

What if Mr. Right was right in front
of you all along?



In
Case you
Missed
It

LINDSEY
KELK

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Lindsey Kelk



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Dedication

For Jeff.
Thanks for making sure I didn't miss you.

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CHAPTER ONE

The only difference between a fresh start and ‘oh my god, my life is a complete failure’ is a good attitude and the right Instagram caption.

Which was why I had my ‘so happy to be moving home’ social media declaration drafted and ready to post, even before the wheels of the plane had touched British soil. It wasn’t a lie but it wasn’t exactly the truth either, which I figured was OK, since that described roughly ninety-seven percent of the internet anyway.

Taking a deep breath, I pushed my wayward curls into some sort of recognizable shape, rapped three times on my parents’ back door and let myself into the house.

‘Knock, knock,’ I called, heaving my bags inside. ‘It’s only me.’

‘Look lively, Gwen, sounds like burglars.’ I could hear my dad slapping his thighs all the way from the other side of the house.

‘Yes, put your hands in the air and step away from the baked goods,’ I ordered as I bounced into the living room all jazz hands and forced smiles. I dropped my backpack on the floor and searched the room for snacks.

‘Seriously, I’m not joking, where are the Fondant Fancies? I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.’

‘Plenty of cultures eat horses,’ Mum said, gathering me up in a trademark Gwen-Reynolds-hug, swinging me from side to side and making sweet, unintelligible noises. ‘Probably better for you than a Fondant Fancy.’

Dad, the more stoic of my parents, opted for a pat on the shoulder and a curt nod before he disappeared into the kitchen to emote. He wasn’t the touchy-feely type. At my graduation, while everyone else was sobbing and crying, my dad shook my hand and slapped me on the back so hard, my mortar-board went flying.

‘How was the flight? Did you have any trouble at the airport? Did you get all your bags?’ Mum asked as she settled on the settee and I took up residence in my favourite armchair. It was as though I’d never been away.

‘Hers and half the plane’s by the looks of things,’ Dad called from the other room. ‘Have you brought all of Washington back with you, Rosalind?’

‘Not all of them,’ I shouted back. ‘Only the good ones.’

‘Not many then,’ he replied, muttering something about ‘the bloody state of politics’ to himself as I heard him turn on the tap.

I smiled and let myself relax for the first time in I couldn’t quite remember how long. The living room looked almost exactly the same as it had when I left, same magnolia walls, same bookcase groaning with books, same painting of a peacock my parents bought on their honeymoon and refused to admit was hideous. It was all so reassuring, however questionable the aesthetic. I hadn’t been back for a visit in more than eighteen months and it was a little over three years since I’d left London for my fabulous new job, producer at a radio station in Washington, DC. Somehow it felt like I’d been away much, much longer than that, and like I’d never been away at all, both at the same time. I wondered if everyone’s family living room had the same time-warp effect on them.

‘So,’ Mum said quietly, tucking her smooth, straight hair behind her ears. I got my hair and my height from my dad but the rest of me, the freckles, the brown eyes, strong nose, wide mouth, were pure Gwen Reynolds.

‘You’re home. Is everything all right?’

I pressed my lips into a thin, straight line. So much for relaxing.

‘Everything is fine,’ I replied as confidently as I could. ‘I told you on the phone.’

‘You did and I’m not going to go on about it,’ she said with an agreeable smile. ‘But if there’s anything you want to talk about, you know I’m here ...’

‘Here we are, here we are,’ Dad walked back in with a heavily laden tray, matching china teacups for them, the novelty Care Bear mug I’d been drinking from since I was six for me. ‘I got one of those fast-boil kettles, worth its weight in gold. Less than a minute, even if you get the water out the fridge.’

Mum reached across the tray for her cup and gave me a knowing look. She wouldn’t say anything else in front of Dad, deep and meaningful weren’t his cup of tea.

They both looked a little bit older, I realized, noticing a few more lines around Mum’s eyes, a bit more grey in Dad’s close-cut curls. It was the

kind of thing you didn't notice when you saw someone every day but when it had been a while, you couldn't help but see it.

'Present time!' I said, setting down my mug and clapping my hands. I wrestled a very full duty-free bag out of my backpack. 'Perfume for Mum, bottle of whisky for Dad ...'

I handed out the tax-free bounty and beamed. 'The man said that was his favourite whisky, I hope you like it.'

'And who are all those Toblerones for?' Dad asked, eyes on my backpack. I quietly pushed it around the side of my chair before he realized the Toblerones had already been eaten. It had been a long flight.

'Can't believe Jo's left home,' I said, changing the subject as I took in all the other details that spelled out home: the velvet drapes, the net curtains, Mum's late-nineties collection of Swarovski crystal bears. 'She says she's enjoying it?'

'Having the time of her life.' Dad lifted his eyebrows over the rim of his teacup as Mum spritzed herself with her new perfume and immediately sneezed. 'According to the one text message she has deigned to send me.'

No one would ever actually call my sister an accident (except me) but even if she wasn't planned, my parents couldn't have cooked up a better child if they'd tried. And they had tried (again, me). Jo was beautiful. A perfect baby with silky, straight hair, a button nose and the biggest blue eyes you'd ever seen, which was why, when I passed all my exams at sixteen and jokingly told everyone I was the brains of the family and baby Jo was the beauty, I didn't mind so much that they agreed with me. It stung a bit more when she grew up and turned out to be an actual genius as well as shockingly beautiful. Where was the fairness in that?

'One in, one out,' Dad said as he passed me the biscuit tin. 'Just when I thought we'd finally got the house to ourselves.'

'Obviously, we discussed the timing,' I joked. 'Didn't want to leave the two of you here on your own to go mental.'

He fixed me with a look that suggested he got the joke, he just didn't think it was funny.

'I didn't think we'd see you back so soon, everything seemed to be going so well. Thought you'd stay over there a bit longer,' he added, his voice lilting up and down as he avoided asking his real question.

Why had I come home?