

Swimming Up the Sun: A Memoir of Adoption

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CHAPTER 2

I flipped nervously through a *Vogue* magazine in Room 220 of the London General Register Office. Two other women sat in the waiting area. Were they also adopted? Except for my adopted sister, I'd never met any others. I thought about the adoption order tucked in my bag and had no idea what to expect. Perhaps a red silk curtain would be drawn aside and my birth mother would be waiting with arms outstretched and she would say, "I'm *so* happy to see you." Perhaps tears would course down her soft cheeks. Perhaps she would squeeze me tight and her perfume would be *Tabu*. To the secretary behind the desk, the three of us appeared calm as we dutifully paged through our magazines, but to me, the waiting room was peopled with ecstatic, ghostly reunions.

The counselor's hand was cool and dry when he shook mine. Mr. C.E. Day welcomed me into his cramped office and sat next to me in a visitor chair.

"Now, before I grant you your birth certificate, I'd like to ask you a few questions. Don't be concerned, it's rather a formality." I was immediately very concerned. "Why do you want to trace your birth mother?"

I couldn't speak for fear of giving the wrong answer. Was she in the file folders on his desk? I mustered a steady voice and said, "I've always wanted to know who she is."

"Of course," he said, gently. He seemed pleasant. Surely he wouldn't fail me. I was, after all, a naturally good test-taker. "About your adoptive family. You have a brother and sister I see. Did you have a good upbringing? Given the ups and downs of any family, of course."

If my mother had been Lizzie Borden herself and my father Jack the Ripper, I would have replied the same: "Very nice. We were a happy family."

"I see you live in the States now. How do you like the States?" What was he getting at? Was I wrong to leave? Could he deny me my papers for not being an English resident?

"I like America," I said, "but I miss England and come back to visit."

"Right then." He reached over and lifted a folder from the worn wooden desk. I glimpsed my own letter requesting an appointment and my application. He handed me an orange and brown brochure entitled *Access to birth records—Information for adopted people*. Its highlights were printed in orange ink:

- o The new legal rights of adopted persons over eighteen
- o The purpose of counseling
- o How to apply

- o Places where you can meet a counselor
- o Where to send your application form
- o Overseas applicants
- o Meeting the counselor
- o What the counselor can tell you
- o Birth records
- o Further information

"May I see your adoption papers?" He studied them and referred to information in the file. "There's not much new I can add to what you already know. Unfortunately, your father's name doesn't appear on the birth certificate. There are many reasons why that happened. For one thing, the registrar requires proof of the father. He would have had to be present at the registration, and that only happens in one out of a hundred cases." I jotted down what he said because I knew I wouldn't remember everything.

"The address of your mother on the birth certificate may be the address of a nursing home or it may be her home address at the time."

My mother. He hadn't shown me the birth certificate yet. He was just reading from the file. "May I see my birth certificate?" I asked.

"I don't have a copy of it here. You'll have to request it at the records office downstairs, and they'll mail it to you. It shouldn't take very long. If and when you locate your birth mother, you should think very carefully about how to approach her." He pointed to the last section in the brochure, "Further information."

"As you can see here, your adoption agency may have more information." He checked the file again. "You were adopted through the Ledbury Court, which comes under the Gloucester County Services Council, but you were registered in Nottingham. Gloucester's quite good. I'll give you their number. One of their probation officers would

have prepared something called the Guardian Ad Litem. It's a confidential report made as a recommendation to the Court. In your case, it would have been filed with Gloucester Social Services. Sometimes it contains useful information. They'll be able to give you the name of the adoption agency in Nottingham as well." He signed a form and handed it to me. It was my birth certificate application form. He smiled. "That wasn't too bad, was it?" I smiled back and took the form. "When you think you're close to finding her, give me a call," he added. He handed me his telephone number and the number of the Gloucester Council on a slip of paper.

"We can try to have a third party make the initial contact for you. A caseworker would visit the family and make a report of the current situation. Saves everyone's feelings that way." Everyone's feelings? It would be a magical caseworker indeed who could spare everyone's feelings in adoption. No red silk curtain but an approved application. I had passed Obstacle One—The Counselor. "Good luck, and do let me know how you get on." When he shook my hand again, it felt warmer.

Downstairs at the cashier's window, I paid about \$5.00 for my birth certificate, twice as much as the government adoption fee my father had paid for me, according to my adoption order. Inflation. In the adjacent room, a dozen people searched in huge black leather-bound books marked "Births," "Deaths," and "Marriages." I looked myself up for the first time, finding an entry that said "July 25, 1956, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Pippa Wright. Mother: Eve Langston Wright."

There I am, I thought. There she is, and there we are together! I stood at the fork of knowing and not knowing, and as I re-shelved the heavy leather volume, I was grinning. Under the yellow and white striped awning of the outdoor café next door, I

sipped espresso amid the fumes of central London. The reality of being an adult adoptee was that officials were kind but treated us like wards of the state. We needed approval from strangers to get the information other adults milling around would take for granted, and we were, above all, expected to behave ourselves like fortunate and obedient children, hands in our laps, pinkies raised over china cups, reporting to counselors, saving everyone's feelings. There it was again. No problem. Years of acting uninterested in my own history had prepared me perfectly for passing in the non-adopted world. Inside I was a she-warrior with a lion heart; I would follow every lead until it died.

I didn't think I'd learned much that was new during the interview, but when my birth certificate arrived in the States, I would at least have an address for Eve, albeit one that was over twenty years old. In the meantime, armed with the slip of blue paper given me by Mr. Day, I decided to visit Nottingham to search out my adoption agency. I liked how that sounded, *my adoption agency*. I caught the Underground train to my girlfriend Fiona's apartment in Whitten. All the way through grimy tunnels and stations, imperceptible to the other passengers, I took soundings from my beating heart and stroked steadily out to sea, straight into the current.

Waiting for me at the bus station in Nottingham, smiling through her slightly bucked teeth, was my Auntie Gerrie. She wasn't a real aunt but an old friend of my adoptive mother's. My adoptive parents, Roger and Jean Burton, had recently divorced and "Moo," as I called my adoptive mother, was now living in Italy with her new husband. My father Roger had been an officer in the Royal Air Force, but throughout our family's frequent relocations, Gerrie and Moo had corresponded, and Gerrie had visited

us often. I liked her; she was Canadian, as friendly and down-to-earth as an American. She'd been a WAF in the Canadian Women's Air Force during the war, and she and Moo had both been secretaries at the University of Nottingham before Moo married my father. Gerrie herself had never married. She delighted in her friends' children, and I'd always loved her adult attention. She had told me about her trips to Spain, brought her oil paints with her on vacation, and when she took up color photography, explained passionately how she had begun dreaming in Technicolor. When I'd phoned her from London, she immediately offered me a place to stay while I searched in Nottingham. I stepped off the bus into her arms, and she carried my bag to the car, quizzing me as we drove to Sherwood. "What did you find out in London?"

"I called Gloucester Social Services and got the name of my adoption agency, the Catholic Children's Society in West Bridgeford. Is that far?" I said.

"West Bridgeford's not far. I can run you over there," she said. "You'd better call them first." I told her I'd try to set something up for the next day. This was my first visit ever to Nottingham. Moo used to weave stories about the magical midsummer nights at Nottingham's Goose Fair. Standing at her elbow in the kitchen, I would stir the white sauce as she grated the cheese, and she'd tell stories of how she and her mother had baked cakes without milk or eggs or butter during wartime. How they'd blacked out their windows with dark sheets every night to protect themselves from the German bombers roaring overhead into the heart of the Midlands. How she hadn't seen an orange for ten years. Nottingham was where Moo grew up, where it all happened for her. As we crossed a bridge over a skein of railway tracks, I saw clots of factories lying off in the distance to

the east and beyond them, the great River Trent. Nottingham was larger and more industrial than I'd imagined from Moo's stories.

Instead of going through the city center, Gerrie drove us up the gentle hills to the suburb of Sherwood. We passed rows of mock-Tudor houses. They were semi-detached, built of russet brick and fronted with black-tarred beams and white stucco, each with a tidy English flower garden in full bloom. With their barrel-chested bay windows, they looked as sturdy as medieval merchants. It always astounded me how English flowers could bloom as they did in the overcast and chilly summers of my childhood. After a stretch of silence, Gerrie remarked that she didn't remember my birth mother being Catholic. I said I didn't either, and we pondered this together.

After we arrived at her house, I called the Catholic Children's Society. A recording told me the number had been changed, and when I called the new number, the receptionist answered, "Southwell Diocesan Society." According to the receptionist, the Catholic Children's Society had gone out of business years ago, and their records had been assumed by another adoption agency. When I was connected to the senior caseworker, I explained I was in search of information. She took down my particulars, and we arranged to meet the next day.

After dinner and television, Gerrie made me comfortable in her cold guestroom. I'd forgotten August was not really a summer month in England, as I had come to think of summer in Washington, roaming carefree in shorts and sandals. Gerrie lent me a flannel nightgown and beneath a paisley feather comforter I snuggled in to the sound of rain slashing at the windows again. What would I find tomorrow? I wondered. Would there be a letter from Eve in my file, asking me to get in touch right away? Such things were

known to happen, I'd read about them in my British adoptee newsletter. Perhaps by tomorrow evening, we'd be having tea together at The Copper Kettle. Perhaps she'd be young and beautiful and reach out to me? Perhaps, perhaps... the jaws of sleep closed tightly around me.

Mrs. Hall, the adoption officer, was waiting for me at the Southwell Diocesan Society. She had both good and bad news. "Unfortunately, many of the Catholic Children's Society records from 1956 and before were damaged by water in the 1960s. The file on your birth mother and most of the files on the adoptees are gone. Destroyed. I'm sorry."

The only records anyone had on my adoption were lost? Why hadn't they been more careful? Why had I never heard of this happening before? Who was trying to keep information from me? My thoughts lurched and raced, but Mrs. Hall continued steadily. "I did manage to find some information showing you definitely were adopted through the agency. Would you like a cup of tea while we talk? I'm sure you would." Yes, please, a cup of tea, the English panacea for soothing shocks and smoothing life's jolts and pains, and it worked.

We sat in her office, drinking milky tea. I was reeling from the specter of my papers—my beloved documents—possibly even my own mother's letter, swirling down a gigantic black drain, sucked into a slimy sewer along with the records of all the other poor pre-1956 adoptees, down to the bottom of a violent, impenetrable sea. Mrs. Hall placed a yellowed index card in my hand. It read "Eve Wright." "This was our system before office automation," she said, smiling. "Of course, you know your mother's name already." Had Eve touched this card? Was this as far as my search would lead?

Mrs. Hall had done some research and began reading from handwritten notes on a pad of lined white paper. "Dr. Grove was the adoption officer in 1956. She's in her seventies now, lives in Cambridge. She handled cases for twenty-four children in 1956, of which twelve resulted in adoptions made in 1956. The others would be listed later. Of those twelve, eight files have been misplaced, including yours." I must have looked bereft because in the next moment, she reached over and placed her hand on my arm. I glanced down at her golden wedding ring and her diamond solitaire. How could she understand? "Even if the file were here, we might not have anything," she said, quietly. "Today, we take down so much more information. You've applied for your birth certificate, haven't you?" I nodded, unable to speak. "Good. I can tell you a few more things, based on the monthly log book, which luckily did survive."

Startled, I looked at her. She had something to give me after all. "You were born at the Nottingham City Hospital on July 25, 1956. The next day, you went to Balmoral Nursing Home, where you stayed from July 26 to August 11—with your mother. You were collected from the Hollies, 8 Maperley Road, on August 25. That was your date of placement." She turned over the page and continued reading. "The Hollies was a mother and baby home, run by the town authority. However, my records show your mother was not at the Hollies; you were there alone."

I scrawled everything on the back of an envelope; I didn't want to forget a single detail. I was still swirling like a torn leaf down the drain of lost records. August 11, the day that she relinquished me; August 11, today's date. While I listened and wrote, questions rose in my mind like bubbles breaking on the surface of a pond. Did we really spend two weeks together at a nursing home? When did she decide to give me up?

Mrs. Hall nibbled her pen. "I wonder why your adoptive parents didn't apply in Herefordshire, near where they lived?" I explained that my adoptive mother was from Nottingham, and how Mr. Day thought I might be able to obtain the court's Guardian Ad Litem report. Mrs. Hall shook her head. "The report was probably destroyed," she said. "They aren't usually kept."

More papers gone. It was infuriating how non-adopted people so casually disposed of our records. Didn't they understand that was all we had? Mrs. Hall continued, "... went through Hereford Court, not Nottingham. I have to tell you, that's unusual. I wonder if someone intervened." She reviewed her notes.

"There was money in the family. At least, someone paid for a nursing home for two weeks for you and your mother. Your father, perhaps? That didn't happen often. Eve was only at the hospital for twenty-four hours. She was twenty-three, did you know that?" This was new information. When she had me, she was only about a year older than I was now, a young woman, but not a teenager.

"Ah, here's something else. Yes! I see. She was not known to the agency until July 31st, 1956. That's when she was referred to us." Mrs. Hall looked up at me. "That was a week after you were born."

"What does that mean?"

"I can't be positive, but I would guess you were a concealed pregnancy. Usually, young women made arrangements before the birth, but sometimes, they tried to keep their pregnancies secret as long as they could. Then they didn't contact us until after the birth, when the hospital referred them. I can't be sure, but the late date is a strong

indication that's what happened," she said. A concealed pregnancy. I was a secret baby? "I don't know if the agency made home visits to your adoptive parents in Colwall. It was a bit far, but usually they would."

She examined my adoption order. "December 13th. It took almost four months to get the adoption order. That's about right. The law requires that a child be six weeks old before the application is made." I thought but didn't dare ask: Was that to give Eve a chance to change her mind? Did she wait two weeks before deciding to give me up because she was uncertain about what to do? If my father had given her money, perhaps there was some other reason. If he had given her money, why didn't he do more? Why didn't he marry her? The taboo against asking questions made it impossible for me to speak my mind, even to Mrs. Hall.

"Do you know anything about your father?" she asked. I told her that my adoptive mother said that his family ran a haberdashery in Nottingham and that they were Jewish. "The only haberdashery I can think of now is Roughton's on Derby Road. They've been around as long as I can remember. I don't know if they're Jewish, though." More new information; I wrote it all down. This frankness with which she spoke to me and made suggestions, this was new too. My parents had prided themselves on their open-mindedness, but adoption was a loaded gun. My attempts to pry out information were cautiously worded and carefully planned. I sensed from them that they'd be injured if I showed too much interest. I knew without being told that a child who'd been put up for adoption had to be careful; she could be returned to an orphanage or children's home. Yet here was a woman, a social worker, talking as if an adoptee's history were the most open subject in the world. I shivered with a silvery thrill at my new recklessness.

"What are you planning to do next?" Mrs. Hall asked as we stood up to leave.

"I'm going to talk to Canon Ingles at St. Peter's Church," I said. "He married my adoptive parents and was a family friend. My mother once told me his wife sat on my adoption board," I said.

"Good," she said. Then she looked straight at me and her soft gray eyes turned to steel for an instant. "Let me offer a word of advice, if I may. Some of us, such as myself and most of the staff here, feel it's perfectly normal for adoptees to be curious about their birth families, and yes, even search. But there's another school of thought that says you should leave it alone. If you meet someone like that from the Old School, do remember they mean well, but don't pay much attention to what they *say*. I understand why you have to search." She took my hand in hers and shook it. "I understand very well. Good luck!" When later I encountered Canon Ingles, I appreciated Mrs. Hall's warning and her encouragement.

Canon Ingles was pleased to see me, having known Moo and her family for many years. When my grandfather died, according to Moo, the well-wishers at the funeral service spilled out of the doors of St. Peter's Church into the surrounding cobblestone square. An old gentleman in black church robes, Canon Ingles moved with the staccato vigor of a wind-up toy. He appeared intelligent and kind.

I had told him on the phone why I was calling, and he showed no displeasure that I was after adoption information. In fact, he invited me to tea and proudly showed me around the little stone church, pointing out the latest stained-glass window and brass fittings. Then we walked over to the rectory, where he asked after my mother and life in America and spoke fondly of Moo's father, my grandfather. Thinking the old dear had

forgotten the acknowledged reason for my visit, I eventually asked him directly. "Did you know my birth mother?" Moo had hinted that he knew her family as well.

Canon Ingles paused and smiled, as if contemplating his new window. "Oh, dear," he said, finally. "That was so long ago. I'm afraid I don't remember a thing." The pit of my stomach churned; I sensed he was being cagey and pressed him whether he actually knew her family. "Heavens! What gave you that idea?" he said, all round-eyed innocence beneath his shining, bald head. Now I knew he was lying. He actually clapped his hands together and gazed up at the ceiling. I was suddenly face to face with a cartoon of Friar Tuck. I told him Moo had said he knew both the families.

"Did she, now?" he answered and rearranged his vestments, still smiling with absurd liturgical sweetness. We sat silently in the chilly rectory. This was why I'd come to see him, I reminded myself. Not to have tea or look at the church windows; I'd been forthcoming about my mission. I had no intention of leaving without finding out all I could. I could hear birds singing outside in the churchyard. Finally, he shuffled his feet, and when he looked at me again, his face was sour and he was evidently annoyed. I'd put him on the spot but I had warned him. Mrs. Hall's visit had made me bolder. She'd given me confidence in my search.

"I met your mother's family once," he admitted. He was sitting behind a wooden desk strewn with hundreds of papers and bills. The shelves were filled with moldering leather-bound books. Then he smiled, and I thought he'd remembered something. I poised my pen.

"Yes," he said, "Your mother was married within a few months of the adoption. My wife was a member of the adoption committee. She wasn't a Nottingham girl, no, no.

She'd been to school in the area, I think, an art student. Her parents didn't live in Nottingham, though."

"Then how did you know them?"

"They came to me, asking for help," he said. "I gave them the name of a nursing home. It doesn't exist anymore," he said, quickly, seeming to cover his tracks. "*Wonderful* idea, adoption. Without it, the baby would suffer, you see. I think your father's people were Jewish," he added, whispering. He reached over and held my hand. I wanted to withdraw it but thinking he was about to confide something important, I leaned in.

"Nothing to worry about, dear." He stroked my hand like a father of the church consoling one of his sheep. "You were a special case ... came from two good families -- no criminals, nothing nasty." He leaned back and released my hand with a sigh.

I thought to myself, *You could be from Mars for all you understand why I'm here.* "Nothing nasty" was not why I'd traipsed thousands of miles to sit in his gloomy office. I'd come for information, data. I was an adult, and *I'd* be the judge of what was nasty and what wasn't. He was treating me as if I were a child. I felt like shaking him. But instead, I girded myself Perry Mason-style and asked him where Eve went after she'd had me.

"Who's that, dear?"

"My mother," I said calmly.

"And how is your dear mother? It's been years since I've seen her! Is she still in England, did you say?" His evasiveness shocked me but I kept my head.

"My birth mother, Eve Wright. Where did she go?" I asked again directly, no holding back. He smiled as if I hadn't spoken at all. I said I thought he knew something he wasn't telling me. He waved his hand self-importantly, dismissing the matter.

"She married and went abroad. So long ago, don't remember. Come, you must be going. I must show you the gardens before you leave. We do have such lovely gardens in England, you must admit." He floated out of the study, a pontificating cloud of jangling vestments, leaving me alone, surrounded by his ancient books, his dusty church life, his narrow prejudices. My intuition told me that she didn't go abroad. She stayed in England. Was this intuition or was I simply angry? It was difficult to tell. What would Perry Mason do now?

That night, Gerrie and I ate fish and chips in front of the TV and watched *Coronation Street*, an English, working-class soap opera that had been running for years. Moo always hated it and made me turn it off. She didn't like its dreary theme song and the Midlands accents she'd left behind when she married Roger, my adoptive father. Though she had never returned to Nottingham while I was growing up, she often reminisced about it. Again and again, she told the story of how her parents took her every summer to Goose Fair, about the carnival rides, and the displays of cows, sheep, and ducks, and the long, wonderful summer nights that never ended. Besides a few childhood pleasures, though, Nottingham seemed to remind Moo of something she wanted to forget. She never told me what it was, but she had no intention of returning once a week via *Coronation Street*.

I told Gerrie about how I'd tried to talk to Canon Ingles' wife about my adoption before I'd left the church that afternoon. How she had refused to even acknowledge my

presence. How Ingles himself ushered me out of the front door with a firm hand on my back.

"I always thought Ingles was a bit of a puffball," said Gerrie. "Your mother doted on him but then..." She broke off, not wanting to criticize Moo. I knew how easily my mother was flattered, especially by men, and Canon Ingles was a master of paternal comfort, which she had probably found flattering. As far as I was concerned, during his condescending reception he'd entirely missed the point.

"Yes," I said with pleasure, "a real puffball."

I had one more mission to carry out while in Nottingham: to look for my birth father, Philip. When I told Daddy I was beginning my search, he'd sent me a copy of my adoption papers and a note that said, "I hope everything goes well on Wednesday," referring to my appointment with the counselor, Mr. Day. Daddy was a proper British gentleman who kept his own counsel, but in his quiet way, I knew he'd given me his blessing to start searching. A native of Norfolk, not Nottingham, he had met Moo when he was social secretary of the Students Union at the University of Nottingham and Moo was secretary to the Vice-Chancellor. He didn't remember as much about the layout of the city as Moo would have done, including the name or location of my birth father's store, but Moo and I had been estranged for a few years. We'd had a stupid argument in Italy in which she sided with her Italian husband and I had responded rudely. With damaged pride on all sides, I had beaten a hasty retreat from the family farmhouse to a *pensione* and not a word had passed between us since.

To support my search, Daddy had tried to loosen the rusty wheels of his memory and given me directions to where he thought Philip's family business might have been.

But I had neither the shop name nor Philip's last name—if indeed his first name was Philip—nor an address. All I knew was that I was looking for the trace of a small, Jewish-owned haberdashery that had been in existence in the City of Nottingham twenty years ago and might have long since closed. I wasn't too hopeful of success.

Following Daddy's directions precisely, I found myself at the bottom of a hill where two busy streets intersected. In the location where my father thought the shop might have been stood a traffic circle and a five-story car park. Nottingham had changed in twenty years. I sighed and pondered the hill. Since I was here, I might as well investigate, but I did it with a doubtful heart. I walked up and down the hill, asking window-washers and shop owners if anyone had heard of a Jewish haberdashery that was once at the bottom or the top of the hill, name unknown, but no one knew anything.

Positioned halfway up the hill was a small synagogue. I walked in and looked around. It was the first synagogue I'd ever been in, quiet and dark. It seemed to be empty. There was no one there to ask. Warily, I realized that having no name and address was an insurmountable liability. I must find out his name somehow. I was exhausted. I had no idea searching would be such a struggle.

Riding the bus back to London, weighed down by what seemed like an unsuccessful visit, I wrote a letter in my notebook to the Ingles, summing up the frustration I felt.

August 9, 1978

Dear Canon and Mrs. Ingles:

To you, I may be a nuisance but that is because you sit on committees, viewing these things "objectively." You sat on my adoption board. You are responsible to me, whether you like it or not.

Had the proper records been kept and made available, my need to know might have been satisfied. Since the information that is rightfully mine has been destroyed or removed, my curiosity—more than that—my passion to know where I came from has been honed. What you dreaded, that I might actually trace my birth parents, is now my only avenue.

You know more than you admitted. I believe you deliberately tried to lead me astray. It is a spiteful way to behave and I am angry with both of you. Still, you have every right to your archaic notions.

Suffice to say that your well-meant evasions and deceptions have not discouraged me. On the contrary, you talked to me and saw a determined person. I intend to investigate the circumstances of my birth so I can learn what you insist I should forget.

Sincerely,

Nicole J. B_____

I never mailed the letter.

Back in London, I returned to the Register Room at St. Catherine's House. People were searching, tracking down information on births, deaths, and marriages. I knew my way around now. I went straight to the big black marriage registers and pulled them off the shelf with a quiet fury, one by one, beginning with August 1956, the month following my birth. Each register covered three months. At Jan-Feb-Mar 1957, I waited impatiently until another patron finished his copying.

To kill time, I wandered back to the Births section and looked up my adopted sister, Christobel: Oct-Nov-Dec 1960. There she was: "Julie A. Hill, born in Hastings, [5h 286]." I copied down the citation to send her a postcard, though she had never been interested in searching. Why was I intrigued and driven, and she not at all? Why was my adopted sister, with her angelic English complexion and carefree giggles, so different

from my dark introspection? We had been raised in the same family; was it a force of lineage that steered us to separate fates? I knew only the strength of the undercurrent that felt as if it were towing me out to sea.

Back in Marriages, the man had re-shelved the register I was looking for. I lifted it onto the worn oak reading table and ran my index finger down the chronological list of names. My heart was racing as if I knew she were nearby. I could almost hear her calling my name. I had to slow down my tracing to make sure I didn't miss her. I wanted to be scrupulously thorough. I didn't want to leave and feel later that I'd done a shoddy job.

Nothing.

I re-shelved Jan-Feb-Mar 1957 and pulled down Apr-May-June. Nothing. Volume after volume, I traced the names down the avenue of one side, up the boulevard of the next. Oct-Nov-Dec 1957. My finger stopped as my eyes took in the entry: EVE WRIGHT married DEREK GOODMAN in Nthmbld. W. [1b 704]. Leaning against the reading table, I felt satisfied knowing I had been right and Canon Ingles had been wrong, at least in part. She *had* married but she didn't go abroad; she stayed in England. Even before I looked in the births register, I was sure I'd find a half-sibling born the next year. My mother's middle initial was missing but the name was unusual enough I wasn't concerned.

Now that I'd found Eve, I relaxed into the rest of the search. I went for coffee at the cafe next door and returned to check the entry again. It hadn't changed. I went back to Births and looked for her birth entry, remembering she was twenty-three when she had me, therefore born sometime in 1933. She was thirteen years younger than Moo. I found her: Apr-May-June 1933, "EVE L. WRIGHT, mother's maiden surname BARLOW,

District of Yardlow [7b 822]." Moving along, I began looking for my siblings—my siblings. My family.

Considering that she might have been pregnant when she married, I searched the registers for Goodman births nine months from my birth, April 1957. Persistence paid off. After two hours of searching, I had assembled my whole family. Goodman children registered between 1957 and 1964, born to Mrs. Goodman nee' Wright:

MARTIN GOODMAN, District of Deptford, Jan-Feb-Mar 1958
KAREN A. GOODMAN, District of Fullham, Jan-Feb-Mar 1960
CRAIG B. GOODMAN, Nthmbld S., Oct-Nov-Dec 1962
NEIL J. GOODMAN, Nthmbld S., Apr-May-June 1964

I looked through four more years of registers, but four children (five counting me) seemed to be enough for Eve; there were no more. I was tired by the time I copied down the last citation. Hours had passed since I'd arrived, and I hadn't had anything to eat. Before I left, I ordered a copy of Eve's marriage certificate and Neil's birth certificate, which would give me the most recent address in the records. A grand day's work, I thought, as I boarded the train taking me back to my friend Fiona's flat.

The next day, I took a cut-rate coach called the Magic Bus from London to Paris to meet American friends. As I left England, I was spent but relieved. I hadn't found my birth parents, but I was on their path. Some people had been forbidding, true, but others had been encouraging. I could wait until my next visit to continue where I'd left off.

Time would be my friend or so it seemed. In my notebook, I wrote:

"Forget the past? I wish I could. That beveled jewel, chipped, clouded, a relic. Forget the past, it's gone. I *can't* forget what I don't know. But I am beginning to feel involved, no longer a detached adventurer. The day belongs to me. My search is *real*."

I'd ordered the information I needed to continue. It might even be waiting for me on the hall table by the time I returned to the States.