

The Air of Discontent

Sighing I re-arranged the fish knives, I'd sorted all the kitchen drawers now. Earlier I had filled up three black bin bags of clothes, next on the list was emptying the linen cupboard.

When Dad died five years ago I'd moved back home to look after Mum, but nothing was ever right,

"Hannah, I like my tea stronger than this."

"How long did you leave the bread out? It's stale."

"You should get your hair cut Hannah, your fringe is too long."

Growing up as an only child in this house, the air of mother's constant discontent clung in the corners of every room. My friends' parents were all much younger than mine. Now I am an orphan. Mum passed away last year after falling and breaking her hip.

It made sense to sell my flat and stay in the house. 2020 was a new start, plans to modernise the house, make it brighter and more airy. Just as the builders were about to start, a pandemic screwed up all plans. Surrounded by memories of my childhood filling every lonely day, I slept in my old bedroom where my musical teddy sat on the shelf.

The linen cupboard could wait, I remembered the brown leather suitcase with dad's old photos in. The metal clasps, rusted with brown spots, sprung open easily. Black and white photos filled the case. White sandy beaches and palm trees, souvenirs of Dad's National Service. The essence of aftershave lingered in the air. When the case was empty, I noticed the lining was slightly split. Tucked just inside was a letter.

Hesitating, I examined the envelope and slowly turned it in my hands, childish writing on thin blue paper.

"Dear Julie,

2nd August 1982

The nuns said I can write you a letter, which your new Mammy and Daddy might give you. I'm sorry that I cannot keep you. You're a beautiful baby. I had to come to England to have you as nobody at home knew, except my Mammy. I am going back to Cork tomorrow. The nuns tell me you are going to a very nice home of a man and lady that cannot have children and that you will want for nothing. I hope they will be kind and love you as much as I would if I could keep you. I managed to bring a wee teddy from home that plays music, I hope they let you keep it.

I will think of you every day.

Your loving Mother,

Bernadette Doherty

I wiped the tears from my cheeks. Everything started to make sense, but nothing made sense.

The letter was dated my birthday.

I was adopted.

My name should have been Julie, not Hannah. I thought of the teddy, yes it must be the one upstairs, my real mother had given it to me.

I might not be an orphan, that feeling of 'something missing' might be fulfilled.

Frantically opening the computer, I started typing in Google search.