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It was November, three months after the awful day at the park when Olivia's life as she knew it had been blown apart. She looked around at the mountain of boxes tied with satin ribbons, filled with delicate latte-coloured macarons. Towers of the things teetered on the benches and the dining table, ready for the fundraising bake sale tomorrow at Darcy's school. It was possible, she observed, that she was channelling her grief into baking. This wasn't entirely a bad thing, given that she was a pastry chef. How much more complicated her life would be right now if her loss had manifested in an inability to bake. Instead, the windows of her cake shop in the main street of Richmond, Tasmania, were full of tempting treats, the aromas wafting out into the street to entice customers. She'd never been so busy.

Tonight, though, it was time to put the baking trays down. 'That'll do, pig,' she muttered to herself, echoing Farmer Hoggett from the movie *Babe*. She lifted her apron over her head and turned off the oven, quietening its hum. In the ensuing silence, she could hear her own heartbeat. The kitchen walls seemed to tick down like a cooling car, exhaling with relief after her whirlwind of activity. It was only nine o'clock, hours before she'd be tired enough for her busy mind to rest.

Darcy was asleep. She'd given him some paracetamol for the pain in his leg, and he'd drifted off in her arms. But for her, sleep had become an elusive thing. She was crippled by the silence, the emptiness, the stillness of Ma's absence. She was lonely, she realised with a shock. Lonely. A horrible word. A pathetic one. Thirty-three was too young to be lonely, surely? Yet Darcy was only six, and he was lonely too. They both missed Ma so much.

From inside her handbag, she retrieved the envelope and plucked out the black-and-white photograph she'd found at the back of a drawer in Ma's room. The photo must have been taken in England. There was Ma – Eleanora Kent – in a dark, fitted, sleeveless dress that came to just above the knee. It was impossible to tell what colour the dress was – navy blue, perhaps. Or green. She was a young woman, maybe twenty, and the expression on her face was one of secret delight, an expression Olivia was certain she'd never seen in a lifetime of living with her. Her hair was swept up high, and she clasped the handle of her bag with white gloves as she leant against a stone wall, smiling towards the photographer, or maybe someone nearby. On the back of the photo, in Ma's handwriting, was the year, 1966, the same year she'd come to Australia as a ten-pound Pom with her parents, falling in love with Lawrence on the ship, marrying him as soon as they'd stepped onto shore, and having Olivia's mother, Laurie, the next year. Sadly, Olivia had never met Ma's much-loved Lawrence, who'd died not long after their marriage.

Olivia was fascinated by this image of Nora. It was Nora in a whole other world, a world Olivia had never experienced. She moved to the lounge room and flopped onto Ma's recliner, gazing at the photo. On a whim, she lifted her laptop from the coffee table onto her knees, and typed in *Stoneden, Cotswolds*. She was rewarded with breathtaking images of

green fields and sparkling rivers, swans, stone cottages, gardens of lavender and roses. She skimmed through a site about the village's history, and then came upon a link to an article in the village's local paper, posted two months ago, that made her heart kick hard against her ribs.

### ***Calls for descendants to rebuild dying village of Stoneden***

*After a controversial campaign, the Stoneden Renaissance Committee has pushed through its ambitious proposal to the district council to reinvigorate the village by inviting descendants of former residents to emigrate to Stoneden and contribute to its economic and social viability.*

*Although Stoneden's heritage charm has made it popular with Hollywood cinematographers, its population has been declining and its economy has suffered, with the closure of shops and other local businesses. The Renaissance Committee's president, Mr Clarence James, says the village needs an urgent revival if it is to remain a working village rather than 'just a museum'.*

*A similar project was previously launched in Italy, where over 100 castles, monasteries and farms were given away in return for their conversion into tourist destinations to boost local economies. The island of Arranmore in Ireland has also sought to reverse emigration by welcoming professionals from Australia and the US who are able to work remotely from the island and boost its declining population.*

*A trial phase of one year has been granted to Stoneden's Renaissance Committee, which now calls for applications from descendants of former residents of the village who have a profession or business and can demonstrate their ability to contribute to the local community and economy. Successful applicants will need to live and work in the village for a minimum of five years (pending final approval after the trial phase), and will receive financial assistance from the council for the transition. In the interests of building the population and securing a future for Stoneden, precedence will be given to families with school-aged children.*

*Anyone interested, from anywhere in the world, can visit the project's website to find out more and submit an application.*

Olivia read the article, then read it again. She followed the link to the council's website and absorbed the information, excitement inching her towards the edge of the recliner, as if she could spring up and fly halfway around the world this instant. Stoneden was calling for people just like her, a professional pastry chef with her own business and a school-aged child. And what was there to keep Olivia and Darcy in Tasmania now that Ma was gone? They had no family left here, with Nora's parents gone at least twenty years and Olivia having lost her own mother when she was a small child. Darcy's father lived on the other side of the world, in Norway, known to his son only via the internet.

If she had just one wish, it was to have a family once more. Maybe this was the last chance for both her and Darcy to save what was left of their family, building a true relationship between Helge and Darcy, and maybe, just maybe, discovering the last remaining connections to Olivia's own family tree.

She clicked on the link to apply.