

Chapter 1 *A hand on a guitar*

Before I was born, my mum played music with four friends. There's a photograph of them in our living room. Evie, Grace, Angela, Kate and my mum. They were the Sweet Pepper Band, and they played South American music. Mum played guitar.

Mum had long dark hair. In the photograph she's wearing a big hat, a red shirt and yellow trousers. She looks South American, but she's not, she's English. She's smiling in the photograph. She looks beautiful.

She's beautiful now too. But these days her hair is short and the dark brown colour comes from a bottle. Mum doesn't play her guitar very often any more. It sits in the corner of the living room waiting for Evie, Grace, Angela or Kate to visit.



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When I was a little girl, I liked to put my small hand on the front of Mum's guitar while she played it. My hand moved a little because of the music. Mum said that was called vibration. She was happy that I could feel the vibration of her music when I put my hand on her guitar. And she wasn't angry when one day I had blue paint on my hand and I put it on the guitar.

Mum liked me to feel the vibration of her music, you see. That's because I can't hear her music. My ears don't work. I'm deaf. I was born like that. Sometimes I think that's why Mum doesn't play music very often, because she knows I can't hear it. And now that I'm eighteen years old, my hands are too big to put them on the front of the guitar.

I don't know if Mum was sad to have a deaf baby. She tells me I was beautiful when I was born. I had lots of blonde hair and blue eyes that went brown like hers after a few months. But I don't think Mum's sad because she smiles all the time.

Mum smiles more than anyone I know. She's always happy, that's one of the things everyone loves about her. The children at Busy Kids Day Nursery, where we both work, all love Mum. Busy Kids is Mum's business. She started it five years ago.

Mum's really good with children. I remember when I was quite young – five or six years old – I was sad about something. I don't remember what I was sad about, but I do remember what Mum said. We sat in a chair together with her face close to mine and she put her arms around me. We stayed like that for a while, and then she sat back so she could talk to me. Mum and I use our hands and fingers to talk to each other. It's called signing.

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Anyway, Mum said that we can choose how to be in life – happy or sad. She said, ‘Life’s short, so choose to be happy.’ I try never to forget those words.

I try to be like my mum because I think she’s a wonderful person. I don’t know much about my father because he left after I was born. All I know is that he played music too, and that he’s French. He lives in Paris now.

Mum and my father met when he was working in Norwich for a year. They fell in love and soon got married. Dad moved into the house where Mum and I live now. Norwich is a beautiful place, but it isn’t as big and exciting as Paris. I think my father got bored. Or perhaps he was sad when I was born deaf. Because that’s when he went away to live with his family in Paris. He never came back.

Some of my friends don’t talk to their parents very much. My friend Suzanne sometimes tells her mother she’s

with me when she's really with her boyfriend. She does this because her mum worries about her all the time. She worries about where she is and who she's with. But Mum and I are very close, and I couldn't tell her something that wasn't true. Anyway, she doesn't worry the way Suzanne's mum does, so I usually tell her everything.

But I didn't tell her when I fell in love for the first time.

I don't know why. Perhaps it was because it felt so strange; because *I* felt so strange. It was almost like being on a boat on an angry sea. Sometimes I was afraid of how I felt.

And there was another problem. I didn't know the name of the man I was in love with.