



Stories from Under the Umbrella

"You know that moment," she said, and I could hear a little smile through the phone, "...that moment after you've checked in and found your apartment door, and you open it and look into this lovely room, and through this big window at the other end all you can see is ocean? And that amazing blueness fills the room, and there's a sound, that roar... and you have that 'wow' feeling because you know you'll be waking up there for the next three days, and you get a burst of happy excitement? Well..."

There was a pause.

"I was gazing at this stunning view, and then I stopped looking at the view and I looked around. Guess why. I'm **such** an idiot."

I didn't guess.

"Why?" I asked. "Why did you stop and look around?"

"It was autopilot..." her words faltered. "I forgot for a second. I looked around to find her and see the excitement on her face."

I closed my eyes and waited. Nothing more came.

"Because," I ventured, "that little face all lit up is even more beautiful than the ocean."

Then she wept.

"I LIVED for that," she said. "What do I live for now? How DARE I feel happy? Ever?"

What right do we have to the happiness meant for our child, when she is no longer there to delight in it?

How do we manage that guilt?

Will every joy in our future be stolen by pain?

"Do you still forget sometimes," she asked, "that they're not with us any more?"

"Yeah sometimes. We have to keep reminding ourselves that they're ok. We've got the challenges! Just keep remembering that she's ok."

"She's ok," she repeated. "Yes I do think so. In the end, I talked to her about it. I talked about holidays we've had, and how fun they were. She loved the beach. After that, it was like she was with us, sharing it. In my heart."

"Bravo."

"I miss her so much."

"Miss her with more love than sadness. If you can."

"I like that. I'll try."

"Also... she loves you, too. Can you honour that?"

Pause.

"By not beating myself up for feeling happy?"

"Exactly."

"Easier said than done. It's not like it's deliberate."

"You know how close she feels," I said, recalling moments of abject darkness, "at the terrible end of the spectrum? In anguish, guilt, grief? Well, what about the rest of being alive? The whole spectrum. She can be close to you through all of that, too. Just like your weekend away, she can share the good experiences with you. Have her in your heart."

"The whole spectrum?"

"Including joy."