

Inside Out

Dylan

Ours wasn't a close family. I hadn't seen my cousin David for three or four years. I had expected, of course, that I would run into him at his mother's funeral.

From time to time I have to return to Canberra to play squash with clients. Sometimes, we even get around to discussing the odd contract. I am not, nor have I ever been, the kind of person who flies halfway across the world to attend the funeral of his aunt. Nor am I the kind of hypocrite who would do this despite not having seen the woman for most of the last decade, and not particularly liked her when I did.

This time, however, it just so happened that one of these infrequent trips coincided with my aunt's funeral, and Suzie, my wife at the time, was adamant that, since I would be there anyway, it would be shameful not to show my face. I tried to reason with her: the old bat would not have appreciated my attendance, I said. Suzie replied with equal pragmatism – my aunt would hardly be in a position to make a fuss, but my own mother would and I ought to have more respect for her feelings.

Suzie, as you can probably tell, was a responsible person. It's a shame things didn't work out between us.

In the end, I went. I was the last passenger to board the flight to Canberra. In a moment of petulance I had shown up late to check in and spent too long in Boots looking at things I knew I wasn't going to buy. Knowing the other passengers would be annoyed at the delay, I ambled along the aisles to find my seat, grinning at anyone who met my eye. I was surprised when one of these people turned out to be David.

Sat beside him was his wife, Faye, who I had met once or twice before. This meeting confirmed my earlier impressions of her as being attractive and well-dressed. I admit to feeling a certain degree of disappointment when she demonstrated none of David's enthusiasm about my arrival, responding to my spirited greeting with a reply that was polite, but not warm. As David and I became quickly involved in animated conversation, I saw her turn away, disinterested, to gaze out of the window onto the runway. Her detachment intrigued me; I got the impression that the two of them had had some kind of falling out.

During the period we spent together in Canberra, I was to discover that the situation was more complex than that. In those few days I found my willingness to listen valued, my advice appreciated, as I tried on for the first time the unfamiliar role of trusted confidante, trying to help each of them to piece together what had happened between them. Their life together occupied my imagination, and I began to care about them both in a way that was entirely new to me. From what each of them imparted to me at odd moments during our time there, I formed the impression that they must have been

in the process of this 'falling out' for some time. Something had changed, though, when they had received the news about my aunt.

1

The front wall of the flat that Faye and David shared consisted almost entirely of two wide windows that faced out over Princes Street, affording their owners (and any guests they might be entertaining) an expensive panoramic view of the castle and the city walls on the opposite bank of the river which was accessible from anywhere in the apartment. At least, that's how they'd put it in the brochure.

The interior was fashionably open-plan, which meant that the kitchen lacked the self-containment of what might technically be called a room. Nevertheless, it was Faye's favourite space in the apartment. Its teak, faux-marble Formica and chrome offered valued respite from the oppressive, coordinated blueness of the rest of the flat. Collaborating in this colour-domination was a carefully eclectic assortment of genuine early twenty-first century IKEA pieces. These hung about the room with an apparent nonchalance in a spatial arrangement that was about as far from being as random as it looked as it is possible to get.

Bookshelves leaned against the walls at either end of the expanse of glass. A large, low glass-topped table that Faye had never liked was placed in front of one of the windows, with three high-backed upholstered leather chairs clustered around it. She had

chosen the lounge furniture that lolled at the other end of the living area, by the doors to the spare room and David's study. Like almost everything else in the flat, it was blue. The colouring of the décor and the furnishings was the legacy of an old consensus of taste, long since transformed into an uneasy tolerance which neither party thought worth mentioning.

After meeting Faye for the first time, most people usually commented on the slight air of impatience that she gave off. By the time she had reached her early thirties, however, most of her friends had accepted this as part of her character, and she rarely had first meetings with anyone except clients. On this particular morning she frowned her way from her bed to the kettle as usual, and didn't think about this. The walk from the bedroom door to the kitchen counter was a familiar one, and at seven a.m. she was not usually inclined to focus intently on anything uninvolved in the process of closing the physical gap between herself and the coffee jar.

The coffee helped to clear her head, allowing her to have her first proper thought of the day, which was that she must have forgotten to take her earrings out before going to bed. She fiddled with the left one as she wandered partway across the strip of blue carpet between the door and the cream linoleum of the kitchen floor. She sat down at the table. The backs of those earrings were loose, but they were a favourite pair, a present from David before they were married. She doubted he remembered. If he did, he had certainly never bothered to comment. It had never occurred to Faye that this might be

because he didn't know what to say. For a while now she hadn't really had the time to wonder about such things.

She finished her coffee and returned to make herself a second cup. Irritated to discover that the jar on the kitchen counter was now practically empty, she sighed and opened the cupboard. She'd bought a fresh one the day before, she was certain. She had to back up a few feet and stand on tiptoe to see it, right at the back of the top shelf. David. Mentally making him a sarcastic thank you that he would never hear, she assumed the one-footed ballet-dancer-cum-netball player balance necessary to reach the back of the shelf. She stretched to reach her quarry, pulling it toward her, navigating a blind and precarious path amongst the other tins, packets and containers until she was able to prise it out of the cupboard. As she lowered herself to a standing position, she felt the jar slip from her hand and watched as it thudded onto the worktop in front of her. It smashed, spilling a sinister-looking mixture of glass shards and coffee granules onto the counter and over the floor. Her cheeks were suddenly wet. A simple cup of coffee: what was so wrong with her, that she couldn't even do that right?

Surprised and embarrassed by her over-emotional reaction, she jumped and turned her back as the bedroom door opened. For extra authenticity, she grabbed a cloth to dampen at the sink.

David emerged; she felt him glance at the mess on the counter, then shift his gaze to her back, sensing with rising irritation that he was about to make a big deal out of this.

“What happened? Are you okay? Did you cut yourself?” Keeping her back to him, she held the cloth under the tap for longer than was strictly necessary.

“I’m fine. It’s nothing.”

He didn’t say anything else, just walked over to the toaster to begin making his own breakfast. Now that his back was to her, she was able to move to clear up the mess, before returning to the kitchen table.

“You’re quiet this morning,” she observed, picking up the copy of yesterday’s newspaper that was still on the tabletop. The scrape of the knife went uninterrupted as he buttered his toast.

“Actually, I’m not feeling too good,” he replied. The top buttons of his shirt were undone, his dark hair still uncombed, as he approached the table. With his plate in one hand and a teacup in the other, he was forced to clench two fingers awkwardly around something in his palm. This turned out to be two of the aspirin caplets that never seemed to have much of an effect on his headache, however many pairs he swallowed in giant single gulps. He looked pale, and she noticed some grey hairs around his temples that hadn’t seemed to stand out before. What had happened to him in these last few months that had made him so *tired*?

“You should make an appointment,” she said. She was staring at him. Realising this, she looked back at the pages of the newspaper. He took another bite of toast, chewed it in a long-winded, overly thorough way that irritated her, and swallowed before replying.

“I’ll phone from work.”

“You could just as easily do it from here.” He looked at her again.

“We both know you won’t do it from work. I’ll do it for you.”

He watched, unsure of what to do as she started toward the phone, then spoke again.

“No, Faye - really, it’s fine. I’d rather do it from work.” A pause. Then, by way of explanation, “My diary’s at work.”

Defensive, she curled up around the rebuff. “And of course there’s the other advantage: I won’t be there to hear you.”

He didn’t contradict her, and she turned back to a news story that she wasn’t really reading. She knew that what she had said was unfair, cruel even. She also knew it was true. Once she might have expected him to argue, to fight back. They used to have blistering arguments. Now it was as if he’d lost the energy, or worse, the will, to fight her anymore. Instead, he changed the subject. She could have predicted this attempt to poke her gently out of her irritation.

“What’s in the news today? Anything momentous happened in the world?”

It seemed he remained oblivious to substantial evidence that this tactic usually had the opposite effect to that which he was trying to achieve. Today’s result was no different.

“It’s yesterday’s. But since you ask, a couple of murders, a row in the Commons, crisps are giving us cancer and there’s a cold front coming in from the East. Take a look for yourself. I’m going for a shower.”

She slapped the paper shut on the table top. *He knows how much I hate him talking when I'm trying to read*, she thought as she headed back to the bedroom, aware that he probably didn't, and that she hadn't been reading in any case.

She'd just closed the door – suppressing what she knew was a childish impulse to slam it behind her – when he called her back, infuriating her further. This had to be deliberate.

“Faye?”

Towel in hand, she returned the door.

“*Yes?*” she hissed.

He looked at her for a moment. He was frowning again, his lips pursed, his mouth half-twisted to the left. The expression was one that betrayed, at least to Faye, its wearer's struggle to articulate himself. She stared back. She didn't have time for this. Then his face relaxed and he dropped his eyes.

“Don't use all the hot water,” was, in the end, the best he could manage.

2

“Don't use all the hot water.”

Pathetic. He was aware of that. He knew it almost before the words came out of his mouth. But if he'd waited for what he had meant to say to shape itself into some sort

of comprehensible form they would have stayed there, staring at each other, all day. Instead he said that.

Any conversation with Faye usually ended abruptly, leaving David with a faint feeling of frustration, a tenseness that he wouldn't be able to shake for a few hours afterwards. He picked up his teacup and cradled it in his large left hand, swirling the brown liquid around in its porcelain enclosure as he wandered over to the window. He ran his free hand over the surface of the glass-topped table, his favourite item in the flat. He rarely noticed any of the other furniture. It was all just indistinguishably blue. He had used to *like* blue. Now he found that the colour pressed in on him, its upholstered, claustrophobic sheen giving him a vague sensation of seasickness.

He looked down onto Princes Street. The people who traversed the damp concrete, making the thousands of hurried, carrier-bagged journeys that made up a day in the city centre were always more reassuring to look at than the imposing structures of the castle and the city walls. His fellow humans were small, and not one of them seemed to be aware of their place in the design unfolding around them. He had, for a long time, found it comforting to know that he wasn't the only one like that.

Below, a middle-aged woman in a light mack stooped to shake out a rain-darkened umbrella before entering the mall. A moment later David saw her reappear, this time behind the panes of the shopping centre's glass front. She joined the queue at the counter of the over-priced, over-decorated chain-company coffee house that waited to

ensnare weary and bedraggled shoppers just inside the whirring automatic doors. Leaving the woman to order, he imagined, a Skinny Latte and a Ham and Gouda Cheese Panini, he allowed his focus to slide to the left. Back outside, he noticed, a dog was tied up alone in the vacated seating area, its haunches probably growing wetter on the pavement. Poor dog; it was all it could do to wait and blink the rain out of its eyes. David thought he understood, and, his vision slightly blurred in this swift, unexpected rush of empathy, looked down at the cooling contents of his cup.

Inspired, he turned away from the window and went back to the kitchen, where he leaned against the kitchen units whilst he drained the remnants of his tea. After a second, a guilty impulse made him straighten. For whatever unstated and unfathomable reason, Faye hated him “lolling all over things” in the kitchen. He returned to the pot and poured out a second cup of tea, being careful to add just a small amount of skimmed milk and a carefully measured half-spoon of sugar. He took a clean spoon from the drawer and stirred the tea until the motion created a little whirlpool in the centre of the cup, then placed it on the table, a pale blue coaster beneath it. He went to the front door and picked up the mail from where it had landed the doormat almost an hour earlier. He sorted it into two piles, one of which he knocked together neatly and placed squarely on the right-hand side of the steaming cup of tea.

He picked up the newspaper, shuffling its pages back into the correct order – David liked order - and folded it carefully before placing it on the left side of the mug. He moved a chair so that the sitter could read at the table, then opened a drawer and took out

a knife. He leaned against the fridge as he slashed open the handful of envelopes. Rapidly, he assessed their likeliness with the same level of interest he had shown to the stream of young graduates who had passed through his office during the previous afternoon.

Why he did this, what he thought he might achieve by this series of small actions that might in some way redress the effects of larger ones, he didn't know. He hadn't thought about whether the gesture was supposed to constitute an apology, a statement, an explanation. He hadn't thought beyond that first impulse, compelling him just to do something - anything at all - that Faye would know was for her.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Faye didn't really seem to understand, either. He pretended not to look as she returned, blinked once as she noticed what he had done, and frowned in an effort to work out what response was expected of her. Eventually, she resolved not to mention it at all and sat down with her mail. She was dressed now, in pale blue shirt and grey slacks, her blonde hair pulled back from her face and twisted onto the top of her head. She muttered to herself as she scanned the contents of her own envelopes.

“Bank statement: a week out of date...mobile phone promotion: I only need one phone, for God's sake...Why *do* they bother sending this stuff?” This morning, her habit didn't annoy David. In fact, though he showed no outward sign of it, he welcomed, even

relished, its familiarity. He opened another letter. This time, what he read drove all other thoughts out of his mind with the heavy efficiency of a snow-plough.

The handwriting was Elena's: he had recognized it on the envelope. This, in itself, was not unusual. When he pulled out the three sheets of coral notepaper, though, he found that they were not covered in her usual hasty, extravagant scrawl. The writer's hand had evidently wobbled in places, and there were blotches on the paper. He read it once, then put it down on the table top and stared at it. Beyond the edges of the pages, the contents of the room blurred into a bad impressionist picture painted entirely in subtly varying shades of blue.

He felt, rather than saw, Faye look at him. "What is it?" she sounded uncertain – not surprising, following his earlier odd behaviour - and opted for joviality "Are they repossessing the furniture to pay for the phone bill?" To him, she sounded as though she were far away, or underwater. He swallowed.

"No. It's- from Elena. She -" he began, but the task of explaining seemed suddenly too large to surmount. Though he had rehearsed what he intended to say many times, he found himself unable even to complete the first sentence. He pushed the letter away from him and stumbled mechanically into a chair, then leant forward until the tip of his nose touched the polished table top, and watched as a small, clear pool formed on it. There was noise, too. A scraping, gulping, wheezing sound that seemed to come from

somewhere behind him. After a second, he realized that it was spilling from his own throat.

The underwater voice, again. “David? David, who’s Elena?”

3

Faye let her tea go cold. Had he been in a position to notice, David might have seen a certain irony in this. She folded her hands on the table before her and stared at the three sheets of pink notepaper which suddenly seemed to demand her attention. And yet she didn’t feel inclined to reach for them, or to focus on the words that stained their surfaces.

In those moments of silence, she tried to decide whether to not to expect, or desire, an answer. It was a long time before she got one.

David’s eventual revelation was, as she had expected, one of betrayal. A betrayal that she felt all the more keenly, perhaps, because she felt herself partly to blame.

It transpired that Elena was an old friend of his mother. And now, it seemed, a friend of his. A friend he had been writing to, on and off, for years. *Writing*. David never *wrote* to anyone. Emails, text messages, even the odd, brief phone call, yes. But *letters*? That was something entirely new.

At first, he tried to explain. “I needed to know Mum was alright. Obviously I couldn’t ask her, so Elena’s been helping me, sending me letters every so often; just telling me where she is, what she’s doing, you know. Mum -” he broke off for a moment, then looked at the wall “- she didn’t know about it. She’d have been upset.”

“I didn’t know either.” Faye said, quietly bruised.

He shook his head gently, but wouldn’t look at her. “No. You’d have been upset too.”

“So now she’s – gone, then?” she knew she sounded grateful. After a pause, she tentatively pursued the question. “Dead?”

He nodded. “We didn’t say goodbye. She thought I hated her.”

That wasn’t fair. He was obviously determined to feel guilty, and to make Faye share in this. She refused. “Well, what did she expect? She treated her own son like dirt. She hasn’t spoken to you for fifteen years. Not since-”

“Since we decided to get married.” His tone hardened. “Funny, that.”

She paused, testing herself to see if she could resist the bitter challenge in his comment. She couldn’t. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

It was his turn to say nothing for a moment. Then he seemed to make up his mind about something. His eyebrows drew closer together and his jaw was set.

“Strange, isn’t it, just how many people have disappeared from my life since you and I met? You’re persistent, I’ll give you that.”

Faye couldn’t believe what he was saying.

“*What?*” she said.

“You heard me. You’ve systematically set out to ensure that anyone who might pose a threat to your position at the centre of my life is moved out of the way.” The centre of his *life*? At what point, she wanted to ask, have you ever offered me that position? And what makes you think I’d want it if you did, you self-obsessed prig...?

But Faye didn’t say any of this. Instead, she tried to disarm with rationality what was clearly a ludicrous accusation. “I realize you’re upset, but that’s the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. I couldn’t have made your mother back off any faster if I’d tried. I didn’t have to *do* anything to get her to break off all contact with her precious only son, even if I’d wanted to; she loathed me enough on sight to do it all by herself!”

Faye bit her lip. Her detachment hadn’t been quite as evident as she’d hoped.

“My mother’s only crime was to feel concern for a son she could see was going to get hurt! And I threw it back in her face.” He was determined to pursue this, then. Well, let him. She didn’t care anymore.

Except, of course, she did.

“Oh, grow up, David! We both know that however much she supposedly loved you, she hated me more. She was a bitter old hag and she didn’t care who she hurt. Or had you forgotten? Your own *mother* never showed up to your *wedding*. She was too busy sulking because she hadn’t got her own way. You know as well as I do that it was her that promised you that if you married me she’d never speak to you again – and she kept her word! For fifteen years! *That’s* how much she loved you, David! So don’t try

and tell me I'm the wicked witch in this story, because you've got it the wrong way round: all *I* ever did was love you, though I can't for the life of me remember why."

There. That shut him up. He just stared at her. But Faye wasn't finished. She had almost forgotten the bitter taste of the rows they had used to have. When had they stopped fighting one another?

"Your mother, David. Your choice. Not mine. You could have tried to make contact with her again, any time you liked. *Apparently*, you were still in touch with Elena, all that time. You knew exactly where she was. If she'd loved you as much as you say, she'd have welcomed you back, and I'm sure she'd have been more than happy to hear all about your terrible life with Cruella de Ville. I don't know what stopped you; pride, cowardice, or just plain stupidity. But I do know that it had absolutely nothing *whatsoever* to do with me."

He laughed. He just sat there, and laughed. Faye wanted to throw something at him.

4

I expect David can imagine himself, now, as he must have looked to her. He had become *that* kind of man – the kind who, when threatened, retreats into an arrogant withdrawal that is little more than a reflex, a posing pretence of self-belief. At the time, it

was the only response he was capable of. He knew what Faye was telling him was fundamentally the truth, or at least the truth as she knew it. They both knew what he was saying was ridiculous. He didn't even believe it. But this didn't matter to him, then. True or not, it offered a way of venting all his real frustrations about Faye, and his mother, and himself. So when he said "If you believe that, Faye, then I pity you. You really don't know yourself at all," he meant it. He pitied her with the kind of stone-in-the-stomach empathy you feel for someone whose situation is so familiar, so utterly synonymous with your own, that you know you should be able to reach them.

"And you do, I suppose? The man who's barely spoken to me for the last year? Well I know *you*, David, and it's about time you faced the fact that however much you think that you're superior, that you're the only one to have grown, to have *progressed*, you're the same self-important, self-indulgent, head-in-the-sand *coward* you've always been." Faye paused for breath, then continued, red-faced and hurtling towards a state of uncontrollable rage.

"All this time, I was wrong. Your mother *is* still speaking to you. She has been every day since the day we got engaged. But it's not her voice telling you all those things about me anymore, David, it's your own. They are what *you* believe, about the woman *you* married, so for God's sake be a man and stop hiding behind Mummy."

David may not have been sure of exactly what he did think, but he knew that this was wrong. He responded recklessly, in a bewildered hope that what was most important would surface and make sense of the confusion, or even just blot everything else out so

that the details - correct or otherwise - didn't matter any more. "Oh, I know exactly what I believe about you, Faye," he lied, "And while we're on the subject of the truth, let *me* offer *you* a little *honesty*. The trouble with you is the same as it's always been. You simply cannot stand the thought that you might not possess someone totally, that any small part of them might not order itself according to you-"

She tried to cut him off "Don't flatter yourself, David-" but, for some reason beyond even himself, he was not to be shouted down. Not this time. "- and when you get what you want, you consume it. You use people up until they're of no interest to you anymore, and then you discard them. And that's *exactly* what my mother told me the day I said I was going to marry you, and that's why *I* stopped speaking to *her*, not the other way around. Out of loyalty. Loyalty to you!"

This, at least, was true. She must have sensed it, too, because it was then that they both found they had nothing left to scream at one another. Whatever they had scratched for so long at had finally burst to the surface, and lay there, now, exposed.

Silence. They stood, facing one another, on opposite sides of the table. She stared at him, attempting to process the information he had just imparted to her. He looked away, amazed that he had finally said it, and at the sense of liberation he now felt. And then he felt angry again, angry that he had suffered unjustly for this secret, kept solely to protect her from guilt, but most of all that he himself had allowed things to happen that

way; that, in his own mind, he had assumed responsibility for what they both knew was happening between them.

He knew she was seeing him, herself, and everything in between in an entirely new way as a result of what he had just said. He knew because he was too. Even though he had known it all before, he had heard the words now. And their sound had broken something in him. He sat down, supporting in outspread hands a head that felt like it had endured ten rounds of pummeling by a bigger, fitter boxer.

“By God, she was right. Look at us. Look at me.” he looked up at her, her anger transfigured into a kind of numb despair. “Get a good long look at what you’ve turned me into, Faye, because it’s what I have to look at every day, and it’s the hard proof of everything that poor woman tried to make me understand.”

Faye took a seat of her own, shaking. “Why in God’s name didn’t you tell me any of this before?” she asked. And David couldn’t think of any way to answer.

* * *

Neither of them went to work that day. That afternoon, David wrote back to Elena. As he fixed the specially-bought airmail stamp to the outside of the envelope, he couldn’t help thinking that it would be quicker, easier, to send an email. But Elena was an old lady; she didn’t use email. To his knowledge, she didn’t even own a computer. And

anyway, there was a sort of tradition to this ritual. He and his mother's flatmate had communicated in this way for years - ever since Faye and David had emigrated from Canberra - the two conspirators sharing a clandestine bond that was more than a mere exchange of information between contacts, but less than a friendship. It had been in both their interests to keep it a secret. Faye and his mother had been more similar than they had realised, in many ways.

Still, there was urgency to the dispatch of this particular letter that hadn't been necessary in that of any of the dozens of others he must have sent over the years. An email would definitely have been more efficient. Of course, David's mother would never have approved. And this was, in its finality, about her. The price of a stamp, and the time it took for the letter to arrive: He owed her this much, at least.

There was a knock at the door of the study. David sighed and swiveled his chair to face Faye as she entered, cradling another mug of tea. As she perched on the corner of the table she looked smaller, somehow. Paler. She hadn't yet bothered to remove the mascara that had smudged on to her cheeks. Speculating on her thoughts, he wondered if perhaps it didn't seem so important to her now. The dark, watery streaks on her face made her appear fragile and vulnerable, and for the first time he could remember she looked lost. It must have been quite a shock for someone who had never really needed anyone else to suddenly feel so cut adrift. David was seized by a clichéd but powerful desire to hold her, to tell her it would be alright, that this could be a chance for them to make an honest start. A real one, this time. But he couldn't bring himself to make those

promises - not just yet - because he wasn't even sure of their reliability. And he simply couldn't lie anymore.

Instead, he waited for her to speak.

"Would you like one?" she asked, gesturing at the cup of tea. "They reckon it cures all sorts, so I thought I'd give it a go." Softly, she added, "Maybe we both should." For some reason, this was important to her, then. He nodded, and she stood.

"Faye. Wait a second." She turned back to face him. He picked up the envelope. "I wrote back. To Elena. I said I'll be going home for the funeral." She nodded, then turned back toward the door. "I wrote that I'd go alone, but I thought perhaps - perhaps we both could." He paused. "It'll take a few days for it to get there, so I should send it today, really. But there's still time to change it, if you do want to come."

"Back home with you? Back to your family?" her voice cracked. He wondered if it had been a mistake to ask. But then she faced him, and smiled. It was a small smile, and it wobbled, but it held as she spoke again. "That...would be best, I think. That's if you want me to come." This time, there was no hint of bitter accusation. The implicit question was genuine.

He did. Of course he did. He started to get up, to move toward her. "Faye, I-" But she had turned away again. "I'll make you some tea," she said. "Sugar?"

5

It was to be a long flight. The next forty-eight hours would be the longest unbroken period of time that Faye had spent with David for some while. She was oddly nervous about this. Perhaps it was the clinical, almost therapeutic quality implied by the glossy, curving white surfaces of the plane's interior that gave her anxiety its optimistic edge. As she gazed out of the window at the other planes beside theirs on the tarmac, she wondered if David, too, felt oddly liberated by the near-total absence of blue in this, their new, shared environment.

Faye's consciousness returned to the inside of the cabin in time to take in the closing words of the safety announcement. "When the seat belt sign above your seat is illuminated, you must fasten your seat belt. We suggest that you keep your seat belt fastened throughout the flight, as we may experience turbulence."

The intercom system clicked off, giving way to a new silence between the two of them. Faye looked across at her husband and hoped that, given time, they might learn to fill it.