

CHAPTER 1

MAY 15, 2054, POZZUOLI, NAPLES

“MOTHERRRRRRRR!!!!!!!”

Clara's anguished cry echoed throughout the house, down into the cave and it was heard even on the beach, about 200m away, where people suddenly saw a group of frightened seagulls flying away. Ilaria ran to Clara's room “what's up, love?” she asked in alarm, expecting the worst.

“Mum, how can I do, my qubit¹ it's dead, dead, do you understand? Deceased, kaput, dead!!! I am ruined, destroyed, devastated! UH GOSH... how am I gonna do it now? I have to start my graduation thesis today, abso-

¹ *The likely successor to today's computer, the Qubit. The name is the contraction of quantum bit, derives from the term coined by Benjamin Schumacher to indicate the quantum bit or the unit of quantum information. In May 2017 the IBM built and made the two operational universal quantum computers most powerful ever made until then. Quantum computers, considered the successors of our modern computers, offer solutions to complex problems for which it is not possible to identify models, because the data does not exist and the possibilities to be explored in order to arrive at the answer are far superior to those that can be processed by classic computers.*

lutely today, my schedule will go and get fucked, I'll never have time to work on it and learn it for July if I don't start today, right now !!! Mum please help me! "

After letting out a sigh of considerable relief, Ilaria sat down on Clara's bed and thought for a moment, while mulling in a low voice: "Daddy's old PC, the model preceding the qubits, we gave it to Uncle Gianmarco for his excursions on the sailing boat, he uses it to measure the progress of the re- population of the ocean floor, and that cannot be touched... Dario, your cousin studies on his qubit us and even that is unthinkable to use... I would give you mine if I had one, but I haven't owned one for years now, as you well know... I think we have to buy a new one... maybe tomorrow you go for a ride and look for a decent one... darling, you'll see, everything will work out for the best, it's not the end of the world" mother said turning to Clara and stroking her head as she always did when she wanted to calm or comfort her.

"Mum, this is a tragedy, don't you understand?" her daughter answered in the catastrophic tone that only teenagers know how to use. "NOW I have inspiration, it is NOW that I MUST start writing, tomorrow will be

too late, I have everything clear in my mind now, right now, I have been waiting for this moment for weeks, and now that it arrived, my qubit is betraying me, he disappoints, he deceives me, he teases me, he abandons me... what an absurd problem ... mum, how do I do now ???”

Ilaria wanted to laugh, but she stopped herself. Once her daughter's adolescence drove her crazy and emotionally involved her in her multiple and daily misfortunes, but then she had learned to understand them, these tragedies that Clara lived, had framed them for what they were, had welcomed her and her adolescence with tenderness and a sense of humour, and she had managed to stay steadfast. Even now she had to stand firm and think... think...

“Idea!” she exclaimed.

Clara's face lit up, and her eyes still wet with tears turned to her mother hopefully. As much as she rejected her and wanted at all costs to free herself and cut the umbilical cord, as all teenagers should, she still retained a deep trust in that energetic and affectionate woman, always

cheerful and full of friends who invaded her house at any time, day and night, which she welcomed with her husband Giordano always with a smile, or rather, two.

“which is... ???”

“Your grandmother's old Mac, it must be here, somewhere, let's go and look in her room, you'll see we'll find it. It was not in a bad state, and moreover it was of that very latest generation, even if it preceded the Qubit; she had cared a lot and had kept it properly. “You'll see, it'll work. And then I believe it will also bring you luck for your final exams, you two had such a special relationship, she will protect you, as she did in life, you'll see” in saying this, Ilaria went to the room that had been Nicole's and started to look around. She opened the closet where they had left her things, when they hadn't distributed them to relatives and friends, as she had asked herself to do. The smell of their grandmother invaded them. It is strange how the smell of the people who left us remains so long after, Ilaria found it almost cruel, yet at that moment she rejoiced, smelling in that smell the comforting presence of her friend Nicole, who later had become her mother-in-law. How similar they

were, the two of them, perhaps that's why Giordano had chosen her as his life partner, and how close and accomplices they had been since they had met. Nicole had introduced her to Giordano, actually. Their bond from the infinite past and their friendship, despite the difference in age, had been no mystery to anyone. Ilaria had suffered a lot for love before meeting Giordano, and Nicole had always encouraged her to find her centre, to use suffering to change her destiny. She remembered well her worried voice when she answered her calls, and then tender and encouraging after she in tears exposed her yet another disappointment. There hadn't been a time when Nicole hadn't answered her phone calls, or at best she hadn't called back immediately. Ilaria knew that her victory would also be that of her friend. It was incredible how many similar experiences Nicole had had before meeting grandfather Patrizio: for every painful situation that Ilaria exposed her, Nicole had had a similar one, from which she had emerged victorious, always using her inner strength. Once Nicole had answered from Ibiza, where she had gone on vacation with Patrizio, the boys and some dear friends. She was devastated with guilt for having left a boy who she then saw on Facebook happy and content with another girl. As

Nicole spoke to her, encouraging her, in order to make her feel strong and powerful even at this moment, she on the other end of the line could hear the noises of the

Plaza de Vila, the main square of the ancient city. In fact she saw her in front of her in that magical place, where she had been several times, an intrigue of alleys, from which suddenly spectacular views of the bay of Ibiza open up. She imagined her along the winding and steep streets passing in front of souvenir shops and art galleries without paying a glance, all intent on finding the right words to get her out of the abyss of solitude she was in. Even that time, when they finally put down the phone, after more than half an hour of conversation, Ilaria felt heartened and saw a little light of hope at the end of the tunnel. This was the effect that Nicole had on her, she thanked heaven for having met her and prayed to make his dreams come true also for her, who, unlike Ilaria, who was full of doubts and fears, was sure of it. At that time Ilaria was a flight hostess, so she travelled a lot both for work and pleasure: on vacation she had the opportunity to fly at bargain prices and took the opportunity to make beautiful trips to exotic places. It happened that once, however, on the occasion of a week's

vacation, Ilaria made a different decision: she planned to stay in Naples at home and take a breath, offering this vacation simply to herself, slowing down and looking around.

That was a particularly dark period for Ilaria , she had just turned 30 and felt the need to have a family, to have a partner and children. But she was too beautiful and intelligent to be satisfied, and she deeply believed in love, so it seemed to her that she could not find peace. She passed from one story to another without ever finding what she was looking for, constantly prey to her insecurities that made her react in an exaggerated way to every little change of mood of the partner on duty.

Those were disconcerted and most of the time they didn't feel like taking the honour and the burden of such passion and beauty, and ended up walking away. During that week she had decided to dedicate to herself, she slept a lot and went to the gym, strolled aimlessly around her beautiful city and met old friends who made her feel good. One evening she stayed at Nicole's for dinner and that was when she met Giordano. They had actually met several times before, but that evening may-

be she really saw him for the first time. He arrived with his mighty cheerfulness and the open smile that always distinguished him, he went into the house and it seemed to her that the house was illuminated. Nicole and Patrizio weren't expecting him, he had been living alone for several years now, and obviously they were pleasantly surprised. Ilaria greeted him embarrassed, as opposed to how she always did, because that evening she felt attracted to him and was a little ashamed of this.

Instead, he remained relaxed and cordial as always, he always liked to find people at his parents' house, it was certainly nothing new, he and Tommi had grown up like this, for them this was normal.

If he had to be completely honest, he really liked that girl who often hung out at his parents' house, she was bubbly and full of energy, even if at times he had seen her cry desperately with Nicole, but he imagined that this must be part of the play, being a passionate. That evening they all had dinner together and, after a while at the table chatting about this and that, Giordano thought that Ilaria looked different: firmer, more mature, less devastated. He looked at her with different

eyes all

evening. When dinner was over and the hosts went to sleep, she and Giordano stayed talking on the sofa for a long time, then he wanted to take her home because it was a nice evening and he proposed to stop and have a digestive in that little cute bar, by the sea. Then the sea, the full moon, the sand sparkling under the moon, did the rest of the magic. After the digestive they started walking on the beach, barefoot. The sand had a magical colour that evening, it looked pink, it reminded her of

Barbuda beach which was made up of microscopic pink shells. They were immersed in that magical night, accompanied by a strange, new feeling of complicity never felt before. Ilaria found herself in his arms without knowing how it had happened. They exchanged a shy kiss, then another more passionate one and Ilaria thought, where have you been all of my life? He looked at her with his tender gaze and, while his very white teeth glistened in the light of the full moon, he said smiling: “Where have you been all of my life?”.

The rest is history. They had been together for about 30

years now and still loved each other not like the first day, but more. Their love had become solid and, even if the butterflies in the stomach that you feel the first 3 or 4 years had almost completely disappeared, it can be said that they were even happier like this: those butterflies basically ruined everything, they did not make them feel safe and relaxed, they always kept them on hot coals. Instead this relationship today was so warm, beautiful, so friendly and intense. They no longer had sex, which had been an important part of their early years together, now they were making love. Ilaria was saddened by those women who betrayed their husbands because they no longer felt the famous butterflies in their stomach. Enough with butterflies, aren't you happy, she argued, isn't it much better this way? True love is not just that, it would be an understatement... those are emotions, they are hormones, they are the waves on the surface of the ocean. Instead I think that this is true love, if the butterflies go away and the understanding, the affection, the complicity and the respect remain, then you can feel really satisfied. And, finally, rely on the powerful but always calm ocean current that flows undeterred on the ocean floor, regardless of the waves on the surface. So yes, you are happy and satisfied in a

relationship. Basically this is the fairy tales' "...and lived happily ever after". Usually fairy-tales tell the adventures of the heroine until she meets her other half, thus fulfilling her sentimental dream. But then? What does it mean that they lived happily ever after? Perhaps absence of problems, the fact that everything will go smoothly. And yet how boring can it be? Or maybe flat... and yet the secret was all there, Ilaria thought, in leading a peaceful life next to your life's partner. No more obstacles, no more ups and downs. It isn't boring, it is fulfilling, is what you struggled for. This she thought, and harmony was at home in the family she had created with Giordano.

They found it in a black bag, the kind used for old computers, next to a pile of Buddhist newspapers that Nicole had kept neatly and that Ilaria still used to consult. They pulled it out of the bag, and when they tried to turn it on, after inserting the plug, it immediately obeyed the power button with no problem, as if it hadn't been two years since it was last used.

Clara hugged it to her chest and looked at her mother with gratitude. They didn't add a single word, both sat-

ified. Ilaria went back to taking care of her plants, relieved just like any mother who solves a problem to her daughter, and Clara, after plugging the charge into the computer and then into the socket, sat down at her desk and opened a new Microsoft document word, titled, MY DEGREE, and set to work.

And she was right, the girl. The moment to start writing her essay seemed just the right one: the words she wrote flowed on the monitor in front of her eyes like an infinite snake, she wrote and wrote and wrote for almost two hours. She reread, corrected, searched for insights on Google, and finally after another hour she felt satisfied and decided to stop until the next day (or until the next inspiration!). She was about to turn it off when she heard a knock on the door and saw the nice face of her beloved cousin, Dario, appear.

“Can I come in?”

“Hi, bro. I am destroyed (but happy). I just gave my graduation thesis a good start. I like it. What are you doing here?” Clara said with a smile.

"I'm starting another period with you... you know, mum and dad are gone again, they'll be back in three weeks... do you mind?"

"What are you saying??? You know that when you stay with us I'm just happy, it's great, bro, no prob "

Dario's gaze was fixed on his grandmother's Mac.

"What are you looking at" Clara said, following his gaze as if hypnotized "Ah, yes, my Qubit has abandoned me, so mum dusted off this old grandmother's Mac for me to work tonight, you remember that, huh?"

"How could I forget it? Grandma made me play with those old card games she still played and that old-fashioned Candy Crash, which now are nowhere to be found... what good memories, she was always so welcoming and sweet with me... with us, Clara. I miss her." Dario made a sad expression and Clara, to cheer him up, indeed, to not give him time to get sad, said: "Come on, let's find those games and let's relax a bit, I want to see if you still remember how to play"

Dario smiled and walked over to Clara's desk. Gently, as if he were touching a sacred thing, he touched the computer with his fingers, then went to the keyboard and, after a moment of pause, in which he was surely thinking of Nicole, he began to fiddle as only kids can, to look for “Her” games. Fiddle here, fiddle there, at one point a folder caught his attention.

“Clara, look here,” he said to his cousin, who approached, putting her face close to Dario's.

“Ah, this then! Open it, open it, I'm sure that "you" refers to us 2 !!!” Clara said.

They had in fact found a folder called “for you”, and almost fearful, but full of curiosity, they clicked on it twice, as you should on old Macs.

