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Prologue

by Janie Reynolds

It was just another evening when nothing happens, like most evenings when you're sixty and live on your own. But you're fine, because you've forgotten what excitement feels like. You've taught yourself that being content is easier than being lonely.

That's when I first heard she'd found out. My lovely daughter, married, in Clapham, with the handsome David. Living the sort of pleasant, un-extraordinary life a mother finds comfort in knowing her daughter has managed to piece together.

"I'm completely freaked out about something, Mum," she says down the phone.

"Oh, no."

"I had to get my medical records for the Chinese doctor I'm seeing and it says I went missing when I was five. For three weeks. I obviously need to know about this."

Lost for words, it feels like 25 years of silence and worry are coming at me like a wrecking ball. I duck.

"The thing is, Jules," I say. "Do you? Tell me. Are you happy? Are things with David nice and smooth and settled? Are you cherishing the idea of having a happy family?"

"Of course I am, mum," she says. "I'm not pregnant yet, but... Why are you asking me that?"

"Because that's the point," I say. "You're happy because you don't know. No good can come from knowing now, about something that happened when you were a little kid. God was kind when he wiped it from your memory."

"So, I've been lied to my whole life?"

“I might have been hoping you'd never find out, but I never lied,” I said, “it's your choice. You can get on with your life, enjoy it to the full and try to forget you ever saw that entrance in you records. Or, I can tell you. But you'll be opening up a huge Pandora's box that doesn't need to be opened. Because you're fine as you are, not knowing. You're perfect. Innocent. Unscathed. The scars would come with the knowing.”