

God's *Timing*

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Jamet E. Green

God's Timing

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Lucy has suffered a crushing sorrow and now, to her, the world seems to be a place of chaos and disharmony. She is convinced that she or her family will sooner or later be caught up in some disaster and longs to know what the future holds so that she can be prepared. Although she is holidaying in one of the most beautiful places in the world, her dark thoughts drag her down to the point where she is almost overwhelmed.

Is it by sheer coincidence that she is introduced to someone who has the knowledge and absolute proof of what the future holds? Lucy finds herself going on a journey of discovery that almost blows her mind and at the end of her holiday there is one last surprise.



God's *Timing*

A Journey of Discovery
... And Eventual Healing

Janet E. Green

To my Mother

Jean Alison Holmes

With thanks to my brother

Jim Holmes

for help in the editing and book design

Contents

1	Lucy	10
2	Felix	26
3	Lucy	39
4	Manasseh and Ephraim	51
5	Pip	60
6	Lucy	69
7	Avhiu	80
8	Louise	93
9	Lucy	107
10	The Twins	114
11	Iron-Age Britain	124
12	Chris	135
13	Lucy	145
14	Dunkirk	153
15	Gigi	167
16	Lucy	177
17	Gedi	187
18	Lucy	195
19	Family	210
20	Lucy	219
	Also by Janet E Green	225



1

LUCY

*The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those
who are crushed in spirit.*

(Psalm 34:18)

Lucy sat on a tree trunk that had been uprooted during a high spring tide and sucked out into the ocean. It had tossed about on the green waves for several days before it had been deposited on the white caster-sugar-like beach at Diani. There it had stuck firmly in the sand while the waves washed over it and now it was well embedded at the top of the beach. Bleached and smooth, it made an ideal place to sit and enjoy the scenery while the tide was low.

At sixteen, Lucy was slim and pretty with her long blond hair and toned body, but her big blue eyes were full of overwhelming sadness as she observed her surroundings. She

knew her parents had brought her on this holiday to help her recover from the grief that often overwhelmed her, and she had to admit that this was the most beautiful place she had ever been to.

From where she sat at the top of the beach, her eyes swept the expanse of sand that ran down to the edge of the sea where the turning tide was beginning to run small wavelets up the beach. The sand was so glaringly bright in the brilliant morning sunshine it would have been impossible to look at it without sunglasses; in the intense light, it shimmered and sparkled as the hot rays bounced off the pristine, wave-smoothed surface.

The sea beyond was aquamarine where it was shallow, but deepened into turquoise further from the shore. The slight breeze and the incoming tide was teasing the water into undulating little waves that sent off bright sparkles of light where they were struck by the sun. Most of the waves were too small to break before reaching the beach, but once they did hit the sand, they curled into lace edged wavelets and hissed up the beach for a short distance in a flurry of bubbles. There were birds in the low surf, scurrying around looking for morsels thrown in by the tide.

Almost at the horizon there was a brilliant white line in the ocean that indicated where the coral reef lay. The waves from the royal blue open sea that lay beyond the reef were bigger than the ones inside the reef and sent up a spume of spray as they hit the coral. Above all this, the sky was a cornflower blue along the low horizon and darkened to sapphire as it rose in a dome above the perfection below.

Lucy wiped the tears that had gathered in her eyes with the back of her hand. The flawless beauty before her was supposed to be a balm to her soul, something to give her hope, and help her to come to terms with what had happened, but instead the exquisite perfection of her surroundings seemed to contrast horribly with the black sadness in her heart and it made her feel worse than ever. What was the point? Lucy wondered. She had tried to engage with her parents, Felix and Philippa, the previous evening when they had settled into their holiday beach chalet and they had told her of all the activities in which she could get involved while on this vacation.

‘There’s a water-sports centre just down the beach that offers kite-surfing, kayaking, stand-up-paddling-boarding and wind-surfing,’ her father had told her. ‘You’re an athletic young lady and shouldn’t have a problem mastering the art of one of those disciplines if you feel you’d like to learn something new.’

‘Yes, and there’s a glass-bottomed boat you can hire that will take you out to the reef where you can go snorkelling,’ her mother added. ‘The chap who owns that also offers deep-sea fishing.’

‘Or,’ suggested Felix, ‘you can just walk on the beach, swim in the sea, and build sandcastles!’

‘I’m a bit old to build sandcastles!’ Lucy said, smiling at her parents. ‘Tomorrow I’ll just walk on the beach and maybe have a dip in the sea while I decide what else I’d like to do.’

Lucy wanted to feel better. She had told herself that she would make a real effort on this holiday to rid herself of the black, gloomy cloud that seemed continually to hover around her head, but if even these beautiful surroundings were making her feel worse, how could she ever expect to feel happy again? Her own sadness seemed to weigh down heavily on her, but as if that wasn’t enough, world events also added to the load because every time she watched the news there were new disasters assailing different parts of the world.

Graphic scenes of fires or floods consuming whole communities would flash on the television screen; devastation caused by earthquakes; terrorist attacks; and even volcano eruptions. The people involved in these disasters were filmed running away with raw fear and incomprehension reflected in their pitiful faces, and it was heartbreaking. When there were no disasters to report the news turned to atrocities committed by people—stabblings, murders, child abuse, and those who preyed on others and stole from them. Sadness and outrage seemed to surge from the television or radio as these reports were made, but on the whole no one appeared to take much notice.

It seemed to Lucy that many thought money was everything and being unscrupulous was clever, so long as you didn’t get caught! People were actually proud of their actions and blatantly cheated and stole from others while boasting about what they had done. It made Lucy sick to watch the news sometimes, and she often worried that it was inevitable

that she or her family would fall prey to scammers or some dreadful event.

People told her she shouldn't worry; what would be would be. But Lucy did worry. How could she not when the future was so obscure? Surely it was naïve to stick your head in the sand and ignore what was going on in the world? Things couldn't go on as they were, she was certain of that, but others conducted their lives as though they were completely blind to the things that distressed Lucy so much.

She wearily watched people living their blind lives in a predictable and repetitive fashion. Their trite chatter, their inevitable laughter, their conventional lifestyles—all the same, nothing to distinguish one from the other; it was as though every scene in their lives was placed in a rotational order and replayed again and again without variation—and no one seemed able to see the futility of it all!

They can't all be wrong, Lucy thought. It must be me. I want some reassurance about the future, but I know that's impossible. She shook her head in despair; she could feel one of her headaches coming on—it always happened when she allowed herself to think about things too much and get stressed. I just wish I could jump off the earth and get away from all the blind madness she thought, as she rummaged in her beach-bag for painkillers and a bottle of water. She was so tired of gritting her teeth, painting a smile on her lips, and pretending she was okay while trying to ignore the silent screams inside her head that told her she must escape from all this, from the people, from the predictability and futility of life, from everything in this evil world.

Her hand closed around her packet of painkillers and as it did so an unexpected solution suddenly snapped into Lucy's head. It was clear, easy, and very appealing, and it seemed to fill her whole mind so that she couldn't think of anything else. How lovely it would be to leave this world and get away from the grief that weighed her down night and day. And she would never have to witness any more disasters, never have to hear another lie, never have to see depraved people indulging in their greed. It would all be gone: the hurt, the sense of angst, the sorrow, and the impotent rage that beat inside her skull—all gone; nothing more to torment her.

She had never felt like this before and the urge to end it all

was so overpoweringly strong, Lucy found she couldn't resist it. She scabbled in her beach-bag again and found her bottle of water. As if in a trance she popped the painkillers out of the foil one by one and laid them in a line along the tree trunk on which she was sitting. She would take the lot just to make sure. It would be easy—all she had to do was shovel them into her mouth in twos and threes and swallow them down with the water—and then just wait to die. She felt she could almost see her loved ones who had gone before, beckoning encouragingly.

Lucy unscrewed the top of her water bottle and took a sip to wet her mouth; she was about to pick up the first couple of tablets and swallow them when she was suddenly hit from behind by something solid and meaty. The impact almost knocked all the breath out of her and she found herself falling off the log, scattering the pills as she fell, while the water bottle flew from her hands and spilled its contents over the sand. She hardly had a moment to try and comprehend what had happened, when a very warm and wet tongue started licking her face and ears.

'Honey, Honey. Oh my goodness, what have you done now?' Lucy could hear someone calling from afar as she pushed herself into a sitting position and tried to fend off the enthusiastic dog that was looking absolutely delighted to be greeting her so zealously.

'Down, down,' commanded Lucy. But the little Staffordshire bullterrier was determined to make the girl see how pleased she was to meet her. The dog's eyes danced with happiness while her tail was a blur as she pranced around Lucy, her rather rotund body wiggling with delight. 'Okay, okay, I love you too,' Lucy couldn't help laughing—the little dog personified joy and happiness and it was contagious. For the moment the dark thoughts in her head were eclipsed by the sheer ebullient delight that radiated from the honey-coloured canine. 'Just settle down a little and let me get up!'

At that moment the owner of the voice that had shouted at the dog ran up. 'Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry,' he said. He caught the little dog and held her tightly under his arm where she wiggled about indignantly. 'Are you all right? She didn't hurt you, did she? Can I help you up?' The man, who appeared to be only a few years older than Lucy, had

a deep voice and he enunciated the words he spoke with a slight lisp. Lucy saw that he had a round, slightly asymmetric face that made him look a little odd and she wondered if he had Down's syndrome. There was something about him that indicated he must be simple, but he had kind eyes that at that moment were full of concern.

'Don't worry, I'm fine,' she reassured the man as she scrambled up. 'I like dogs and your one was just being friendly.'

'Thank goodness you're not cross. I'm Joe and this is Honey.'

'Hello Joe and Honey, I'm Lucy. Put her down Joe, she isn't happy being held; she wants to run about.'

'Now you behave yourself,' Joe said to Honey as he set her on the beach. 'You've already caused enough trouble as it is!' Honey had spied a crab hastily running to its hole and as soon as her feet touched the ground she immediately chased after it. 'Honey's a bit naughty,' Joe told Lucy as he watched his dog digging frantically in the sand where the crab had disappeared. 'She escapes from our garden and runs down the beach to look for people to make friends with because she's a very friendly person.'

'She's lovely,' said Lucy.

Jo suddenly saw the tablets that had scattered onto the sand near the tree trunk. 'Oh dear—your pills are everywhere,' he said, kneeling down to retrieve them. Then he suddenly stopped and looked at Lucy. 'You weren't going to take them all at once, were you?' Joe's expression was full of concern. 'My father did that; he took a lot of pills and died. It was horrible! I cried and cried because he was dead.'

Lucy's eyes filled with tears. The stark words from Joe's lips made her realise the enormity of what she was about to do and, had Honey not intervened at the critical moment, what the consequences of her actions would have done to those who loved her.

'Don't be sad,' said Joe looking troubled. 'I didn't mean to make you cry, but you mustn't take too many pills, Lucy. It's a bad thing to do because you die and then everyone's sad.' He looked so kind and concerned it made Lucy's tears flow even faster.

'I don't know what to do,' she said in a choked voice. 'The thoughts in my head are as cold and dark as outer space and even sitting in this lovely place where every-

thing is bright and beautiful isn't helping.'

'If it's the thoughts in your head that are troubling you, I know someone who can help,' Joe said beaming at her. 'Come on Lucy, I'll take you to see Gigi; she's the wisest person in the world and even knows what's going to happen in the future.' He held out his hand to Lucy, but she hesitated. 'Don't worry,' he said, 'it's just up the beach, not far at all.'

Lucy wasn't sure she was doing the right thing, but she grabbed her bag and followed Joe up the beach with Honey on her heels. She knew Joe was harmless; when she looked into his eyes she could see there was no malice in him at all. But who was this Gigi person whom he was insisting she met?

Joe had said Gigi knew what was going to happen in the future, so perhaps she was a fortune-teller—Gigi sounded like a fortune-teller's name and as Lucy hurried after Joe she tried to imagine what she might look like. She would be a plump lady with jet-black ringlets falling around her face, Lucy decided. Big, gold hooped earrings would hang from her ears and she would have several rings on her fingers as well. She would gaze through spectacles with frames that were encrusted with diamonds at her big crystal ball and see what the future held.

Lucy knew she was being fanciful and she might actually be heading into danger by blindly following someone she didn't know, but she was lured by the knowledge that Gigi really might be able to tell her what was in store for her in the future, so she continued to trail after Joe.

After trudging through the soft white sand of the beach for a short while, Joe turned inland and went up a path for a short distance before coming to a locked gate. He opened it with a key and further up the path a palm-thatched house was just visible beyond the Casuarina trees through which they had to walk. Lucy had to pick her way carefully through the prickly little cones that had fallen from the trees as she was barefooted, and she didn't look up at the house until she was quite close. When she did, she could hardly believe her eyes.

The roof was neatly thatched with palm thatching, but that was where normality ended. The white outside walls of the house had been decorated with painted scenes of wildlife pictures, each one running into the other seamlessly, so that there was a feast for the eyes wherever she looked. The ani-

mals and birds were depicted in minute detail and looked so lifelike Lucy felt they were about to abandon the walls and wander into the garden that was ablaze with colour.

The numerous bougainvillea bushes, interspaced by palm trees and other costal shrubs, burst with a riot of flowers in different hues, and the frangipani blossoms added not only colour but also a heady fragrance. There were real birds flitting about in the trees and, as Lucy's eyes followed one of them, she saw a Colobus monkey, its long black and white coat floating in the breeze as it leaped from branch to branch like poetry in motion.

'Wow, this is really something!' Lucy gazed around at everything in amazed delight.

'Do you like it?' Joe asked sounding pleased. 'I did the paintings and I do the gardening as well.'

'It's amazing—it's like I imagine the Garden of Eden—Joe, you're a genius!'

'That's the first time anyone has called me a genius' said Joe laughing.

Apart from the paintings and the remarkable garden, the house was a typical beach dwelling. There was an open veranda that ran along the front of the house and Lucy could see that someone was sitting at a table at the far end of the veranda. She seemed to be surrounded with books and papers, all of which were held down with paperweights that ranged from beautiful Cowrie or Spider shells to lumps of coral.

Lucy was trying to see if the person was anything like she had imagined, when suddenly there was an eruption of barking as several dogs of differing sizes realised that they had a visitor and they all rushed to greet Lucy. She noticed they upset a big Siamese cat that was sleeping on a chair near the entrance to the veranda as they raced past, and he jumped to his feet and glared at them out of his brilliant blue eyes. Then she saw an African grey parrot perched on a swing that hung from the rafters on the veranda who was jumping from one foot to the other and craning his neck to see what the excitement was all about.

'Hello you lot,' Lucy said to the tide of furry bodies that had suddenly engulfed her legs. She bent to greet the dogs, all of whom seem pleased to see her. Honey had to get in on the act again, of course, and she barged the others out of the

way with her little tanklike body as if to say—this girl was my find!

‘The little black dog is Pippin,’ Joe told her. ‘The brown one is Jacky, the fluffy grey one is Hugo, the German shepherd is Alex, and the sausage dog is Sal. You already know who Honey is!’ Joe seemed very pleased to see that Lucy obviously loved dogs.

Something suddenly landed on Lucy’s shoulder making her jump. ‘It’s only Tinky, our pet monkey,’ said Joe. ‘He’s quite harmless and friendly; he just wants to say hello as well.’ Lucy turned her head and looked into the monkey’s eyes. They were large and brown and twinkled with mischief.

‘Oh, he’s so sweet,’ she said, tickling him under the chin.

‘Come on, I’ll introduce you to Gigi,’ said Joe.

‘Hello, hello,’ squawked the parrot; he was swinging upside down on his perch as he stared at Lucy with one eye. ‘Hello, Jambo, karibu, karibu!’

‘Hello,’ said Lucy trying not to giggle—it all seemed so bizarre; Joe, who appeared to be a simple genius, the extraordinary brightly painted house and superb garden, and now a menagerie of animals to wade through before meeting someone who might be a fortune-teller. The situation felt completely surreal, but for now all her gloomy thoughts had been chased out of her head.

The cat had now jumped from its chair and was winding itself around her legs making it hard for her to move on. ‘This is Arthur—or King Arthur as we call him because he thinks he’s the boss when it comes to the animals,’ Joe told her.

Lucy spent a few moments getting to know Arthur. ‘Does the parrot have a name?’ she asked as she stroked Arthur’s soft furry body.

‘He’s called Sukie—Sukie can be the name of a girl or a boy parrot and we’re not sure what Sukie is really, so it’s a good name for him.’

Eventually Lucy was able to mount the veranda steps and walk over to the woman who rose from her chair as she approached, and she was nothing like the exotic person that Lucy had imagined! Gigi was quite old, Lucy thought, older than her own mother—more wrinkled, but there were still the remnants of the beautiful woman she had once been. However, her bright blue eyes that shone with intelligence held a

haunting sadness and there were lines of grief etched on her face. Her once lustrous dark hair was now almost all grey and was piled on her head in an untidy bun, and she was wearing a rather faded sundress and had rubber flip-flops on her feet.

‘Gigi, this is Lucy and she has dark thoughts in her head and wants to kill herself,’ said Joe without preamble.

Lucy blushed to the roots of her hair and wanted to curl up into a ball because she felt so embarrassed, but the lady didn’t appear to be overly perturbed at hearing this rather startling news.

‘Hello Lucy, I’m Gigi,’ she said, smiling at the girl. ‘I’m glad you managed to fight your way through the menagerie of animals that Joe has managed to collect—it’s no small feat!’

There was compassion in her eyes as she looked at Lucy and she seemed to radiate tranquillity; Lucy felt oddly drawn to her. She sensed she was looking at a woman who understood how she felt.

‘I’m sorry you have dark thoughts in your head,’ Gigi said. ‘You must be feeling very unhappy, my dear. Why don’t you come and sit down and you can tell me what’s bothering you. Joey, would you be a dear and get us some cold drinks?’

Lucy felt very awkward. She sat on the edge of the chair that Gigi had indicated she should take and wondered what to say. Tinky suddenly landed on her shoulder again and that gave her a moment to compose herself while she made a fuss of him. Joe arrived with the drinks but didn’t stay—he knew that Gigi would know what to do and it would be better to leave the two women alone.

‘It often helps to talk about your troubles,’ Gigi said gently. ‘But if you’d rather not, that’s okay. We can have a nice drink together and leave it at that.’

Lucy was surprised that Gigi hadn’t bombarded her with questions and then tried to reassure her with meaningless assurances that she had heard before, countless times. Nor had she rushed to the telephone to try and find someone who could help her with the suicidal teenager who had been dumped in her lap. Instead Gigi appeared to be quite unruffled about the situation and the calmness she exuded seemed to envelop Lucy, so the girl felt herself relaxing again. She was under no pressure to do or say anything, but she sensed Gigi’s warm quiet personality reaching out to her

with compassion. Suddenly Lucy burst into tears.

‘I just don’t want to be in this world anymore,’ she said. ‘Wherever I look, there are problems—the world seems an ugly place to me and the one person that I loved most of all has died and I want to be with him. I desperately want to get away from all the nastiness and evil—I just can’t imagine that anything good can be in the future. I think I’m cursed and I want to be somewhere nice where everyone is happy and kind to each other.’

Lucy expected Gigi to tell her that things were not as grim as she thought. She should be more positive and things would get better. She had heard it all before and she waited for Gigi to say what she expected, but she didn’t.

‘What do you actually think happens when you die?’ Gigi asked her.

Lucy had to think about that for a minute. All sorts of explanations of death seemed to flit through her mind. There was the light at the end of the tunnel that would be God. There was something she’d heard in church about her immortal soul, which she assumed would float up to heaven after death. Then there was the thought of all her dead loved ones, now changed into angels, looking down at her from heaven and longing for her to join them and be an angel as well.

But she also had to consider the other darker side of death. If life was like a railway line that ended with a fork—one way going to heaven and the other to hell, what then could she expect after death if she was destined to follow the hell route? This could certainly be a possibility if she took her own life.

‘What are your thoughts, Lucy?’ Gigi prompted her. ‘If you have several differing views on death, tell me about them all.’

When Lucy had given Gigi all the versions she could think of what she imagined happened after death, the lady smiled and shook her head.

‘If you want to find out what happens after death you can discover the truth in your Bible,’ she said, pulling her Bible towards her.

Lucy saw that the lady’s Bible was shabby and worn-looking. When Gigi opened up the yellowing pages, Lucy noticed that there were handwritten notes inscribed in all the margins and along the top and bottom of the pages. There didn’t seem to be a space left where there were no notes.

‘The Bible is full of treasure just waiting to be discovered,’ Gigi remarked as she flicked through the pages. ‘Some of the treasure is lying openly on the pages, clear for you to see. Other treasure you have to dig for—often it’s in fragments so you have to dig through the Bible to find all the pieces and then put them together. And the Bible never stops giving. I’ve been delving into it for years and I’m still finding nuggets of treasure within its pages.

‘Now, death, well, you don’t have to read very far into the Bible to read that death came about because of disobedience. In Genesis we read: *But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die,* (Genesis 2:17). Do you know the story of Adam and Eve, Lucy?’

‘Yes, I’ve been brought up as a Christian.’

‘Well then, you’ll know that part of their punishment for disobedience was separation from God. They didn’t die immediately, but in time they did die—so what happened to them then? Well, they were dead! They no longer had any consciousness. In many places in the Bible death is likened to sleep, a deep lifeless sleep in which you are unaware of anything. In Psalm 146:4 it says when referring to man: *When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.* And in Psalm 115:17 it says: *It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to silence.* In other words, when you’re dead, you’re dead!’ Ecclesiastes also has a bit to say about death. In Ecclesiastes 3:19 we read: *Man’s fate is like that of the animals, the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal.* Then again in Ecclesiastes 9:5 it says: *For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing.* A bit further on in Ecclesiastes 9:10 we read: *Whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.’*

‘But ... didn’t that all change when Jesus died for our sins?’ Lucy asked rather hesitantly.

‘By dying for our sins Jesus made it possible for us to be resurrected—all of us, those of Old Testament times included—but only after he returns to earth for the second time will people be resurrected.’

‘So...when we die we’re just dead in our graves until Jesus comes again?’

‘That’s right. There will be no floating up to heaven after we die. In John 3:13 it says: *No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.* In all probability we won’t ever go to heaven because Jesus is going to make his Kingdom on earth. Meanwhile when we die, we remain in our graves until we’re called out of them. In John 5:13 it says: *A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.* That makes things pretty plain, doesn’t it? And we certainly won’t become angels because we’re a different species than the angels. It would be like us turning into giraffes or some other animal that’s a different species from us!’

Lucy digested this in silence. She didn’t like giving up on her idea of floating up to heaven to be with her loved ones and she was trying to think of something that would confirm what she had believed. Suddenly she remembered something in the Bible that rather proved she could be right.

‘Isn’t it written in the Bible at the part where Jesus is being crucified, that Jesus said to one of the thieves who was being crucified with him, that he would be in paradise with him that very day?’

‘Yes, that’s written in Luke 23:43. But we know that something can’t be right about that text because Jesus died and was dead for three days and three nights before he rose from the dead. We know from his own lips he had not ascended to heaven when he first came out of the tomb three days after he was laid in it. In Luke 20:17 Jesus said to Mary: *Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.* So he couldn’t have been in paradise with the thief on the day he was crucified. Perhaps there was a mistake in the translation of that part of the Bible—or it could even have been just a punctuation mistake. Perhaps the words—“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise,” should actually read, “I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise.”’

‘So you’re saying everyone who dies just lies in their grave until Jesus resurrects them to life again?’

‘Yes. In Ecclesiastes we read that when a human being dies, his body returns to dust, and the human spirit, which has

recorded everything in his mind and his experiences, returns to God. (Ecclesiastes 3:20-21). God will keep his spirit safely, but the dead person will know nothing until he is resurrected after the second coming of Jesus.

‘We know that when Jesus returns, everyone who has ever lived will be judged by him because God has given him authority to do so (John 5:27). So it wouldn’t make sense to have people floating around after they died before judgement day, would it?’

‘No, I suppose not.’

‘So now you know that if you were to kill yourself you wouldn’t immediately be seeing your loved ones; you would just be dead. And since God put you on earth for a reason, he wouldn’t be pleased if you decided to take your own life, especially as it’s his prerogative, not yours, to decide when you die!’

Lucy knew what the lady had said was undeniably true because she had proved it by the Bible verses she had read to her and she suddenly felt completely deflated. Killing herself had been an enticing option and now it no longer seemed at all attractive. It appeared that the only other option she had was to live in this dangerous and unpredictable world and not know what was going to happen to her in the future.

‘It’s not wrong for you to hate all the injustices and atrocities of this broken world, Lucy,’ Gigi said gently. ‘For a while it will remain so, but eventually God will restore peace on earth by establishing his divine Kingdom over all nations. Jesus Christ will return and seize control of all human governments and rule by God’s law. Also, we may receive the gift of eternal life and become part of that eternal Kingdom—that is the message of the good news of the Kingdom of God.’

‘But how long is that going to take?’ Lucy wailed. ‘And how is it all going to work? I don’t understand how it can happen or how we all fit into things.’

‘I can help you understand, Lucy. But to do that I would need to talk about the past first, before I get on to the future, and that will take some time. Once you begin to understand I think you’ll feel more positive about living in this sad and broken world. Perception will give you hope, and that’s what we all need when we find ourselves questioning the many wrongs in this world.’

Although Gigi had not turned out to be the fortune-teller Lucy had imagined, she instinctively knew the lady would be able to give her a far more comprehensive insight to her future than any fortune-teller could, and she really wanted to stay and learn what Gigi could teach her; death was no longer an option, so she needed some hope for the future. But she knew her parents would start worrying if she was away for too long.

‘Would it be possible for me to come back so you could tell me about the future—and the past?’ Lucy asked. ‘I don’t want to worry my parents by disappearing for ages—they’re dreadful worriers!’

‘Of course you can come back, child. Whenever you have time, just come to our gate and give Joey a shout. We’re in most of the time and it would be a pleasure to see you again.’

‘Is Gigi your mother?’ Lucy asked Joe when he escorted her back to the gate.

‘Yes; I’ve always called her Gigi because that’s what my father called her, but she is my mum. Are you going to come back and see us again, Lucy?’

‘Yes, Gigi explained some things to me today, but she needs time to tell me about the past and the future, so I’d like to come back and hear what she has to tell me.’

‘Good.’ Joe looked pleased.

‘Joe, I’d just like to thank you—and Honey of course—for stopping me doing something really stupid. I don’t really know what came over me earlier today.’

‘That’s okay,’ said Joe looking embarrassed.

As Lucy made her way back up the beach towards their holiday chalet, there was a kaleidoscope of thoughts in her mind. She felt appalled at how close she had been to attempting to take her own life without even a thought as to how it might affect her parents. It had been as though she was in some sort of trance and the only thing she could think of was herself and her own feelings. It would have been a dreadfully selfish thing to do and she was so relieved that Honey and Joe had distracted her.

Then Lucy’s thoughts drifted to the strange household from which she had just left. Everything there seemed a little asymmetric, but the overriding feeling that had emanated from the place was peace, love, and tranquillity. Lucy felt drawn to

Gigi and Joe and all their animals, and she knew she could trust Gigi to tell her the truth when she told her what was going to happen in the future.

It had been a strange morning, but Lucy found to her surprise that her spirits had risen and she felt happier than she had in a very long time.



2

FELIX

*A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord
delivers him from them all.*

(Psalm 35:19)

Felix stood facing the sea in the humid darkness that precedes the dawn on the East African coast of Kenya. Already a pearly greyness on the skyline tinged with pink heralded the breaking of the day. Everything was so still—there wasn't a breath of air and the sheen of light reflecting on the sea made it appear as a sheet of glass. Only the slight lapping sound at the edge of the water indicated that there was a huge ocean out there, waking up with the dawn. Felix stood stock still, breathing in the pungent scent of the coast: sea-salt, wet sand, seaweed, fish, and sudden unexpected bursts of fragrance from the Frangipani bushes that

grew just beyond the beach. He was waiting for the first flush of the sun to strike on the scene and illuminate the perfection that surrounded him.

Felix loved this hour of the day. It was as though he was witnessing the world as it had been on the first day of creation. Everything before him was so perfect when the sun, after first rewarding him with a brilliant display of iridescent pink and orange along the low skyline, suddenly peeped over the horizon and sent a million sparkles flashing off the ocean. The scene before him was so clean and fresh and blindingly beautiful. Everything that had gone before on the previous day seemed to have been washed into oblivion and the flawless panorama that spread before Felix's eyes seemed almost too perfect to be true. Behind him the darkness lingered because the sun had not yet illuminated the dark pockets and depressions on the land where most people still slumbered in their beds.

Felix kept his face to the sea because he felt that he was facing everything that was good and new and hopeful. It was like facing the future with an optimistic spirit. He did not turn and face to the shadows behind him because they appeared to him like his past—full of pain, sadness, and anger. He would never have believed, as a young man, that his simple desires for this life could have been so cruelly denied him. He hadn't hoped for fame or wealth; he had just wished for happiness and although periods of his life had indeed been happy there were also periods of great sadness and anger. His biggest concern at the present time was to help Lucy restore her mental health. This was paramount and he knew that if it could be achieved his own healing would also be accomplished.

*

Felix had been born in South Carolina in the United States and lived with his parents and two sisters on the outskirts of Inman, known as a small town with a big heart. His was a happy childhood; his parents were staunch Christians and brought their children up according to their faith so he had many happy memories of Christian gatherings when they picnicked by the South Pacolet River, played baseball, and later, when Lake Bowen was constructed in 1960, his fishing expeditions with his friends.

Felix had not been particularly academic when he was at school, but that had not bothered him too much. His father told him that God had created him for a purpose and if he found he wasn't cut out to be a scientist or lawyer, that was okay. He must just find his niche in life and live the best existence he was able. That sounded good to Felix and he decided he would like to go into hospitality once he had finished school. He had no wish to leave South Carolina or go traveling to other countries. Inman was his town; it was where his family and friends resided and he hoped to one day marry and raise a family of his own right where he had been born.

First, however, he had to make some money to pay for his qualifications, so he got himself a job with the grand title of Warehouse Operative, working for a supermarket. In his mind he had his life mapped out. Once he had made enough money, he would decide which area of hospitality in which he would train—hoping to end up eventually in management. He would marry a beautiful woman and they would have a large family which would have a similar upbringing to his own.

Felix had been barely eighteen years old when he met the woman of his dreams. One day when he was at work, he went outside to have a cigarette on his break and discovered a young lady sitting in the sun eating cherries.

'Hi, I'm Mary-Lou,' said the girl smiling up at him. She was wearing a very short mini-dress that had ridden up her legs and her sun-gilded limbs were long and coltish. Her lovely blue eyes twinkled with fun and her full lips, stained pink from cherry juice, were smiling up at him. Felix couldn't help thinking she looked as ripe and delicious as the cherries she was consuming. He was completely smitten.

'Would you like a cherry?' Mary-Lou offered the punnet of cherries to him. 'I was just having a five-minute break from stacking shelves and thought I'd sit in the sun and have something to eat.' She ran her pink tongue over her lips as she appraised the man standing before her. Felix worked out and boxed at the gym and Mary-Lou couldn't help admiring his physique.

Felix and Mary-Lou started dating immediately, but less than a month from the day he met her, Felix's conscription papers came through the mail box and he knew he was going

to have to go and fight in the war in Vietnam. Going to war didn't frighten him, but he was terrified of losing Mary-Lou to another man while he was away. He was completely captivated by her and just knew that she was the right woman to be his wife and bear him children. So despite his parents' advice that he should slow down and not take things too fast, he proposed to Mary-Lou and she readily agreed to be his wife. Her family approved of Felix, but they, too, agreed that the young couple were taking things far too fast and tried to persuade them to wait until Felix got back from his stint in Vietnam.

However, Felix and Mary-Lou were determined to marry, so the ceremony went ahead and everything looked peachy for them. They rented an apartment and were deliriously happy together—the only thing that marred their bliss was the dark cloud of Felix's departure hovering on the horizon.

'I wish you didn't have to go and fight in this stupid war,' said Mary-Lou. 'What has Vietnam got to do with us, anyway?'

'I wish I didn't have to go as well, honey, but I don't have any say in the matter. It's just something men have to do sometimes. My daddy served in the Army Corps in World War Two in North Africa and Europe, and I hope he'll be proud of me for fighting for my country.'

'But Vietnam isn't your country!'

'Sure, honey, but we're fighting against communism—if we don't, it'll affect the whole world in a bad way and we don't want that to happen!'

Felix and Mary-Lou both wanted a large family, but they agreed it would be best to wait until Felix got back from Vietnam before trying for a baby.

'I'll only be away for a year,' Felix reassured her. 'But it would be best if you moved back with your parents when I go, and then as soon as I return, we can resume our lives together, have a baby, and make plans for the future.'

*

Felix had to go for eight weeks basic training and he found he really enjoyed boot camp. He was fit, sharp, and had a natural aggression that he hadn't realised he possessed. He

wrote often to Mary-Lou and told her what he'd been doing. 'We have to learn everything from weapons familiarisation, bayonet and hand-to-hand fighting to shining our boots and making our beds!' he wrote.

By the time he was shipped out to Vietnam he felt he was ready for anything, but when he arrived the reality of the situation was very different from what he was expecting. Before he left the USA, he had some notions of doing his duty and making the world a better place in which to live, but as soon as he arrived he realised that no one else cared about such things. Morale was very low and everyone just seemed to want to get through their tour and go home—and Felix very soon found out why. He knew things would be tough fighting in Vietnam, but it was as if he had fallen off the edge of the world and landed in hell! It was unimaginably worse than he could have ever anticipated.

For the first couple of weeks he felt in a state of confusion because he didn't really know what he was doing, and no one seemed to care. He was immediately pushed into going on patrols, but he wondered if he would even recognise a Vietcong soldier if he saw one! The terrain through which they patrolled seemed as unfriendly as the enemy. The damp jungle was full of critters and snakes, and it seemed to collaborate with the Vietcong by concealing them as they waited to ambush the American soldiers.

Felix felt terrified—not only of making contact with the Vietcong, but also because he wasn't sure he would react in the correct way when they did so. On the day of his first contact mayhem ensued—or that's how it seemed to Felix. With the sharp explosions of machinegun fire reverberating in his head he automatically threw himself onto the ground without thinking and tried to find cover. The air was full of the smell of cordite and he could see the flashes from the enemy guns coming out of the dim jungle. The men around him were firing back and there seemed to be a lot of swearing and yelling, but he couldn't comprehend what was being said. Someone screamed and another one cursed and then one of the soldiers jumped up and threw a grenade towards the enemy before dropping to the ground again. The explosion that followed echoed around in his head as he watched another soldier throw his grenade.

Then Felix realised all had gone quiet. The enemy had fled and now the only sound was the sobbing of one of the men who had been injured badly. The wounded soldier was close to Felix and he could smell the metallic odour of his blood and hear his pitiful cries as he called for his mother. The medic started working on him as a helicopter was called in to evacuate the wounded.

When they continued their patrol, Felix realised he hadn't even fired a shot. Fear and confusion had immobilised him and he had only taken cover because his instinct to survive had prompted him to do so. He looked at the men trudging along the jungle path with him. All of them were covered in mud, many were bloodied from minor injuries and their expressions were tough and unyielding. He felt deeply ashamed and hoped that none of them had noticed he hadn't fired his weapon.

After two weeks, Felix was surprised that he was still alive, but he was beginning to get the hang of things. The men would work together to survive but they expected each soldier to look after himself as best he could. There was no room for weakness. Those who were weak either got killed or went mad and had to be repatriated. It was a mistake to think of home because it made you weak. Vietnam was your reality and you had to deal with it and find the best way to survive.

There were no excuses for quitting, but it was hard to adjust to the nerve-jangling sorties into the jungle when you never knew if you would make contact or if you would set off a boobytrap and end up horribly mangled or dead. It was hellish to be pinned down by enemy fire and have to slither around in the jungle undergrowth while bullets zipped above your head and mortar bombs fell with heart-stopping explosions. The exposure to death and destruction was horrifying—seeing the enemy blown to shreds was bad enough, but when it was one of your own soldiers, maybe someone known to you or even a friend, it was unspeakably appalling. It was hardly better when they returned to camp. The clatter of helicopters coming and going was constant, and the sounds of war coming from the jungle was a reminder of what was to come when you returned to the fray.

To survive this hell, Felix realised he had to toughen up mentally. He knew he had a natural aggressiveness and to live

he had to tap into it. He decided that he must perfect every method of fighting he had learnt to give himself a chance of getting out alive and home to Mary-Lou. He honed and refined every fighting skill he had acquired so that he became an accomplished killer, be it with his rifle, a hand grenade, a knife, piano wire or his hands. It gave him no pleasure to kill, but he did it with deadly efficiency. He felt no guilt because he knew it increased his chances of survival.

As time went on, he realised that he, together with the others, were slowly becoming like animals. His mindset had necessarily changed; he was now a predator, a killer who spent most of his time either killing or practising different ways of killing a man. He'd had to change to survive; life in Vietnam was all about staying ahead of the game and keeping alive and no one could go through a year living in those conditions and not return to America a completely different person.

His idealistic notion of fighting communism and making the world a better place was short-lived when he arrived in Vietnam. No one seemed to care about that in this country. The Vietnamese didn't even seem particularly grateful for the Americans coming to help them fight their war—in fact they seemed to resent them! The only ones who appeared to like them were the whores because they were making a good living out of the war-weary, homesick soldiers! However, Felix would not permit himself to take a whore—it would be disrespectful to his wife and he loved Mary-Lou too much to do anything that she wouldn't approve of.

At first Felix had written long letters to Mary-Lou and she had written shorter, but loving letters back to him. But as the weeks passed, Felix's letters became shorter and shorter—he just couldn't think of anything nice to write about. He kept a photo of his wife with him at all times and looked at it from time to time, just to remind himself that somewhere, in another world, there was a beautiful woman waiting for him and if he could stay focused and outwit, outshoot, and outlive the enemy, he would one day get back to her. He wasn't happy when Mary-Lou's letters became less frequent and definitely less loving, but he blamed himself. If he couldn't write her a decent letter, how could she be expected to write a decent reply to him?

*

When his time was up, Felix could hardly believe he had completed his year in Vietnam without being seriously wounded or killed. He had witnessed so many atrocities, some of them at his own hands, but now he could leave it all behind him, go home and resume his life where he had left off. But could he? A little voice in his head told him he was a changed man and it wasn't going to be that easy to resume his former life. Nonetheless, he couldn't wait to see Mary-Lou again, and surely, he figured, if he could adjust to the life of a soldier he could readjust to life as a civilian once again.

Mary-Lou had returned to live with her parents when he had gone off to war, so he made his way back to their house and hoped that his wife would be at the garden gate waiting for his arrival. She wasn't, so he went up the path and rang the bell. Her mother opened the door. Felix noticed she looked a bit anxious, but he didn't think anything of it—he just wanted to be with Mary-Lou.

'Mary-Lou is in the front room,' her mother said, and let him make his way there without following him.

Mary-Lou was silhouetted against the light as she stood with her back to the big front-room window when he entered the room. Standing beside her was a man that Felix had never met. Felix expected his wife to run and fall into his arms, but she remained where she was. He paused, wondering what was wrong.

'I'm sorry,' said Mary-Lou. 'We shouldn't have got married before you went to Vietnam—we were too young, and it was all too quick.'

'No!' Felix anticipated what she was going to say next and he rushed and enfolded her in his arms. He was going to tell her how much he loved her and how the thought of her waiting for him at home had helped him through the hellish year he'd had to spend in Vietnam. But then he felt the round, hard bump in her middle and he pushed her away in horror. She almost fell and the man who was with her stepped forward to steady her.

'Be careful,' he warned. 'She's in a delicate state.'

'Did you cause this?' Felix was beginning to comprehend what had happened and he felt the anger rising up and

engulfing him. He turned to look at the man properly for the first time. He was quite handsome and his thick, wiry, fair curls gave him a self-assured demeanour.

'I'm sorry,' Mary-Lou sobbed again. The tears that had gathered in her eyes were spilling down her cheeks. 'I didn't want to tell you while you were in Vietnam because I thought it would be unfair since it was so horrible out there for you, and all. Me and Martin are in love, Felix, I got a cleaning job in the college and he was studying there and it just kinda happened.'

Something exploded in Felix's head. Here was a man who had dodged Vietnam by going to college, and then he had calmly stolen Felix's own darling Mary-Lou while he been out there busting a gut and trying not to get killed!

'I'll kill you!' Felix roared. He jumped to grab Martin, but the other man was quick on his feet and he dodged Felix's near grasp and made a break for the door. Felix was close on his heels and furniture crashed to the ground as the two men hurtled through the house.

Felix knew he was going to kill Martin. For the past year he had been killing people—people who probably didn't even deserve to be killed. Now he had a man in his sights who did deserve to be killed and Felix was well qualified to do it!

Mary-Lou's shrill screams suddenly brought other members of the family who had been lurking in the house running to see what was happening. Martin dashed through the front door into the garden with Felix hot on his heels. With a roar of anger Felix launched himself at the running figure and brought him down on the front lawn. In a trice he was on top of him and his arm snaked around Martin's throat and started to throttle him. Martin kicked at Felix and tried to squirm out of his grip, but it felt like he was fighting a man of granite whose arms were made of steel.

Felix was so intent on killing Martin he was unaware of Mary-Lou's father, Garry, and her two teenage brothers running up. They shouted at him to stop, but nothing was going to distract him from his mission and it took the three of them to drag him away from Martin. Even then, he was straining to get back at the man.

'Get the hell out of here,' gasped Garry to Martin as he clung onto Felix for dear life. 'Take Mary-Lou and make yourselves

scarce.' Martin needed no second bidding and seconds later the sound of his car could be heard speeding away.

Felix stood staring in the direction of the receding car. He didn't have a car of his own so he knew that giving chase was out of the question. He was still simmering with rage, but slowly it was beginning to dissipate.

'Are you all right?' Garry asked him.

'How can I be all right?' Felix snarled. 'My wife's betrayed me and you stopped me killing the bastard who stole her.'

'I'm sorry, I really am,' said Garry. 'But you're not in Vietnam now and you'll land yourself in a heap of trouble if you go and kill someone.'

Felix realised that Garry was right later that day when he had cooled down and taken stock of the situation. He was glad that his father-in-law and Mary-Lou's brothers had managed to stop him from killing Martin, because he knew for certain he would have ended the man's life if they hadn't intervened. That was what he was trained to do—kill people! He didn't really have any other skills and now that Mary-Lou loved another man and was expecting his child, Felix felt unmotivated to learn a skill which would be useful for civilian life. He fell into deep depression.

It was just after his divorce from Mary-Lou came through that Felix met an old school friend, Ben Flood, who had joined the Peace Corps and volunteered to work in Zambia for two years. He had done this to dodge military conscription.

'There's money to be made in Zambia,' Ben told him. 'Why don't you join me, and we can go into partnership and become cattle buyers.'

'Cattle buyers?'

'Yes, we buy direct from the farmers and sell to the butcheries—there's loads of dough to be made from doing this.'

This was an opportunity to escape—Felix no longer wanted to stay in Inman, South Carolina. Everything had changed since he had returned from Vietnam. Inman hadn't actually changed, he realised, it was he who had been transformed into a completely different person and he no longer fitted in. Unfairly, he also found himself reviled for his part in the war. He didn't understand it; he thought he was doing a good and patriotic thing by fighting in Vietnam, but opinion had changed and people seemed to despise him for fighting the Vietcong.

So Felix took the opportunity to escape from the United States and found himself in Zambia — and Ben was right: there was money to be made as a cattle buyer. Their partnership had lasted for a good few years until Ben decided to return to the United States and find himself a wife, as he had built up his capital and thought the time was right to go home.

Felix was sworn off women for life and he had fallen in love with Zambia. He loved the wide-open spaces where everything was wild and free. He found the gently undulating land, that was pocked with kopjes and covered in Mopani trees, attractive. He enjoyed the climate and got on well with the local Africans. He didn't feel the slightest inclination to return to America where civilisation caused hustle and bustle, and everyone seemed busy rushing about trying to make money. He wrote to his family, of course, and when they replied he was reminded of how folk lived there — it was a very different life from the peaceful existence he enjoyed in Zambia.

When he heard that after bearing Martin two children Mary-Lou had divorced him and gone off with another man, he just shrugged his shoulders. He was quite happy by himself in Zambia and he decided to stay there and buy some land. He found a farm near Choma in the Southern Province where he could farm cattle. It wasn't a bad life; he had his dogs for companions and there was a farmer's club where he could socialise and pick the older and more experienced farmer's brains when necessary, which was quite often at first. But he was a hard worker, he learnt fast and he made a success of farming.

The farm that adjoined his one on the northern border belonged to a couple called Dawie and Pip Badenhorst. Felix didn't really like Dawie. He was a large, aggressive Afrikaner from South Africa and he had a bullying attitude. He would often try to intimidate people with whom he came into contact. It didn't work with Felix who had met people like him fighting in Vietnam and discovered that most of them were bullies because of personal insecurities.

Pip was hardly ever seen with her husband; he seemed to want to confine her to their house as much as he could and never even brought her to the club at the weekend when most of the farmers and their wives were congregated there. The few times Felix had met Pip she appeared vulnerable and

nervous. She was slim and pretty and had honey blond curls that danced about her face, but she seemed to exude anxiety and her eyes were large and full of fear. On one of the few times Felix had met her, he noticed she had concealed bruises on her face under makeup. He wondered if Dawie hit her; he was the type of person who would hit his wife, Felix decided.

The farm adjoining the southern border of his land was leased by Edward and Georgina Wendal-Anderson. They were very rarely seen and never socialised with the other families in the area. Felix was aware that they were struggling financially. They couldn't afford to buy a farm of their own and the land they leased was poor and unproductive. To compound things, in Felix's opinion Edward wasn't really cut out for farming.

The couple were originally from England and it was common knowledge that they had a son who was a special-needs child. Rumour had it that Georgina had gone into early labour after Edward had left for Lusaka to get farm supplies one morning, and she had given birth on the farm with only the housemaid to assist her. Apparently the child wasn't breathing when he was delivered and it took Georgina and the maid five minutes to get him to take his first breath. The lack of oxygen to his brain had caused damage and many of the people around wondered if the Wendal-Andersons were reclusive because they were ashamed of their son's lack of mental ability.

Felix had come across the Wendal-Anderson family broken down on the side of the road one day. Their pick-up had got a puncture but the car jack was malfunctioning and Edward was having a problem jacking up the vehicle so he could change the wheel. Felix stopped to help them and Edward explained what had happened.

'Every time I get it jacked up the jack fails and down it goes before I can even get the wheel off. Samuel's been finding stones to try and prop the vehicle up but there don't seem to be many big ones around here.'

Felix assumed Samuel was the backward son and he appeared at that moment carrying a fairly large stone.

'Well done son, that's a whopper,' said Edward. 'But I think Mr Thompson's going to lend us his jack, so don't bother about looking for any more.'

Samuel laid the stone on the ground carefully and smiled at Felix, but he didn't say a word. Felix noted with surprise that he was a very good-looking lad. He must have been about fourteen or fifteen and was well built, his muscles noticeable under his shirt. He had strong, clean-cut features and thick dark curly hair. Felix had imagined their backward son as a jibbering idiot, who dribbled and let his tongue hang out, but this lad looked completely normal; there was just something about his eyes that gave an indication that he wasn't quite all there.

Georgina sat at the side of the road in the sun and while Felix was helping Edward change the wheel, he studied her covertly. He decided she must have been very beautiful in her youth. Even though she was a mature woman, Felix could see she still retained much of her beauty, but there were lines of despondency on her face that marred the attractive woman she could have been. Samuel obviously took after her in looks.

When they had got the spare wheel on the vehicle and Felix was about to depart, both Edward and Georgina thanked him profusely and then Samuel came up and politely shook his hand.

'It was good to meet you, Samuel,' Felix said, but the boy only smiled and remained silent.

'He doesn't speak,' Georgina murmured.

Felix felt sorry for the little family as he drove away.



3

LUCY

*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people
he chose for his inheritance.*

(Psalm 33:12)

Lucy and her parents gazed through the glass bottom of the boat in which they sat, totally mesmerised as they watched the magical underwater world unfold beneath them. Brightly coloured fish and interesting sea creatures could be seen weaving about in the corals and waving seaweed that grew on the bed of the sea. When they got to the sandbar, they were able to don their goggles, flippers, and snorkels and get up close and personal to the life underwater.

Felix and Philippa had been encouraged to notice that Lucy had perked up since arriving in Diani. She had come back from her walk the previous day showing more animation than