world and over the centuries? Wasn't it all a colonial-inspired plan for power and economic wealth? Was there not political force behind it all?

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Of course there was. And today's right-wing 'supremacy' groups have not forgotten how influential this can be; Christianity being misused. One of the Christian missionary teachings in this direction was how God 'ordered' the hierarchy of rich and poor just as it was supposed to be, remain so, and thus be accepted as such. One verse of a very popular 19th century hymn that confirmed this teaching has since been removed, but only in recent times.¹³

spirituality

Marco sighs deeply after reflecting on so many negative views of Church and religion. A totally rational person would surely give in. There is no reason, there is no logical justification to stay in the church, he adds. Religion is a total hoax, opium maybe, heroine perhaps, placebo definitely.

Yet beyond Church and religion, there is that force we call God; it would be illogical to reject the existence of some universal power just because we have difficulties with its man-made institutionalisation.

In addition there is no totally rational person. We are not like a computer or a robot, and those devices will never be like us. Whatever the scientific predictions¹⁴ for emulating human sensitivity – we will get only programmed simulations. True emotions of humans will be missing, but so will the illusive, yet

13 “All things bright and beautiful” original verse 3. The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate.

14 Progress in Artificial Intelligence, AI

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more powerful, dimension of *spirituality*.

Humans are developed thinkers. Yes, but with our primitive perspective on time and our infinitesimal knowledge of the universe, we know that 'developed' must be relative: Our thinking and comprehension is tiny compared to the full intricacy of our own body, mind and spirit. It is also as insignificant as our place in the great creation of all things (or the total ad-hoc-ness of all things).

Spirituality is what takes us beyond our known physical environment, our ability to rationalize, and to conceptualize. It provides a calm force within us to overcome the limitations imposed by our basic senses (seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, touching) or even our expanded list of senses if we include taste, thirst, hunger, pain, balance, and time. Even beyond the possibility that some humans can detect magnetic waves, as can birds who use them for direction finding.

Spirituality helps us find internal peace, it can bring us inspiration, ways to release ourselves from a bad situation or steer us from focus on material possessions. We as beings are a creation of something greater than humanity itself, and that invokes questions which we are pretty certain we will never answer, yet we still want to 'know'.

Know what?

Well, if we think that we are here because of a plan, or a plan gone wrong, a creation by some force or being; or even if

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we think that there was no creation, but only pure evolution — we have arrived here with the faculty to think and to ponder the question as to why we are here. Are there forces guiding us, watching us, listening to us?

So ponder we do.

Then some want to know what happens after death, which is a whole new area of speculation and belief. Does our spirit go someplace? Will we come back? Marco has found his own solution to this series of questions – he does not believe in any afterlife, nor return to this life. On the contrary, he sees that propagating these teachings is forming opium addiction and is potentially dangerous as seen by suicide bombers and all who give up everything in this life to be 'close to God'. In fact Marco cringes regularly when this particular element is evoked within the liturgy or in readings; he can maintain his sanity and continuing faith only by re-interpreting 'life ever lasting' in the sense of life beyond sickness, life beyond extraordinary loss, and life beyond our own which will benefit from what we have helped leave behind. We leave behind offspring, teachings, morals, as well as role model actions in place for an inclusive and sustainable world: — our genetic legacy, our shared experiential legacy, and our collective documented legacy.

In contemplating spirituality at this point, Marco becomes very excited. He realizes that spirituality is universal, it is not something that is held by people of a single religion, nor of a particular race. It also transcends any belief system. It is

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inherent to all human beings, whether you belong to organized religion or not, or even believe in God or not, there is something of spirituality in all of us. Just like marco was waiting inside, we can rationally ignore, suppress, or deny our spirituality but it must come through. Surely it will come through. Yet perhaps it takes some kind of societal structure to enable the process; to 'give permission' so to speak; or to encourage.

Marco sees his own church as opening the space for spirituality to be expressed, searching for meaning if you like, or simply becoming content and at peace with not knowing in any rational way. At the same time, he realizes that a church is far from being the unique answer to providing a spiritual support – and that some individuals might not need a faith community at all. Particularly those who self-categorize as atheists will want to stay away from churches – yet the atheist world is populated with spiritual souls. Believers and non-believers are not different kinds of mortals !

Some might be further nourished through the right forum or gathering – physical or even virtual. One does not have to become Christian, or belong to any other religion, to find spiritual nutriment. Spiritual gatherings connected to no specific religion, or no religion at all, take place all over the world.

Thus, for spirituality to flourish, the arguments around interpretation of details within sacred writings of any specific religion, or the interpretations that differ between

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denominations of the same religion, become inconsequential.

Even more importantly, the discussion around whether 'God' exists and in what form, is irrelevant to most of these groups and to their spiritual well-being. So many books are written to challenge the existence of God – it has got to be a lucrative marketplace!

Such debates, especially those based on rationale, logic and various forms of 'proof' are, of course, missing the point – which is: *faith and spirituality do not need to prove God's existence*. 'God' becomes symbolic, representing a being, entity, or force way **outside** of our understanding – yet that force is acting strongly **within** us. None of this is in the sphere of rationality and logic, which is why the 'God discussion' widely misses the mark.

Does 'God' exist 'for me'? is a more acceptable question; but don't ask me to define 'my God' in your terms!

Marco hesitates at this point when he realizes that he just articulated a conflicting set of thoughts. On one hand he talks about 'my God', while on the other hand he believes that if there is a God then there can be only one. Marco is by no means suggesting a return to worshipping idols, sun gods, moon gods, a veritable 'top ten' depending on the place, the time, and the tribe. To break the apparent paradox, it is sufficient to understand it as being a piece of the One God inside each of us, call it 'Spirit' if you will.

evolving church - history and strategy

We do not have control of life, but we can choose how we see life, feel life, react to life, and look after our lives. Developing spirituality is going beyond the need to control, ending the belief that we *can* control. Spirituality replaces our view of certainty. It transcends knowing, goes beyond thinking that we have the truth - and especially that any one religion has total truth and that one set of scripture holds *the truth* about everything. Dogma is the danger of all religion. Remember what Marco says about 'having Jesus Christ' or 'having Muhammad'. Already we take 'sides', get camps of belief - being conditioned and indoctrinated.

Organized religions can help us develop a spirituality, to grow faith in ourselves and faith in others - love of ourselves and love and respect of others. Such faith can build bridges with other religions, peoples, cultures - so much more useful than remaining in a bubble of exclusion¹⁵.

The expansive, transnational nature of major religions (way before any transnational corporation!) is an incredible phenomenon - but also has meant dramatic confrontation across the world¹⁶. Just as humans fight each other and compete with each other, person to person, tribe to tribe, country to country - religions are no different because they are practiced by fallible humans as they rally behind an

15 Or worse, in a singularity, a bubble of complete isolation.

16 Reconquista, Crusades, partition of India & Pakistan, Israel-Palestine conflict, etc

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ideology.

The universal church of christianity itself has split into numerous pieces¹⁷, and the fragmented remains continue to this day to be plagued by arguments around doctrine and interpretation.

Jesus had the Roman Empire and the Jewish tradition to take care of; he brought a clear message of love and inclusion, breaking through tradition, getting heard, setting seeds but definitely upsetting the incumbent powers. He was a rebel of his time.

Muhammed, six centuries later, brought pagan Arabian tribes together, so providing a sense of togetherness and common purpose. For him, the moment was ripe. Even so, Sunni and Shia Muslims went their own ways almost immediately after Muhammed with the rise of competing caliphates.

Until the 16th century, the (catholic) Church was somewhat a secret society for all except those who could read the original scriptures or Latin. Prior to the Reformation with translation of the Bible into local language, and invention of the printing press to disseminate it¹⁸, believers could but blindly follow the preacher and you needed to be in church to hear it of course.

In this third millennium the Church's sphere of influence remains trans-border, but is now weakened and further divided by confrontation with current day realities and well-informed,

17 Split of Catholic Church 1054. Reformation 1517-1521

18 1522-1527: 100,000 copies of the New Testament in 5 years in Germany

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strongly opinionated, and influential societies moving at varying speeds on different parts of the globe.

Marco dreams of all churches making a faithful return to their origins, welcoming every part of the 'Body of Christ', no more discrimination, and reaching out with renewed openness to those who have left the Church, and those in the camp of atheist.

Yet, we need to bring scripture-based teaching into context of today's world, with today's knowledge, making our world an inclusive and better place for each one on the planet in this life, not in some life to come. Marco sees this as an essential church strategy for a globalised world in which our younger generations are more informed, more concerned and involved, and increasingly integrated in many aspects of planet sustainability — real issues such as climate, pollution, human rights, wealth gap, crime and corruption are all on the agenda. Linking of scripture, Christian teachings, and meaningful practical activities are the way forward to bring back young membership to diminishing mainstream Church.

So we need to tip the balance away from what an individual will gain from attending Bible study and church on Sunday toward more energetic collective activity in putting something in to make a difference where it is needed; and that is where the young people will contribute enthusiastically and learn more what true Christianity is all about.

Kudos to those churches already succeeding in doing this.

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rejecting the hate – reaching out

Marco's *coming out*, has provided many new experiences along an extensive journey, far from being just an isolated or ephemeral event.

He has lost friends without any comment, and made many new friends both straight and gay. However, the most significant experience has certainly been the realization that “now you are one” - on the receiving end of anti-gay articles, target of homophobia, being suddenly very sensitive to the positions of many churches, horrified by anti-gay legislation in more than 70 countries, and gay-bashing elsewhere. Marco's most recent disappointment is with happenings in his home town where there has been need to open a shelter for young gays (late teens, early twenties) thrown out of home by their parents.

What Marco has learned is that to understand the hurt, you have to stand in the shoes of the one being hit. Previously, Marco was very much on the sidelines of the issue – supportive but uninvolved and unconcerned. The transformation is not a surprise, but value of his experience is unprecedented.

Those who stigmatize and marginalize might think twice about their acts if a member of their family or close friends were to “be one”. Sometimes that doesn't work either. Young gays expelled from school, disowned by parents, excommunicated from their church, or refused a job – have committed suicide in despair. Only then might the harassers

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wake up to the reality of what they have caused – some never do. Suicide rate of young gays is the highest of all groups in many countries. In Switzerland one out of every four homosexual boys or girls will attempt suicide . . . how can we ignore that kind of call for help?

Yet we do, and the excuses come with no mercy from some churches – that being gay is not a problem: they 'love' gays but cannot accept the 'gay lifestyle' — meaning that gays who act naturally i.e. are attracted to, love, and have intimacy with, another person of the same sex — are considered sinners who insist on their sin (we love left handed people but we cannot tolerate that they write with their left hand). The sinner versus the sin.

From where does the hate originate? Well the word homosexual does not exist in the Bible because any comment about same sex encounter comes from entries made more than two to three millennia before the concept of natural sexual orientation would even be known about. So at that time those encounters were judged as totally unnatural and wrong, even risky. Right up until the mid 20th century, at which time science showed homosexuality to be a totally natural phenomenon, we might forgive those prevailing views. Although homosexuals throughout those ages needed to keep quiet and suffer more than hell if ever discovered. And in many places that remains the ugly truth today, despite the science.

Old Testament Leviticus and Deuteronomy¹⁹ is where the

¹⁹ References are given in footnotes in chapter nine

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majority of entries about same sex intimacy are to be found, yet there is also one significant mention in the New Testament; that of Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans. Paul of course also never uses the word 'homosexual' – as it was hardly possible to have invented a word to describe something unknown and unimagined. What he does speak of is 'natural' and 'unnatural' relationships. Unnatural ones mostly involved orgies, drugs, getting into a frenzy - and thus inducing states where fully heterosexual men and women indulged in 'unnatural' sexual acts. Thus, 'unnatural' behaviour.

Paul's writings have been interpreted across the ages in the context of ignorance of innate same-sex orientation. Now we know that sexual orientation is an inborn and unchangeable natural identity – thus homosexual acts are totally in-line and 'agreeable to nature'.

So because the science is 'so recent' we cannot criticise Paul's writings, but we can criticise churches for their continued use of out-dated interpretations once we do know better. Then it is unforgivable to not recant that which continues to make life difficult for so many – and to condone or even ignore persecution and great danger for many more.

Bravo to those churches which have made clear statements and taken initiatives to move forward on eliminating such discrimination.

Chapter 11

Marco on the body and self-healing

Human bodies are masterpieces of creation, or wonders of nature and evolution - depending on - well, you know; points of view and beliefs and all that. Yet so are the animals who roam the earth and the fish which swim in the sea. So it is with each plant and insect, and so on.

All these creatures have built-in 'apps' for self-survival, mating and reproduction, for adaptation, and for repair and healing. Without recourse to modern science and medicines, the human body can, to a great extent, heal wounds and protect against disease through an amazing cell regeneration and immune system which comes to each of us, straight out of the box. It is not perfect, humans died of many more diseases prior to antibiotics – but those are not perfect either as, when we over-use them, bacteria develop their own resistance and fight back.

However, our own internal immune and repair system can also become less effective if it is constantly shut down by artificial competition and complete lack of exercise. The old adage “a flu takes seven days with medicine, and one week without”, bears some truth. Marco is convinced that the more we rely on artificial means the lazier our internal system becomes. Of course we need to be mentally convinced as well,

Chapter Eleven – self-healing

so 'placebo' prescriptions can help satisfy the brain, thus giving our body the chance it needs to prove itself without our mind getting in the way. Once we have a bit more faith in the body, then inactive placebos can be eliminated as well; resorting to medicines only when absolutely necessary. Vaccinations keep the body's own immune system active in cases where we know it cannot deal with certain diseases alone.

Broken limbs need help to ensure that the body repairs them in the right place. Repair, yes, but it does not *replace* whole parts. Maybe a few more million years of natural evolution could produce humans able to totally renew themselves, piece-by-piece. There are animals (species) that are already capable to renew body parts – so it is logical that similar capabilities could develop through human evolution also; although that risks to take a bit longer than we would like.

In the shorter term we might envisage a man-made genetic intervention – or some other way of encouraging our bodies to retain stem cells required for the purpose of regeneration. We can bet that there is ongoing research around why humans *cannot* while some creatures *can*.

Religion teaches us that God is concerned for each and every one of us, however natural evolution is less concerned with the individual than with survival of the species, so re-growing a complete arm might never happen as there is no reason from nature as to why it should. When all else fails, the species becomes extinct ('the rivers and valleys were here long

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before man came along, and they will be here long after he's gone').

Transplants, artificial support, and replacement organs help survival and longevity of large numbers of individuals each year, but those numbers have little impact on the species as a whole. Whereas history has shown that epidemics and pandemics come close to annihilation levels, so medical solutions such as vaccinations become primordial.

More significant even than medicine, is that we are creating conditions for self-annihilation by destroying our own habitat rather than ensuring its well-being and continuity.

Something short of 10% of all humans that ever existed are alive today. In absolute terms, we reached numbers years ago where traditional farming and natural food supply would have become insufficient. Now, industrial-scale food production along with pollution and waste is fast eradicating the ecosystems that support its viability.

Our activities are unsustainable for our planet to cope and for us to survive.

With these facts about over-population in mind, Marco smiles sadly when he hears from religious groups that gay relations should not be endorsed or encouraged - as they do not contribute to pro-creation.

Chapter 12

Karim

Marco is a highly privileged gay person.

He lives in a country where his status is not illegal, nor seen as a sickness, nor labelled as a 'chosen lifestyle'. Here, he is not openly harassed nor discriminated against by authorities, and same-sex civil partnerships are legalised since 2007 – replaced by same-sex marriage in 2022. He belongs to a liberal and inclusive church and has access to a gay association with social, consultative, protective, prevention, and medical services.

Not all problems have gone away; homophobic attacks do remain current even though not officially recorded as such (due to the strange kink in the law which specifies that every person should be treated equally regardless of sexual orientation!). Switzerland is not the best place for homosexuals to live in the world²⁰, but in general there are few institutionalised reasons for feeling insecure, marginalized, stigmatized, discriminated against, or unsafe.

For many months after that first encounter with Karim, they spend good times together alternating between their two countries.²¹ Karim is not *out* in his neighbourhood, nor yet to his son; and to further family members he will not be able for

20 Switzerland rated 22nd among 49 European countries in 2018 (ILGA Europe)

21 France is rated 15th on the “rainbow” scale of 2018 (ILGA Europe)

Marco's Awakening

cultural reasons that still haunt and contaminate.

Karim's visits to Marco's place have been less frequent than the inverse; distance and driving time in the absence of convenient public transport are major reasons — work schedule is another. Karim owns his house with a large garden, which needs working on during the summer months, that could also have had some influence.

When Marco hosted, they would typically meet up in Geneva, Karim having driven in via the Annemasse road. On Sunday it could be early enough to be in church, which was quite special as so many gay guys would not choose to go or had long since been scared away from church, and from religion in general.

Once in Marco's apartment they might muse over improbable plans for one to move in with the other. There was a tone of sincerity in the desire to do so, but each knew in his heart that in reality the chances were slim; each had his own responsibilities and historical ties on his side of the lake – not to mention the two distinct country administrations, taxation systems, sets of legal rights – by no means impossible, but really heavy. Nevertheless, there were euphoric moments when they would drive out to IKEA and end up assembling stuff that they both liked. Karim loved to be comfortable while watching a movie, so they spent several hours choosing one of those sofas with a protruding long section for lying comfortably yet 'seated'.

Over at Karim's house in autumn there was firewood to

Chapter Twelve – Karim

order, to stack, and to bring inside when needed – this was not for an ambiance fireplace but the much more serious need to heat the house. Wood was burned in a central enclosed stove in the living room. Bedrooms would get heat if the upstairs doors remained open. Bathrooms were allowed the privilege of an electric radiator. Every morning the stove's ashes had to be cleaned out and the inevitable soot removed from around the chimney. Winters at the house were not tough, but kind of inconvenient.

With the coming of spring, the house became a much more fun place to be. It boasted large terraces with deckchairs and sun umbrellas where breakfast tasted oh so good. There were strawberries, rhubarb which gave two harvests, and a huge fig tree which seemed to supply endlessly once it started. Karim loved to make jam and insisted on peeling the figs.

Marco says that views from the house and garden were just amazing, and he thinks he could see his apartment building between the Swiss lake shore opposite and the Jura mountains.

It was only a short drive down to the lake – Karim would take advantage of the long lakeside pathways for his favourite, and quite regular, running routine. Further along were a series of pebble beaches backed by a narrow strip of forest. Beaches close to the main road were designated as public family spaces, then came the nudist beaches and at the very end were those informally dedicated to gays – at least that was the very visible result, reserved or not. Karim and Marco swam there quite often, the summer water temperature on that side, sheltered

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from the most northerly winds and currents, becomes really pleasant for most of the summer season.

After swimming, our two heroes would return to the house to prepare dinner and maybe watch a movie. On the days when Marco needed to return home, Karim would drive him to the port in time for the last boat back to Ouchy and then the train the rest of the way. Marco has fond memories of his times at the house, and notes also how special the return could be. That last boat was one of the new high-speed 'NaviBus' and without being overcrowded at that time of night, it provided a sensation parallel with first class air travel – modern, light and bright cabin, comfortable, plenty of room, quiet and smooth as it zipped over the water. And in that space Marco could reflect and savour the memories of the day, or the week. He was so happy, so content, felt so undeservedly lucky.

Yet Marco also realizes that Karim is not the passionate lover type – cuddling and kissing is not his thing. And although he is primarily a 'top' he does not self-define as dominant, and therefore does not require submission from his partner. There is certainly nothing wrong with vanilla sex and very good friendship; but could Karim bring the missing traits? Would he want to develop them?

Marco tries to analyse the situation. Karim clearly avoids to settle and develop a monogamous relationship which is why he backs off on the lover thing. Could it be in respect of his deceased wife? He was devastated to lose her after her

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suffering from illness and he looking after her so intensely – those thoughts are going to preoccupy him for a long time to come.

Karim never stopped hunting for quick, short pleasure – he was into young men - preferably red-heads! - on the beach, in the forest. And when he and Marco went to the gay sauna together, they would cruise their separate ways in the back rooms.

So, Marco also kept hunting via the web gay dating sites and by physical meeting at the gay association. Falling into the submissive role and finding that learning curves just don't get any steeper – from stepping out of total denial and life-long abstinence – to liking it, wanting it, needing it – and getting it from Geneva to Lausanne, and beyond. All this while still into vanilla with Karim, and an ever-deepening platonic friendship.

Marco was not into hunting the beaches and forests, he needed to know something about his potential partner prior to getting intimate – even if any sexual activity would be with protection. Contacts and knowledge came via the web and his computer screen – mainly screen, seldom voice. Marco used only real dating sites, not chat sites with multiple participants – he had really learned a lesson from that very first chat he entered.

The dating sites proved very useful – basic screening (age, weight, ethnicity, cock size, preference for top, bottom or versatile) plus specific fetishes like leather, rubber, sneakers,

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etc. Then the next level, such as availability, can you host, and finally what are you looking for longer term (friendship, love, ships in the night, permanent partnership, live together, etc). Oh, yes, not to forget: Safe sex, HIV status.

Marco chose carefully, to the best of his ability, making sure to have several message exchanges which resulted in a real conversation about interests other than who would fuck who first. Some conversations were not worthy of the name; they would last a very short time, and would be based mostly on obscenity and limited vocabulary. It was here that Marco realized just how much his French language skills had improved when chatting with mother-tongue french guys who could hardly spell and whose grammar was atrocious.

And then there were message flows where it was clear, almost from the beginning, that there would be no physical meeting, yet where the back-and-forth exchange in itself was highly stimulating. Quite long moments could easily be spent building fascinating ideas of extended play activity and imagining how their toys and fetishes might be used in the hottest of “scenes”.

Guys were usually quite generous in displaying photos, but of course it was difficult to know how recent they were. Naturally, the sites are adult-only so many types of photo are permitted, with hardly any restriction. So, practically without exception guys show everything across whole image libraries of detailed postures in previous encounters.

There were moments when Marco had difficulty – when a

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photo reminded him of Clément – such a face he will never find again: He keeps at hand the most wonderful photo of Clément and goes into a daydream while describing his emotions:

“I stare into his eyes for minutes at a time - this is the most beautiful face I have ever stared into; so kind, so calming, so full of humanity. Look at that gentle curve on his lips, as an invitation to share intimately with him and listen intently - to bathe in the softness of his voice and the young wisdom of his words. His stare comes back to me from those wide open blue eyes - so penetrating – yet so warm and hypnotic.”

Marco opens up Clément's first carefully-crafted note of kind rejection alongside the photo and plays back in his mind the conversations and caring hugs and kisses which had followed.

He could go crazy in front of such recall, but has learned to calm down since his first uncontrollable reactions. He has faced the realities of age, time, space and mutuality - but continued attraction makes him fully understand why seeing and meeting this man had brought him to shake off his long-held facade and forced him to find himself.

Marco is lucky with his dates and short relationships - a guardian angel watches over him. On not one occasion has there been any reason to feel threatened or in danger. On the contrary, each encounter has been satisfying and almost all resulting in multiple follow-on sessions. Marco remarks that,

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in his straight life a relationship would develop through meeting, getting to know each other by sharing interests, followed by intimacy. During his limited 'gay existence' much the opposite has been true. Each has begun with an intentional meeting for sexual play, and only afterwards has come testing for wider interest and compatibility. Yet Marco recognizes his own willingness in all of that; to enjoy male to male experiences which would normally be discovered without any time pressure in younger years. Finding a rest-of-life partnership is not necessarily the right goal at this point in time; it is too late in life to experiment slowly, and too early in this new phase of life to contemplate monogamy or permanency.

And then came Renato; we will meet him later.

Chat and dating sites can be very local, they can also be national, European, or even global with helpful filtering of how far you want to walk, drive or fly. Marco is already well aware of the inconveniences of commuting to France across the lake, involving trains and boats for the journey; nevertheless the payoff is great. Karim's place is wonderful, Karim is delicious, and the lake boat travel makes it all feel like vacation.

Sometimes they were in one home, sometimes in the other, and they often compromised with a mid-way meeting in Lausanne, at the port of Ouchy where the lake steamers come in from the French towns of Evian and Thonon, and the train station is a short walk away or a quick ride on the driverless

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metro.

Karim and Marco would roam the town which is built on a 500 meter high hillside, thus it has several levels of streets connected by many interesting ramps and bridges. Marco likes the town and realizes he lives so close but goes there far too infrequently. In his eyes Lausanne has a youthfulness about it, with wide spaces, pedestrian areas, open air cafés and trendy shopping. It is a university town, lots of cultural events, and home of the Olympic Committee. At lake level, on the 'Quai d'Ouchy', on the walk back to the harbour, is the super-modern Olympic Museum.

All in all, these times spent together have given Marco moments to savour the area he has been ignoring before – the area where he lives, where he is a citizen; and to enjoy it with Karim. In the beginning, Lausanne was synonymous with time in the gay sauna – the largest in the area. Now it is rather walking, eating a picnic overlooking the lake, chatting face-to-face, no computer; all in the fresh air and sunshine.

Neither of them has anything more to prove, they know each other well; this time is their time, just being together basking in each others' company - with intimacy of the bedroom always a beautiful thing when it happens, but no longer on top of the agenda. Their relationship has shifted. Karim still hunts for the illusive young red-head; Marco is unsure what he wants but knows that he needs a firm hand from a confident and dominant male to help him make up his mind. Karim might have the capacity to provide that, and indeed probably looks to develop

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himself in a more assertive role, but would certainly have great difficulty to do so within this already formed and set relationship. It would require unnatural forcing and so he understandably does not volunteer to provide it. Their current relationship is one of equals in all senses, enjoying a profound harmony and mutual trust. It is quite certain that each will need to go his separate way to find a new level of challenge and satisfaction.

So return to the dating sites for both of them.

They will not lose contact in a hurry, probably never will. Marco insists he will always be there in case of need, and believes Karim will be also.

Chapter 13

hurdles and initiation

Marco seems destined to meet with guys who live some way off - in Lausanne, on the distant side of lake Lemman, across the border in neighbouring France, and soon to add an even further-away destination – Zurich. There have been some really pleasant dates with local guys in the Geneva area, all of them hosting, all of them into safe and clean sex, yet clearly not looking for more than a casual 'fuck buddy' relationship. Those hook-ups usually took the form of a fun series of 'scenes' – even enactments of the dominant-submissive scenario which Marco believes he is looking for – yet not overly serious and without manifested desires for anything longer term.

As he experiments with search filters, scanning so many profiles and perusing endless photos, Marco increasingly identifies with characteristics of guys in Germany and the German-speaking area of Switzerland. Perhaps it is cultural differences that bring more openness of these kind of preferences to the chat site. With on-line exchanges, he is then able to pick out serious potential from that which does not match his criteria or that which he finds suspiciously dishonest or way off track. Firstly, if the man is searching for occasional meetings only, however tough or demanding he might seem, it suggests '*a short scene - get your rocks off - and leave*' kind of situation. Only if there is an implied, or clearly-stated, desire

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for spending very regular or prolonged time together does Marco become interested. Not that he can exactly describe what he is looking for, but he is certain that he needs guidance, encouragement, demands even, - to go beyond what he has already experienced.

Marco makes contact with Martin, the name behind a profile where the images show an immense array of toys and a playroom full of gear to blow the imagination. The photo of Martin shows a well-built guy, late forties perhaps, in a posture which suggests “if this is what you want, come and get it”.

Well at this stage, Marco's feeling is that such an encounter might be just a bit over the top, a 'touch too much'; but nevertheless decides to give it a try. The on-line chat proves very one-sided - hardly an acknowledgement to the first remarks and even briefer responses to questions about this man's expectations; he clearly is playing the game of “ask me the right questions, otherwise I don't answer”. Marco did, of course, expect a domineering style of replies to his messages, after all, that is the kind of profiled guy he was looking for, but in reality they were starting to sound unnatural, not in a theatrical sense, rather revealing a lack of self-confidence. So he changed the focus of the chat to give compliments about the profile photos and on the equipment displayed there – after all it would require a very large house, plus a great deal of time and financing to conceive such an installation. Martin's remarks were not always credible and Marco became persuaded that the

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images were most likely taken from the website of a rental location – which placed doubt on other elements of the conversation as well.

Responses became vague and less immediate. Finally, Martin lost it completely and 'shouted' to “get your arse over here and find out”.

Meanwhile, Marco had made contact with Renato, the name behind another germanic profile — similar domineering posture in his on-line photographs, focus on dominant and submissive roles, and a much more modest playroom, which Marco figured would fit into a pretty normal house or apartment. All in all, more genuine.

Initial exchanges gave the impression that there was little or no hope of meeting; Renato was occupied with another 'sub'. His house was 'full'. However, the tone of the conversations were respectful and positive; so Marco imagined that within the immediate rejection rhetoric were cracks of possibility, should the right guy come along. At least there was no harm in trying, in pushing a little, in selling himself against the incumbent competition. How could he position himself, to encourage Renato to give him a test – a trial? Marco didn't know Renato and vice-versa, only through the on-line profiles with a few words augmented by photos of faces, toys and scenes. Renato gave some clues during the exchanges as to his personal life rhythm, and so Marco was able to pace messages accordingly, giving reflection time, not wanting to be overly pushy, yet

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more and more feeling that this is a man he wants to meet, be with, and learn from.

There was hesitation from Renato, and sometimes no return communication for a few days. So Marco would go back with more good reasons why the two should meet. Why he, Marco, would be able to please and satisfy more than any other who had submitted to his domination. Of course Marco wasn't sure at all, but there was nothing to lose and he was determined to *be* what he was selling. He geared himself up mentally to want it to work, to believe it would work, and that he would not only meet Renato's expectations but that he would also enjoy immense pleasure and self-satisfaction from the very first encounter and earn the privilege of extended and return visits.

Thus, Marco was not selling air, he was selling what he knew, what he had, and what he could bring to a relationship. He felt the advantage of having passed through the 'school' of short but valuable experiences with different male partners in the relatively short time he had been *out*. He would now take what he had discovered and bring it together as only he could – using his own brand of sensitivity, of passion, of sensuality. Marco knows that if the reaction be positive, if Renato is to like what is presented to him, and if he be a true dominant, worthy of having another man submit to him, he will demand more. He will demand that what he receives be adapted to exactly his desires — what he wants, in the way he wants it, when and also where he wants it. And if Marco can serve and please in this

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way, surely his own needs will equally be fulfilled and his horizons expanded.

With this basic framework agreed and established, it would then be possible to evaluate if the engagement should remain purely sexual or if further elements of a true relationship can be envisaged or are actually developing.

Hey, but wake up! For the moment Marco is far ahead of the reality, he has not yet received an invitation for he and Renato to meet. He goes back to the chat site, no new messages, no new activity on that profile. What to do? He scans the photos one more time and then pulls up the message history to evaluate each word and nuance. Is there something he missed, are there more hidden clues? If he chats again so soon is he seen as just another *pushy bottom* looking for the first available firm hand that comes along? Judging from his frequent chats on the site and the many profiles he has studied, Marco realizes there are lots of desperate guys out there - so many offers of submission to a seemingly restricted supply of safe dominants; offers just to get tied up or to get fucked, or both. It is clear that a dominant guy like Martin would be ideal for filling some of these needs - tying you up to a St. Andrew's cross, beating your arse to get himself excited and then ploughing straight in. If you are lucky he will use a condom. So far, Marco has managed to avoid such a rough and basic encounter, and he has no intention to fall into one now; so the 'on-line foreplay' of messages with Renato is particularly important.

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That evening Renato replies with comments about Marco's insistence (does he mean '*pushy-ness*'? thinks Marco) – oh heck, he blew it. How could he have done that? He was so sure he had not sounded that way even if indeed he had felt impatience dwelling inside; and only in one instance had he sent two messages between those of Renato. So he re-read this new message and began to construct in his mind the possibility that there is nothing negative within those comments; they could actually be interpreted as seeing something passionate and authentic in Marco's chat writings – almost a surprised pleasure in receiving such vivid and genuine intent within the insistency.

Could this be so?

Marco was contemplating his next move; to apologise for his inappropriate assertiveness, to explain more, to withdraw, to do what? But he didn't have to. Renato responded first:

“Be here 14h00 on Thursday; plan to stay at least 2-3 days”.

Will the chemistry work? Will there be affinity? Will he last even one day before Renato loses either patience or interest? Will this man correlate in reality with Marco's needs, as he has done so far through the on-line exchanges? Will Renato be willing or able to take him to new levels?

Marco decided to treat this particular encounter as never before. With Karim it had been a physical meeting and a rather spontaneous beginning. Most on-line dates had each been

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treated as a hook-up, which would work out or not, with no goal of lasting tenure; so no stress. This one is special; Marco had set it up that way and will enter into it with the greatest of intent and with total belief that it will be like no other. Even if several of his dates had indeed turned out to be more successful and more enduring than expected, this one is designed and destined to be the top of the mountain. Which of course means a long way to fall and be hurt in the event of failure, or at the very least a long solitary walk back down to base camp.

Marco must be able to keep his cool, serve up what Renato will demand - while remaining true to himself. He will be there as a submissive, not as a prostitute. The role is a voluntary one, not a financial need – only one of calling and hopefully mutual satisfaction.

A dominating male takes on a huge responsibility in the relationship he is controlling. He must care for the safety and well-being of the partner during any activity he initiates, sexual or not. The 'Dom' therefore must have the utmost self-confidence and be totally respectful of the partner's wishes, desires, and limits. The submissive must be able to place complete trust for any scene or situation to work well and for an appropriate relationship to develop. It is hard work and quite an undertaking to be a Dom, while recognizing the seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of being equals in an otherwise hierarchical scenario.

Marco sensed that Renato embraced such qualities and thus would thus cast aside any doubt about a successful first

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encounter. Wonderful day dreaming until Marco suddenly realized,

“Oh, shit; Thursday is tomorrow.”

Working towards this meeting has taken weeks, yet Marco realizes he is far from being prepared with the details. For starters Renato lives in a small village, a train and bus ride away from Zurich city – all together a not-so-obvious journey of some 3-4 hours; better not screw up the connections.

Then, how to dress?

Until now, first meetings have been rather casual, although on occasions the date has given preferences or even clear requirements for follow-on sessions. This time, there are no instructions, but clearly leather will be a definite advantage as it is a turn-on for both - very clear from the photos and the on-line exchanges – for both it is a true fetish. So, in the absence of specific instructions, Marco picks out his black leather pants, Perfecto jacket - and a pair of *short* boots to avoid going too much overboard with motorcycle gear while travelling by train !

Next, on-line with the Swiss railways to sort out train times and also a final bus connection with the village itself. Fortunately, Renato changes his mind from the initial “you sort it out, but don't be late” approach to a much appreciated last minute offer to meet, for this first time, at the final railway

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station - instead of taking the Post Bus which winds its way through numerous country villages.

Marco is used to traveling light - a small black rucksack accompanies him wherever he goes. A bottle of water, clean underwear, a couple of T-shirts and a K-way folded-up rain jacket is the maximum he will ever need. Most times, it is far too much ! Oh, yes, spare protection lest an excited date would 'forget'.

During the train rides, self-interrogation becomes the prime thought process: why is this date more important than others? what if it doesn't work out as intended? how will you prove everything you have described about yourself? how will you handle rejection if it comes? why do you need and want this particular encounter to work for the longer term? what will you do if it doesn't?

Marco satisfies himself by believing he has done the maximum to project his real, sincere desires, not to oversell, and to believe in the good faith of Renato. If it doesn't work out, then it will have been a profound learning experience – but it *will* work out, he is convinced - and more to the point he is confident that Renato is also about to be convinced.

At the scheduled time, Marco arrives at that final railway station, happy not needing to navigate the local bus system. He positions himself at the assigned meeting place and waits patiently.

Renato arrives in his grey Volvo - easy to recognise –

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looking for a fully black-leather-clad guy on the parking — not difficult to recognise either.

Marco is self-conscious, nervous for the first time on a date; when the window slides down and he is signalled to open the passenger door, he has difficulty speaking anything coherently. Renato is wearing really nice leather pants, his leather jacket is lying on the back seat. He beckons to get in and buckle up. Then he announces, in no uncertain terms, that railway station pick-up is a one time exception and that his expectation is not to serve, but to be served – if that is anything but clear from the outset, then perhaps the next train home is the right alternative.

Marco understands immediately and nods his agreement enthusiastically – isn't this exactly what he has been waiting for, longing for, dreaming of? He wanted to use the “Yes Sir” response, but simply nodded and mumbled while he felt his hand being placed on the hump in those smooth leather pants belonging to the man to whom he will submit from this moment on.

There is still time to 'escape', to pull out, to go home; but that would be the dumbest move imaginable right now.

Chapter 14

peaceful co-existence

Those first days with Renato played out as a dedicated time of mutual “discovery” of preferences, expectations, initial limits, at the physical level – and of how subsequent interplays were handled and perceived by each of them. From the outset, Marco describes their interaction as firm but respectful by Renato, and totally invigorating and immensely satisfying from his own perspective. It was clear that he was being taken much further than ever before yet there was no pressure nor urgency to move too far too soon.

Three days passed quickly. That first session was awesome, the next already set for the following week.

Within a month it was clear that a dream was being realized, Renato was claiming his sub, and Marco was able to contribute the best of his sensitivity, of his passion, of his sensuality – traits which seem to have matured significantly since his coming out.

After the second month it was time to become serious with goals for a regular schedule and agreed 'conditions' for the relationship to continue. Firstly, it was to be monogamous – hunting would cease. Secondly it would be both safe and sane. Finally, given the distance and regular travel, the cost would be eased by investment in a national train & bus pass.

In a similar way to the agreement between Karim and

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Marco, it was assumed that neither would give up their existing home, their existing social contacts, or other patterns of life developed in their local area and in the local language. So, here he goes again: Marco the eternal commuter, definitely a self-inflicted choice yet he could not feel more ecstatic about the prospects of the 'job' (!)

Transport ceased to be a problem when at Renato's place. He owned not only the car, but also two motorcycles, two bicycles and, later, two e-bikes. Marco quickly found out that none of these were idle machines rusting away in the garage – cycling would become a regular activity both in the local area, across the country and on international organised trips as well. Marco had been a motorcyclist (hence having all the leather gear) - had sold his Honda 750 Sport some years earlier, and thus was over the moon to become a 'captive passenger' holding on behind his new friend. In fact Marco believes that he has now seen more of Switzerland and southern Germany with Renato by motorbike than by any other means. And he remarks how amazing it is just how many mountain passes and cantons can be traversed in a single day!

Apart from use of the 2-wheeled vehicles, quite a bit of walking took place – there are countryside and forest walks directly from the apartment, and many hilltop and mountain pathways a short drive away; the whole area is just so beautiful and wonderfully inviting to get outdoors as much as possible ('get out—work out'). Renato enjoys cross-country skiing;

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while snow-shoe walking and sledging have been on the program as well.

Planned cycling trips quickly became a favourite spring-summer-autumn activity – a two bike rear rack for the car enabled taking the bicycles they knew and which worked well, rather than renting. Even for other countries, taking own bikes to the starting point of a coach ride provided by the tour operator has proven a good compromise.

thirteen years on

It is now thirteen years that the regular commute takes place. Years of a constantly developing relationship, from purely physical beginnings through mutual care and attention to deeper feelings than either of them have ever experienced previously in their lives. Marco is fully realizing his perfect dream and in addition recognizes the incredible feeling of security and well-being by being close to Renato and by fulfilling his needs as well as he is able.

Marco says that this relationship has made him “be so much more alive again” - mentally, physically, sexually, even spiritually. Yes, spiritually. Renato does not practice any religion, fits well into Marco's definition of atheist, does not understand why weekends should be reserved for church (although accepted it as part of their agreed 'conditions'!) — yet he has given Marco faith in another human being, outside

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of any formal affiliation, any family connection, any social or professional status. Faith in a human being - because of him just being him, with all his imperfections and prejudices – but with the raw goodness of a well-meaning, good-hearted, patient, generous and open man.

Marco has shared and learnt so much since their on-line meeting – they will never pray together as was the case with Karim, they will hardly ever agree on political positions, and their reading preferences will probably never converge — but those areas are of little importance knowing that the *base* is solid.

It took decades to finally understand what '*base*' means. The pair reflect from time to time on how things would have been had Marco *come out* at an earlier age and that they would have met in their 20's or 30's and become young boyfriends.

Yet letting water flow freely under the bridge and getting uniquely pleasure from dreams, rather than having regrets about them – is all part of developing a healthy spirituality. Reality is what we live, it is our lives; we can have intentions and plans to change directions, but we must do so from a position of firstly accepting *what is* – for our own peace of mind and tranquility. If we do plan to change something, then our mental energy and physical energy will benefit from a calm starting position — uncluttered and unheated by dissatisfaction, regrets, anger, frustration, or blame.

Chapter Fourteen – peaceful co-existence

cool start + cool view = healthy spirituality

Marco is definitely feeling good about his situation, which he admits was not an easy destination to reach. The road has been sometimes rocky and he may have left a couple of blown-out tires back there. Yet getting one's shit together ('regrouping' in more acceptable vocabulary) and re-establishing 'cool' at regular intervals, allows to have faith and move on.

You see, Marco already told us there is, in his view, no after life. So this life is *what we got*, and being thankful for *what we got* is already a great help. It can happen that the *more we got*, the less we find reason to give thanks, and that is a pity. So being religious we give thanks to God, otherwise we just show our friends how appreciative we are of *what we got* and particularly of *their* friendship. Ok, the religious folks should do that as well. ;-)

Marco marvels at the incredibly wide diversity of people on this planet. Apart from the white and black and brown and yellow, he discovered people behind the multiple letters of LGBT+, he has been introduced to different religious groups, he has many friends who are not religious, he has heightened awareness of the complex realities behind all of the labels but where each one shares a common factor — each one is a physical **and spiritual** human being. Marco keeps insisting on this point as there are atheists who have profound spirituality despite their rejection of, or simple disbelief in, God. There are also those who accept God, yet are turned off by any organized

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religion based on specific doctrine and scripture. So, yes, spirituality is a human component, a distinguishing human quality which needs to be nourished. It deserves attention even though many are unconscious to its calling.

Also significant to our well-being is the often-quoted 'serenity prayer' – about *accepting* what I cannot change and having *courage* to change what I can, and asking for the *wisdom* to know the difference. Perhaps even more important, is asking that those who would judge us might also *share that wisdom*.

For example, describing Marco begins with characteristics he cannot easily or realistically change. Thus: 'white' followed by 'white and male' and then 'white and male and gay' – all accurate and becoming a more complete description. If he were left-handed, it would also fit here. We *cannot* change our skin colour. We *can* modify our visible behaviours to hide that we are gay, we can act straight, but *cannot choose* to be straight (and even if such a decision were possible, as some people still insist, Marco cannot believe anyone would choose to be gay).

Ethnicity belongs here - and nationality might also, along with items forced by strong social pressure, or by other circumstances where changing, or even thinking about changing, could be social or literal suicide. For example religion fits here, because we had no choice when we came into the world and, in itself, it should have no influence on whether I will make a good engineer or not.

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Marco recalls a newspaper headline announcing that a major city has a black lesbian mayor - characteristics which shouldn't be relevant to her being elected, and certainly not as headline material.

Beyond this first level are those things which the individual can influence, even decide upon – the individual will consider if change is possible, and whether he/she has the will and courage to head in that direction. It is on *these* dimensions which others might justifiably judge us.

Marco's message here is hopefully clear — that sorting out the two levels in our own mind helps in self-acceptance as well as getting others to accept us as we are. It allows us to gain that position of 'cool' so that we can put our energies into positive, meaningful projects.

And you know what? If we have to change our environment in order to move forward; then that's exactly what we must do. No seed sown on stony ground. True for a relationship, a team, a company, a societal community. We move to where the love is; and we will always find it. Marco recalls a lesson from a company department which had lost its sparkle — when the boss can only criticise, when team mates are uncooperative, when no-one seems to care — go find that other group which desperately needs you and what you can offer; look out for the signs which beckon to “come and join us”.

Marco's Awakening

Marco considers sharing more experiences and stories. He most certainly could write enthusiastically about cycling trips, motor cycle tours, days of walking, and cultural visits across Europe which he and Renato have made together over these past years – more numerous and intense than he could ever have imagined. Closer to home there have been regular stays in east Switzerland with romantic lakeside restaurants and cozy hotels. They discovered high mountain walks with the sun shining in blue skies and the bright white snow squeaking differently underfoot depending on altitude and temperature. From the canton of Graubünden they recall numerous precious travel moments on the 'Rhaetian Railway' - those iconic red trains of the area, passing over engineering masterpieces of stone bridges and viaducts, constructed in the most unbelievable places, with spectacular scenery in all seasons.

Marco cannot help but give thanks as to how his seemingly unreconcilable *coming-out* situation has evolved so positively. He regularly looks back, never to minimize the difficulties and risks of the journey, and always rejoices in '*what he got*'. He recalls with delight the many encounters, experiences, and friendships — along the path he never ever expected to travel.

"It doesn't get better than this". . .
. . . at least not here on earth in this life.

POST NOTES

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marco's awakening - this book:

'Marco's Awakening' is a late-in-life *coming out* story with retrospectives back to youth, an intense and complicated journey, and a positive ending to the story so far.

Marco's journey includes separation, extended psychoanalysis, a major liberating breakthrough from denial to insatiable lust, and steep learning curves in his new gay world.

Marco's most difficult challenge is the reconciliation of homosexuality and his faith. Despite all the scientific statements confirming that being gay is neither sickness nor a choice, many societies and many churches continue to stigmatize and marginalize. Marco brings his experiences and his opinions to this discussion throughout the book.

Warning: this book contains some male to male sexual references, references to suicide, provocative statements about God and religion, and criticism of Christian churches in general. Yet the writing is by a gay Christian, coming from a position of love and respect, and who prays that churches increasingly accept and include previously stigmatized LGBTI+ groups.

POST NOTES