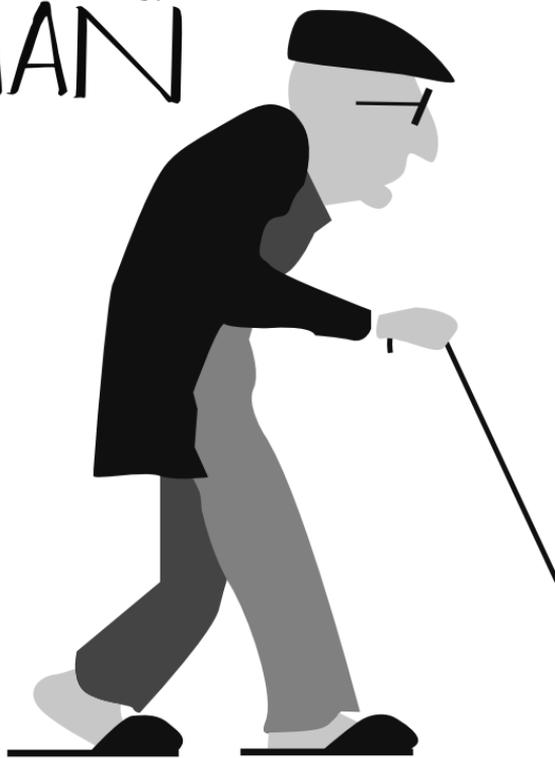


THE  
ACCIDENTAL  
FURTHER  
ADVENTURES OF  
THE  
HUNDRED  
-YEAR-OLD  
MAN





# FOREWORD

I AM JONAS JONASSON and I want to explain myself.

There was never meant to be a sequel to the story of the hundred-year-old man who climbed out of a window and disappeared. Many people wanted one, not least the protagonist, Allan Karlsson, who kept strolling around inside my head and calling attention to himself whenever he wished.

‘Mr Jonasson,’ he might say, out of nowhere, as I was busy with my own thoughts. ‘Have you changed your mind yet, Mr Jonasson? Don’t you want to have another round before I’m *really* old?’

No, I didn’t. I’d already said everything I wanted to say about what was perhaps the most miserable century ever. The idea had been that if we reminded one another of all the shortcomings of the twentieth century, maybe it would make us better at remembering and less inclined to make at least *those* mistakes again. I packaged this message of mine with warmth and humour. Soon the book spread all over the world.

It sure as hell didn’t make the world a better place.

Time passed. My inner Allan stopped getting in touch. All the while, humanity kept moving forwards, or whatever direction it was moving in. Event after event filled me with the sense that the world was more incomplete than ever. All the while, I was just an onlooker.

More and more I started to feel the need to speak up again, in my own way. Or Allan's. One day I heard myself asking Allan straight out whether he was still with me.

'Yes, I'm here,' he said. 'What might you have on your mind, Mr Jonasson, after such a long time?'

'I need you,' I said.

'For what?'

'For telling it like it is and, indirectly, how it ought to be.'

'About everything?'

'About more or less everything.'

'Mr Jonasson, you understand that won't help, right?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Good. Count me in.'

\* \* \*

RIGHT, THERE'S ONE MORE THING. This is a novel about recent and present events. I make use of a number of public political figures in the plot, and of people in their immediate vicinity. Most of the characters in the book go by their real names. Others, I have spared.

Since these leaders sometimes look down upon, rather than up at, ordinary folks, it's reasonable to poke a little fun at them. But that doesn't make them less than human, every one, and as such they deserve a moderate amount of respect. To all these potentates, I would like to say: I'm sorry. And: Deal with it. It could have been worse. As well as: What if it is?

Jonas Jonasson





# INDONESIA

A life of luxury on an island in Paradise ought to be satisfactory to just about anyone. But Allan Karlsson had never been just anyone, and his hundred-and-first year of life wasn't the time to start.

It was, for a certain amount of time, gratifying to sit in a lounge under an umbrella and be served drinks of various colours at whim. Especially when one's best and only friend, the inveterate petty thief Julius Jonsson, was right next to one.

But soon old Julius and the much older Allan grew tired of doing nothing but frittering away the millions from the suitcase they'd happened to bring with them from Sweden.

Not that there was anything wrong with frittering. It just got so monotonous. Julius tried renting a fully staffed hundred-and-fifty-foot yacht so he and Allan could sit on the foredeck with fishing rods in hand. It would have been a pleasant break if only they enjoyed fishing. Or, for that matter, eating fish. Instead, their yacht excursions involved doing the same thing on deck as they'd already learned to do on the shore. Namely, nothing at all.

Allan, for his part, made sure to fly Harry Belafonte in from the United States to sing three songs on Julius's birthday – speaking of too much money and not enough to do. Harry stayed for dinner even though he wasn't paid extra for it. Altogether, this constituted an entire evening of pattern-breaking.

By way of explanation for his selection of Belafonte over anyone else, Allan pointed out that Julius had a soft spot for this newer, youthful sort of music. Julius appreciated the gesture and didn't mention that the artist in question hadn't been young since the end of the Second World War. Compared to Allan, he was, of course, a child.

Although the superstar's visit to Bali provided no more than a speck of colour in their otherwise dull grey existence, it would prove to affect Allan and Julius for a long time to come. Not because of what Belafonte sang, or anything like that, but because of what he brought along and devoted his attention to during breakfast prior to his journey home. It was a tool of some sort. A flat black object with a half-eaten apple on one side, and on the other a screen that lit up when you touched it. Harry touched and touched. And grunted now and again. Then tittered. Only to grunt once more. Allan had never been the nosy sort, but there were limits.

'Perhaps it's none of my business to pry into the young Mr Belafonte's private matters, but if I may be so bold as to enquire what you're doing there ... Is something happening in that ... well, in *that*?'

Harry Belafonte realized that Allan had never seen a tablet before and was delighted to demonstrate. The tablet could show what was going on in the world, and what had already gone on, and it verged on showing what was about to happen. Depending on where you touched, up came pictures and videos of all imaginable sorts. And some unimaginable ones. If you touched other buttons, out came music. Still others, and the tablet began to speak. Apparently it was a 'she', Siri.

After breakfast and the demonstration, Belafonte took his little suitcase, his black tablet and himself, and headed to the airport for his trip home. Allan, Julius and the hotel manager

waved adieu. The artist's taxi had no more made it out of sight before Allan turned to the manager and asked him to procure a tablet of the same sort Harry Belafonte had been using. Its diverse contents had amused the hundred-year-old and that was more than could be said about most things.

The manager had just returned from a hospitality conference in Jakarta, where he had learned that the main duty of hotel staff was not to deliver but to over-deliver. Add to this that Messrs Karlsson and Jonsson were two of the best guests in the history of Balinese tourism, and it was no wonder that, by the very next day, the manager had a tablet ready for Karlsson. And a cellular phone to boot. As a bonus.

Allan didn't want to seem ungrateful, so he didn't mention that he had no use for the phone since everyone he could imagine dialling had been dead for at least fifty years. Except Julius, of course. Who had nothing to answer with. Although that particular point could be remedied.

'Here you are,' Allan said to his friend. 'It's really a gift from the manager to me, but I have no one to call but you, and until this moment you didn't have any way to answer.'

Julius thanked him for his kindness. And chose not to point out that Allan still couldn't call him, but for the opposite reason.

'Just don't lose it,' Allan said. 'It looks expensive. It was better before, when phones were stuck to the wall with a cord so you knew what they were up to.'

\* \* \*

The black tablet became Allan's most treasured possession. What was more, it was free to use since the hotel manager had instructed the staff at the computer store in Denpasar to

set up the tablet and phone with all the bells and whistles. This included, among other things, linking the SIM cards to the hotel, which found its total telephone costs doubled, although no one understood why.

Once the hundred-year-old man learned how the remarkable contraption worked, he no sooner woke for the day than he turned it on to see what had happened overnight. It was the minor delightful news items from all the corners of the world that amused him most. Like the one about how a hundred doctors and nurses in Naples took turns signing each other in and out so no one had to work but everyone still got paid. Or the one about Romania, how so many government officials had had to be locked up for corruption that the country's prisons were full. And how those officials who had yet to be arrested had a solution to the problem: legalize corruption so they would avoid the need to build more prisons.

Allan and Julius developed a new morning routine. The old one had involved Allan launching into every breakfast with complaints about his friend's loud snoring, which he could hear through the wall. The new one involved the same, but with the addition of Allan's reports about what he'd found out on his tablet since last time. At first Julius enjoyed the brief news updates, not least because they took the focus off his snoring. He was immediately delighted by the Romanian notion of making the illegal legal. Just think how much easier it would be as a petty thief in such a society.

But Allan quickly disabused him of that thought, because if petty thievery were to become legal then the concept would cease to exist. Julius, who had been on the verge of suggesting that he and Allan leave Bali and move to Bucharest, immediately deflated. The joy in being a small-time thief was,

of course, mainly derived from tricking someone out of something, preferably someone who deserved it or at least wouldn't suffer too much from it. If swindling could no longer be considered a swindle, what was the point?

Allan consoled him with the information that the Romanians had turned out to a man to protest against the politicians' and officials' plans. The average Romanian was not as philosophically inclined as those in power. He or she reasoned that those who stole should be locked up, no matter their title or position, and whether or not there was anywhere to lock them up.

Breakfast times at the hotel in Bali ended up revolving ever more often around where in the world Julius and Allan should go now that life had become so humdrum in their current location. When the leading news story on the morning in question told him that it was twenty degrees warmer than usual at the North Pole, Allan wondered if that might be an option.

Julius stuffed fried noodles into his mouth, finished chewing, then said he didn't think the North Pole was the right place for him and Allan. Especially not if the ice was about to melt. Julius caught a cold whenever his feet got wet. And there were polar bears, and all Julius knew about polar bears was that they seemed to get out of the wrong side of bed every morning from birth onwards. At least the snakes on Bali were shy.

Allan said that perhaps it was no wonder a polar bear might lose its temper given that the ground was melting beneath its feet. If things were about to go down the tubes, that bear probably ought to stroll to solid ground while it still had time. Canada, in that case, because the United States had a new president again – had Allan already mentioned

this to Julius? And, by golly, this new guy wouldn't allow just anyone over the border.

Yes, Julius had heard of Trump. That was his name. The polar bear may have been white, but it was a foreigner first and foremost. So it shouldn't get its hopes up.

The news on Allan's black tablet had the curious habit of being both big and small. Mostly big, unpleasantly enough. Allan sought out the small and charming but got the rest of it into the bargain. It was impossible to see the molehills for the mountains.

During his first hundred years of life, Allan had never reflected upon the bigger picture. Now his new toy was telling him that the world was in a dreadful state. And reminding him of why he had, once upon a time, rightly chosen to turn his back on it and think only of himself.

He recalled his early years as an errand boy at the gunpowder factory in Flen. There, half the workers had devoted their free time to longing for a red revolution, while the other half was horrified at the threat from China and Japan. Their understanding of the Yellow Peril was nurtured by novels and booklets that depicted a scenario in which the white world was devoured by the yellow one.

Allan did not care about such nuances, and he continued along the same path after the Second World War when brown shirts made brown the ugliest colour of them all. He noticed this as little then as he did the next time people converged around an ideological expression. This time it was more a longing *for* something than away from it. Peace on earth was in, and so were floral VW buses and, frequently, hash. Everyone loved everyone else, except Allan, who didn't

love anyone or anything. Except his cat. Not that he was bitter: he just *was*.

The flowery era of life lasted until Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan took over in their respective realms. They thought it was more practical to love oneself and one's own successes. But if you insisted on disliking someone it should be the Russians. Essentially there were no other threats, and when Reagan killed Soviet Communism simply by *talking about* sending missiles from space, it was peace and joy for all, except the half of humanity who had no daily food and the several thousand British miners who no longer had a mine to go to. The new view was that there was no reason to care about your neighbour; it was enough to tolerate him or her. And people did, until the winds of change blew once more.

A bit unexpectedly, perhaps, the brown-shirt ideology made a comeback. Not by way of Germany this time, at least not first and foremost. Or even second and middlemost. But in a number of other countries it was in. The United States wasn't first among them, but it soon became the most noticeable, thanks to its recently elected president. It was impossible to say how much he really believed in it: that seemed to change from day to day. But the old adage about doing something yourself if you want it done right wouldn't suffice: it was time to point out external threats to the white Western lives we all deserved to live.

Allan, of course, wanted to consider his black tablet a tool of pure entertainment, but he had a hard time shielding himself against the broader contexts he was beginning to perceive. He thought about putting the tablet down. Leaving

it be for a whole day. And another. Only to admit reluctantly that it was too late. The man who had, more than anyone else, not bothered to care about the state of things had started to care about the state of things.

‘I’ll be damned,’ he mumbled to himself.

‘What’s that?’ Julius wondered.

‘It was nothing. Except what I just said.’

‘Damned?’

‘Yes.’

# INDONESIA

Once Allan had come to terms with his new-found relative interest in the rest of humanity, his black tablet helped him regain lost ground. It greeted him with the news of a Norwegian who had his own lake, where he fed the roach and bream pellets full of carotene. When the pike in the lake ate the recently fed fish their flesh turned pink, whereupon the Norwegian caught them, filleted them and sold them as salmon. He minimized his risks by exporting the frauds solely to Namibia where, naturally, there lived a retired health inspector from Oslo. The inspector sounded the alarm, the Norwegian was locked up, and the price of salmon in south-western Africa went back to normal.

And so on. The black tablet helped Allan enjoy life again, even as Julius continued to live in frustration. It had been *months* since he'd managed a single dishonourable undertaking. In his last few years as a criminal at home in Sweden, he had devoted himself to a mild form of that Norwegian pike-salmon business. He'd imported vegetables from distant lands, had them repackaged and sold them as Swedish. There was a lot of money to be made there. The cool northern climate in combination with a sun that never set meant that tomatoes and cucumbers matured slowly and developed world-class flavour. Or, as the nineteenth-century poet Carl Jonas Love Almquist put it, 'Only Sweden has Swedish gooseberries.'

Gooseberries in particular were not of interest to Julius; besides, there was little market for them. But the same was not true of green asparagus. When spring became early summer, people would pay four or five times as much for a bunch of asparagus, as long as it was Swedish.

Julius Jonsson's Swedish asparagus, at that point, was shipped all the way from Peru. For a long time business was good. But then one of Jonsson's middlemen grew too eager and began to sell Gotland asparagus on Hötorget in Stockholm at least five weeks before it was even to be found on Gotland. This led to rumours of fraud, and the Swedish foodstuffs authorities began to stir. Suddenly there were spot checks when and where there shouldn't have been. In short order Julius lost three whole Peruvian lots, all seized and destroyed in the name of the law. Moreover, his middlemen – unlike Julius – were locked up. Such is a middleman's lot.

But even if the long arm of the law couldn't reach all the way to the brains behind it, Julius had lost interest. He was tired of Sweden being orderly beyond all reason. Who'd ever died of eating Peruvian asparagus?

No, honourable petty thieves might as well not bother any more. So Julius had chosen to retire. He made some moonshine, poached a moose here and there, borrowed the neighbour's electricity without permission – and that was about it. Until a hundred-year-old man unexpectedly knocked on his door. The old man said his name was Allan, and with him he had a stolen suitcase they opened after a pleasant dinner and accompanying vodka. It had turned out to be full of millions.

So one thing had led to another, and another to the third. Julius and Allan had shaken off all the stubborn individuals who wanted their money back and ended up in Bali, where they were doing away with it at a steady pace.

Allan saw that Julius was hanging his head. He tried to inspire his bored friend by reading aloud from his black tablet about various types of immorality from all the corners of the world. Romania, Italy and Norway were already settled. President Zuma of South Africa managed to take up a whole breakfast when it turned out he'd built a private swimming pool and a theatre with taxpayers' money. A Swedish dance-band queen received well-deserved attention after calling seven dresses and eighteen pairs of shoes a 'business trip' on her tax return.

But the head-hanging didn't stop. Julius needed something to do before he became depressed for real.

Allan, who hadn't let himself be concerned about anything at all for a hundred years, could not feel at peace, given his friend's lost spark. Surely there must be something Julius could engage himself in.

That was as far as he got in his musings before chance stepped in. It happened one evening after Allan had crawled into bed, while Julius felt he still had sorrows in his soul to deaden. He sat down in the hotel bar and ordered a glass of local arak. It was made of rice and sugarcane, tasted like rum, and was so strong it made the eyes water. Julius had learned that one glass would blur one's troubles and a second would chase them away. Just to be safe, he tended to have a third glass, too, before bedtime.

The evening's first was empty and the other well on its way when Julius's senses expanded enough for him to notice that he wasn't alone in the bar. Three chairs away sat a middle-aged Asian man, also with arak in hand.

'Cheers,' Julius said, raising his glass.

The man smiled in response, whereupon both turned bottoms up and grimaced.

‘Now things are starting to look up,’ said the man, whose eyes were as full of tears as Julius’s.

‘First or second?’ Julius asked.

‘Second,’ said the man.

‘Same here.’

Julius and the man moved closer and each decided to have a third glass of the same.

They chatted for a while before the man chose to introduce himself. ‘Simran Aryabhat Chakrabarty Gopaldas,’ he said. ‘It’s a pleasure!’

Julius looked at the man who had just said his name. And had enough arak in his body to say what he was thinking. ‘Surely no one could have a name like that.’

Yes, one could. Especially if one was of Indian origin. Simran Etc. Etc. had ended up in Indonesia after an unfortunate incident with the daughter of a far-too-unsympathetic man.

Julius nodded. Dads of daughters could be more unsympathetic than most. But was that any reason to possess a name that took an entire morning to say?

The man, who was named what he was named, turned out to have a pragmatic attitude toward the significance of his own identity. Or perhaps he just had a sense of humour. ‘What do you think I should be called instead?’

Julius liked the exiled Indian. But if they were going to become friends, all those names in a row just wouldn’t do. He had to seize this opportunity. ‘Gustav Svensson,’ he said. ‘That’s a proper name, rolls off the tongue, easy to remember.’

The man said he’d never had trouble remembering Simran Aryabhat Chakrabarty Gopaldas either, but he agreed that Gustav Svensson sounded pleasant. ‘Swedish, isn’t it?’ he asked.

Yes. Julius nodded again. Couldn't get much more Swedish than that.

And there and then, his new business idea began to take root.

\* \* \*

Julius Jonsson and Simran Something truly hit it off as the third glass of arak took hold. Before the night was over they had decided to meet again. Same place, same time, the next night. In addition, Julius had decided that the man with the impossible name would henceforth be called Gustav Svensson. Simran Aryabhat Chakrabarty Gopaldas thought that was just as well. The name he'd had so far hadn't brought him an overabundance of luck.

The old men went on in the same vein for several nights in a row. The Indian grew used to his new alias. He liked it.

He'd checked into the hotel under his previous name on the day the two had met, and he continued to stay there while he and Julius laid plans for their future partnership. When the hotel manager informed him, at increasing volume, that he wanted payment for the Indian guest's stay, Gustav told Julius that he intended to depart from the place permanently. Without paying. And without announcing his intentions. The management would never understand, after all, that Gustav couldn't be held responsible for Simran's bill.

But Julius understood. When was Gustav planning to depart?

'Preferably in the next fifteen minutes.'

Julius understood this too. But he didn't want to lose his new friend, so he sent the man off with the phone Allan had given him. 'Here's something so you can be reached. I'll call

you from my room. Now go. Take the way through the kitchen. That's what I would do.'

Gustav followed Julius's advice and was gone. Later that evening, the hotel manager appeared after wandering around for at least an hour in pursuit of the now-vanished Indian guest.

Julius and Allan observed the sunset from the shore, each in a comfortable chair and with an accompanying drink. The manager apologized for the intrusion. But he had a question. 'Mr Jonsson, is there any chance you have seen our guest Simran Aryabhat Chakrabarty Gopaldas? I've noticed the two of you spending some time together here at our establishment in recent days.'

'Simran who?' said Julius.

\* \* \*

Thenceforth, Gustav Svensson and Julius Jonsson had to meet somewhere other than the hotel when the time came to talk business. The manager couldn't exactly lay the blame for his vanished guest at Jonsson's feet, but that didn't stop him aiming a slightly raised level of suspicion at the Swedish gentlemen. In their case, there was considerably more money at stake. Thus far they had always paid up, but currently the bill was larger than usual and it seemed advisable to proceed with caution.

Jonsson and Svensson's meetings were instead held in a filthy bar in central Denpasar. Gustav turned out to be almost as much a petty thief as Julius. Back home in India, he had spent many years living large by renting cars, switching their engines and returning them. It often took the rental agency several months to discover that the vehicle in question had

become seven years older, and by then it was impossible to say which of several hundred renters was the guilty party. Unless it was someone on the staff.

In those days, fancy cars had become part of Gustav's daily life. As a result he noticed that the nicer the car, the greater the potential to attract a beautiful girl. This equation got him into trouble more than once. To such an extent, most recently, that he had found it best to leave the automotive industry, the girl and all of India behind, since the girl had become pregnant. Her father had turned out to be both a Member of Parliament and a military man, and when Gustav, for strategic reasons, had asked for the girl's hand in marriage, the father responded by threatening to send the seventh infantry after him.

'What a grumpy bastard,' Julius said. 'Couldn't he think of what was best for his daughter?'

Gustav agreed. A complicating factor was that the father had just noticed that his six-cylinder BMW had become a four-cylinder while he was on a business trip to Singapore.

'And he blamed you?'

'Yes. With no evidence.'

'Were you innocent?'

'That's beside the point.'

In conclusion, Gustav said it felt right that Simran Aryabhat Chakrabarty Gopaldas was no more.

'But it's too bad he didn't have time to settle up with the hotel. Cheers to you, my friend.'

\* \* \*

Some time after their initial, cheerful meeting at the bar, Julius Jonsson and his new partner Gustav Svensson, with the help of a substantial amount of the money that remained in the suitcase, took over an asparagus farm in the mountains. Julius held the reins, Gustav was the site manager, and a great number of impoverished Balinese people bent their backs in the fields.

With the help of previous contacts in Sweden, Julius and his new partner now exported ‘Gustav Svensson’s locally grown asparagus’ in lovely bunches tied with blue-and-yellow ribbon. Nowhere did Julius or the man who had, until recently, been named something else claim that the asparagus was Swedish. The only thing Swedish about it was the price, and the name of the Indian grower. Unlike the Peru project, this wasn’t as illegal as Julius would have preferred, but you couldn’t have it all. Furthermore, he and Gustav succeeded in establishing a supplementary, and shadier, line of business. Swedish asparagus had such a good international reputation that Gustav’s Balinese variety could be shipped to Sweden, transferred into different boxes, and exported to a series of luxury hotels around the world. In Bali, for example. High-profile hotels there had their international reputations to consider, and it was worth every single extra rupiah it cost to avoid serving guests the bland, locally grown variety.

Allan was glad his friend Julius was back to his old self. And with that, life surely would have been a gas once more for both Julius and his hundred-year-old friend with the black tablet, except the money in the suitcase that never ran dry was starting to run dry. The income from the crop fields in the mountains was respectable, but life at the luxury hotel

where the friends resided was anything but free. Even the imported Swedish asparagus in the restaurant cost half a fortune.

Julius had wanted to broach the topic of their finances with Allan for some time. He just hadn't got round to it. At breakfast that morning, however, the time had come. Allan had brought his black tablet along as usual, and the day's news was a story about the love between siblings. The North Korean leader Kim Jong-un had just had his brother poisoned to death at an airport in Malaysia. Allan said he wasn't overly surprised: he'd had his own dealings with Kim Jong-un's father. And grandfather.

'Both father and grandfather did in fact intend to take my life,' he recalled. 'Now both of them are dead, but here I sit. Such is life.'

Julius had grown used to Allan popping up with such reflections on the past and was no longer surprised by them. He had probably heard that particular story before, but he didn't quite recall. 'You met the North Korean leader's father? And grandfather? How old *are* you?'

'A hundred, almost a hundred and one,' said Allan. 'In case that somehow escaped you. Their names were Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. The one was only a child, but he was very angry.'

Julius resisted the urge to enquire further. Instead he guided the conversation towards the topic he'd been planning to discuss from the start.

The problem was, as Julius had hinted earlier, that the suitcase of money was increasingly transforming into a suitcase without money. And it had been two and a half months since they'd last settled their debts with the hotel. Julius didn't want to think about what the bill would say.

‘Then don’t,’ Allan suggested, taking a bite of his mildly seasoned *nasi goreng*.

More urgent was the issue with the boat-renter, who had been in touch to say that he had throttled their line of credit and intended to do the same to Messrs Karlsson and Jonsson unless their debt was settled within the week.

‘The boat-renter?’ Allan said. ‘Did we rent a boat?’

‘The luxury yacht.’

‘Oh, right. So that counts as a boat, does it?’

Then Julius confessed that he’d been planning to surprise Allan on his hundred-and-first birthday, but their financial situation was such that the celebration couldn’t be up to Harry Belafonte standards.

‘Well, we met him once before,’ Allan said. ‘And my birthday parties and I have never quite seen eye to eye, so don’t worry about that.’

But Julius did. He wanted Allan to know he had appreciated the Belafonte gesture. It had been above and beyond. Julius was no spring chicken himself, and at no time in history had anyone done anything as nice for him as Allan had.

‘Though I wasn’t the one singing,’ Allan said.

Julius went on to say that there would absolutely be a party: he’d already ordered a cake from the one bakery he’d been able to find that would make it on credit. Thereafter awaited a hot-air balloon ride over the beautiful green island, along with the balloon pilot and two bottles of champagne.

Allan thought a hot-air balloon ride sounded pleasant. But perhaps they could skip the cake, given that their finances were strained. Even the hundred and one candles might cost a fortune.