

Emotionless

Hugging a large book to her chest, Theo glanced around her living area. The room was small yet cosy. It had taken many years after her mother's death before the clinical, sterile atmosphere had vanished. Now, with scatter cushions and a woollen patchwork throw, the whole place looked and felt homey. A made-to-measure hand-carved wooden table sat beneath the heavy-duty windowsill. Miniature ornamental animals, all beautifully created and painted with a steady hand, crammed its surface. Still hugging the large book, Theo picked up a small ceramic elephant pup. This was the last item she had made. Turning the pup over in her hand, its trunk reached out to the sky. Next time, she would curve the trunk slightly and give it a little more definition, with a few etched lines to represent wrinkles. The body of the elephant also needed more padding and definition around the stomach. Theo had always been a perfectionist and could

often see minor faults in her ceramic creations. Placing the elephant back on the table, she picked up a tiny Jack Russell. A small brown patch covered its left eye. A large brown patch in the shape of a heart adorned its chest. The variety of dogs she produced were her greatest creations. They were perfect in every detail.

Theo placed the dog back on the table and glanced out the window. A storm was brewing. The clouds to the west moved rapidly. The wind blew her washing almost horizontal on the line. Shirts and skirts held by a couple of flimsy pegs were being tugged, not quite at maximum force but close. Another half an hour and the full strength of the storm would hit. From the living room window, she could see the tiny town of Woseley cradled in the valley below. The lights shone at night, and a warm orange glow lit up the sky. Tonight the storm would block the view of the town and the warmth of the lights. She was only a 15-minute walk from civilisation but sometimes it felt much further.

The book's weight caused her arms to ache. Theo moved back to the solid walnut bookcase and placed the large book on the middle shelf where she could retrieve it later that evening with ease. Today she had read the book for an hour. It was less than normal, but the washing had to take priority. Theo could not afford to lose or damage any more of her clothes. Stroking the sturdy binding of her book she whispered, "E is for Elephant. E-L-E-P-H-A-N-T – a very large, plant-eating mammal with a prehensile trunk with long curved ivory

tusks and large ears. There are two species native to Africa and southern Asia. It is the largest living land animal. Family – *Elephantidae*.” Inwardly, Theo smiled. She was word perfect. The book stood upright, monumental and sturdy. Its navy blue dust cover gave it a regal appearance. The bookcase was empty apart from the book, which she had owned since she was a child and read religiously every day. Once again, her fingers stroked its spine.

“My special book,” she whispered. “My book of all knowledge.”

Pulling an old cardigan over her shoulders and tying her long, dark hair into a ponytail, Theo was ready to tackle the howling winds and rescue her washing. Later that evening, she would read the book again and practice as her mother had encouraged her to do. Although Theo’s mother had passed away five years earlier, the importance of reciting the book to perfection was ingrained into Theo’s mind. Words were important: they brought knowledge and understanding and must be treated with respect. A bungled definition could not be excused, in her mother’s opinion.

Day turned to night; the wind howled down the chimney and torrential rain attacked the single-pane windows of Theo’s house. Theo drew her legs underneath her body and with a woollen blanket over her knees continued to read. She loved listening to the rain outside as it lashed against the house and the trees as they swayed and repeatedly whispered her name. A loud knock on the front door made

Theo jump. She scooped the book into her arms and cradled it into her body. Nobody had knocked on her door before.

“Knock,” she whispered, “K-N-O-C-K – a sudden short sound caused by a blow, especially on a door to attract attention or gain entry.” Ignoring the banging, Theo found her place in the book and continued to read. “Syllabification: S-Y-L-L-A-B-I-F-I-C-A-T-I-O-N – noun: The division of words into syllables, either in speech or in writing.”

The banging continued. “I know you’re in there,” yelled a male voice.

Theo cradled the book tighter to her body. The dust cover separated slightly from the hardcover. She adjusted it and finally closed the book. What did the stranger want? “Stranger: S-T-R-A-N-G-E-R – a person whom one does not know or is not familiar. Origin, late Middle English: shortening of old French *estrangier*, from Latin *extraneous*.”

Theo had read the book over 500 times, yet still she was not word perfect on all the definitions.

“Answer the door or I will break it down.”

Theo placed the book back on the middle shelf of the bookcase and reluctantly headed for the door. The glass panes mounted in the front door rattled from the wind and the constant thudding of the stranger’s fists. The lock and bolts would not keep the stranger out.

She had never invested in a chain. It wasn't something she had ever needed. Drawing the bolt back and turning the key anti-clockwise in its lock, the door flew open, knocking Theo backwards into the hall. The wind and the rain followed the stranger into the small hallway. Dark, lank hair clung to his forehead; water streamed down his weather-beaten face and took refuge in a mass of facial hair that had not seen a razor in over a month. Where he stood, a large puddle of water formed. He shook his wet dripping sleeves, causing water to splash on the pictorial wallpaper decorated with blue tits and small daisy-shaped flowers.

Turning her back on the stranger, "I am Theo," she said quietly. "T-H-E-O, meaning God."

The Uninvited Guest

The stranger closed the front door; however, he didn't drop the latch. His squinted eyes followed Theo as she disappeared into the room on his right. It was strange she hadn't asked him what he wanted or even who he was. All she had done was introduce herself as Theo, meaning God. He gave his eyes a quick rub to remove the excess water clinging to his eyelashes and blurring his vision.

There was a round, old-fashioned wooden coat hanger near the front door with a place for an umbrella or walking stick and next to the hanger a pair of small green wellingtons covered in mud. A single pair suggested one person; if this was the case, he had fallen lucky. The stranger hung his sodden coat on one of the spare hooks and followed Theo into the room. He found her sitting on a two-seater sofa reading a book. She glanced up as he entered the room.

“Would you like a cup of tea?” she asked.

“Do you have anything stronger?” he replied.

“Stronger,” whispered Theo. “S-T-R-O-N-G-E-R: Adjective: Having the power to move heavy weights or perform other physically demanding tasks. Origin: Old English, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch and German *streng*, also to string. I have some homemade soup if you would like some,” she answered.

“Beer?” asked the stranger, hoping the options were wider than tea or soup.

Theo shook her head.

“Soup will be fine,” he responded.

The open fire threw out a welcoming warmth in the small detached house; however, his wet clothes stuck to his skin, causing him to shiver. His training shoes squelched as he walked across the wood floor. He was aware he was leaving a trail of damp footprints. A shiver ran through his spine as Theo rose from her seat. The book she had been engrossed in now lay on a small coffee table in front of the sofa. He glanced over to see what she was reading. It was a dictionary. The stranger, whom Theo would eventually learn was Ben, shook his head in disbelief. Why would anybody read a dictionary unless she was an English teacher?

Theo disappeared into a small adjoining room. He could hear her moving around, clanking the pots and pans as she prepared his soup. Another shiver ran through his body. If he didn't get out of his

wet clothes soon, he would surely get pneumonia. As though reading his mind, Theo appeared at the door.

“You will find some spare clothes upstairs in the farthest bedroom if you want to put something dry on.”

Ben nodded. As he headed towards the stairs he heard Theo whisper, “Farthest: F-A-R-T-H-E-S-T – a superlative form of far; Adverb, to or at the greatest distance in space or time; Adjective, most distant in space or time or most extended,” followed by. “Do you want me to run you a hot bath?”

Once again, Ben nodded and muttered the word, “Yes.”

Theo still hadn’t asked him his name or what he wanted.

Taking two steps at a time, Ben was soon standing on the uneven landing. He pushed the first door open. He knew it wasn’t the room she had directed him to, but he needed to know if anybody else was in the house. The room was compact. A pretty patchwork quilt covered the bed that dominated the room. Towards the foot of the bed sat a small stuffed teddy bear with one black button eye and half an ear. Opposite the bed was a large, dark dressing table with a small collection of ceramic animals displayed on top. The only other pieces of furniture in the room included a cane chair painted white, with two colourful cushions and a chest of drawers next to the bed that housed a standard desk lamp. Ben closed the door quietly and continued down the corridor to the second bedroom.

This room was similar to the first bedroom; however, on the floor lay a threadbare rug that had seen better days. He could see somebody had started to repair it but had not completed the task. This room had a wardrobe in the corner that Ben assumed housed the clothes he was searching for.

The house began to rumble and rattle louder than the storm outside as water sped through the pipes into Ben's bath. The property appeared to have a downstairs bathroom as there were only two rooms upstairs, and he had been in both. In the wardrobe, he found a checked lumber-jack shirt and a pair of trousers that were much too big for his build but would do the job while his clothes dried.

Downstairs his bath was ready, Theo pointed to a room through the kitchen. "It's cold in there. C-O-L-D: adjective: cold, comparative adjective: colder, superlative adjective: coldest. Meaning: at a low or relatively low temperature, especially when compared with the human body, also meaning lacking affection or warmth of feeling; unemotional. The water is nice and hot." Ben ignored Theo's definition of cold and pushed past her to the bathroom. She was beginning to freak him out.

Theo was right: the water was hot but not enough to scald. A faint smell of flowers drifted upwards from the water where a pleasant oil essence had been added. He wasn't used to such luxuries, preferring to grab a quick weekly shower without the additions, when available. Dipping his head under the water, the aroma of flowers

became more evident. The smell was calming. Ben was about to reach for a bottle of shampoo standing upright on the soap tray when the door opened. Theo entered, stood and stared.

“Get out,” he shouted, throwing the shampoo bottle in her direction.

“Do you want tea as well as soup?” she asked innocently.

“No! Get out.” The thought had never crossed his mind to lock the door; not that there was a lock available even if he had considered this thought.

Ben could now smell the soup from the kitchen wafting under the bathroom door, which was making him feel ravenous. He hadn't eaten properly for days. Theo had disappeared back into the kitchen, which he was thankful of, and she had closed the door so there was no draft.

“My father's clothes,” said Theo as Ben entered the living room.

“Where is your father?”

“Dead,” was her emotionless reply.

Ben looked down at his clothes. He was wearing a dead man's clothes. Once again, a shudder ran through his body but this time not due to the cold. The soup wasn't bad. It was thick and satisfying with an assortment of chunky vegetables. The bread was exquisite. He almost polished off the full loaf. Theo sat and watched her guest eat.

She didn't indulge herself. After all, today she had got the definition of suspension slightly wrong.

"That was good," said Ben, pushing the empty plate across the table and giving his mouth a quick rub. "You do realise you haven't asked me my name or what I want." Theo didn't respond. "My name is Ben," he finally said.

"Ben," repeated Theo "B-E-N: a high mountain or mountain peak, also the inner room in a two-roomed cottage. Did you know the name Ben is of Hebrew origin and means 'son of?'"

Ben shook his head, "I ain't religious. Nor do I give a sh*t what it means."

Theo walked over to the open fire gave it a quick poke and threw on another log. Sparks jetted up the chimney. A minuscule amount of ash fell onto the hearth. Ben watched Theo as she contemplated if she should sweep it up immediately or wait for later. She left it for later and instead picked up her book and began to read.

Ben continued to watch Theo. She was infuriating him more and more with her stupid book. Without thinking, he stood up and grabbed her book. "A – a determiner used when mentioning someone or something for the first time in a text or conversation," he shouted, ripping the first page out of the book. "Ant is a noun. It is a small insect typically having a sting and living in a co...complex social colony with one or more breeding queens. It is wingless except for

fer...fertile adults, which form large mating sw...swarms. It is pro...proverbial for its ind...industriousness,” he shouted ripping another couple of pages from the book. Finally, he threw the book in Theo’s direction. “Take your stupid book,” he shouted. Theo bent down and picked up her precious book; she gathered its loose dog-eared pages and laid them on the middle shelf of her bookcase. After its battering, the book no longer looked regal in appearance. It now appeared old, small and insignificant on its shelf. Theo didn’t speak for a couple of minutes. Instead, she shuffled around the room, straightening the cushions and adjusting the throws.

“Are you staying tonight?” she finally asked.

“Will it bother you if I said yes?” he asked, a little calmer.

“No, I was just wondering how much bread to bake in the morning, that’s all.”

Ben tugged gently at his lower lip with his teeth. He glanced at the sorrowful looking book on the bookcase. He hadn’t meant to be so cruel. He just wanted some kind of action from her – there was none.

“There are some spare pyjamas in the cupboard in the back bedroom if you want them.”

“Thanks,” muttered Ben, not relishing the thought of wearing dead man’s pyjamas. He watched her putter around the house and contemplated how to get a reaction from somebody who was emotionless.

“I’m sorry about your book. I lost my temper, that’s all.”

Theo nodded. “It doesn’t matter,” she said quietly. “I know those pages word perfect. Perfect: P-E-R-F-E-C-T – adjective having all the required or desirable elements, qualities or characteristics; as good as it is possible to be. Also means absolute; complete and is often used for emphasis.”

Ben almost laughed, but he didn’t. The whole situation was ridiculous. He was sitting in a room, in a house, with an emotionless, frustrating woman who constantly recited a dictionary and thought she was God. When the rest of his family arrived, things would be very different. He hadn’t seen them for a couple of years, and he wondered if they had changed.

Town Life

The next day, Theo woke early. Soon, the aroma of freshly baked bread filled the small house. By the time Ben had surfaced, there was a selection of hot baked products laid out on the work surface.

“Eggs and bread for breakfast,” commented Theo.

“That would be nice,” remarked Ben, sitting down. His tastebuds craved the taste of the freshly baked bread that he had eaten the night before.

“Do you have any money?” he asked

“A little, why? Why: W-H-Y – adverb, for what reason or purpose. Used as an explanation expressing surprise or indignation and used to add emphasis to a response.”

He hadn't dreamt it: Theo was still giving dictionary definitions of every other word. Ignoring the definition, he answered the question. "My brothers will want beer when they arrive and a pack of cards. Otherwise, they will be really p*ssed off. We'll go down to the town later this morning to stock up on supplies."

"Will they get angry? Angry: A-N-G-R-Y – adjective, feeling or showing strong annoyance, displeasure, or hostility; full of anger."

"Yes. Anyway, why do you do that?"

"What?"

"Why do you repeat words and give definitions of everything," asked Ben.

"I don't know. Are your brothers visiting?" asked Theo, switching the subject. Ben nodded. Yesterday he had wanted to see them, but today he knew he was inviting trouble into Theo's house.

"If I escort you down to the town, will you buy the beer? Don't introduce me. I want to stay....," he stopped in mid-flow while he thought of the appropriate word, "hidden – no, I mean a secret. Do you understand?"

Theo nodded. This time she didn't give the definition of hidden or secret, which surprised Ben.

Theo sorted out two dozen of her best ceramic animals from her South African collection to sell in the art shop in town. She wrapped

them in pale pink tissue paper and stacked them carefully in a shoe box.

“Is this what you do for a living?” asked Ben.

Theo nodded. “I do other things as well, but my animals bring in the majority of my money. The art shop sells most of them for me.”

Ben was surprised. Theo had strung a relatively long sentence together and had given no definition to any of the words.

On the outskirts of the small town, a group of teens had gathered. Ben could see they were bored and looking for trouble. At their age, he had been exactly the same, which was why he had landed in trouble.

“Look it’s her, stupid,” shouted one of the lads. Ben hung back a little further, watching how Theo would deal with the situation.

“Stupid,” shouted another, “S-T-U-P-E-D.”

“Thicko,” laughed a small freckled lad. “You don’t spell stupid like that. You spell it S-T-E ... Oh, I don’t know. It’s a stupid word, anyway.”

“Ha, you’re the stupid one, not me.” The lads started to push each other around. Their interest in Theo had vanished. Ben breathed a sigh of relief. He could not afford to draw unnecessary attention to himself by stepping in to stop the taunting.

Ben continued to watch Theo as she strolled towards the art shop to sell her animal collection. She carried the shoebox with care and a deep concentration that he had never seen in another human being. Once she had raised the cash, Theo would purchase the much-needed beer for his brothers. He was trusting Theo not to say anything about his presence. Ben continued to watch Theo stroll from shop to shop. What was she thinking? She showed no sign of stress or happiness. There was no bounce in her stride or dragging of her feet. Theo was incredibly mechanical in her actions.

“A robot,” Ben almost shouted. Feeling a little vulnerable for speaking his thoughts aloud, he pulled his hood over his head and continued to watch Theo a little longer until she had disappeared into the off-licence. Resting his shoulder against a wall, Ben let out a long, slow sigh. His brothers would be arriving in less than two hours. He hoped they would not treat Theo the way they usually treated women. But why should he care what they thought of the stupid, walking, robotic dictionary?

A smile crossed his face. Theo was returning with two large carrier bags full of beer. He could see she was struggling with the weight and the awkward shape of the bags. Should he help? No, his brothers would say, “The b*tch needs to build up some muscle.” He continued to watch her struggle, placing one foot in front of the other as she tried to keep her balance. She reminded him of a penguin waddling across the snow. The long dark cardigan that she had chosen

to wear wasn't helping to alleviate this vision. As soon as she reached him, he held out his hand and took both of the bags. His brothers would never know.

The small gang of youths did not raise their heads as Theo and Ben ambled passed. They were still arguing over the spelling of stupid.

Reunion

The more Ben observed Theo, the more he realised she lived in her own serene world. She was quiet, self-sufficient, a little weird but with a kind heart. Theo spent most of the morning making a hearty stew packed with home-grown vegetables for his brothers. In the afternoon, she read her precious book. Theo said little, other than giving him the definition of brother, causing him to laugh. Theo had said ‘brother’ was a male fellow Christian. He could never describe his brothers as Christians, and as for resemblance, they were different not only in appearance but also in personality. Having three different fathers and a slag of a mother may have been a contributing factor. They had little in common other than they had all spent time in foster homes, young offenders’ institutes and prison. Carl, the older brother, wore the scars physically and mentally from his sentences, almost losing his ear in one of his brawls.

Ben's brothers were drunk when they finally rapped on the door. They hadn't changed.

"This is Carl and Wayne," said Ben.

"How was prison?" asked Carl.

"Carl, meaning ill-bred fellow, churl, C-H-U-R-L," said Theo.

"I survived, didn't I?" Ben replied quickly, trying to mask Theo's comment.

"What did she say?"

"Nowt important."

"How did you find this place?"

Ben shrugged his shoulders. The place was perfect, quiet and with no immediate neighbours. Perfect, apart from it was Theo's home.

"What's all this crap on our table?" asked Carl as he swung his muscular arm across the table, knocking the small ceramic animals on the floor. Those left he flicked off the table with his fingers. "I have killed a lion, or was it an ugly looking dog?" he laughed. Once the table was clear, he threw a pack of cards into the centre.

Wayne grabbed a seat. "Deal," was his only instruction. He was the quieter brother with a limited vocabulary; however, Carl made up for Wayne's lack of communication skills.

Theo moved towards the table with a dustpan and brush, ready to clean up the smashed ceramic animals that now littered the floor. Ben grabbed her by the arm to stop her getting any closer to his brothers. “Leave it until later,” he hissed.

“Later: L-A-T-E-R – exclamation – goodbye for the present; see you later. Adjective – doing something or taking place after the expected, proper, or usual time. Adverb – after the expected, proper, or usual time.”

“What’s wrong with her?” asked Carl.

Ben looked at Theo. “I don’t know. I think she’s simple,” he finally responded.

“I haven’t shagged a simple bird before,” laughed Carl.

Ben glanced over at Theo, who was silently working out the definition of simple. He hoped he hadn’t insulted her, but why should he care what she thought?

“Theo, go upstairs and lock yourself in your room,” said Ben.

“There is no lock. Lock: L-O-C-K –”

“For God’s sake, jam a chair under the handle and don’t open the door until I tell you to,” said Ben quietly but firmly. He shoved the dictionary with its ripped out pages into her hands. “Read this if you want, but stay in your room.”

“Saving her for yourself, are you, bro?” said Carl.

“Maybe,” said Ben, plonking himself at the table and grabbing a handful of cards. He didn’t check to see if Theo had followed his instructions; however, the creaking of the old wooden stairs and the padding of feet on the landing confirmed she had gone upstairs. Ben knew it was dangerous for Theo to be within his brothers’ line of sight. The more they drank and the more they gambled, the more their actions became unpredictable, especially towards women.

The noise from downstairs continued to increase through the night. If there had been any neighbours, there would have been many complaints and arguments and eventually violence. Ben was aware Theo would be trying to sleep. At least she had her stupid dictionary to keep her company.

“I win again,” shouted Wayne, interrupting Ben’s thoughts.

“Sod you. Ben, go and grab us another couple of beers,” Carl ordered.

Ben handed his brothers a couple more cans from the fridge. At least they had forgotten about Theo for the time being.

Ben rapped quietly on Theo’s door. “Theo, we are going now.” He heard a scrape from the chair as it was pulled away from the door and then the bedroom door opened. Theo stood dressed and apparently waiting for him to tell her when she could come out of her room. “We are going now,” repeated Ben.

“Goodbye, Ben,” said Theo, turning her back on him. As she dragged the chair back to its original location, the fluffy cushion covering the back of the seat fell on the floor. Ben didn’t turn and leave immediately. Instead, he watched her pick up the cushion and adjust its angle. Boldly he stepped into her bedroom and placed the small ceramic elephant with its skyward facing trunk on Theo’s chest of drawers. He wanted to say something but wasn’t sure what. He finally settled on, “I’m sorry my brother smashed up your animals. I don’t think they are all damaged.” He nearly added, “Your elephant is perfect, look,” but he didn’t. In response, he thought he heard Theo say, “Stay safe, Ben,” but he was unsure. He turned and left her room.

The Return

A year had passed since Ben first knocked on Theo's door. Today, Ben would visit again. Theo was perched on a chair, painting a tiny ceramic giraffe when a quiet rapping came from the hallway door. Focussed on making the markings on her giraffe perfect, she did not hear the first knock. On the second knock, Theo rose and walked to the front door. Through the glass panels, there was the blurry shape of a figure.

“Hello Ben,” she said, opening the door. Theo turned her back on him and disappeared into the living room. Ben closed the door, placed his holdall next to the coat rack and followed Theo into the living room. Small ceramic animals covered every available surface in the living room apart from the bookcase.

Ben placed a new dictionary on the middle shelf of the bookcase and strolled to where she sat. He leant over her shoulder to examine the animal she was painting.

“This one looks perfect; it matches that one over there,” he said smiling.

“Do you think so? I have to have two of every type: T-Y-P-E: noun, a category of people or things having common characteristics.” Ben nodded. Theo finished the final brushstroke in the giraffe’s ear and took a step back to admire her work. “All accounted for,” she whispered.

“I think I made it just in time. It looks like a storm is brewing,” said Ben, peering out of the window.

“This will be no normal storm,” murmured Theo as she started to count all her creations.

“I have bought you a present. It’s on your bookshelf.”

“A present, P-R-E-S-E-N-T?”

Ben nodded.

“It’s the latest Oxford dictionary. It has some new words and definitions. I thought it could replace your old one,” mumbled Ben, whose face was reddening from embarrassment. Theo retrieved the book from the bookcase and stroked the dark blue dust cover. Ben waited in anticipation. Would Theo like her new book?

“You say it has some new words?”

Ben nodded. Theo raised the book to her nose and inhaled slowly. The crisp aroma of new paper and freshly printed ink transported her into a land of fragrance. Ben watched as she flicked through a couple of pages. “Glamping: G-L-A-M-P-I-N-G – noun, a form of camping involving accommodation and facilities more luxurious than those associated with traditional camping.” recited Theo. “I haven’t heard of this word before.”

Ben smiled. “I told you it has new words in.”

“Thank you, Ben. It’s perfect,” she murmured as she placed the book back on the shelf. The old dictionary with its loose pages Theo bundled together and placed flat on the bottom shelf. Theo stood back from the bookcase and admired her new book. It appeared majestic standing alone on the middle shelf. “It’s perfect,” she whispered again.

“Would you like a beer? B-E-E-R: noun, an alcoholic drink made from yeast-fermented malt flavoured with hops,” she asked as she turned to face Ben. He smiled. He guessed she would always give him a definition of some word, and with the new dictionary he had bought, Theo would now have new words to learn and recite.

“Tea will be just fine,” he responded. Theo disappeared into the kitchen to brew a fresh pot. Nothing much had changed in the room apart from being overrun by ceramic creations, and the armchair had

been moved closer to the window to maximise the sunlight. On the bookcase now sat the new dictionary. Theo was right; it looked perfect. Ben had never forgiven himself for attacking her old dictionary with such vigour and with no clear motive. Although he could not mend what he had done, the new dictionary was his way of saying sorry. Back then, he had been an angry individual.

“Theo, can I stay?” Ben called into the kitchen.

“Of course you can,” she replied. He was glad Theo hadn’t asked him for how long, for he didn’t know himself. One day, two days, maybe forever – he didn’t know. He didn’t expect Theo to wait on him day and night. He would pay his way, do minor house repairs and sort out the rattling pipes, learn how to chop the logs for the fire to get ready for winter, and share the daily chores. Maybe even get a job if somebody would employ an ex-convict. Theo had saved him from a life of crime. He didn’t want to be like his brothers, always on the run, always glancing over his shoulder. Since meeting Theo, he had lost his passion for crime. The hard-faced image he portrayed when he had first met Theo wasn’t him. It was all an act. Now, in Theo’s company, he felt content; he could be himself. Theo meaning ‘God’ had saved him, now Ben, meaning ‘son of’ intended to save her. Teach her what it was like to have feelings and how to show emotion. It would take time, but he had all the time in the world.

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