



*Adopted
How it feels to be
Sill Kromowitz
1984 (UK)
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Holly, age fifteen

At about one-thirty in the afternoon, the telephone rang, and the voice on the other end asked for my mother. It was a Saturday and I was home alone. I said she was out, so the caller asked me to write down her name, address, and telephone number, which I did. Then the woman who was on the other end of the phone said, "Fourteen years ago I had a baby that I gave up for adoption. I believe you are my daughter."

I was in total shock, and as we talked, my mind was in a different world. She asked me a lot of questions about myself and filled me in on what had happened to her. She said she was five-foot-four, had blond hair and green eyes, and that she worked for a management consulting company. And she explained why she had put me up for adoption. She was seventeen when she met and fell in love with my birthfather, but by the time she found out she was pregnant they had broken up. She wanted to keep me, but her mother talked her out of it. She told me she had gotten married since then, to someone else, but was presently divorced and she didn't have any other kids. We talked for about

an hour, and after I hung up I started sobbing. One of my father's friends, Mike Rodgers, came in the door looking for my parents, and I put my arms around him and just kept on crying and crying. I couldn't stop.

I wasn't crying because I was sad. I had planned on searching when I got a little older, and my parents were going to help me. In fact, it was something we had talked about very recently. So I was happy that my birthmother had found me, but I never expected it to be so all-of-a-sudden. I always figured I had till tomorrow—you know, a few years more before I really had to deal with it.

I was finally able to tell Mike about the phone call, and he drove me over to where my mother—my adoptive mother—was working. On the way over we met my Dad, but I was still crying so hard I couldn't explain what had happened—I couldn't get the words out of my mouth. He thought someone had died until I was finally able to tell him, and then he didn't know what to say. I had to leave for a basketball game at school, so he went and picked up Mom at work, told her to sit down, and told her everything. When I got home from the game, we all talked and decided it would be best to begin a relationship slowly—that we would just exchange information and photographs by mail for a while. That's what we did for about two months. I was still wandering around in a daze during this time, and I was worried about how my life might change. My mother said I should just think of Alison, my birthmother, as a friend, and that I should try to put myself in her position, so that's what I tried to do. And then in May we finally met. We invited Alison to stay with us for a few days, and she flew out for a weekend visit. My parents

and I met her at the airport, and that was really weird. I was glad we were a little bit late because that gave us something to talk about while we were walking through the terminal. After we got to our house she gave me a picture of my birthfather and also the little bracelet they had put on my wrist when I was born. She had kept it all these years.

We spent the weekend mostly talking about what she had been doing since I was born and how she had found me. It took her eight months and a lot of work, calling around and checking records. I showed her my scrapbook and told her about my school—stuff like that. We didn't go out anywhere, and I didn't





get a chance to introduce her to any of my friends. We had a good visit, and after she left, we wrote letters back and forth.

The following month, after school got out, I went to visit her for a week. That was really exciting because I had never been to New York before, but it upset me when her friends would say stuff like “So you’re Alison’s daughter.” I didn’t know what to say. I sort of went along with it because I didn’t know what else they could call me, but by not saying anything, I felt like I was taking away something from my Mom. It’s confusing because I don’t know how to categorize my relationship with Alison. I don’t want to think of it as purely biological, but I don’t know



how else to define it. I feel ridiculous introducing her as “my friend,” and yet I certainly don’t think of her as my mother. Nor do I want to. In my view I have only one mother and that’s the mother who raised me and mothered me—who gave me food and shelter and love while I was growing up. That’s my definition of a mother. My birthmother’s the person who gave me my heredity and my life, and while I don’t want to push her away, I also don’t want to take anything away from my Mom. I don’t want my mother to feel any loss of prestige.

One thing that’s nice about Alison—it’s a part of her that I really enjoy—is that she loves to do new things like ice-skating

or trying new restaurants. My Mom, who isn't particularly adventurous, says this is good for me. She wants me to have new experiences and grow as a person. I know she probably feels a little threatened by Alison, who's ten years younger than she is, but I think she's so secure about herself as a person that she can handle it. And since I tend to be somewhat shy, it has been great for me to travel a little and spread my wings. Still, I prefer having Alison visit us. She flew down again this Easter for a week, and I felt much more comfortable and secure in my own environment. Last winter, when I went to see her, I felt my parents were trying to push me away. I know they were just trying to be nice and let me know I was free to visit her for however long I wanted—that it wouldn't hurt their feelings or make them feel rejected—but instead of making me feel free, it made me worry that they didn't love me, that they were rejecting me!

The past two years have been real hard on my parents. I get the feeling that sometimes they're thinking that they're losing me, and that's the last thing in the world I want them to feel. It isn't true. And most of all, I don't want to lose them. Once, when my mother and I were having a fight—the way all mothers and daughters have arguments—my Mom said something like “Well, you can just go and live with Alison.” Even though I knew she didn't mean it, I felt really hurt. That's the sort of thing that can't ever be said—not in the heat of an argument, and not even joking around.

I think I'm probably mature for my age, so I've been able to handle all of this fairly well. But that initial phone call was definitely a bad idea. If I was a birthmother and I had a fourteen-year-old daughter, I'd probably go through her parents first. And

if I was scared that her parents wouldn't let me talk to her, or possibly wouldn't even tell her I'd called and would just send me a lawyer's letter telling me to get lost, then I'd try to use an intermediary. Calling directly is just too big a shock for a kid. The whole notion of searching is still pretty new, and it's hard for anyone to know how to act, so I'm not mad at Alison and I *am* glad she found me. That's all in the past. Right now we have to deal with the future, and my main concern is that Alison may expect more out of me than I can give. It would be sad if she wanted to make me the center of her existence, because I can't do the same thing for her. I want to be friendly but I don't want anything past that. I know where she is and what she looks like, and that's great, but it's all I ever wanted or needed.

Alison and I have talked about this and she told me I don't need to worry—that any relationship is determined by mutual consent. She says all she wants is for us to be honest and open with each other, and no matter what happens, just knowing that I'm alive and well is wonderful for her. I hope that's true because right now I'm feeling real protective about my Mom and I'd hate to feel I have two mothers. I'd like to keep in touch with Alison, but anything beyond that is too much of a responsibility for me. We've each got our own life to live.