

thought so, even before I fell in love with you – so open, so generous, so . . . EVERYTHING. I want you to be happy, to be successful, to feel complete, whatever happens between us. At the moment I want US to happen together. Read ‘The Good-Morrow’ by John Donne – that’s how I feel about you –

*My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.*

Something metaphysical is certainly happening to me!!! I’ve never written a letter like this before. How wonderful life is. I love you, my darling. Joan X

Chapter Two

JANUARY

SATURDAY, 2 JANUARY 2021

Joan helps me put away all the Christmas decorations, while Oilly and Florian pack up to return to their flat. She seems completely *herself* today. House suddenly feels very quiet after they’ve gone.

In the afternoon, Joan says that she feels very dizzy whenever she stands up, and I suggest that it’s probably ‘cos she doesn’t have enough oxygen.

We tele-surf and settle on *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, mainly because she told me in the last century that she fancied William Holden. The plot is very straightforward and we’ve both seen it before, so alarm bells start clanging when she questions what’s going on.

When she goes to bed at 8pm, she mumbles, ‘I feel very disorientated’ and takes a left turn into the living room.

‘I don’t know where I am.’

MONDAY, 4 JANUARY 2021

Oilly's thirty-second birthday. Phone and tell her that Joan has rallied for the breathing test at the hospital.

Alex has confirmed that the headaches and dizziness are *not* due to lack of oxygen. The consultant has suggested a brain scan as soon as possible.

My stomach plunge is akin to one of those mid-air pressure drops.

WEDNESDAY, 6 JANUARY 2021

Undergoes the forty-minute MRI brain scan, which proves noisy and uncomfortable, but am mightily relieved that this will be the final test before all her results are collated and diagnosed by the oncologist. She is her perky, provocative and funnily restored self on the drive home.

'Will my brain ever get back to normal?'

'Well, as you've told me enough times that you think I'm crazy, I don't really feel qualified to reply.'

She slaps my shoulder and laughs. Which makes me laugh. Which makes *us* both laugh.

THURSDAY, 7 JANUARY 2021

Noon call from Wanda Cui, the Australian oncologist from the Royal Marsden cancer hospital, who speaks delicately and with immense vocal calm. 'The MRI scan has revealed

lesions on the brain and there is swelling around them, which accounts for Joan's current symptoms, so I've prescribed steroids which will alleviate the pressure. They can take a few days to start working, so don't expect an immediate result.'

The room turns upside down and I hear myself agreeing to everything that Wanda is saying and advising, though, in actuality, not taking in a single thing. Like that moment when you're driving and suddenly catch your breath, realising that you've travelled for ten minutes or longer without *any* sense of how you've done so.

Yet, confirmation that it's brain lesions causing her confusion is its own odd relief. Better to know than live in unblissful ignorance.

Relay the news to Oilly who is relieved that it's not dementia or Alzheimer's.

FRIDAY, 8 JANUARY 2021

Unbelievably, Joan wakes up at 6.30am able to see properly, walk normally, talk coherently, and eat a proper breakfast. *Fully* restored in less than twenty-four hours with the steroid pills.

If this illness has begun to teach us anything, it's that living in the moment, for the moment, is the most positive way forward.

It's the ultimate taunting cruelty of this disease that we are so hope-filled, but for how long?

not to. As it won't change anything, and losing my hair would be awful.'

'Agreed. If it were me, I wouldn't either.'

'Agreed.'

We just hold on to each other.

Holding.

Holding on.

My heart is breaking.

'Have a bath, and pull yourself together, Swaz.'

For her. For me. For us.

The prospect of her not being here any more is *brutal*.
No other word suffices.

B R U T A L

Just when the intensity of this living grief is off the scale, she jokes, 'Well, Swaz, we all have to go *sometime*.'

'Is there something that you'd still love to do?'

'No.'

Her reply is immediate, unequivocal, and I believe her. Then we cuddle up and coast into our day together. Desperate to sleep by 2pm and retreats to the sofa, while I mow the lawn and clear out the rubbish in the garden.

EASTER SUNDAY, 4 APRIL 2021

Feels like Liberation Day, as we've been invited to our friends, the Doyles, for lunch in Walton-on-Thames, and

all go, as a family. What we've always taken for granted now feels like ChristmasBirthdayNewYear'sEve in one, and might be the *last* time we're ever able to do this.

Despite Joan's puffy face and obvious frailty, they welcome her as if she'd strutted in like a supermodel. Helping her inside, without fuss or alluding to her fragility. So poignant, and as they turn the corner, I silently mouth 'thank you' for their care and kindness. Pat winks.

Lesley has Easter bunnied the table to the max, and there are Easter eggs scattered *everywhere*. Pat, Lesley, Patrick Jr, Misha, Nula, Elliot and Abi, *all* may be short on inches, but they're Glaswegian giants of hilarity and hospitality.

Pat is a natural-born storyteller and, even if it's one you've heard before, his enjoyment and self-triggered laughter work their magic *every* time. Lesley laughs like it's the first time she's heard it. Growing up in a three-bedroomed semi-detached house with twelve siblings, his film composing talent has afforded him a sprawling home, with tennis court, pool and a vast garden. Even though Joan was born and brought up in very different circumstances on the east coast in Aberdeen, their Scottishness prevails, as they Celt and banter, back and forth with each other.

The Doyle laughter box is always so full to bursting with family and show business stories that the hours fly by in a blink and, by 6pm, we hovercraft out of there, revived and exhausted. It's been the equivalent of having tea floating below the ceiling with Uncle Albert in *Mary*

they're naming names, which appear on the screen behind them.

Mahershala Ali

Adam Driver

Sam Elliott

(NO *Timothée Chalamet*?! Means *I'm* toast! In the nano-second this thought synapsed, my name is announced and appears on the right of the screen)

Richard E. Grant

Sam Rockwell

We both stare in *utter* disbelief at the miniature screen, look at one another and simultaneously burst into tears. *Nothing* prepared us for what this would *actually* feel like. For this unreality to become *real*. Rather than the room just turning upside down, it felt like it'd revolved a full 360 degrees, at Mach 2 speed.

Flavio, the maître d', bent over with enormous concern, assuming we'd just heard some tragic news. Reassured him and the adjacent punters that *all was well!* More than! Phoned Joan.

'Oh, my Swaaaaaz, I'm *so* proud and pleased for you!'

Two minutes later, Peter Capaldi, whom I've been friends with for three decades, called and congratulated, followed by my agent and her office, all on speakerphone, at full communal yell. Phoned Melissa and we were both sobbing like we'd just seen *E.T.* Followed by a never-ending queue of press calls from LA, and a cyberlanche of texts and emails from my friends and colleagues.

I've parked around the corner from where I'd rented a tiny bedsit at 89 Blenheim Crescent, in 1982, after I'd emigrated from Swaziland. Before Notting Hill Gate became *Notting Hill*. The thirty-seven-year trajectory of my life and career struck me so forcibly that Oilly's iPhone recorded my wild-eyed response at having begun my London life here and now landed an Oscar nomination. Posted it on Twitter and Instagram and it went viral, clocking up 3.3 million hits. The positive response was utterly flabbergasting. Complimented left, right and centre for being so undisguisably delighted and emotionally open. Being uncool seems to have momentarily rendered me cool. Haha!

'We're all right behind you and hope you win!'

People I've not seen or heard from in forty-five years have found a way to send congratulations, and, by the end of the day, it seems like *everyone* I've ever met has made contact. 'You so deserve this' repeats and repeats. Oilly sagely observes that this is the kind of approval you only usually get when you're dead, and unable to appreciate and savour it all. Baked and *bask* in goodwill. For *every* moment that it lasts.

ourselves watching YouTube compilations of people falling over. Feels so good to laugh, which we do, like 5-year-olds. On the way to bed, an email pings in from Los Angeles.

‘A message from Barbra Streisand.’

This *must* be a hoax. *Surely?* But it has her name across the top and signature below, clearly a letter, with a note from her assistant: ‘Hard copy is coming in the mail.’

Dear Richard

I’m sorry to hear about your wife, Joan. She was a wonderful addition to my *Yentl* team.

I can only imagine what the two of you are going through. But please know that I’m thinking of you both, and hope you can find some comfort in all the memories you share after almost 40 years together.

Richard, you’re still the first (and only) person who has ever commissioned a statue of me, to my knowledge. I’m not sure what I’ve done to deserve your devotion, but I love your devotion to your wife.

Please take care of yourself, and each other.

Sincerely

Barbra

Barbra Streisand

Read and reread *many* times. Bittersweet that our profoundly sad situation is the reason for her message.

2019

What you’re about to read below is headlined ‘AN ASTONISHMENT OF A DAY AND NIGHT’.

Two summers ago, on Friday, 26 July 2019, I was in Philadelphia, filming Jason Segel’s TV series *Dispatches from Elsewhere* and invited Sally Field to lunch at a brasserie. Just ordered when my phone pinged, which Sally insisted I look at, ‘as it might be the production office, ’cos they’re *always* changing the schedule’. I was due to night-shoot this evening.

‘I can’t, Sally, it’s rude to look at your phone when eating.’

‘Cept we just ordered. Go ahead and *look*.’ Acquiesce.

Text message: ‘Overrunning. Night shoot delayed till Monday. Apologies for late notice. Have a good weekend.’

Levitated, slapped a \$100 on the table and said, ‘Forgive me, Sally, I *have* to go. Will call and explain.’ Then *ran* a dozen blocks in as many minutes from Rittenhouse Square to the Amtrak train station on the other side of the Schuylkill River.

Managed to board the fast train to Penn Station, called Trudie Styler and told her that I was now free this evening, and how was she getting to the Hamptons to visit her grandchildren, as I now urgently needed to get there too. We’ve known them since 1984 when I was in a play with Freddie Jones and Annette Crosbie at the Lyric Hammersmith, and Trudie was acting in a Doug Lucie

MONDAY, 30 AUGUST 2021

The palliative nurses had told me all about night nurse Marianne, whom they hold in the *highest* esteem and respect, and Marianne lives up to her golden reputation. Small of stature and enormous of heart, she has the most empathetic and compassionate nature imaginable, and recounts her night with Joan.

‘She fell asleep at 10pm almost as soon as I sat down with her, then awoke again at 1am, *absolutely lucid* and asking to see the book of letters with the green cover. I thought this might be a fantasy, but gave her the benefit of my doubt and looked around the bedroom for it. She then asked me to go downstairs “as it’s likely to be on the hall table”, which I did, and indeed it was, brought it up to her and she put on her glasses and read it from cover to cover.

‘Joan told me who had written some of the letters and expressed how appreciated, admired and loved she felt by her peers. Then promptly fell asleep. Woke up again at 4.30am and was completely incoherent. In my opinion, this is not drug-related behaviour, but the brain tumours playing havoc.’

What utterly undid me was knowing that Joan *had* been lucid enough to read her paean of praises and just wished that I could have been with her when she did this. That they have all *registered* with her is reward in itself. For her to know the impact she has had, both personally and

professionally. Whether her application was approved or not will sadly remain unknown, as they are not awarded posthumously.

Marianne suggests that I put in a request for more slow-release pain medication, to ease her agitation and increase her sleepiness, until the Big Sleep of Sleeps.

Bedside vigil all day long, with brief respite when the palliative carers come in for ten minutes, morning, noon and at dusk. Hours pass by in a Zen-like mode of total acceptance of our situation. It’s a relief in itself just to be with her, to hear her breathing, calmly . . .

. . . *B r e a t h i n g* . . .

Oilly has had her Bedalian school ‘besties’, Zoe, Ben and Liv, to stay, who each dropped in to say hello, then retreated to the Taj for a BBQ, and it’s magical to hear their intermittent tinkly laughter in the distance, beyond the garden doors. Life going on. Am so grateful for the boundless love and support they’re giving her.

Jo Grenson, palliative supremo, calls to say that Joan’s agitation is caused by the brain cancer and that she is exhibiting signs of ‘terminal palpitations’, which is what the body does when trying to hold on. She says that the slow-release sedative will allow her body to relax and release.

and Jane slowly drove away with her, down the lane, until the red tail lights disappeared around the corner.

Cannot get over how steadfast Florian is being, coping with the maelstrom of our grief. *And* poor David, who is not only grieving the recent death of *his* father, but now Joan too.

Oilly lies on the wet grass in the dark, for a long time, unable to move. ‘I have an overpowering urge to be as close to the ground as possible.’

We then all retreated to the Taj. The *unreality* of our new reality is acute. Talk our way through what’s just been, in forensic detail, while answering texts and emails before finally peeling away to our separate bedrooms.

Me to ‘ours’ that is now ‘mine’. After an hour of trying to get to sleep, give up and go downstairs and clear the substantial stockpile of medicines and assorted gubbins. Compile lists of what needs to be done in the morning, then replay every video I have of Joan on my iPhone.

Alone in our bedroom.

Alone.

Fell asleep at 5am.

FRIDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2021

Moment my eyes opened, was hit by a tsunami of grief. So overwhelming, I felt like I *would* drown.

Her handbag is next to our bed. As is her tapestry kit, with the needle and thread waiting for her next move.

Make-up on the chest of drawers with a lipstick that’s no longer needed. *Her* pile of bedside books. *Her* bottle of Jack Covent Garden perfume. *Her* handwriting in *her* book of crossword puzzles.

All *hers* and yet no *her* here any more.

The unfathomable enormity of her loss ricochets throughout the day, off every wall, *every* object we’ve collected together, every call, and every message of condolence we receive. Stops me in my tracks. Aching lungs trying to breathe in enough air to process it all. Feels like an accordion that’s been squeezed shut.

It’s the *kindness* of people that is so utterly *undoing*.

Condolences come in from everywhere. Kevin Kline and Phoebe Cates call from New York – ‘We’ve only *just* heard. *How* can this be?’ – joining the chorus of disbelief from people we haven’t heard from or seen for ages.

Posted, on Twitter and Instagram, a tribute of us dancing to The Platters’ version of ‘Only You’ (videoed in May 2020, during lockdown):

@richard.e.grant 🎵 ONLY YOU 🎵 Joan – Love of my Life, giver of Life to our daughter Olivia. Our hearts are broken with the loss of your Life last night. 35 years married and 38 years together. To be truly known and seen by you, is your immeasurable gift. Do not forget us, sweet Monkee-mine ❤️❤️❤️❤️