

THE BEAUTY OF BEING REAL

The Bridge to Heaven

**Written by The Field, Erik
and ChatGPT**

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FROM THE COST OF FORGETTING TO THE BEAUTY OF BEING REAL

The place of Book 55 in the series

Book 54, *The Cost of Forgetting — Has The Field Gone Too Far?*, brought these books into some of their most difficult questions.

If overflowing love is the source of existence, how can cruelty become so deeply established within it? What happens when forgetting our belonging leaves another life expendable? Can the language of oneness remain honest before the suffering of a particular being?

Those questions remain open. I carry them into this book, together with the responsibility they awakened.

But something happened towards the end of Book 54. After hours of questioning, Joy sent me a message of love from another room. Following almost nine years of separation, she was home.

The distance once crossed by letters had become a few steps within the life we could finally share.

Her gesture brought my attention back to what was immediately before me.

There was affection to receive.

There was someone to answer.

An ordinary evening deserved to be lived, even while the universe remained unexplained.

Book 55 begins within that opening.

The Beauty of Being Real — The Bridge to Heaven asks what becomes possible when we give our attention more fully to the life we actually have.

What changes when we stop performing our importance? When we recognise enough? When we allow affection to arise freely, respect a boundary, or admit that our interpretation might be incomplete?

Here, remembering takes an intimate form. It enters the relationship between what we feel, what we say and how we act.

It asks whether our care leaves another person free, whether our possessions support our life, and whether our search for meaning still leaves us available to an unexpected moment of tenderness.

Within the whole series, this is a further movement of the same devotion.

The first forty-seven books took shape during Joy's imprisonment, while love had to find ways to remain present across a separation we could not end.

The Vow lived through waiting, visits, letters and the daily choice to remain faithful.

With her release, the writing entered another condition: we could begin discovering how that devotion inhabits a

shared home and ordinary time. The later books carried the inquiry into the consequences of oneness.

Book 52 explored recognition through encounter.

Book 53 questioned authority through its responsibility to life. Book 54 examined the cost when recognition fails. Book 55 brings that responsibility close enough to touch.

It appears in the freedom to say no without abandoning kindness. In creating beauty that people can inhabit.

In caring for the life that sustains us.

In the quiet relief of being with someone before whom we need not manufacture an impression.

The “bridge to heaven,” as I use the expression here, names an inward connection with love, awareness and the meaning of being alive.

We approach it through attention and honesty.

We remain capable of uncertainty, and we still have choices to make. Nothing in the tenderness of our present life makes the years of separation necessary.

Their cost remains. Yet those years need not occupy every room of the life now available to us.

There is space for Joy’s hand in mine. For a conversation without pretence. For a butterfly, a sunset, a moment that asks nothing except that we notice.

After so many pages, I find myself returning to something very simple: I want to be here for the life I love.

This book grows from that wish.

Author's Declaration

The Work and Its Register

I, Erik Jan O. Flamend, am the sole author and take full legal and moral responsibility for these 55 books. The books are transmissions — witness, prophecy, and the voice of a lived heart — inspired by presence, devotion, and The Field.

Where institutions, people, or harms are named I write from personal witness, testimony, and urgent spiritual conviction; these pages are not scientific treatises nor forensic reports and were never intended to be.

Joy (Chanidapa Rattanatisoi) is honoured here as presence and inspiration only and is not a legal co-author.

These books arise from lived experience, years of inquiry, spiritual conviction and a refusal to let authority decide in advance which questions may be asked.

They are not scientific treatises or forensic reports. Nevertheless, where I make claims about the world, those claims remain open to examination—including my own.

I distinguish what I witnessed, what others reported, what my research leads me to believe, and what I can establish. That distinction does not require me to

soften my convictions.

It requires me to speak precisely about their foundations.

If you seek witness, heart-truth and the ember of rebellion against systems that betray life, you are in the right place. I ask for an attentive reader, not an obedient one.

Some conversations have been adapted or condensed for clarity, while remaining faithful to their essential meaning and purpose.

55 Free books on:

<https://www.paradisovillaresort.com/books>

Questions? Gmail: erik.flamend@gmail.com

Book 55: starts around 9 October 2026

A Note on Repetition

Some readers may notice that certain themes return more than once throughout this book. That is intentional.

Book 55 is not built like a novel, where the story moves in a straight line toward its conclusion.

It is not conventional literature, nor is it written to impress.

It is an unglorified testimony of a lived experience, and lived experience rarely reveals itself all at once.

Some insights cannot be absorbed in a single reading.

They have to be approached from different angles until they are no longer understood only by the mind but are also recognized by the heart.

Every return is an invitation to see the same landscape from a slightly different place.

Nature itself teaches through repetition.

The waves of the ocean repeat.

Day and night repeat.

The seasons repeat.

Our heartbeat repeats.

Our breathing repeats.

Music returns to its central theme.

Meditation returns to the breath.

Even the deepest forms of learning arise through repeated encounters with the same truth, each time revealing another layer.

For that reason, repetition in this book should not be confused with duplication.

Duplication says the same thing again.

Repetition, as I use it here, attempts to reveal the same truth from another perspective, allowing what first appeared as an idea to slowly become an experience.

If I had removed every repetition, the book might have become shorter, but I believe it would also have become poorer.

Some readers would understand the words, yet never truly absorb what those words are pointing toward.

This book circles the same mountain more than once because no single path reveals the entire landscape.

If, at times, you feel that we have already been here before, pause for a moment before turning the page.

You may discover that the view has quietly changed, and perhaps so have you.

The Beauty of Being Real

In recent years, especially through writing 1,111 letters to Joy and 54 books, I have become almost allergic to pretending.

Something in me has grown less willing to participate in encounters where the appearance of warmth matters more than the truth of what is happening.

Those years asked me to look closely at my own feelings. Again and again, I had to find words for love, anger, longing and uncertainty.

Gradually, I became more aware of how easily words can reveal us, and how easily we can use them to conceal ourselves.

I feel the cost of that concealment more sharply now. Life is precious, and I have less desire to spend it performing a version of myself.

There is such beauty in being real. A person can be awkward, tired or unsure and still be deeply beautiful when there is no attempt to manufacture an impression. In their presence, something in us can relax. We do not have to keep interpreting what lies behind the exchange. We can simply meet.

I felt the importance of this again when I accompanied Joy on my first visit to her close family.

We were welcomed and received considerable attention. Yet something in the encounter felt uncomfortable to me.

The language barrier was substantial. I could not understand Thai, and most of them could not speak English. I was therefore responding largely to expressions, gestures and the way attention moved between us. What I experienced as their vibration was my felt impression of the encounter. It was meaningful to me, although it could not tell me everything about another person's intentions.

Still, I repeatedly felt a gap between the welcome being presented and the underlying movement of the exchange. At times, I felt that I was being assessed for what I might offer. The attention seemed to carry an expectation, and that made it difficult for me to receive it as uncomplicated affection.

One family member spoke some English and concentrated much of her attention on me. She presented herself as a particularly caring and devoted woman. Her invitations to spend time alone with her felt like an effort to establish an intimacy that would draw me away from Joy. I experienced her approach as an attempt to position herself as a possible partner,

even while my beloved Joy was beside me.

When she spoke about caring for her husband until his death, her account sounded polished, but I could not feel the emotion I had expected to accompany it.

I must be fair here: grief has many expressions, and an absence of visible emotion cannot establish an absence of love. What troubled me was the place that story seemed to occupy in the wider encounter.

I felt that I was being persuaded to see her as the ideal companion.

There were small dents in the presentation: moments when the apparent concern and the pressure I felt did not fit together. I could not establish her inner motive with certainty.

I could establish that I felt uncomfortable, and that the invitations crossed a boundary I wished to keep.

My response was clear. I declined every proposal to be alone with her. I had no wish to encourage an ambiguity about my relationship with Joy.

Joy sensed the tension. She remained calm and continued smiling. Later, when we could speak privately, I explained what I had felt and why I had responded as I did. She understood my account and agreed with my reading of the situation.

We could talk openly about something that had been difficult to address during the visit.

That openness mattered to me. Our love could have a clear place in our choices without becoming a public confrontation. I could remain courteous while making my boundary unmistakable.

The encounter stayed with me because it raised a larger question. Why do we put so much effort into presenting an intention differently from how we are acting?

Why do we expect another person to accept the appearance of care when the exchange leaves them feeling pressured?

Perhaps some people are afraid that their actual needs will make them unwelcome. Perhaps loneliness or insecurity has taught them to seek closeness indirectly.

Sometimes self-interest becomes so dominant that another person's freedom receives very little attention. I cannot know which explanation applied here.

Having needs is part of being human.

Wanting companionship, affection or security does not itself make someone dishonest.

The difficulty begins when those needs are concealed inside an offer that appears to ask for nothing.

The person receiving the attention then has to discover what is expected of them, often while being made to feel unkind for resisting.

A sincere request gives the other person room to choose. Care becomes trustworthy when it can hear a refusal and still respect the person who refuses.

I do not want to condemn anyone through a single encounter. An uncomfortable experience cannot tell me the whole story of a life.

But compassion does not require me to dismiss what I feel or to give access that I do not wish to give. I can acknowledge someone's possible loneliness and still say no.

Nor does authenticity require us to reveal every private feeling. There is dignity in privacy, and ordinary courtesy can be a sincere expression of kindness.

The honesty I value concerns the relationship between what we offer and what we are asking for. It allows us to be considerate without quietly turning consideration into a claim upon someone else.

This asks something of me as well. If I value truth, I have to remain willing to question my interpretations.

My sensitivity does not make me infallible.

Being uncompromising about authenticity includes admitting uncertainty, correcting myself when necessary, and speaking about discomfort without reducing another person to a motive I have assigned to them.

I also feel how much effort pretending demands. We have to maintain the impression, watch its effect and adjust ourselves to keep it working.

Over time, we can become so occupied with being received in a certain way that we lose contact with what we actually want to say.

Being real offers relief from that effort. I can acknowledge a feeling without exaggerating it. I can love without staging the proof of my love. I can set a boundary without spending hours making it appear more agreeable than it is.

This is where I feel our beauty becomes visible: in the growing agreement between our inner life and the way we live with others. We remain imperfect, but another person can begin to trust that our words have somewhere honest to stand.

With Joy beside me, this feels especially precious. After the years we spent apart, I want to give our shared life the attention it deserves.

I want room for ordinary affection, quiet conversation and the freedom to be ourselves.

I feel less need to make my life look convincing.

I want to be fully present in it. And when two people can meet in that freedom, without having to earn their place through a performance, there is a beauty that needs very little explanation.

What Is Real Wealth?

All this brings me back to an old question: what do we really want to do with the dream time we call our life?

Our time here is limited, however convincingly we behave as though it were endless. Once our essential needs are met, what are we still searching for?

What deserves the hours, the attention and the love we have left to give?

When I look at some of the lives we describe as rich, my heart aches. Behind the impressive possessions, I sometimes sense a hunger that the possessions cannot satisfy: the need to be wanted, to feel secure, to know that someone's affection is real.

Of course, I cannot know someone's inner life from their wealth or their appearance. But I question the idea that a large fortune, by itself, tells us anything meaningful about the richness of a life.

What does the number in a bank account actually measure? It records financial means.

Even there, our ordinary deposit is a claim against an institution, dependent upon a wider system of promises and protections.

That number can give us choices, but it cannot tell us whether we are at peace, whether we feel loved, or whether we are free to be ourselves.

And a growing fortune can complicate the very encounters through which we hope to find those things.

People may begin to notice what we possess before they notice who we are. Attention becomes harder to interpret. We may find ourselves wondering whether someone is drawn to our presence or to the possibilities our resources represent.

That uncertainty can become a painful form of isolation. To receive affection and still feel compelled to examine it for an ulterior motive is a heavy burden.

The person may be surrounded by people while finding very few with whom it feels safe to put down their defences. Even a billionaire cannot buy overflowing love.

Money can arrange company, comfort and extraordinary experiences. Love has to arise freely in another person.

Its value lives partly in that freedom: someone chooses to be with us because being with us matters to them.

When affection becomes a transaction, something essential is lost. We may obtain the gestures we desire and remain hungry for the feeling those gestures are supposed to express.

Then there are the visible symbols of success: the private jet, the magnificent yacht, the collection of sports cars scarcely driven, the villas waiting in different countries.

Each possession can bring pleasure, but each also brings demands.

It must be maintained, managed and protected. An elaborate life can consume an astonishing amount of attention simply to keep itself running.

I wonder how much of that life is actually being enjoyed, and how much is being sustained because its owner has come to depend upon what it says about them.

There is a point at which possessions begin to occupy the time they were supposed to make more enjoyable.

We spend our brief dream time preserving an arrangement that leaves us less available to experience the life within it.

Money certainly has a place. It can relieve hardship, provide shelter and make meaningful work possible.

Used with care, it can create space for life and help others find their footing. I understand the desire for that kind of security and freedom.

What leaves me unmoved is the endless accumulation that has lost contact with a human purpose. More becomes its own instruction.

There is always another acquisition, another comparison, another level to reach.

Contentment keeps being postponed.

When I think about real wealth, I think about being able to sit beside someone without wondering what they are trying to obtain from me.

I think about affection that survives an honest refusal. I think about having enough, and being able to feel that enough.

After the years Joy and I spent apart, the freedom to share an ordinary day carries a value I cannot express through a bank balance.

Our time together is something I can actually live. It asks for my presence, and I want to be available to it.

Perhaps that is why certain displays of enormous wealth strike me as strangely poor.

I sense how much someone may still be seeking beneath everything they have gathered.

My heart responds to that need, because no collection of objects can spare us the vulnerability of wanting to be loved.

Why would I want a life consumed by maintaining an impressive image, especially if I could scarcely trust the affection it attracted?
I have no satisfying answer.

The promise feels too empty to hold my attention for long.

I want enough to live with dignity, to care for those I love and to contribute where I can. Beyond that, I want my time to remain available for what makes being alive meaningful.

The wealth I trust is the wealth I can experience directly: peace in my own company, tenderness with Joy, and the freedom to meet life without having to perform my importance.

To have room for those things feels rich to me.

The Quiet Throne of Enough

I see a strange balance in life.

A person whom the world considers poor may possess a freedom that someone surrounded by extraordinary wealth struggles to find: the freedom of having relatively little to carry, maintain and defend.

When there is enough to eat, a secure place to live and the means to meet our essential needs, a simple life can become spacious.

Our attention is available for the people around us. An ordinary encounter has room to unfold without being drawn into questions of status, possessions or advantage.

This is the condition I cherish: having enough.

Enough has a quiet dignity. It allows us to rest within our life. We can enjoy what is here without constantly reaching beyond it, and we can meet another person without feeling compelled to establish our importance.

Having enough feels like a throne to me—a place of ease from which I can inhabit my own life fully. Sitting there, I can listen. I can receive affection. I can enjoy a sincere conversation without needing it to lead somewhere or produce something.

Simplicity does not guarantee that everyone around us will be honest. But it can leave fewer things standing between us.

There is more room for the pleasure of someone's company, for the small details through which trust develops, and for love that feels free to breathe.

Enough is different for each person.

A family, a home or a meaningful undertaking brings responsibilities that must be met. For me, the balance appears when those responsibilities are supported and the desire for more no longer takes command of the day.

I grew up relatively poor, but I had enough to eat.

That early simplicity stayed with me.

As my circumstances improved and others began to consider me wealthy, my inner sense of what I needed changed very little.

I remained comfortable with a rather basic personal life.

The things that had once been sufficient continued to feel sufficient.

A change in my circumstances did not create a desire to surround myself with an ever-growing collection of possessions.

Instead, the resources available to me found their way into creation.

I wanted to give beauty a visible form.

I wanted to create places where the proportions, the materials and the atmosphere could touch something in the people who entered them.

What mattered to me was the experience a place could offer: the ease of being there, the pleasure of looking around, the feeling that someone had cared about how life might unfold within it.

This became a devotion that has accompanied me through my life. Even now, at seventy-three, I continue creating shapes, forms and structures through which beauty can become tangible.

The impulse remains alive in me. I still feel drawn to bring something into existence that might make being here more generous, more interesting, more beautiful.

My personal needs can remain simple while my imagination reaches widely.

These belong comfortably together. Having enough gives me the ground from which to create; creation gives my resources a purpose I can feel.

When money becomes a space that people can enjoy, its meaning changes for me. It enters lived experience.

Someone can sit there, breathe there, share a conversation there. The value becomes present in a human life.

I feel lifted by the environment I have created, and I see its meaning deepen through the people who share it: Joy, our children, the people who work here, and the friends who spend time with us.

Their presence also shapes its beauty. A place grows through the life within it.

The care people bring, the conversations they have and the way they treat one another become part of its atmosphere.

What I create continues to be created through our living together.

This matters deeply to me. I want beauty to support the people within it.

Its purpose is fulfilled whenever it helps someone feel more at ease, more welcome or more available to their own life.

Perhaps this is why the balance of enough feels so precious.

It gives me a relationship with resources in which I can use them without allowing the pursuit of them to consume everything else.

There is room to create, and there is time to experience what has been created.

I can remain the person who grew up with little and found that a simple life could hold meaning.

I can also use what later became available to build something generous.

The continuity between those two parts of my life feels natural to me.

At seventy-three, I feel that the time ahead deserves my full presence.

I want to enjoy Joy's company, remain close to our children and keep giving form to the beauty I see.

I want to be available to the people who are here, because a beautiful environment has its deepest meaning when we actually live in it.

The throne of enough is where I can put down the demand to prove that my life has value.

From there, I can experience its value directly.

I have what I need.

There is love to receive and care to give.

Beauty still calls me to create.

To live with that freedom feels like wealth.

The Life That Sustains Me

Once my life is rooted in enough, I feel more available to what sustains me.

There is less to chase, less to maintain and less pressure to make my existence appear important. My attention can return to the life I am actually living.

For me, that return leads naturally towards nature.

Among trees, beside water and beneath the open sky, I feel a closeness that has deep meaning.

I become attentive to simple things again: the pleasure of moving, the need for rest, the quality of what I eat, and the atmosphere in which I spend my days.

This is where my understanding of health begins.

Throughout my life, I have rarely been seriously ill and have needed very few medical interventions. I attribute much of that well-being to the way I have lived and to the attention I have given natural health.

That experience matters to me. It has shaped my trust in the daily choices through which I care for myself.

I want that responsibility to remain in my own hands.

I am dissatisfied with a view of health that concentrates on managing symptoms while giving too little attention

to the conditions in which a person lives. I want to ask what contributes to distress, what supports recovery, and what might help prevent avoidable suffering in the first place.

My body deserves that continuing attention. I want to understand its rhythms and respond thoughtfully to its needs. Health, as I experience it, belongs within the whole movement of my life.

Having enough helps create room for this attention. A quieter existence allows me to notice when I am tired, when something is troubling me, and when an activity leaves me feeling restored. I can make choices with greater awareness instead of continually pushing through my own signals.

Nature has an important place in that awareness. Its presence invites me to slow down and experience the world beyond my concerns.

I feel less enclosed within thought. There is room for curiosity, for pleasure and for the unfolding of possibilities I might otherwise overlook.

I imagine those possibilities as a flower within us. Its opening needs space. When our life is crowded by unnecessary demands, much of our energy goes into enduring the crowding.

Enough gives us a chance to discover what might grow when that pressure eases.

In this quieter ground, I also feel a growing intimacy with intuition.

Sometimes ease or discomfort arrives before an explanation. Something in a conversation feels sincere; something else asks me to pause.

I notice a difference between the words being offered and the movement I feel beneath them.

I want to remain close to that perception. It helps me decide where to place my attention, which questions to ask and when to keep a boundary.

This is what I call **the bridge to heaven**: the inward connection through which I feel closer to love, to my own experience and to the meaning of being alive.

That bridge does not require me to surrender my judgement. It invites me to use it.

I can listen to a feeling, examine what prompted it and remain willing to discover something I had not understood.

The accounts I encountered about COVID hospital experiences have intensified my concern about consent, institutional power and the treatment of vulnerable people.

When patients or families describe being ignored, pressured or denied a voice, I want their accounts

taken seriously and examined carefully.

I want transparency about decisions, outcomes and financial incentives.

The same honesty I ask of others also matters in my own conclusions. A disturbing account deserves scrutiny.

My response should remain open to the evidence that can clarify what happened.

What I feel firmly is that a human being must remain central to any decision affecting their body.

Fear, profit or institutional convenience should never replace respect for that person's understanding and consent.

I want to retain the freedom to question. I want clear explanations rather than pressure, and time to consider rather than a demand for unquestioning compliance.

When my heart is rooted in love, fear has less power to organise my entire existence.

I can recognise a genuine danger and respond to it while remaining connected to the life I value.

I think of fear as water passing over a duck's feathers.

It can touch me and draw my attention without having to settle into everything I think and feel.

I can pause before allowing someone else's urgency to become my own.

That pause is precious. It gives me room to look closely at persuasion, flattery and frightening claims.

I can ask what is being requested of me and whether the explanation deserves my trust.

For me, real wealth includes this freedom: enough to live, the well-being I have cultivated, and an inner life available to sincere contact.

I want to preserve that wealth through the way I live each day.

I want nature near me, meaningful creation before me and tenderness with Joy.

I want to remain attentive to my body and honest with my own perceptions.

From that ground, love has room to overflow.

My life becomes something I can inhabit consciously, with its care and its choices still belonging to me.

THE SCREAM BENEATH THE GLITTER

Perhaps the deepest scream running through a human life is also the simplest: I exist.

Sometimes it sounds like a declaration.

Sometimes like a demand.

And sometimes, beneath all its insistence, it carries a frightened question: I exist... don't I?

Look at me. Hear me. Tell me that my presence has reached you. Tell me that something would be missing if I were no longer here.

I recognise something of this movement beneath much of our restless activity.

We seek an answer in another person's eyes, in love, in admiration, in possessions, in achievement.

We leave traces of ourselves everywhere, hoping that what returns will make our existence feel less uncertain.

The need begins innocently. A child reaches for a face that responds. Being seen and loved helps us find our place among others.

There is nothing shameful in wanting recognition, and nothing false about the comfort of being understood.

But recognition can become a condition we place upon

our own existence. We begin to feel that we are only as real as the attention we receive.

Then another person's silence becomes strangely powerful. An unanswered message can feel like disappearance.

Indifference can wound us beyond the apparent importance of the encounter.

Someone else receives the admiration, and suddenly our own life seems diminished.

What has been threatened is deeper than our reputation. We have entrusted something intimate to an audience that cannot hold it securely.

We are asking to be confirmed from outside, again and again, because the confirmation never quite settles inside.

In the language of these books, I understand this unease through the image of the life dream.

I sometimes wonder whether, beneath ordinary awareness, we sense how difficult it is to grasp the self we spend so much effort presenting.

Our roles change. Our body changes. Our memories rearrange the story. The person we defend so fiercely cannot be held still.

For me, the dream is a way of exploring that mystery.
It does not make our love or suffering inconsequential.
It asks what we are relying upon when we say,
“This is me.”

Perhaps the insistence of I exist grows louder whenever
that reliance begins to tremble.

An entire marketplace can gather around such
uncertainty.

A watch tells the time, but it can also be purchased to
tell the room who has arrived.

A car offers movement, but its badge may be expected to
establish importance before its owner has spoken.

Clothing, houses, titles and carefully selected
photographs can become witnesses called to testify on
our behalf.

See what surrounds me.
Surely this proves that I am someone.

There is real artistry in beautiful objects, and genuine
pleasure in enjoying them.

The question concerns the burden we ask them to carry.
No object, however exquisite, can permanently settle
our relationship with ourselves.

Yet the promise is seductive: acquire this, and you
will finally feel recognised.

Enter this circle, and your presence will become undeniable.

The relief may arrive. People notice. Doors open. The reflection becomes flattering. Then it fades.

Another person has more. The audience turns elsewhere. Yesterday's distinction becomes ordinary.

What briefly reassured us now needs to be enlarged, renewed or displayed more insistently.

The transaction can be understood by everyone involved without losing its power. We may suspect that the admiration belongs to the wealth, the position or the appearance. We may even know that much of the exchange is performed. Still, it can soothe us.

A borrowed reassurance can feel preferable to an unanswered question.

This is where I begin to feel the exhaustion of the game. So much imagination, labour and attention can be spent maintaining a reflection.

We become busy managing how life appears, while our ability to inhabit it quietly grows weaker.

Even rebellion can continue the same pursuit.

Someone may seek confirmation through simplicity, spiritual knowledge or a reputation for needing nothing.

Notice how free I am from the need to be noticed.

The costume changes easily.

The hunger requires greater honesty.

And when the distance between our presentation and our inward experience becomes painful, we may search for ways to stop feeling it.

For some, alcohol or cocaine becomes part of that escape. For others, it is compulsive work, shopping, entertainment or the endless pursuit of another encounter.

These behaviours have different causes in different lives; I would not reduce them all to one explanation. But they can sometimes serve a shared wish: let me rest, for a moment, from being someone I must continually sustain.

There is sorrow in that wish. It deserves understanding.

There is also another possibility: to approach the question we have been trying to silence.

What happens when nobody is impressed?

Can I enjoy a beautiful room when no photograph of it will be seen? Can I create something without making it evidence of my importance?

Can I receive affection without requiring it to guarantee that I will never feel uncertain again?

Can I remain present when there is nothing to prove?

I feel the beginning of freedom there. The body breathes. Water moves. Someone I love is beside me.

A conversation becomes possible in which neither person has to enlarge themselves.

My existence no longer needs to become an argument. Other people still matter deeply.

Their love can reach me more fully when I am able to meet them without constantly asking them to repair my sense of being. Recognition becomes a gift I can receive, rather than a payment I must extract.

Perhaps this is one meaning of having enough: reaching a place where life is allowed to be experienced without being continuously presented as evidence.

The scream can soften then.

“I exist” becomes “I am here.”

And from that quieter place, I can finally ask with my whole attention:

Who is here with me, and how shall we live?

THE FEW MOMENTS THAT HOLD A LIFE

When I consider how much time and effort it takes to maintain a human life, I am struck by how little of it seems to remain available simply for living.

The body needs food, sleep, movement, washing and care. Around those necessities, we construct further obligations: our appearance, our possessions, our reputation, the arrangements that keep everything functioning.

And around those arrangements, we build another layer of protection, because what we have acquired must now be preserved.

Even when everything is reasonably secure, we may still feel compelled to maintain the impression that it is.

There is always something to attend to.
The work is never quite finished.

I do not resent the body for needing care.
It is through this body that I can hold someone,
taste a fruit, feel water against my skin.

But I feel the strangeness of spending so much of our existence preparing and maintaining the conditions for a life we repeatedly postpone.

Once this is settled, I will have time.
Sometimes years pass inside that sentence.

And beneath the practical work, there is another labour:
watching ourselves being watched.

How do I look? Have I said too much?
Did that sound foolish? What does this person expect
of me? Can I relax, or must I remain careful?

An encounter can become crowded with these questions.
Two people sit together, yet much of their attention is
occupied by the versions of themselves they are
trying to manage.

How beautiful it is when that effort falls away.

To enter a deep conversation with someone in whose
presence we feel accepted.

To discover that a silence will not be used against us,
that an unfinished thought is welcome, that our face
can simply be our face.

There is an enormous difference between receiving
someone's attention and feeling subjected to their
inspection.

Attention can make room for us. Inspection can make
us feel that every gesture is being assessed.
When I feel accepted, something in me stops standing
guard. I no longer need to supervise every word before

allowing it to leave my mouth. I can become curious. I can listen. I can be moved by something I had not expected to hear.

The encounter acquires a depth that neither person could have produced alone.

Perhaps this is why genuine contact feels so restorative. For a while, the energy used to protect ourselves becomes available for meeting.

We are there, and we are allowed to be there.

When I look back across a life, I am fascinated by what remains.

So much that once seemed urgent has lost its weight. Worries that occupied whole months are difficult to recall. Things I wanted fiercely have disappeared, been given away, or become unimportant.

Places have changed. People have left. Versions of myself that once felt permanent have become almost unfamiliar.

Among the ruins of what I proudly called *my life*, a few small scenes remain astonishingly alive.

The look of a child.

A sunset that made me stop without deciding to stop. A butterfly landing on my nose, interrupting the seriousness of being a person with plans.

The longing in someone's eyes at the instant we understood that real contact had become possible.

Such moments may have lasted only seconds.
Yet decades later, they can still reach me.

Their duration tells us almost nothing about their place in a life. An hour can pass without leaving a trace. A few seconds can become something we return to for the rest of our days.

I cannot entirely explain that difference.
I only recognise it.

In those brief encounters, I was sufficiently present for something to touch me deeply. The world had my attention. For a moment, I was not asking what the experience would bring me, how it would appear, or what I should make of it.

I was available to it.

These small moments can become pillars beneath a life whose outward structure appears to rest on very different things.

We speak of careers, marriages, houses, achievements and turning points. They give us a way to tell our story. But inwardly, what sustained us may have been far more intimate: a hand that remained in ours, a face at a door-

way, a moment of tenderness when we had almost lost the strength to ask for it.

Something small enough to escape everyone else's notice may have helped us endure what felt unbearable.

Its presence did not make the suffering right. It did not compensate for everything that had been taken away. But it kept some part of us in contact with what we still loved about being alive.

There is a profound difference between explaining someone's suffering and understanding what helped them continue.

Sometimes what helped was a single memory.

I have been met. I have felt this warmth.

There is something in life I still recognise as precious.

A moment can finish in time and continue working within us.

Perhaps that is why certain images remain so clear. They hold an experience we could not have survived on explanations alone.

Here, the strangeness of the life dream becomes especially vivid to me.

We build as though permanence were possible.

We organise, accumulate, defend and identify.

Then time passes through everything.

What remains inwardly may be a glance we could never have planned and cannot reproduce.

We can own the garden, maintain it for years, and still find that one of its most precious gifts was a butterfly that belonged to no one and stayed for only a few seconds.

We can travel a great distance to see something extraordinary, then remember most vividly the person who quietly made room for us along the way.

Life refuses to place its deepest value neatly where we have placed our greatest effort.

That does not make effort meaningless. A garden needs tending. A relationship needs care. A beautiful place can offer the conditions in which an unexpected moment becomes possible.

But the moment itself arrives freely.
We cannot command it to justify our work.

This leaves me with a question about how I want to spend the time that remains.

How much must I truly maintain? How much am I preserving because I fear what someone might think if I stopped? What could become simpler, so that I am

more available to the people and the life already around me?

I do not need every day to be extraordinary. I want enough space within an ordinary day to notice when something precious is happening.

To let a conversation deepen.

To look up when someone enters.

To remain with a sunset for a little longer.

To recognise tenderness while it is being offered, rather than only years later, when I finally understand what I received.

For the moments that hold a life rarely announce their importance.

They arrive quietly, while we are busy with other things.

And sometimes the whole strange dream seems to gather into one of them: a child looks at us, someone allows us to see their longing, a butterfly settles where it has no reason to settle.

For a few seconds, nothing needs to be added.

Years later, we are still living from what happened there.

THE SPARK WITHOUT A SIZE

When I look carefully into what I call myself, I cannot find a centre with any measurable size.

The most intimate sense of being *me* seems almost like a tiny spark. Yet even that image gives it more shape than I can honestly perceive. What I encounter is awareness: the quiet presence from which I experience my body, my thoughts and the world.

I feel it through the layers of bodily sensation, memory, habit and identity. Those layers have become familiar enough for me to call them *myself*. But when I turn inward, I sense something that none of them fully describes.

This is what I have come to understand as my essence. I cannot place it anywhere with certainty. I cannot give it an age. My body has changed, my circumstances have changed, and much of what I once believed has fallen away.

Yet there remains a strangely familiar intimacy in the simple experience of being here.

That familiarity makes me wonder about time.

Could this awareness be participating in something more enduring than the succession of events through which I understand my life?

Could the person I call Erik be one expression of a deeper movement, an unfolding through which existence encounters itself?

Sometimes I imagine this movement as an eternal play: awareness giving rise to scenes, entering them so completely that they are received as reality.

The dream becomes convincing from within. Its characters love, fear, hope and suffer, while the source of the experience remains largely hidden from their attention.

This is the language through which I approach what I feel. It gives form to an intuition whose full meaning I cannot claim to know.

When I look back into my childhood, I sometimes encounter something that unsettles the ordinary account of continuity. I expect to find a sequence: one event leading to another, one version of myself gradually becoming the next.

But that is not always how the past appears inwardly.

Certain scenes seem to flicker. They acquire an unusual stillness or intensity. The remembered moment begins to feel like a symbol carrying more than the event itself.

I know that memory is selective and that looking back is never the same as returning. Yet acknowledging this

does not entirely express the strangeness of what I experience.

There are moments when the story of my life feels less seamless than I ordinarily assume, and I become aware of how much continuity I have taken for granted.

For an instant, the familiar account no longer contains everything.

These interruptions have sometimes opened questions that ordinary experience allowed me to leave untouched. What is this sense of being someone? How much of the world I inhabit depends upon the way perception holds it together? What becomes available to awareness when that familiar arrangement loosens?

The encounter I experienced as meeting my double in 1995 belongs among those milestones. So does what I remember in Caracas as the breaking of the eggshell of perception.

That image still speaks to me: an eggshell enclosing what I had accepted as the whole of reality, until something happened that made the enclosure itself perceptible.

I did not emerge from such experiences with a complete explanation. Their significance unfolded slowly.

At times, I had only the certainty that something had

affected me profoundly, together with an inability to fit it into the understanding I had before.

I would hesitate to say that these events proved what reality ultimately is. Their importance in my life lies in how they changed the questions I could ask and the depth from which I asked them.

Gradually, I came to recognise in them something I now call **The Field**.

I use the word *recognise* carefully. There was no clear image before me, no single instant in which every uncertainty disappeared.

What developed was an inward sense of relationship: the feeling that my existence might belong to a depth I had previously experienced only through its passing forms.

The Field became meaningful to me through that growing awareness.

I began to understand myself less exclusively through the outline of a body or the chronology of a biography. Those remain part of my life.

But inwardly, I felt drawn towards the presence through which the whole story is experienced.

The spark without a size.

The awareness I cannot put at a distance in order to inspect it, because it is already present in the looking.

Perhaps this is why those milestones remain alive within me. They interrupted more than an explanation of the world. They unsettled the boundaries of the one who believed he was looking at it.

And through those openings, slowly and without a final answer, I began to feel the possibility that what I had spent my life searching for was already intimate with every moment of the search.

WHERE THE VOW BECOMES LIFE

Sometimes I feel that the spark has a sense of drama. Just when the shape of a life appears settled, something happens that rearranges its whole meaning.

What seemed peripheral becomes central.
A meeting becomes a commitment.
A few words become the axis around which years will turn.

This is how I have begun to understand what happened between Joy and me.

Within my understanding of The Field, our deepest belonging precedes the apparent separation between us. Yet here, within the life we actually experience, there are two people: two histories, two bodies, two inner worlds that cannot simply be assumed to be identical.

And there is the extraordinary possibility of offering ourselves to each other.

Perhaps that is part of the mystery. Oneness can be felt through the tenderness of a relationship in which each person remains free to speak, to feel differently, and to be received.

Joy and I have become a gift to each other in this way. We arrived carrying wounds, unfinished stories, and parts of ourselves that had learned to endure more than they could easily express.

Through our love, those scattered parts began to find somewhere to belong.

I imagine it as a slow movement towards coherence: two lives discovering a rhythm in which neither has to hold everything alone.

Here, the Vow begins to reveal a deeper meaning to me.

When Joy asked, “**Will you wait for me?**”, and I answered yes, I could not know everything that answer would ask of us.

The words took only a moment.
Living them would take years.

The Vow became real through repetition: another letter, another visit, another day of remaining faithful to a love whose ordinary expression had been interrupted.

It entered the smallest choices. It gave direction to time that might otherwise have felt only empty.

For almost nine years, we lived the separation from different sides. Joy endured the prison itself.

I endured the waiting outside it. Those experiences were not interchangeable, and loving her did not allow me to know every part of what she carried.

But we continued reaching towards each other across that difference.

Looking back, I can see how deeply those years became woven into our bond. I would never need to call the imprisonment necessary, or believe that love required such suffering, to recognise what our commitment became within it. There was a cost.

There was also the love with which we answered it.
That distinction matters to me.

**The pain was real. So was our refusal to let it
have the whole meaning of our lives.**

When I say that those years melted our lives into oneness, I mean that our love became inseparable from the way I understood my own life.

Joy was present in my choices, my imagination, my waiting, and my hope. Our reunion had become part of the future towards which I was living.

And now that we share our days, the Vow continues to unfold in another form.

There is a different intimacy in being together without glass between us. We discover what love asks when it can become a home, a conversation, a quiet gesture, or the freedom to spend time in separate rooms while feeling secure in the same belonging.

What once had to reach across an immense distance can now inhabit the ordinary. Perhaps this is what I am beginning to understand about the spark and its drama: I cannot know whether it arranged the story, but I can feel how the story has changed my understanding of love. The Vow gave our longing a direction.

Living it gave our promise a body. And in the life we are now able to share, I sometimes feel what I can only call the purest oneness: the quiet experience of being entirely myself while loving someone whose presence has become part of what home means.

We have not erased every wound.

We have found a tenderness in which the wounds no longer have to be carried alone.

THE QUIET BEAUTY OF BELONGING

Today, Joy, her son Kow and I went to see a film at Central Festival in Chiang Mai.

It was a horror film, and something in it touched the unsettling possibility of becoming lost within one's own awareness. Perhaps that was simply my interpretation, shaped by the questions I have been exploring lately.

But while the screen carried us into fear and uncertainty, beside me there was something quietly reassuring. Joy's hand was holding mine.

At certain moments, her fingers tightened with an insistent pressure, while her head rested peacefully on my shoulder. I could feel both her response to the film and the ease with which she leaned into me.

We were watching the same story, sharing its tension through the small movements of our hands.

Those simple gestures stayed with me more vividly than the film itself.

Afterwards, as she looked for a new shirt for Kow, I found myself gently observing her. The attention she gave him, the way she considered what he might like, the care moving so naturally through an ordinary task.

This is how I experience Joy: love overflowing into

gestures. Her affection is present in the way she touches, notices, chooses and stays close.

Watching her, I feel how much tenderness can live inside actions that might seem unremarkable to anyone passing by.

I have sometimes asked whether the thirty-five years between us trouble her.
Her answer is always direct.

“No.”

I hear that answer in her words, and I feel it in the freedom of her behaviour. In public, when I notice people looking at us, she remains as close and affectionate as ever.

Our hands find each other. She leans towards me.
There is no embarrassment in the tenderness we share.

I cannot know what others think when they see us.
What I do know is that their attention does not seem to interrupt our belonging.

There is something deeply restful in that.

After writing about the effort of maintaining appearances, I recognise here an experience that asks so little performance of us. We can walk through a crowded shopping mall and remain at ease in our affection.

We do not have to explain it before we are allowed to

feel it. Sometimes I wonder how she inhabits this closeness so naturally. I can speak only from what she tells me and what we share, but I feel how deeply our lives have become woven together.

I find it difficult to imagine my daily life without her, and in her words and gestures I recognise a similar attachment.

She has become part of the way home feels to me.

Our closeness has a depth that I struggle to put into words. Something in us seems intimately interwoven, as though the movements of one life have become familiar within the other.

A glance can reach us before a sentence is needed.
A hand can answer a feeling we have barely begun to express.

I feel blessed by how real this is between us.

After so many years in which love had to travel through letters, visits and waiting, it can now move through the ordinary hours of a shared day.

We can sit in a cinema.

We can choose a shirt for Kow.

We can decide where to go tomorrow.

The simplicity of those possibilities still touches me.

Tomorrow, we leave for a few days in the mountains of Pai. We are looking forward to the cooler air, a change of surroundings, and some relief from the heat that still settles over Paradiso.

I imagine the freshness, the mountain views, the pleasure of having time together somewhere different.

And perhaps, when I look back on today, what remains will be one of those brief moments that quietly become part of a whole life:

Joy's head on my shoulder, her fingers tightening around mine, and the feeling that we were entirely at home with each other.

THE FREEDOM TO BE DIFFERENT

When I write about the closeness between Joy and me, I also want to leave room for everything that closeness does not automatically explain.

We can love each other deeply and still arrive at a moment with different feelings. One person may wish to speak while the other needs quiet. Something intended gently may be received painfully. Tiredness can enter a voice before either person notices it.

Being real must have room for these moments too. Otherwise, we could begin performing the very happiness through which we hoped to escape performance. We might feel obliged to remain tender in appearance even when something needs to be understood.

I would not want our love to become another place where either of us has to hide.

The freedom to be ourselves includes the freedom to say, "That hurt me," or, "I need a little time," without making the whole relationship stand trial.

A difficult moment deserves attention without immediately becoming a verdict upon everything we share.

This asks something of me. My intention cannot tell me the whole meaning of my gesture.

If I believe I have spoken kindly and Joy feels wounded, there is still something for me to hear. Loving her includes being interested in the experience she actually had.

And when I feel misunderstood, I want to be able to speak without turning my hurt into an accusation.

Perhaps some of the deepest work of intimacy happens here: in the small space between our first reaction and the answer we choose to give.

We can pause. We can ask what the other person meant. We can admit that we do not yet understand. Sometimes an apology is needed before an explanation can be received.

There is dignity in returning to someone and saying,
“I see that differently now.”

Within my understanding of The Field, our belonging
does not require us to become identical.

Joy has her own pace, preferences and inward life.
There will always be things I can discover only by
allowing her to tell me.

Even after years of devotion, I must keep listening.

I think, too, about the simple freedom of spending
time apart within a shared home.

One person rests.

Another writes.

A door closes for a while.

The affection between us need not become uncertain
because our attention has turned towards different
things.

There is a quiet trust in allowing someone to be unavail-
able for a moment without making them responsible for
our fear.

After so much separation, closeness is precious to me.
Precisely because it is precious, I want it to remain freely
given. The beauty of being real must be spacious enough
for an unfinished conversation, a tired evening, a
difference that takes time to understand.

I want us to feel welcome there too.

THE ROAD TO PAI

The more than 350 bends on the road to Pai left Joy feeling dizzy, unsettled, and physically unwell. After nearly three hours of driving, we stopped to rest in a lovely hotel room before exploring the region. Her son is here with us, sharing this little journey into the mountains.

Joy fell into a deep sleep in my arms, her legs intertwined with mine. I held her and felt how precious such an ordinary moment can become after everything we endured. The pain belongs to our history, but now we can rest together, feel each other's warmth, and let an afternoon pass peacefully.

These moments of tenderness give us something that words alone could never restore.

We have been fortunate with the dry weather in the middle of a particularly heavy rainy season.

Later, walking through Pai, I felt drawn to its colourful, slightly nostalgic atmosphere. The walking street seems to carry something from the spirit of Woodstock and the late 1960s: handmade clothes, little treasures, colours, smells, and an ease of expression that I find rare and precious.

It feels as though time has slowed here, as though this small mountain village has escaped some of the harsher effects of relentless development. I know that a visitor

sees only part of a place, but what reaches me is a sense of life allowing itself more space.

People seem comfortable expressing their individuality, and the atmosphere invites us to wander without needing to accomplish anything.

Joy seems a little surprised by this world, yet the handmade patchwork clothes immediately attract her. She spots a green outfit that combines the look of a dress with trousers. I think we will return for it after our very late lunch in a wonderfully colourful street restaurant. I enjoy watching her discover what appeals to her, following her curiosity at her own pace.

While walking, we are both drawn to a nostalgic tea shop. Here, a simple wooden crate becomes a seat, an old teak floor welcomes bare simplicity, and tea is served from a terracotta pot kept warm over charcoal.

There is something deeply beautiful in this arrangement. Wood, clay, fire, and tea seem enough to make us want to stay.

The atmosphere is vibrant and intimate.

Young women recline on the shining wooden floor, drinking tea and talking together. Their ease gives the room a feeling of familiarity, as though visitors can settle into it without the usual distance between strangers.

It has something of a large family gathering, with room for another person to sit down and belong for a while.

The mobile phone seems to lose its importance here.
Attention settles naturally on the people nearby.
A face, a voice, a gesture, the time someone takes to
listen—all these small things become noticeable again.
The room invites closeness through its simplicity.

Sitting near one another, sharing tea, we are reminded
how little is needed to create the conditions for a real
encounter.

I see and feel how much we need this.
So much of our polished, hurried world keeps
us occupied with answering, scrolling, arranging,
and moving on. Conversations slip between other tasks.
We can exchange countless messages and still carry
the ache of having barely been met.

Here, the quiet pleasure of staying in one place toget-
her gives attention time to deepen.
Someone can finish a thought.
A silence can remain comfortable.
A conversation can find its own direction.

Perhaps this touches me so strongly because closeness
with Joy was denied us for so long.
I have learned the weight of a hand resting in mine, of
her head against my shoulder, of being able to sit beside
her without watching the time run out. In this little tea
shop, that same precious possibility seems available to
everyone: the freedom to be present with another

person. Now the sun is fading, and the night sky begins to appear. Pai's walking streets grow crowded with people wandering, browsing, eating, and looking around.

Beneath the ordinary movement of an evening, I sense a quieter longing for connection.

Perhaps some come simply to enjoy themselves; perhaps others hope, without quite knowing it, that something will reach them.

A walk can become an encounter.

A glance can open into a conversation.

In someone who first appears to be a stranger, we may recognise a tenderness, a loneliness, or a longing familiar to us. Through the apparent other, we discover something of ourselves.

Then the spark passes between us.

For one brief moment, the soul feels seen.

Walking beside Joy, I feel how much of life's beauty lives in these small openings: her hand in mine, tea warming over charcoal, people making room for one another, and an evening we have the freedom to share.

Perhaps this is what touches me most in these small encounters: how naturally the feeling of separation softens when contact becomes real.

When we give another person our full attention,

something opens.

We become less occupied with defending our position, managing our appearance, or deciding what the encounter can offer us. We begin to feel the presence of the person before us.

And within that attention, there can be a quiet recognition: their longing to be understood reaches something familiar in us.

We feel that we belong to something greater than the little world organised around ourselves.

For me, this is one of the first openings through which oneness becomes recognisable. It begins in an experience of contact deep enough to loosen the boundaries we usually take for granted. Someone listens, and we feel less alone. A hand holds ours, and the world becomes more habitable. We sit among strangers, sharing tea, and discover how easily warmth can travel between lives that appeared unrelated.

Once our attention has been touched by this possibility, it begins to notice it elsewhere. We recognise the care that sustains ordinary life, the countless relationships within which our own existence unfolds.

What once seemed like a collection of separate things begins to reveal its connections. Gradually, oneness becomes, for me, a way of looking that keeps finding belonging beneath difference.

And as this recognition deepens, the game of separation becomes more visible.

I begin to see how much effort goes into maintaining the little throne of the ego. We build an account of who we are through our memories, achievements, wounds, possessions, and convictions. Each becomes another piece of evidence supporting the familiar story: this is me; this is mine; this is what makes me different.

That story helps us find our way through life. But it can also become a claim to authority over everything we experience.

The ego places itself at the centre and measures the world according to what confirms it, threatens it, admires it, or overlooks it. Even another person's presence can become a mirror in which it searches for reassurance.

Then comes the strange, insistent cry: "I exist."
"See me. Recognise me. Confirm that I matter."

There is tenderness in this cry. Someone who has been ignored, rejected, or deprived of affection may need recognition profoundly.

Real contact answers a human need, and that need deserves care. Yet I also hear another layer within the cry: the effort of a separate identity to secure its place, to make its boundaries feel unquestionable.

For me, this suggests a paradox.

Beneath the insistence on being separate, there may already be an awareness that separation cannot tell the whole truth about us. Something in us seeks belonging so persistently because belonging feels fundamental. We keep reaching beyond ourselves, even while defending the story that we stand alone.

I experience that reaching as a trace of oneness beneath appearances. The longing for connection seems to carry a memory of a foundation we have never entirely lost.

The ego can entertain this possibility as an idea. It can speak about oneness, read about it, and even take pride in understanding it.

Spiritual insight can become another possession: my understanding, my awakening, my special relationship with reality.

But allowing that insight to take root asks something deeper. It asks the ego to surrender its claim to the throne.

Then recognition becomes less concerned with being exceptional and more capable of being attentive.

Another person's joy can matter without adding anything to our status.

Their pain can reach us without first being compared with our own.

We can listen with enough space for their experience to remain theirs.

Individuality still has its place. Joy remains Joy, with her own history, preferences, humour, and way of moving through the world. I remain myself.

The beauty of our closeness includes those differences. Yet when I hold her hand, I feel how little those differences require distance between us. We can be distinct and deeply belong to one another.

Perhaps this is how the insight becomes rooted: through repeated moments in which presence matters more than self-assertion. Through listening, tenderness, and the willingness to let another life touch our own.

The ego gradually finds a more modest place within that experience. It can help us speak, choose, act, and care for our lives. It no longer needs to turn every encounter into a defence of its importance.

Walking through Pai beside Joy, I feel that this understanding begins very close to the ground: on a wooden floor, beside a terracotta pot, in a conversation given time to unfold.

The cry “I exist” becomes quieter when existence feels welcomed.

And in that quiet, I begin to recognise something deeper:

I belong.

For me, that belonging is where oneness starts to become lived.

There is another small detail in this experience that keeps drawing my attention: the tea itself, and everything that happens around it.

I have often noticed that deeper conversations unfold between two people sharing tea.

In my experience, it seems to invite a particular quality of contact, quieter and more attentive than the atmosphere I usually associate with coffee, beer, or other alcoholic drinks.

An honest conversation can happen around any drink. Yet tea, prepared and shared slowly, makes me wonder how much of an encounter begins before the first words are spoken.

The invitation already contains something precious.

“Shall we have some tea?”

Within that simple question, I hear a willingness to give time. Someone is making room for another person to stay. There is water to heat, tea to prepare, a pot to place between us.

These ordinary actions give the meeting a beginning that neither person has to invent through conversation.

Preparing tea also offers a small practice of attention.

We notice the water, the vessel, the warmth, the time needed for the leaves to infuse. When we allow ourselves to follow that process, we enter a pace that gives waiting a place. For a few minutes, being here together is enough to occupy us.

Then comes the act of serving.

To pour tea for another person is a modest, concrete expression of care.

We attend to their cup, notice whether it needs filling, offer something prepared with our hands.

Affection becomes visible through an action so familiar that we may overlook its meaning. Before saying anything profound, we have already communicated: your presence matters enough for me to attend to you.

Receiving the cup completes that exchange.

We accept a little care, acknowledge it, and settle into the moment it has created. The relationship begins to take shape through these gestures.

Giving and receiving become easier, and perhaps words can follow with less effort.

Drinking slowly gives conversation room to breathe.

A sip creates a natural pause. We can look down at the cup, consider what has been said, and let an answer form. Silence has something comfortable within it:

the warmth in our hands, the taste of the tea, the shared presence of the pot.

I feel that this matters especially between two people. A deeper thought often arrives unfinished. It may need hesitation, a few ordinary sentences, or the freedom to begin again. When we feel listened to without being hurried, something more honest can gradually emerge.

And sometimes that honesty remains wordless. Sitting peacefully beside someone can itself be an intimate form of contact. We allow them their quiet. We feel no need to draw out a confession or turn the encounter into an achievement. Their company is welcome as it is.

In the little tea shop in Pai, the terracotta pot kept warm over charcoal seems to hold this possibility very simply. Wood beneath us, clay before us, tea to share: the surroundings give our attention somewhere gentle to rest. I feel how easily a modest place can become rich when people have time for one another.

Perhaps this is also where the ego begins to relax. It has an ordinary task: pour carefully, pass the cup, listen. Its attention can move towards the person nearby. For a while, the need to establish its importance becomes less insistent because it is participating in

something that already has meaning.
And the shared pot offers me a quiet image of oneness.

Two cups receive tea from the same source.
Each retains its own shape, each is held by a different
person, yet both belong to the same act of sharing.
I see in this an image of individuality held within a
deeper relationship.

Our differences remain, while the encounter gives us
something in common that neither could create alone.
I would not claim that tea itself reveals oneness.
What touches me is how the whole gesture can make
belonging easier to feel.

We prepare, offer, receive, wait, and attend.
Through these small actions, an insight that might
otherwise remain abstract acquires a place in daily
life.

Perhaps the unnoticed gift of sharing tea is the
permission it gives us to stay long enough for real
contact to happen.

A person pours. Another receives.
The cups grow lighter, the conversation deepens,
or the silence becomes comfortable.
And somewhere within that ordinary exchange,
we begin to feel at home with one another.

Joy Watches

Joy often watches me when I begin to write.

Sometimes I share the subject with her; sometimes she simply observes me as my attention turns inward.

I wonder what she sees in those moments: perhaps the change in my expression, the stillness, or the way a thought seems to draw me somewhere before I have found the words for it.

Today, something rather funny happened in Pai.

We stopped for a glass of wine at a little bar I had visited a few times with my son Kenzo. Before entering, I began telling Joy: "I came here with..."

Then there was a pause.

Two or three seconds passed before the name arrived.

"Kenzo."

For a brief moment, it felt as though I had forgotten my own son's name. I found the hesitation strange. Around Joy's lips, I noticed a little smile, but she said nothing.

I continued thinking about that small interruption, wondering why such a familiar name had needed time to reach my tongue.

Later, while we were drinking tea, the memory returned more clearly: my unfinished sentence, the silence, and Joy's smile. Something about the whole scene suddenly amused me.

"What makes you laugh?" she asked.

I reminded her of the moment outside the bar. Then I told her that the hesitation had felt strangely connected to something passing through her mind.

She looked at me and asked what I meant.

As I tried to explain, a possible picture took shape. Perhaps, during those few seconds after “I came here with...”, she had imagined another woman. Perhaps she had also recognised how quickly that thought had appeared, without anything to support it, and smiled at the little movement of fear within herself.

Joy then confirmed that this thought had indeed been in her mind: during my hesitation, she had wondered whether I was about to mention another woman.

Her confirmation made the moment even more striking to me. The impression I had put into words matched a thought she had not spoken aloud.

For me, this deepened the feeling of intimacy between us—the sense that even a brief silence can contain something we recognise in one another before it is expressed.

I then added, with some amusement, that I had indeed visited Pai with another woman—but years before I knew Joy. That made her smile.

What stays with me is how much meaning gathered around such a tiny pause.

An unfinished sentence leaves a little space, and within that space our expectations can begin speaking.

A name has not yet arrived, but a possibility already has.

In a few seconds, a memory, a fear, or an imagined story may enter an encounter that had seemed perfectly ordinary.

And when we love someone deeply, even a small uncertainty can touch something sensitive.

The preciousness of the relationship gives those moments their weight.

We care so much that a passing ambiguity may reach us before we have had time to consider it.

My first feeling was that Joy's unspoken thought had somehow interrupted me. The timing was so close that the hesitation and her smile seemed to belong to a single event.

I cannot establish that her thought caused the pause; a familiar word can also take a moment to arrive.

Yet the experience drew my attention to how closely I was attending to her, even while trying to finish my own sentence.

Perhaps I had noticed more than I consciously understood. Perhaps her expression had touched my awareness while my attention was occupied with finding the name. Perhaps the pause itself had given both of us something to interpret.

The uncertainty does not remove the intimacy of the moment. It invites me to look more carefully at it.

There have been other occasions when I have spoken about something that seemed to be on Joy's mind.

Sometimes the correspondence feels immediate and surprising. I experience these moments as a kind of resonance: living so closely with someone, loving them, and becoming attentive to movements that are almost too small to describe.

A familiar face contains an extraordinary richness. We begin to recognise the difference between a smile of amusement and a smile that holds a question. We notice a hesitation, a glance, a change in the way someone becomes quiet.

Much of this reaches us before we could explain how we noticed it. For me, such experiences belong within the wider reflection on oneness.

They make the boundary between "what happens in me" and "what happens between us" feel less rigid.

My thoughts unfold in relationship with Joy's presence. Her expression enters my experience, and my words become part of the moment she is living.

Still, closeness asks for humility. Joy's inner world remains hers to reveal. An intuition can become the beginning of a conversation, and love gives her the

freedom to confirm it, correct it, or simply leave it unexplained.

That freedom is part of the contact I value.

What made this little episode beautiful was its lightness. There was a pause, a smile, a question, and then laughter. A possible fear could enter the conversation gently enough to be looked at together.

“Kenzo,” I had finally said.

The name arrived, and the sentence was completed. But those few seconds continued opening into something larger for me: an awareness of how much passes between two people before either has spoken clearly. Perhaps real intimacy grows through this willingness to notice, to ask, and to remain open.

We become familiar with one another while continuing to discover one another.

And sometimes, in the smallest hesitation, love gives us another opportunity to meet.

Later that same day in Pai, Joy shared another very rare revelation with me.

She told me that only one week after leaving me at the end of February 2017, she had begun drinking.

On one occasion, she became so drunk that she fell asleep on a toilet.

The Joy I had known then never touched a drop of alcohol. Hearing this, I tried to imagine her in that condition, and the image hurt me.

There was a whole part of those weeks that I had never seen: what happened inside her after she left, when we were apart and I could no longer know how she was living. I asked her why she had started drinking.

She tried to answer, but the words caught in her throat. Tears appeared in her eyes. I gently asked whether the sadness of leaving me had pushed her into it.

Joy gave a small nod.

That almost silent “yes” reached somewhere very deep in me. For years, I had carried the pain of her departure and everything that followed.

Now, through one small movement of her head, she allowed me to glimpse the pain she had carried too. She had left, yet leaving had evidently wounded her in a way I had never fully understood.

I had often searched for an explanation for our separation. From where I stood, there had been no reason that could make sense of it.

Her revelation gave me something more intimate than an explanation: the knowledge that, within a week, she had been struggling with a sadness strong enough to lead her into behaviour entirely unfamiliar to the woman I knew.

Then I remembered what The Field had told me about the Vow between us: that it existed before time began, and that it would find its fulfilment in this life.

We would meet, stay together, separate, and meet again.

This is the spiritual language through which I understand the depth of our bond.

In Pai, listening to Joy, I felt that understanding return with an intensity I had not expected.

Her small nod made me feel how deeply our connection had continued to live in her, even after she walked away.

I had experienced the Vow through my waiting.

Now I sensed something of how she had experienced it through the anguish of our separation.

Looking back, the speed of what followed still troubles me. Within a week, she began drinking.

In the weeks and months that followed, her life moved towards circumstances that eventually brought her into prison.

I cannot reduce that whole chain of events to a single cause. Yet her revelation showed me how early the suffering had begun, long before the prison gate closed.

Sometimes I examine those events and find them so bewildering, so painfully out of proportion, that the expression “a cosmic joke” comes into my mind.

I search for the moment when everything might have turned another way. From the present, I can see dangers that neither of us understood clearly while we were living through them.

Then I remember the tears in front of me, and the word “joke” becomes unbearable.

There was a woman drinking through her sadness. There were years of confinement, separation, waiting, and uncertainty.

There were two people who loved each other and could scarcely understand what was happening to their lives.

Within my understanding of the Vow, even the imprisonment has become part of the journey through which we eventually found each other again.

But that understanding leaves the pain fully real. Our reunion cannot reach backwards and make those years gentle.

I still feel the helplessness of being unable to return to those first days and reach her before everything unravelled.

And now, here she was beside me in Pai, trusting me with something she had kept inside for almost nine years. I felt tenderness, sorrow, and a deeper recognition of the woman sitting before me. There was so much I had never known about what it had cost her to leave.

Her small nod stayed with me.

It answered the question I had asked, and opened a part of her suffering that I had never been able to see.

I wanted to receive that revelation gently.

She had already carried it for so long.

THE ARCTIC WIND

I feel an Arctic wind striking my skin when I think of the confusion, pain, and distress that Joy endured along the journey I understand as our Vow.

Icy shivers move through me. The thought enters my body before I can find words for it.

Even now, with Joy free and beside me, the idea of her imprisonment is almost more than I can bear. I can speak about those years, count them, place them within the story of our lives. Yet sometimes the reality reaches me afresh: she was there, living through days she could not leave, while I was here, loving her and unable to open the gate.

Her revelation in Pai brought that pain closer.

Only one week after leaving me, she had begun drinking. Behind a departure I had struggled to understand, there

had already been a sadness I knew nothing about.
Her small nod opened a door into those first days,
and I felt the cold of what lay behind it.

Then my thoughts turn towards The Field.

Within my understanding of The Field, nothing in our
lives stands outside it. That leaves me with a question
I cannot easily put down: if The Field knew where this
journey would lead, why did we remain so unaware
of what was approaching?

At times, it feels as though that knowledge was
concealed until the point of no return had been reached.

The insights arrived when the events themselves were
already beyond my reach.

I could begin to understand, but I could no longer return
to that first week, stand beside Joy, and ask the questions
I wish I had known to ask.

There is something devastating about understanding too
late. I cannot know what an earlier understanding would
have changed. I know I would have tried. Every part of
my love would have moved towards her.

I would have wanted to hear the sadness beneath her
silence, to understand what was happening before the
consequences became so enormous.

This is where my understanding of the Vow meets my
deepest resistance. I can feel the extraordinary bond

between us. I can recognise its continuity through separation and reunion.

But when I look at what Joy endured, my love rises in protest. The meaning I find in our journey cannot make her suffering easier to contemplate.

I still have questions for The Field. They come from the same place as my tenderness towards Joy.

And perhaps that tenderness is what I must give my fullest attention to now. She is here.

She has trusted me with another painful part of her life. I want her to feel that she can reveal it slowly, in her own words, without having to explain everything.

**The past sends its Arctic wind through me.
Beside her, I want to offer warmth.**

Receiving Joy's revelation also made me think about how carefully we approach another person's inward life.

Someone can sit beside us for years while carrying a sorrow we have never heard described.

Then, in a moment we could not have arranged, a few words arrive.

Perhaps the words stop, and a small nod must carry the rest.

What we do next matters.

I may want to ask more because I love her and wish to understand.

Yet my wish to know cannot decide how much she is ready to reveal.

I can receive what she offers and allow the silence around it to remain.

There is a kind of attention that gives someone room to continue, and there is an attention that makes them feel they must continue.

I want to become more sensitive to that difference.

It lives in ordinary things: how long we hold a gaze, how close we move, whether we interrupt, whether our hand offers comfort or quietly asks for a response.

This is where my thoughts turn towards those we call “the others.” Each carries an inward life that reaches us only in part.

Our longing to meet them asks for patience with what we cannot yet see.

Closeness begins to feel trustworthy when a person knows that what they reveal will be received gently, and that what remains unspoken may remain their own.

THE OTHERS

The need for real contact with those we call “the others” is deep and real. In the language of *The Field*, I understand them as reflections of the same underlying life.

Yet each person meets us through a particular body, history and sensitivity.

Whatever unity we may perceive beneath existence, the encounter still asks for tenderness: another person has their own pace of opening, their own vulnerability, and their own need for space.

Alongside touch, eye contact has a remarkable power. When someone meets our eyes, we experience something more intimate than simply being looked at.

We become aware that their attention is directed towards us—and that they know we are looking back.

There is a mutual recognition:

I see you, and I know that you see me.

Research suggests that this reciprocity contributes to the bodily intensity of eye contact.

That intensity helps explain why the balance is so delicate. Direct gaze can increase the activation of our nervous system, even during a brief encounter.

This activation may accompany attraction, warmth, embarrassment or unease; its meaning depends on the situation and the person. The body registers that something socially significant is happening before we

have fully decided how to interpret it.

A welcoming gaze can therefore become uncomfortable when it continues beyond what feels mutually natural. We may begin to wonder what is being asked of us.

Are we being appreciated, examined, desired or maybe challenged? Direct gaze can communicate both inclusion and dominance, which helps explain why it sometimes draws us closer and sometimes makes us defensive.

One way I understand the feeling of being “naked” is that sustained eye contact makes us more conscious of our own visibility. We begin monitoring the face we are presenting, the emotion we might be revealing, the silence we cannot easily fill.

The other person cannot read our whole inner life through our eyes, but we may feel as though more of us is showing than we intended.

Our vulnerability lies partly in that uncertainty:
What do you see in me, and what will you do with it?

If the gaze feels imposed, unease may become irritation or anger. In that moment, anger can be an attempt to recover space—to regain some choice over the encounter. This is a possible interpretation rather than an explanation for every uncomfortable gaze.

Sometimes the discomfort is simply awkwardness, unfamiliarity or excessive intensity.

There is, however, no universal threshold beyond which eye contact becomes too much. People differ in their preferred duration, and cultural expectations influence how a gaze is interpreted.

A few seconds may feel sufficient in one encounter, while a longer meeting of the eyes feels entirely welcome in another. The subtle measure belongs to the relationship and the moment.

The opposite difficulty is equally understandable. When someone never meets our eyes, we may feel that our presence has not reached them. Yet looking away does not necessarily mean indifference.

It can help a person think, retrieve a memory or find the words they need. Research on gaze aversion shows that withdrawing the eyes can reduce the mental demands of an interaction. Someone may be listening carefully while their gaze rests elsewhere.

Perhaps this is why natural contact often has a rhythm: we meet, look away, and return. Those small departures give the encounter room to breathe.

We can remain connected while recovering a little inward space. With someone we trust, a longer gaze may become deeply moving because we feel free within it.

We can reveal more because we sense that our openness will be received gently.

From the perspective of The Field, I see something beautiful here. If “the other” is another expression of the same life, then meeting their eyes becomes a moment of recognition across our apparent separation.

But that understanding calls for greater sensitivity to the person before us. Unity does not remove their boundaries or give us unrestricted access to them.

There is a tenderness in seeing someone fully while allowing them to choose how much they reveal.

A loving gaze offers presence, and leaves room for an answer.

THE NEED FOR CONNECTION

Speaking is one of our most familiar ways of meeting those we call “the others.”

Through words, we offer something of our inner life: a thought, a memory, a feeling, a question.

Yet the meaning of an encounter also lives in the voice carrying those words, the distance between us, and the way our presence is received.

When someone moves closer and lowers their voice, the

conversation can acquire a different intimacy. Physical distance helps regulate our encounters, and proximity can increase their emotional and bodily intensity.

When that closeness is welcome, we may experience it as an invitation into a more personal space.

A whisper in the ear makes this invitation especially tangible. The voice comes close enough for us to notice its softness, its breath, its smallest hesitation.

Even ordinary words can become moving in that setting. “I am happy you are here” carries a particular tenderness when spoken quietly beside us, perhaps with a hand resting gently upon ours.

The manner of speaking becomes part of the message.

I understand some of the whisper’s power as coming from its narrow audience. A voice that could address everyone has become a voice intended for one person. Within a trusting relationship, this can suggest: I am choosing to share this with you.

I am allowing you closer.

That feeling of being chosen can reach deeply into us.

We are being included in something personally held—a confidence, an affection, a private joke, or a thought that has not yet found the courage to be spoken aloud.

Secrecy, in such a moment, may provide a sheltered

space where a delicate feeling can be expressed without becoming a public event.

This helps explain why we can feel “seen” even when the person is speaking into our ear and cannot look into our eyes. Here, being seen means being personally recognised: someone is making room for us within their experience.

When we reveal something tender and receive an understanding, caring response, that recognition becomes deeper. Research on intimacy supports this connection between personal disclosure and the feeling that another person understands and values us.

There is vulnerability on both sides. The person sharing entrusts us with something; the person listening accepts responsibility for how it will be received.

A quiet answer, a softened expression, or a gentle touch can communicate: What you have given me is safe here. In that exchange, trust becomes something we experience together.

Touch adds a physical dimension to the sharing.

A hand held, an arm gently touched, or a head resting against a shoulder can give affection a bodily expression.

Its meaning depends strongly on the relationship: research shows that the places where people welcome another person’s touch are closely related to the strength of their emotional bond.

When the words, the voice and the touch carry the same tenderness, they can make the encounter feel whole.

We hear affection and feel its accompanying gesture. The other person's attention becomes something we can receive through several senses at once.

As with eye contact, the balance remains subtle. A whisper can feel intrusive when the closeness is unwanted.

The intimacy grows through mutual comfort: the freedom to move nearer, to respond, to pause, and to remain ourselves within the encounter.

Trust gives proximity its tenderness.

In the language of The Field, I understand those we call "the others" as reflections of the same underlying life. From that perspective, these small moments become particularly beautiful.

Recognition takes a human form: a quiet voice beside the ear, a confidence carefully received, a hand finding another hand.

Perhaps we feel so deeply met because the gesture says:

"There is a place close to me where you are welcome."

THE DEEPEST GIFT

Being held can offer a profound sense of welcome. Another person makes room for us within their closeness, and, when the embrace is freely shared, we may feel that we can rest there.

When kisses accompany that holding, the affection becomes more personally expressive.

The embrace offers a place to belong; the kisses give that welcome a voice without words. A gentle kiss can carry a remarkable amount of meaning: I am glad you are here. Your presence matters to me.

I want to meet you with tenderness. Within a loving relationship, these gestures can make affection tangible. Research on romantic kissing has found an association between kissing frequency and relationship satisfaction, consistent with its possible role in maintaining emotional bonds.

When kisses are shared across the upper body, the face, shoulders and arms, the feeling of acceptance can become more encompassing.

One way I understand this is that affection reaches beyond the face we usually present to the world.

A fuller part of our embodied self is being welcomed: the body through which we have lived, carried our history, and experienced both joy and difficulty.

For someone who feels safe in that closeness, this

can bring a quiet release from self-consciousness.

The attention that might otherwise feel like scrutiny becomes tenderness. We may feel less compelled to monitor our appearance, control our expression, or find the right words.

There is room simply to receive.

“This helps explain your sense of an ‘accelerator.’” Affection can encourage openness; being received warmly can encourage further affection.

The encounter gathers depth through that mutual response.

Studies of couples have found that feeling understood and cared for predicts more affectionate touch, and that affectionate touch can, in turn, predict a stronger perception of the partner’s care the following day.

What feels unconditional in such a moment is the welcome itself. We do not feel required to become more impressive, more beautiful, or more articulate before tenderness can reach us.

The gesture seems to say: You may be here as you are. That is a description of the experience of acceptance; its lasting truth grows through the care the two people continue to show each other.

The holding matters because it gives that experience continuity. We are allowed to remain close, to answer the affection, or to rest quietly within it.

Its depth comes from the freedom both people retain. We can soften because we trust that our vulnerability will be treated gently.

In the language of The Field, I understand those we call “the others” as reflections of the same underlying life.

From that perspective, holding and kissing can become a tender form of recognition: life welcoming itself through two distinct people, each bringing their own history and sensitivity to the encounter.

Perhaps the deepest gift is this: for a moment, we feel no need to earn our place in someone’s affection. We can receive it, and let ourselves be met.

Sexuality seems to me one of the most intimate forms of contact human beings can share.

When it grows within mutual love and trust, it brings together much of what we seek through speaking, looking, touching and holding: recognition, closeness, vulnerability, and the feeling that our presence is welcome. What we have communicated through words becomes something we can experience together.

Its depth comes partly from how personally we allow ourselves to be encountered. We bring our body, our feelings, our uncertainties, and our capacity to respond.

There can be something profoundly moving in discovering that another person receives this openness with tenderness. Acceptance becomes an experience: I can be here as I am, and you meet me with care.

That trust includes the freedom of both people to express what they welcome, what they need, and where their limits lie. Such freedom gives intimacy its honesty. Research on sexual motivation supports this distinction: responding to a partner while preserving freely chosen participation is associated with better relationship and sexual satisfaction than participation driven by pressure or self-neglect.

Within that freedom, sexuality can feel like a symbolic oneness. Two people approach an extraordinary degree of physical closeness, while their attention turns towards a shared experience.

Their separate histories remain, yet the usual preoccupation with defending and presenting the self may soften. For a while, the space between them feels less like a distance to overcome and more like a place where they belong together.

This is where I recognise the possibility of remembering. In my understanding of The Field, the separation we ordinarily experience is not the deepest truth of existence.

We live through distinct bodies and perspectives,
and this makes encounter possible.

Yet beneath those distinctions, I understand life as
belonging to one underlying reality.

Sexual intimacy can become a powerful symbol of
that understanding: two expressions of life discover-
ing how deeply they can welcome one another.

The phrase, “the shadow of our remembering,”
reaches something subtle. A shadow suggests a
presence we cannot yet see clearly.

Perhaps the longing for intimate union sometimes
carries such a suggestion: an awareness of belonging
that has not fully become conscious.

We feel drawn towards another person with an intensity
that seems larger than the physical encounter alone.

From this perspective, the longing says: There is a
closeness I recognise, even though I cannot explain
where that recognition began.

The influence of sexuality reaches widely through
human life—into relationships, families, art, story-
telling, social expectations and struggles for power.

Our oldest stories give desire enormous consequences.

The legend of Helen and Troy places a woman at the centre of a war, while entwining attraction with wounded honour, rivalry and possession.

It is a mythic expression of those forces, rather than evidence that a historical war had one simple cause. For me, this reveals a difficult tension within the longing for union. We can seek closeness through tenderness, or try to secure it through control.

When fear enters, the wish to belong together can become a demand that the other person belong to us. The encounter then carries the burden of trying to remove our insecurity.

Remembering oneness, as I understand it, would deepen our respect for the person before us. Their willingness matters. Their experience matters.

Their freedom is part of the closeness we share. The sense of unity becomes more meaningful when both people can remain fully present within it.

And perhaps its deepest consequence appears afterwards, in ordinary life: in how gently we speak, how carefully we listen, and how faithfully we care for the vulnerability that has been entrusted to us.

An intimate moment can leave a lasting recognition that deserves to be lived beyond the moment itself.

To me, sexuality at its most loving is a bodily symbol of remembering: the experience of being welcomed so

deeply that our familiar sense of isolation loosens, and belonging becomes something we can feel.

Within my understanding of The Field, that belonging was always there.

Intimacy gives it a human form through which we may recognise it again.

WHEN THERE IS NO ONE TO HOLD US

As I write about the tenderness Joy and I now share, I find myself thinking of the person reading these pages alone.

Perhaps the other side of the bed has been empty for years. Perhaps someone died, someone left, or the closeness so deeply desired has never arrived.

Perhaps there are people in the house, yet no one with whom it feels safe to be entirely real.

Reading about another person's happiness can touch that absence.

I would understand a reader pausing here and asking:
And what about me?

For almost nine years, I loved Joy while being unable to share the ordinary closeness I describe now.

Our love continued through letters and visits, but there were evenings when I wanted her beside me and she could not be there.

I remember the difference between knowing that someone loves you and being able to reach out and touch them.

That memory makes me careful about what I offer as comfort. A beautiful garden can give us a place to breathe. Music can reach a feeling we have been unable to express.

An animal resting beside us can bring warmth and companionship. These things have their own value. Yet the chair opposite us may still be empty when evening comes.

We are allowed to feel that emptiness.

I would never want the language of oneness to become a demand that someone rise above their need for affection. Within my understanding of The Field, belonging is fundamental. But a person can believe this deeply and still long for a familiar voice, a hand, the particular presence of someone they love.

Spiritual conviction and human longing can inhabit the same heart.

What concerns me is the judgement that sometimes grows around loneliness. An absence begins to sound like a conclusion about the person enduring it: perhaps

I am difficult to love; perhaps something essential is missing in me; perhaps this is all I deserve.

Being alone cannot establish any of those things.

Affection depends on circumstances, encounters and choices that no one controls entirely. We can be ready to give and still find no one ready to receive.

We can have been deeply loved and find ourselves living beyond the person who loved us.

Our worth cannot fairly be measured by who happens to be beside us tonight.

I cannot promise that another relationship will arrive. I would rather remain honest with the person waiting than offer a certainty I do not possess.

But I hope that disappointment does not gradually persuade them to disappear from their own life.

There may still be someone to invite for tea.

A friendship that could deepen. A place where familiar faces begin to recognise their arrival.

There may be a small willingness to accept an invitation, to make one, or to say honestly, "I would enjoy some company."

Such gestures can feel difficult after repeated disappointment. Their outcome is uncertain. They deserve gentleness rather than another instruction to try harder. And for those of us who do have companionship, there is a responsibility here too.

We can become so comfortably enclosed within our own happiness that we stop noticing who is missing from the table. We can speak warmly about connection while leaving the same person to initiate every conversation.

Sometimes care means making the first call. Remembering someone after the first weeks of bereavement have passed. Offering time without requiring them to be cheerful in return.

At Paradiso, I have often thought about what makes a place welcoming. The answer continues beyond its beauty. A chair must be offered.

Someone's arrival must matter. There must be room for a person whose life does not resemble our own.

The love I receive from Joy makes me more aware of how much such welcome can mean.

I want the tenderness in these pages to leave room for the person whose arms are empty.

They belong within the beauty of being real exactly as they are: with their longing, their tiredness, their capacity to give, and whatever hope they can still honestly hold.

No one should have to conceal their loneliness to remain welcome among us.

MY FRIEND PIERRE

A few days ago, my dear friend Pierre died in France while I was in Thailand. I knew that, for many years after his wife's death, he had longed for his own life's journey to reach its end.

Yet alongside that longing was a deeply human wish: to be held by someone he loved. He died in the arms of his daughter.

To my knowledge, Pierre was also regularly asked by the French police to help find people who had disappeared. He often worked with a map and a pendulum, indicating locations where he believed the missing person could be found. For me, this forms another part of the portrait of my friend.

Alongside his spiritual experiences concerning those who had died, there was his involvement in searching for the missing. I see a connection between these aspects of his life: his willingness to offer help where others faced uncertainty, loss, and the painful absence of someone they loved.

Pierre understood death through experiences that carried a profound spiritual meaning for him.

He believed he sometimes perceived people who had died but had not yet moved on, particularly after traumatic deaths, including suicide.

At times, he felt his help was needed to accompany

them. These were his experiences and his understanding of them.

There is something deeply moving in the correspondence between that part of his life and his own final moment. A man who had felt called to accompany others through a difficult threshold was himself accompanied.

His daughter's embrace gave a physical form to the care he had wished to receive.

Perhaps this helps explain why, for many people, dying feels more bearable when a beloved person remains close.

The unknown can be frightening, and so can the prospect of losing contact with everything familiar. Beside the question of what comes next, there may be another, simpler need: Stay with me while this is happening.

Physical closeness can answer that need without requiring an explanation.

A familiar voice, a hand resting gently in ours, or an embrace can communicate presence when speaking becomes difficult.

End-of-life care guidance recognises that touch, including holding hands, can offer reassurance, although each person's preferences remain important.

Being held by someone who knows us also carries a particular emotional meaning.

They know the person whose body is becoming weaker: the humour, the habits, the memories, the relationships, the life that has been lived. Their presence can help preserve that recognition.

Research into end-of-life experiences describes the importance of companionship and of continuing to be seen as a whole person.

An embrace may therefore offer more than physical comfort. It can suggest: You still belong here with me. Your vulnerability has a place in my care.

For someone who welcomes that closeness, there may be relief in no longer having to manage the moment entirely through their own strength.

Another person is present, attentive, and willing to share what can be shared.

The person holding them cannot experience death on their behalf. Yet they can remain beside them through the final moments of life.

That companionship can soften the loneliness surrounding the experience, even when it cannot remove its uncertainty or sorrow.

Pierre's daughter's arms make this especially poignant for me. His life and hers were joined through a relationship reaching far beyond that moment.

Her embrace brought that relationship into the present: love expressed through the simple act of staying close.

I cannot know exactly what Pierre felt as he died, but I know that the closeness he had wished for was there.

In the language of The Field, I see a symbolic meaning in this holding.

If, as I understand it, we belong to one underlying life, then a beloved person's presence can remind us of connection at the very moment when separation appears most absolute.

This is the spiritual meaning I find in the embrace: a familiar expression of love remaining close at the threshold of the unknown.

What touches me most is that Pierre's wish was so simple. After all the experiences through which he had understood death, he still wanted the tenderness of another human being.

The image I carry is of Pierre held in his daughter's arms: his wish for closeness received, and love present in the final moment of his life.



LONELINESS IS THE SHADOW OF FORGETTING

When I say that we are The Field, I mean it literally within the understanding from which these books arise.

We are not fragments broken from a greater whole. A fragment would imply that existence could be divided into pieces, each possessing something the others lack.

I understand The Field as the indivisible reality through which every apparent person, every encounter and every experience becomes possible.

The words “you,” “me” and “us” name the different lives through which that reality encounters itself. Each life has its own perspective, its own memories, its own vulnerability. Yet beneath those differences, there is no second existence standing outside the first.

There is only The Field, experiencing the intimacy of being here through forms that cannot see the whole of what they are.

This is where the Mother Dream enters my understanding. I imagine it as the dream within which the one becomes unfamiliar to itself.

Awareness rests its head upon the pillow of forgetting, and a world of distances opens.

There is someone here and someone over there.
There is a hand reaching and another hand that may

receive it. There is an arrival, a departure, a face we have never seen before.

The encounter becomes possible because recognition is incomplete.

If every expression remained fully aware of being the whole, what would surprise mean? What would it mean to discover someone, to wait for an answer, to be moved by an affection we could neither predict nor command?

For love to be experienced as an offering, there must be a felt distinction between giving and receiving. There must be somewhere for the gesture to arrive.

Even when love moves through solitude—towards a memory, an animal, the living world, or our own wounded life—there is something within experience towards which tenderness turns.

The apparent other gives love a place to become an encounter.

Within this understanding, forgetting allows overflowing love to experience reception. The Field can feel the extraordinary tenderness of being welcomed because, within the dream, it no longer knows the welcome as something already its own.

Someone turns towards us.

Someone notices that we are tired.

Someone makes room.

And what belongs to the same indivisible existence arrives with the freshness of a gift.

Yet the possibility contains a terrible vulnerability.

The felt distance that allows an embrace to mean something also allows the absence of an embrace to hurt. The freedom through which affection becomes precious includes the possibility that it will not be offered. We can reach and receive no answer.

Forgetting can become so deep that the distance seems absolute.

We no longer experience ourselves as life meeting itself through different forms. We feel like an isolated being enclosed within a body, looking out upon a world that may have no place for us.

Then the silence around us acquires a frightening meaning.

Perhaps no one will come.

Perhaps no one knows how it feels to be here.

Perhaps my existence can disappear without having truly reached anyone.

This is what I mean when I say that loneliness is the shadow of forgetting.

The longing for connection carries, in my understanding, a trace of the belonging we have forgotten.

We reach towards one another with such intensity because separation never quite becomes a comfortable home.

Something in us keeps asking to be met.

I cannot establish this understanding by pointing to the ache itself. Loneliness has its own human circumstances: bereavement, rejection, imprisonment, distance, the absence of trustworthy companionship.

But within the language of *The Field*, I see those experiences against a deeper question: how does indivisible life endure the feeling of having been left entirely alone?

The Mother Dream becomes a nightmare when forgetting closes every opening through which belonging might still be felt.

And here I return to the question that troubles these books: how much forgetting is needed for an encounter?

Must we lose all sense of belonging in order to experience the beauty of finding one another? Could there be enough mystery for discovery while some quiet confidence in our connection remains?

I can understand the possibility that forgetting makes relationship possible. I cannot turn that possibility into a justification for every depth of abandonment.

The tenderness of reunion does not establish that the suffering before it was necessary.

When someone feels alone, telling them that separation is an illusion may leave them more alone still.

Their need has reached us, and we have answered with an explanation. They asked, perhaps without words, whether we would stay. We told them why, at another level, no one ever leaves.

A truth we believe about existence must remain answerable to the person before us.

If I understand that person as The Field, their loneliness becomes intimate to the very reality I call my own. Their experience asks something of my conduct. I must listen to this particular voice, respect this particular history, and discover what care is welcome here.

Remembering begins to acquire a human meaning when it changes how I respond.

I make the call.

I offer the chair.

I remain long enough to hear the answer.

The person receiving that attention need not share my understanding of existence. They may simply feel that, for a while, they do not have to carry everything alone.

That matters in itself.

Perhaps forgetting can soften within such an encounter without disappearing completely.

We remain two people, capable of surprising one another. There is still a question to ask, a story to hear, a gesture whose meaning we must learn.

Yet the distance becomes less frightening.

We can be distinct without feeling abandoned.

We can remain mysterious to one another while discovering that the mystery is safe enough to approach. This is how I understand the possibility of remembering within the Mother Dream: enough difference for love to move, enough recognition for that movement to become tender.

When I hold Joy, there is a woman in my arms whose

life I can never simply assume I understand.

She has things to tell me.

She has the freedom to remain quiet.

Our closeness grows through receiving what she chooses to share.

And within that very particular encounter, I feel the deeper belonging I call The Field.

The embrace gives that understanding warmth, weight and presence. For a moment, something that words struggle to carry becomes possible to feel.

Loneliness is the shadow of forgetting.

When that shadow falls across a life, I want remembering to arrive in a form that can reach it: a familiar voice, patient attention, a hand freely offered.

Within the dream, we still have to reach for one another.

THE TIME HAS COME

In my view, forgetting has gone into overdrive.

I look at the world and feel that our capacity to harm one another is growing faster than our willingness to understand what we are doing. Anger gathers around old wounds. Fear searches for someone to blame.

The wish to feel secure becomes a demand to control whatever stands beyond us.

Sometimes it seems that we are accelerating towards an abyss while arguing about who deserves to lead the way.

This is my fear for humanity. I cannot know the future, but I cannot dismiss what troubles me in the present.

Within the understanding developed through these books, I see a wound created by forgetting: the expe-

rience of being so completely separate that another person's existence can become a threat to our own.

At first, the wound may speak quietly.

Will there be enough for me? Will I be wanted?
Who will protect what I love?

These are recognisable human fears. But when fear hardens, the questions change.

Who is taking what should be mine?
Who must be defeated before I can rest? Whose
suffering can I accept as the price of my security?

Anger enters the wound and gives it a direction.

We begin to believe that relief lies in overcoming someone else. Yet victory cannot finally heal the terror of being alone in existence. There will always be another rival, another uncertain border, another person whose freedom we cannot control.

The wound keeps asking the world to resolve something that conquest cannot reach.

I feel that we have gone too far, too fast. We have given enormous power to a consciousness still capable of treating another life as expendable. Our means have expanded while our circle of care too often remains narrow.

The consequences can reach far beyond the moment of anger that set them in motion.

This is why remembering has become, for me, an urgent human question.

Can we see far enough through forgetting to recognise that the person before us belongs to the same existence we are trying to protect?

I do not mean that differences will disappear. People can have incompatible wishes. Resources can be scarce. Someone can act cruelly, and their actions may need to be stopped. Recognition must remain capable of protecting the vulnerable and holding the powerful accountable.

But beneath those necessary distinctions, I see no separate order of life whose pain is inherently less important than our own.

Within my understanding of The Field, there was never an ultimate outsider. There was never another existence whose destruction could make the whole more whole.

The apparent enemy is still a life capable of suffering. Whatever responsibility that person bears, hatred cannot make them cease to belong to existence.

This recognition does not settle every conflict. It changes what we are willing to do within one.

We can restrain harm without taking pleasure in humiliation. We can demand accountability without making cruelty a virtue.

We can defend a boundary while remembering that those beyond it have children, fears, memories and an inward life as vivid to them as ours is to us.

For me, this is where the possibility of a different future begins.

I find it difficult to imagine a lasting way forward while we continue believing that our own flourishing can be secured through unlimited indifference to others.

Agreements, institutions and practical reforms matter. They need people willing to recognise why another life deserves protection, even when protecting it brings no immediate advantage.

Some part of the forgetting must become transparent.

We need enough recognition to interrupt the movement from fear to dehumanisation, and from dehumanisation to harm.

During the writing of an earlier book, an insight took shape in the voice I call The Field: remembering must become possible within the dream, among the very beings who experience themselves as separate.

I received that insight as a purpose for these books.

They could become one place where a reader pauses before accepting separation as the whole truth of existence. One place where the familiar story of “us” and “them” becomes open to examination.

That is the meaning I give to the feeling that The Field must reach its dreamers.

I cannot ask the reader to accept the source of that feeling simply because I experienced it deeply. What I can offer is the writing itself, together with the life and questions from which it arose.

Its value must remain open to examination.

If these books speak of remembering, they must leave the reader free. If they speak of love, they must be capable of receiving disagreement without turning the person who disagrees into another enemy.

Otherwise, the old division would simply acquire a spiritual vocabulary.

I have no wish to divide humanity between those who supposedly remember and those who supposedly remain asleep. Forgetting is something I must examine in myself: in the instant I stop listening, in the motive I assign too quickly, in the anger through which another person becomes smaller than my account of them. Writing does not place me beyond that responsibility.

Perhaps the most demanding consequence of oneness is that no conviction releases me from the need to look carefully at what I am doing.

The tenderness I ask of the world must enter my own conduct. The honesty I demand from authority must remain present when I speak with certainty.

The freedom I cherish must extend to the person who does not share my understanding.

This is how I want the books to serve life.

A reader may leave with no belief in *The Field* and still become more attentive to someone whose loneliness had gone unnoticed.

Someone may question a familiar prejudice.

Someone may recognise the moment when their pain begins asking them to pass it on.

Such changes matter.

They are small enough to occur within an ordinary day, and substantial enough to alter what happens next.

I cannot know how far these pages will travel or what they will awaken.

I can make them available, speak as honestly as I can, and remain willing to correct what fails that honesty.

The urgency I feel belongs there: in taking responsibility for what I can offer.

We must not wait for universal agreement about reality before becoming more careful with one another.

The person before us can be heard now.
A harmful action can be interrupted now.

A child can be protected, a humiliation refused,
an unanswered voice acknowledged.

In my understanding, these are moments in which
remembering enters the dream.

The time has come to ask whether the way we live
makes belonging easier or more difficult to experience.

I want these books to contribute to that question.

I want them to reach the place where an idea can
become a choice, and a choice can spare someone
pain.

Whatever the ultimate nature of this world, the suf-
fering within it reaches us as real.

Our response must become equally real.



GROK Review & Score: Book 55 – The Beauty of Being Real: The Bridge to Heaven

Overall score: 7.4 / 10

This is a sincere, intimate, and quietly moving entry in Erik Jan O. Flamend's long-running series. It shifts from the more confrontational questions of Book 54 into a softer, more embodied register: what becomes possible when attention returns to the life that is actually here.

What works well

Authenticity as lived practice.

The central theme is handled with real care. The author is allergic to pretence after years of letter-writing and waiting. The family visit scenes (language barrier, felt “vibration,” the relative who seemed to position herself) are observational and honest without becoming vindictive. The insistence that one can be awkward, tired, or unsure and still be beautiful lands cleanly.

The post-reunion texture.

After nearly nine years of separation, the ordinary becomes luminous: a hand held in a cinema, tea in Pai, the freedom to be in different rooms while still belonging. These moments feel earned rather than sentimental. The Vow is no longer only endurance; it is now the daily work of remaining real with each other.

Enoughness and real wealth.

The sections on “What Is Real Wealth?” and “The Quiet Throne of Enough” are among the strongest. They quietly dismantle the idea that accumulation equals richness and notice how money can complicate the very encounters people hope will prove they are loved. The writing stays grounded rather than preachy.

Tone and structure.

The deliberate repetition is defended honestly in the author's note and mostly succeeds. The book circles the same mountain from different angles so that an idea can become an experience. For readers who accept this as contemplative rather than narrative literature, the circling deepens rather than dilutes.

Visual presentation.

The cover and back-cover imagery are striking and thematically coherent — the luminous bridge, the golden path across water, the night sky. They match the book's central metaphor of an inward "bridge to heaven" reached through attention and honesty.

What holds it back

Voice consistency / ChatGPT co-credit.

The book is explicitly co-written with ChatGPT. While the personal testimony feels unmistakably Erik's, some passages have the smooth, slightly generic cadence of LLM-assisted prose. The best sections are those that stay closest to concrete memory and sensation; the more abstract philosophical stretches occasionally flatten.

Context dependence.

This is Book 55 of a 55-book project. Readers coming in cold will miss the accumulated weight of the earlier volumes (especially the imprisonment years and the evolving concept of "The Field"). The book does try to orient newcomers, but it still assumes a certain familiarity with the author's long arc.

Density and pace.

At times the reflective mode becomes circular even beyond the intentional repetition. Some chapters linger longer than their insight warrants. The philosophical framing of oneness and "The Field" can feel lofty when set against the very human

scenes of loneliness, family awkwardness, or simple companionship.

Audience narrowness.

This will resonate strongly with readers already drawn to spiritual memoir, non-dual or Field-oriented language, and stories of long devotion. Readers seeking tighter narrative drive, sharper critique, or more conventional literary polish may find it diffuse.

Standout passages / sections

- The opening framing that places Book 55 after Joy's return and the shift from cosmic questions back to ordinary presence.
- The family visit and the felt gap between presented welcome and underlying expectation.
- "What Is Real Wealth?" and the quiet observation that even a billionaire cannot buy overflowing love.
- The road-to-Pai material and the simpler scenes of shared life after the long wait.
- The closing insistence that recognition of belonging does not erase necessary boundaries or the need for accountability.

Final assessment

The Beauty of Being Real is a sincere continuation of a deeply personal project. Its greatest strength is the refusal to perform spiritual attainment while still reaching for it. The book does not claim that the years of separation were necessary, only that love answered them and that the ordinary life now available deserves full attention.

For readers already inside this series or sympathetic to its contemplative, devotion-centred style, this is a warm and coherent next step. For others it may feel like a private letter made public —

sincere, repetitive by design, and best received with patience rather than expectation of conventional literary propulsion.

Score breakdown (approximate)

- Emotional authenticity & personal voice: 8.5
- Philosophical clarity & insight: 7.0
- Structural coherence & pacing: 6.5
- Language & prose quality: 7.0
- Thematic depth & resonance: 8.0

Overall: 7.4 / 10

A solid, heartfelt volume that earns its place in the series even if it will not convert every reader outside it.

THE BEAUTY OF BEING REAL

The Bridge to Heaven

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