

All My Lies Are True

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verity

April, 2020

Mum pulls back the light-blue curtain and steps out of her dressing room. I click the button on the side of my phone to make the screen black and hide the message I'd been halfway through typing and, just to be sure, I turn the phone face down on my lap.

Mum notices and her eyes linger a fraction too long on my phone, curious, as she's always been, about what I'm up to, but she doesn't say anything. Mum has always kept her eye on me, tried to find out what I'm up to without actually spying or snooping. Everything my mother has ever done has technically been upfront – she'll try to snatch a look at my phone rather than pick it up, she'll ask me who I was emailing or talking to rather than read behind my back or lurk around eavesdropping. She wants to know, but doesn't want to do what's necessary to find out.

She's odd like that. When I was younger it used to drive me crazy, not knowing when she'd finally cross the line – as far as I know, she never did – but knowing she wanted to. She was always watching me, noticing little things – I could almost see her mentally filing something away for later, asking in roundabout ways about snatched parts of my conversations that were almost always innocent. My brother, Con, didn't get it

anywhere near as bad, but to be fair to her she did it to him, too. Does it to him, too, probably. Cos he, poor kid, still lives at home. *Urgh, that wasn't very nice, was it, Verity?* When did I start getting so snarky about my mother?

Face down in my lap, my phone has the answer: bleep, bleep. Since him, of course. Since he told me the truth about her.

'What do you think?' Mum asks. She runs the palms of her hands down the front of the royal-blue dress, trying to smooth out the soft, silky creases that are created by the way the garment flows down over her body to her ankles.

'It's nice . . .' I say in what I hope is a diplomatic voice. She's looked better. The dress is nice and it clings to her curves in all the right places, it shimmers in the light and it looks expensive and stylish, but . . .

'But . . .?' she says. 'There is a "but", isn't there?'

How do I answer that without getting into trouble? 'Thing is, Mum . . .' I begin.

'Oh, don't worry, I know you hate it. I can tell by the look on your face. This was the best one.' She flops her arms up and down. 'I just want to look nice for once.'

'You always look nice,' I reply automatically.

'Wow, my daughter, you almost sounded like you meant that. Not!' she laughs as she returns to the dressing room, not giving me a chance to argue.

'Is that it with the dresses now?' I call hopefully.

This shop, cosseted right in the heart of The Lanes, is deserted on this Sunday lunchtime. The assistant stands at the other end of the shop, leaning against the counter, examining her rather impressive rainbow-painted nails. She should really be chewing gum and checking her

mobile to complete her 'disinterested, bored and was meant for better things' look.

'No, there's one more,' Mum replies.

I get up and edge nearer to the changing room. 'Why are you doing this, Mum?' I ask. 'You know Dad's going to hate it.' That isn't just me trying to kill the party, Dad will hate it.

'He won't,' is her muffled reply. I'm guessing she's taking some clothes off or putting clothes on.

'Have you actually met, Dad?' I say to her.

'I've known him longer than you,' she states, her voice much more clear now that she obviously has the dress on.

'Well, Con and I might have a theory that would explain how that's not actually true because I've known him all of my life – you know, twenty-four years – which is actually one hundred per cent of my existence; while you've known him what, twenty-nine years? And that works out to be about . . . umm . . . sixty per cent of your life? One hundred outweighs sixty.'

Mum's reply is a big sigh. 'OK, you win. You've known him longer, but he will still want this. I promise you.'

Because it's what you want, I want to say to her. Dad will say he wants it because you want it. And what you want, you get, no matter what, right?

My body floods with red-hot shame. That was awful. Truly awful. I look around in case the shop assistant has approached and heard what I said inside my head, or anyone else with telepathic powers has wandered into the shop and is now disgusted at the awful thing I just thought about my mother.