**61**The coffin is brought back home by Suzanne. It has a union jack flag draped over it and the body inside is headless. I don’t want to see Suzanne as I arrive by train; I’ve got something more important to do. Terry and I look after the body upstairs in the house. Terry prays over it. He opens up the coffin but I have to turn away…as I see the severed vertebrae and spine suspended in the neck. I can’t bear the thought of Dave like this. The headless body smells of something…I can’t think what it is…it occurs to me that it’s beef and blood…

I awake still smelling the beef and the blood. Slowly my conscious mind starts to realise that the restaurant downstairs has started to prepare for their lunchtime bookings and the smell is wafting upwards through my window. I lie motionless for a few minutes running through the dream in my head, disturbed by my subconscious mind’s ability to portray such a stark image of how I feel about a man I once loved so deeply it nearly destroyed me…perhaps the dead body was me? No, it’s most definitely Dave. Deep in my gut I felt that the absence of his head signified something more disturbing than his physical death.

I had grieved long and hard when our relationship was finally over, over because of his decision to close himself off from what I thought we both wanted - a life of excitement, experimentation and exploration – an existential journey of two souls. He chose rather to deny who he was and to marry Sarah, a beautiful but dull girl whom his family, friends and the press had approved of. My grief had been long and punishing but I’d come out the other side, a wiser person, recognising that not everyone wanted freedom in life – it was a price many, including Dave, were not prepared to pay.

Dave was an extraordinary sportsman and athlete; he’d played for many of the top clubs in his career as a footballer and had been a talent that had given pleasure to millions and had brought enormous wealth to both him and the clubs he’d played for.

I’d met Dave in a club on New Year’s eve in 2011; he was dressed in tight leather shorts, a mask to conceal his identity and a collar to signify his submission. He’d approached me at the bar where I was standing sipping my water and observing the talent around me. I was pretty new to the Dominant lifestyle but I wasn’t going to show it: I was confident in myself and in my desire to experiment with someone who was similarly willing to go on a journey of exploration of our sexual desires. I didn’t know at the time where it would lead or the depths of personal discovery it would bring but I desperately wanted to take this first step.

Dave was taking a huge risk going to clubs like this; a well-known and well liked player he had a lot to lose if he was discovered. I admired him all the more for his bravery. He wasn’t a huge talker but his actions spoke loudly – this was a side of him that he couldn’t not explore. It leaked out of him in everything he did, his relationships, his football and his social life.

In one of his many relationships he’d started to trust his then girlfriend and had asked her one night to spank him hard; she’d been willing to do this but what she hadn’t anticipated was his loss of inhibitions which made him risk everything by asking her to penetrate him. She’d gone running to the press and had exposed him as a deviant – “Dave’s dirty secret” - one tabloid front page screamed. The press had had a field day which had made him feel ashamed and exposed. His only defence was to deny it.

Several years on, he’d bravely sought to explore this part of him again; he had tried to live a ‘vanilla’ lifestyle but each relationship had ended the same way – with him making his excuses and getting out.

Following our night at Club X we met regularly me pushing him to explore his limits of pain and pleasure; the trust between us building each time we met enabling us to open up more of our minds and discover our deeply creative natures.

Our relationship extended beyond the carnal and Dave started to discover that his imagination was rich and colourful. He started writing poems at first about beauty and its opposite, ugliness, which he described in his poems as narrow mindedness and fear. For a person who had finished his education early, his literary skills were extraordinary – natural, vibrant, honest, and powerful.

He looked into himself and had found another life – beyond the superficial world of a footballer, the pretty girls, and his own vanity. His poetry developed into short stories with the first of many being published (under a pseudonym) in a magazine. He was overwhelmed with pride and so was I. I recall our intimacy that night – it was explosive. Two minds and hearts joined in ecstatic joy; we both said to each that there was nothing more fulfilling in life than developing as a human being. Our journey together had taken a new and exciting turn and I was sure there was more to discover.

He was introduced to Sarah by his family; she was the daughter of his parents’ friends so she came pre-approved. Stunningly beautiful, polite and well-spoken she looked good on his arm. At 33 his career was coming to an end and there was an expectation that he should get married; there was also still gossip in the press about his sexuality. He’d been seen with many girls but no one ever became a serious girlfriend. We had managed to keep our relationship discreet and away from prying eyes. Me being several years older than him didn’t serve his public image and I was happy with that.

As with most sportsmen and women Dave had an ego and had a tendency to be swayed by vanity and people’s expectations. Despite his discovery and personal growth as a writer, his self-esteem was still driven and dictated to very much by what others thought of him and by others I mean his family. I understood very well why this was but I loved him and wanted him to be able to choose his own life not the one his family expected of him.

He started dating Sarah casually at first; he spoke of her to me – defending her in fact - that she wasn’t like other girls – that she was strong and principled. After a few months he started cancelling dates with me and started ignoring his writing. I tried hard not to be upset and to be supportive until I started to realise that Sarah’s strength did not come from a woman who had worked hard and had achieved in life but rather from a narrow-minded determination not to explore anything beyond her comfort zone. She judged harshly and this, Dave interpreted, was being ‘principled’. The irony wasn’t lost on me – his writing had been exactly on this type of ugliness which we both hated. I realised that, despite our 2 years together and all the things we had enjoyed and discovered in each other, Dave still felt guilty about who he was – unlike me he hadn’t embraced the freedom our lifestyle offered; rather her harshness made him feel secure because he felt he deserved to be condemned for his sexuality and creativity.

It was devastating when he announced to me that he was to marry Sarah and that we could no longer carry on seeing each other. His writing had stopped entirely which he explained was ‘for a season’ and that it was time he grew up and faced his responsibilities in life (his family’s words). His once vibrant face dulled as he tried to convince me of this nonsense. He couldn’t look me in the eye anymore and explained that he wanted to have children and that Sarah would be a good mother.

The press went wild; Hello magazine were invited to photograph the wedding and Dave and his new bride were celebrated in every tabloid paper around the world.

For months I was lost; not just for myself but for him and for his choice to turn away from a lifestyle that had given him the key to unlock his creativity as a writer. Looking into himself, he had discovered more than just a sexual preference but a part of him that enjoyed expressing himself not on the football pitch but in the world of literature.

As I lay in bed, still shocked by the significance of my dream a chilling thought crossed my mind - better that he had never looked; than to have looked and turned away.