

The Hidden Mother

by Vera Gajic

Julie, Wendy and Dad, were looking at some old photos, distracted from sorting out Mum's things again. It was the third time since the funeral that the girls had gone home to help Dad sort out their mother's possessions. She hadn't been a hoarder but it still felt like a mammoth task going through a lifetime of stuff. Far easier to reminisce and go through the photos, they'd found a little stash of them in their Mum's sock drawer.

"Who is this baby?" Asked Julie, "I don't recognise it, but it looks vaguely familiar, it's not one of us."

"Ahhh," said Dad hesitantly " That is your half brother"

"What!" both girls shouted in unison, aghast.

Julie spoke first, "What are you talking about Dad? We don't have a half brother, neither of you were married before."

"That's true but your Mum did have a baby before we met. She gave him up for adoption because she was only 16, she never told anyone who the father was, not even me," explained Dad.

"Why did she never tell us?" said Julie.

Neither of the girls could compute this stunning new information, it made no sense. They'd both been close to Mum and were devastated when she got breast cancer.

She'd fought it for over a year but they'd found it too late and she'd died a week after her 50th birthday, just made it to the half century but with no hair, no breasts and no life left. She'd given them the "talk" individually about how proud she was of them and how much she loved them and not to be sad but to remember the good times. They'd both wept uncontrollably throughout.

This just didn't feel right, how could they not have known, particularly as Julie had become pregnant at 16, just like Mum they now realised and had kept the baby. She'd made a pretty good job of being a teenage Mum. Wayne was now 12 and although she'd split up with his father they both shared the childcare and Julie had started university last year. That's why she thought Mum said she was proud of her, but maybe it was because she had kept her baby, not like Mum.

Julie and Wendy couldn't sleep that night. They stayed in Wendy's old double bed in so they could talk but they kept falling into silence still stunned by what they'd found out.

About three in the morning Julie announced that they had to find him.

"But Mum wouldn't have wanted that or she would have told us" said Wendy. "I don't think it really matters what Mum would have wanted now that she is dead, we need to find our brother, he might have been looking for her" replied Julie

The next morning they told Dad, "you've got to help us, what do you know? When was he born?"

"It's difficult," said Dad, "I feel I am betraying Judith by telling you, she didn't want you to know."

"But why not, I don't understand," said Julie, "I kept my son."

"She said she didn't want to be a bad role model for you."

"But when I got pregnant she still say anything and suggested I had an abortion, when she didn't do that herself."

"I know, that made her feel even worse when she saw what a good job you were doing bringing up Wayne and how much she loved him, but we were supportive of you, I tried to tell her it wasn't the same as her situation where her parents wouldn't help her keep her baby, in fact they would have thrown her out, it was the 60s" explained Dad "I tried to persuade her to tell you but she was adamant. I would have kept her secret if you hadn't found the photo, I wasn't going to lie about it when you asked."

"Do you know when he was born?" asked Julie

“He was born on your birthday Wendy, that’s why she was always sad on your birthday,” said Dad.

“Oh my God, I thought I was imagining it, I swore she was always unhappy on my birthday, it ruined by 11th birthday.”

“Yes he would have been 18 then so I suppose that was why it hit her harder than usual, I remember that day, I hired a clown for the party, which set her off didn’t it.”

“Right that’s it I am definitely going to find him,” said Julie.

Just at that moment Cilla Black came on the radio talking about all the families she’d reunited on her TV programme.

“That’s it,” said Wendy, “we’ll get Cilla to help us.”