

Croix Val Mer,  
France

9 November 2037

Darling Jo,

*I am sitting overlooking the sea in Croix Val Mer. The sun is setting and the light has that wonderful limestone quality to it. The vegetation is greener now that summer is over but it feels autumnal, there is a slight chill in the air. The contrast that the light creates between the various colours has a certain harshness to it. It feels like a sunset at the end of a year, the end of an era, perhaps, even, the sunset of a life – mine. Oh, I am sure I will continue to enjoy this view for years to come, at least I certainly hope so, but sunsets have always made me reflective and this one makes me particularly so .*

*Do you realise we have now been friends for 54 years?! Thank you. You have always been more than I could ever have expected from a friend. You have loved and supported me through it all. Your energy, enthusiasm and laughter have been a constant inspiration. I know that were we having this conversation face to face you would now be protesting loudly that it is I who have been an unconditional friend and support for you. How wonderful is it that we should be able to disagree on such a happy subject. We have always said that you were born with all the right chemicals and, if I have the opportunity to come back to this world, I want the same mixture! In case I have not said it to you often enough; thank you. I love you.*

*Love. I suppose so much of our lives have revolved around this issue. I have always held the concept close to my heart and I am very lucky to have been loved and to have loved all my life. Love has so many forms, all equally valuable.*

*I was lucky to have been loved by my parents and to have the opportunity to love them in return both instinctively as a child and then consciously as an adult. I loved them, as you know, very deeply and I miss them to this day. Yet, I still feel them around me, or perhaps more accurately, within me.*

*As I write this I am crying more out of gratitude than loss. I think I actually did get the balance right between loving and caring for them and having my own life. I am glad I told them how much I loved them and that by the end of their days we loved each other unconditionally, with complete acceptance, warts and all. I continue to be proud of who they were, glad that they are so much a part of me. I think that as they look down on me tonight, they too are proud of me, the person they created, and I know they will be happy that I am happy.*

*I have also been lucky to have been loved by so many friends. People who are truly honest, whose hearts have been in the right place while firmly connected to their heads; a winning combination. To have been the recipient of such love carries enormous responsibility and I can honestly say there were few times when I failed to live up to that responsibility. Perhaps this proves that karma does exist, and that what you give is what you get or what you get is what you give. I don't think I know a single person who has had an 'easy' life. But life is easier when you can give and receive love. I will never forget the Christmas when I realized I was far more excited to see the faces of my family when I gave them the gifts I had so carefully selected than I was to know what lay wrapped up under the Christmas tree for me. I pity*

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*those who have lived long lives and never known that the greatest pleasure of all is to give, in all its forms.*

*And last, at least on the direct theme of love, is Kim. We have been each other's soul mate, lover and best friend for 31 years! How I despaired all those years ago of finding such a special person. I suppose I didn't help myself much in this respect until I moved back from Hong Kong, though I would not change those fantastic years there, even if I could. And then, out of the blue, came the most wonderful person to have walked this planet.*

*We have worked hard on our relationship and it has not always been easy. But as I look at Kim now, the two of us well past our prime, I am more in love than ever and I know it is reciprocated. You know, the only reason I would want to live forever is that I can't bear the thought of not being with Kim. Apart from being separated, I have no fear of death, just such gratitude for having had such a remarkable life.*

*Every human being is a unique blend of success, failure, joy and disappointment. I suppose that I slightly regret not fully knowing this to be true until I reached about forty. I am sure I would have had far less fear had I known and accepted it earlier. Needless fear, of others and of failure, limits one's ability more than any other factor in life; believe you can achieve something and, in most cases, you will. I am grateful to have lived by this philosophy for the second half of my life. It has paid handsome dividends.*

*We were in Shanghai last year. What a metropolis it has become since 1993, when I first tramped its bleak, damp streets filled with cyclists wearing Mao jackets! We went to 308 Plaza, the building in which we invested in 1997. It was an extraordinary feeling to look up at its 40 floors of gleaming glass knowing that it would not be there had I not sat in a hotel room for three solid days writing the feasibility study. If I had thought about it at the time I am sure that I would have said it was impossible. But I just did it. And now there is an amazing building that will survive far longer than me, perhaps for hundreds of years. Even if I alone know that it is a monument to the Tom Preston 'can-do' attitude, it is enough. Many people leave far less indelible marks on this world.*

*As I look back at my career, I feel amazingly privileged. It allowed me to live and work all over the world, meet some real characters, some of whom, were I to describe them, might be thought of as figments of a deranged imagination. I have seen many different cultures from the inside and built and maintained relationships spanning the globe. I may not have made as much money as I would have done in a more conventional career, or one that had been more focused on the creation of wealth. However, I regard the experience as being as valuable, if not more valuable, than the money. Would I trade my experience for \$20 million dollars? Categorically: No.*

*That said, how fortunate am I to be sitting here, now, with the sun disappearing below a blue grey horizon, knowing that Kim and I will be secure in whatever remains of our lives. We have the wonderful opportunity to spend time here in the South of France, to be at home in London when we feel like it and to know we will be cared for in old age and ill health – no matter what.*

*My career has also provided opportunities to make a valuable contribution to the lives of others. I suppose a good example of this is Glymen, the penniless, semi-starved tout we picked out of a crowd of hopeful and desperate taxi drivers at the airport in Accra when he had*

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*nothing. He drove us around that week, remember? Then at the end of it we gave him a job. To know he is growing old, content in his house with his wife, children and grandchildren, sustained by his total trust in God, is a wonderful feeling. I don't take sole credit. Much goes to you, Jo, and to the man himself but it is a small example of how we can all provide opportunities to people who then go on to use them in an ethical, honest and well considered way.*

*When I look back, I am awed by the twists and turns that led me into executive coaching. I still can't believe how lucky I was to find the career I love so much at the age of 40. You know, even now I can't give it up! I cannot think of a better way to earn a good living while helping others find the best in themselves, by getting the most out of their jobs and leading richer lives. It seems almost fantastical.*

*Thomas Preston & Associates is going from strength to strength with the 'young blood'. I am so proud of all the coaches and the back-up team. Can you believe that it is now the biggest executive coaching firm in Europe? Quite amazing, and a tribute to the people and the power of coaching!*

*I suppose on the macro level my recent charity work for the homeless, 'Street to Home' is one of the things I am most proud of. It is the culmination of my values, my experience, and my wish to make a difference, plus my commercial acumen and management skills. To know that I began a self-sustaining organization that flourishes and has already helped countless people, is an achievement about which I am both humbled and proud.*

*Homelessness destroys. It is the developed world's most shameful humiliation. It is the cause of, or result of, some of humanity's most awful characteristics. If you were sleeping on a street would prostitution seem so degrading to you? Would heroin be a one-way street to death or a relief from reality? Would a Bentley be a symbol of what you can achieve or of what you despise? How must it be to feel safer on the street on a freezing January than with a husband who beats you and your children? And how often do we, the fortunate, think about these things?*

*Now, thanks to the work of so many, there is a realistic, if embryonic, solution for at least some of the people who suffer so profoundly. It is a judgment call as to whether these people have brought their troubles upon themselves and one I would rather not have to decide. We all make what we believe are the best decisions – albeit that others may regard them as totally misguided. But I have now seen many people turn their lives around and build futures that would not have otherwise existed. They then help others to do the same. I feel honoured and humbled because of my involvement in this. As the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: 'To know that just one life has breathed easier because you have existed. This is to have succeeded.'*

*Well, darling Jo, as the sun goes down I am very fortunate to be able to reminisce in such a self-obsessed way but to a friend who is dear enough to wish to share in my innermost thoughts. How lucky I am to know you.*

*Tell me, how are things in Australia? And when are you coming to stay with us? You know you are always welcome and for as long as you want (or can bear it!). I miss you and can't wait to have you here in person so that we can bore Kim silly with all our African stories while we cackle like a couple of aged hyenas!*

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*Come soon.*

*Much love,*

*Tom*