

From Jostein Gaarder's *Equinox Overture* [at the end] -

“Once again, I pass the Pavilion Tea House. The young woman who peeked up at me and laughed while I was standing in front of the big globe with all the exotic place names comes out of the white building. She must have spotted me through the divided windows of the teahouse.

She smiles warmly and provocatively, but looks down at the black notebook that I am still holding onto. She asks: “What is it you are going around and taking notes about all the time?”

This hurts me, because when one goes around taking notes all the time, it is because there is something one is afraid of forgetting.

“I am supposed to write about this spring equinox,” I say. “I want to try to relate a small sample from each of the time zones, and thus include all of the hours of the day and all of the 24 musical keys as well.”

“Musical keys?”

She watches me nod devoutly: “I follow the circle of fifths in major and minor. Greenwich is the starting point for everything and is in a straightforward C major, Prague in the ghostlike D minor, Alexandria in the light and airy F major, Baghdad in exasperation’s G minor ... and so on around the globe. The final stop is Iceland, a heart-rending A minor, before the circle is closed in the park here and we are back in C major.”

She laughs. She gives me a flower she has been holding between two fingers. It is a daisy. She says: “Write about this!”

I am so taken aback that I scarcely have a chance to thank her before she adds: “A daisy ... Do you know what that means?”

I shake my head. I didn’t even remember that daisy was the English name for this flower.

She regards me intensely. Her green eyes sparkle secretively. Then she says:

“Day’s eye ... We say that this flower is the day’s eye because it closes at night and opens again the next morning ...”

We stand there a while talking about the spring equinox, time zones and musical keys. While we are talking, the cell phone she is holding in her left hand starts

ringing. She just switches it off with a brusque movement without checking the identity of the caller. I think that she knows who was calling.

We talk some more, tell each other things, and we become so personal in the end that I make her privy to my disgrace. Tomorrow, I confess, I will perhaps find out that I am walking the first steps of an early stage of Alzheimer's disease.

She then takes my hand. Her eyes are shining. It is not only due to me. She too is in the process of losing something. I have disclosed my secret, but I do not know hers.

She says: "I have thrown away many years of my life. It is shameful how much I have squandered. I have wasted a part of this universe!"

A tear rolls down her cheek and we bid farewell.

That is how I end up with a small notebook in one hand and an unassuming flower in the other. I sense an intense agitation. How long will I remember these hours? How long will I manage to hold onto her, she who gave me the flower I am holding? But we have made a date. We will meet again on the next spring equinox.

The only way I can calm myself down now, is to sit down as quickly as possible in front of my laptop and try to write about all of it. I will certainly manage to find a vase for the daisy. Then I remember that I have a miniature bottle of vodka in my shaving kit. I had been planning to empty it anyway, and the empty bottle will make a perfect vase for the Day's Eye."

- **Translated by Diane Oatley**