

The Homecoming.

Sophie's home was in her image. The outside was bright and cheerful, painted in cream, not offending the world with garish colours, wanting to blend in, just like Sophie. She was inoffensive and was modest to a fault. But other feelings darkened the inside of her house.

Inside Sophie's house each room was very different. Guests were welcomed into a living room that was neat and orderly, and a dining-room that was kept for guests to eat and drink, but never used by Sophie when she was alone.

No guest was ever allowed to venture upstairs. That part of the house was Sophie's secret self. It was neat and organised, but every door was tightly shut. Each door was black, except for the children's playroom door, which was yellow.

Sophie would spend hours in that room, playing with Lego and racing cars. The room was in memory of her son, George, who had disappeared when the family was on holiday in Spain over twenty years ago. Sophie had been visiting an art gallery while George had been in the care of his father, Robert, who had decided to go drinking in a local bar, with George in tow. Robert had visited the toilet, leaving George to play with other children, but when he returned, his three-year-old son had disappeared.

The police were involved and the hunt for George involved investigations that covered Spain and the United Kingdom, but with no success. The incident led to a breakdown in the relationship between Sophie and Robert. They could no longer spend time with each other as Sophie, try as she might, could not forgive Robert for the event which had shattered their lives.

'I am so sorry. I made a terrible mistake, which I shall regret for the rest of my life,' Robert had pleaded, but the hurt was too deep for Sophie to listen, as cries of anguish reverberated around her head.

The only way Sophie could survive, let alone be happy, was to spend time in the playroom, playing with the racing cars that George had loved so much, talking to him in her mind, and challenging him to see which of them would win the race. This was the only time that even the smallest rays of sunshine could peep through the playroom windows in Sophie's head and lighten her heart.

'You have to let me win sometimes,' Sophie would say to George as she indulged her small son's desire to win every race.

Then, when the sessions were over, she would return downstairs to face the challenges of the world, supported by the mental relief afforded her by her sessions in the playroom.

Then, one afternoon, there was a knock at the front door. Unusually for her, Sophie allowed the knock to interrupt her playroom game with George.

She went downstairs and opened the front door, where a tall handsome young man greeted her with a bashful smile.

'Hello' he said.

Sophie's heart filled with joy.