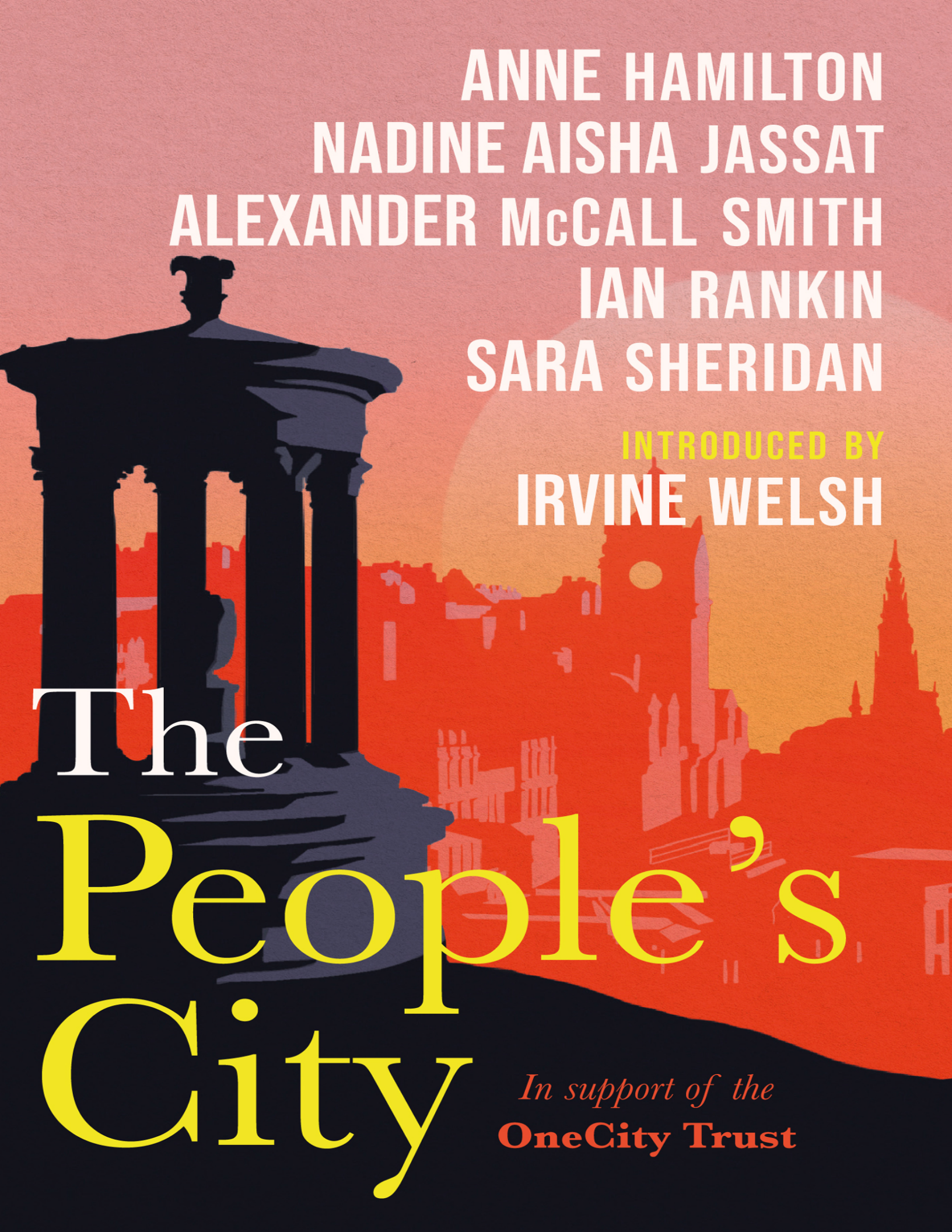


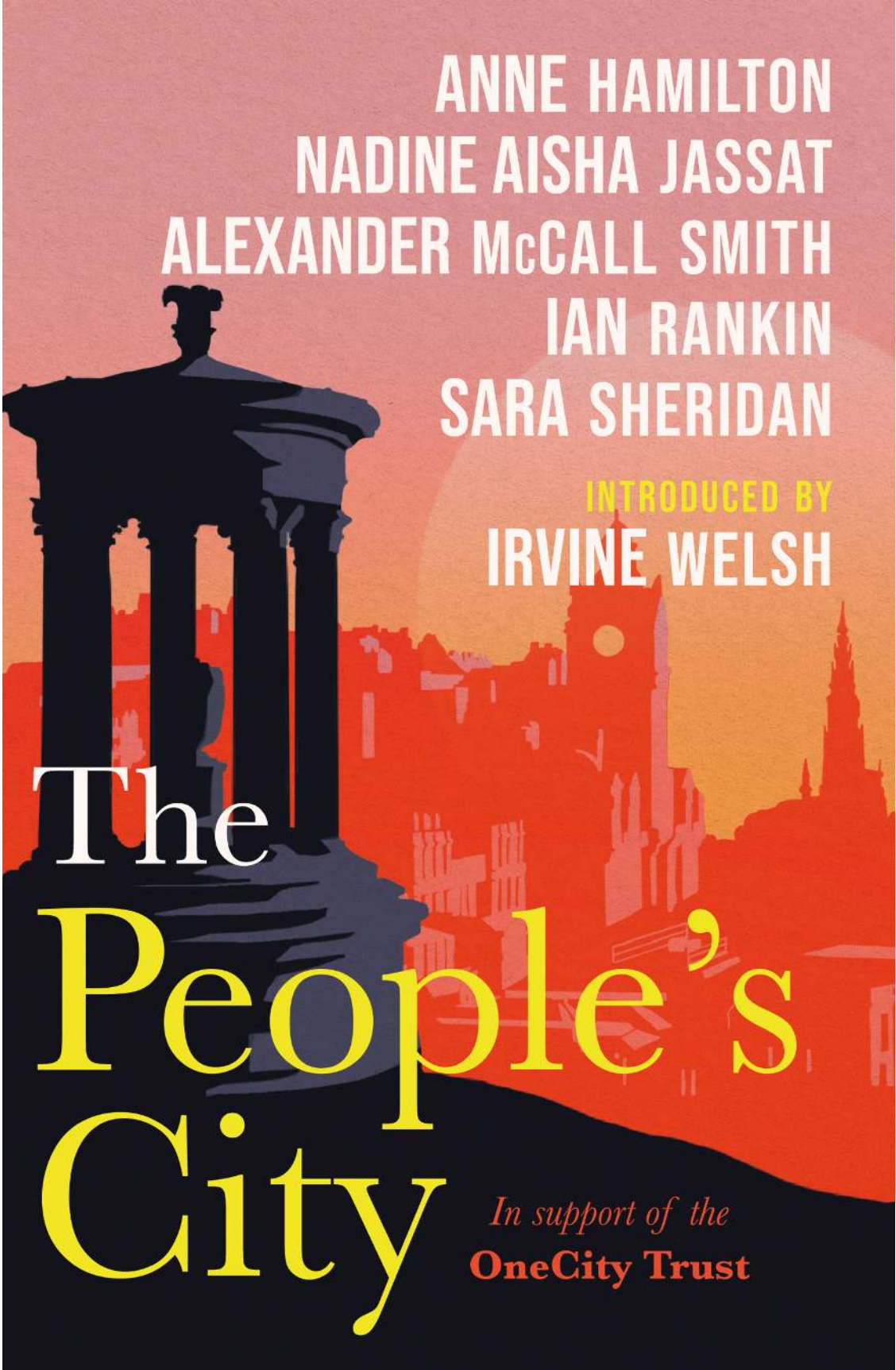


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INTRODUCED BY
IRVINE WELSH

The People's City

In support of the
OneCity Trust



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'On Portobello Prom' © Sara Sheridan, 2022

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FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to see the fourth anthology to be published in aid of the OneCity Trust; along with the continued support of three of Edinburgh's most famous authors and original contributors from our first book, *OneCity*, published in 2005.

In 2022, I welcome the addition of three female authors, who all, through their own personal connection to Edinburgh, add their unique writing style to this eclectic collection of stories. The reader will be enraptured by this anthology of short stories, and its Edinburgh landmarks, the majority of which are set in times gone by and add a historical twist that make the book hard to put down.

The aim of the first book in 2005 was to promote the message through the OneCity Trust that Edinburgh 'should no longer be a divided city but one city with one voice'. Sixteen years later, and the division remains evident from a report published in 2020 by the Edinburgh Poverty Commission, 'A Just Capital: Actions to End Poverty', which finds that over 77,000 citizens are living in poverty, including one in five children. This shows an increase of over 25 per cent in the last five years.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also caused great hardship to many in the city, bringing increased unemployment, the need for food banks, along with a decline in mental health. Data poverty has increased also as the world turns to online meetings as a way to communicate with others. Schools used online teaching

methods with children; yet some homes didn't have access to the internet or adequate equipment. The inequalities have been huge, and the pandemic has exacerbated the divide in society.

The OneCity Trust has been fortunate to work with a number of key organisations over the past six years to deliver community benefit funding to projects in the city. The support of the City of Edinburgh Council, Travis Perkins Managed Services, CGI UK Ltd, ENGIE, CCG (Scotland) Ltd and City Fibre has seen tens of thousands of pounds being distributed to local communities. Together, we will work to end the inequality and poverty which continues to divide our city, with a vision that, one day soon, we will have a Thriving, Welcoming, Fair and Pioneering city for one and all.

I would like to thank all of the authors for giving their time and story writing talents to our book; the OneCity Trust is indebted to you. To Travis Perkins Managed Services and Morrisons Energy Services, thank you for your financial support which has helped us produce this book. To our readers, thank you for purchasing this book, which will raise funds for the OneCity Trust to continue its legacy to make Edinburgh 'OneCity'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Ross', written in a cursive style.

Frank Ross, The Rt. Hon. Lord Provost of the City of
Edinburgh

INTRODUCTION

Since I contributed to the first OneCity Trust book in 2005, I'm sorry to say not much has changed in our city - or in society as a whole.

The poorest parts of Edinburgh are still characterised by underemployment, low wages, and insufficient access to essential services, as deprivation thrives exponentially, passed down from generation to generation like a devastating disease. Now more people than ever before have been pulled down onto the breadline, with many more households struggling to make ends meet as benefits are continually cut and community funding is slashed. Working people that might once, fifteen or twenty years ago, have been considered middle class, are now shackled with debt, as proven by the lengthy queues outside food banks.

These issues stem from the fact that in places like our capital - a global tourist attraction - the focus has shifted from serving the needs of locals to feeding the bottomless trough of neoliberal capitalism. Therefore people are largely deigned not to exist in a city increasingly redesigned to attract tourists, wealthy students, businesses, and housing developers. The people who bring income are paramount, and our modern culture of cheap Airbnb accommodation, landlordism and commercial development constantly feeds the dominant narrative telling us that so-called 'legacy citizens' are irrelevant to the city's progress. They are simply displaced casualties of an economic, social and technocratic order that says they

have no relevance in the modern world. After all, if Edinburgh does not court the international market, politicians argue, another city will simply take its place, with the income and investment going to other communities around the world.

In short, the people who actually live in Edinburgh, especially in our poorer communities, are at best forgotten, at worst ignored.

Government agencies and the poverty industry are not friends of our communities. All major transnational bodies, governments local and national, and all major political parties, are accepting of an economic system that sees poverty as a (regrettable or otherwise) consequence of the enrichment of the already super-wealthy. Whether their posturing is 'national' or 'global' such agencies are basically the hirelings of the one per cent. Therefore, any attempts to challenge this paradigm are piecemeal and token, with progressive policies rarely scratching the surface of such systemic issues.

So, what can be done to ensure this damaging legacy doesn't continue decade after decade? I believe it is time we accept that the state is no longer the driving force for change. It has become purely a tool of capital, and now cannot have a role in redistributing power and wealth through the society and community it purports to represent. Therefore our citizens have to find the voice and the confidence to start putting their own structures in place – and there has never been a better time to do it. The fact that football fans now feed their local communities through at-turnstile-collections for food banks, and that organisations like Helping Hands brought sport and recreation back into the schemes, tearing some children from screens and a future of morbid obesity, shows that the

problems of the community have their solution in the community. A disinterested state, run only to service the needs of the untaxed global and national wealth-looters, will only, at best, offer crumbs on a grudging whim. Our citizens need to take the power and responsibility for their own destinies into their own hands.

Over the past 18 months or more, the pandemic has highlighted the existing inequalities that already plagued our neighbourhoods, shining a spotlight on the hunger, debt and hardship that goes unacknowledged in the mainstream media and political parties (unless through some token pious bleating as they assume the neoliberal agenda). In the middle of a time when family and friends were pushed achingly apart, communities rallied together, installing vital safety nets that the Government had, year after year, pulled out from under them. People were given a glimpse of what our society could look like if we lived in a more benign world that actually put people first, and that is a legacy we need to build on and help flourish.

As a writer, I naturally believe art and culture is vital for encouraging this empowerment to take root. In low employment and low economic areas, the arts are the only real way people can express themselves, and that's why projects like the OneCity Trust book are so important. The purpose of this collection of stories, just like the last, is to encourage people to have the confidence to express themselves. Because doing this involves articulating your own needs and taking action to meet them.

So while angry that the great welfare state, constructed after the horrors of the Second World War, has been decimated and warped beyond repair by the super-wealthy, I'm proud to be associated with a venture that is about art

and culture – another one of the casualties of a neoliberal order that reduces them to profitable entertainment.

Brian Eno once said: ‘culture is what you do when you do what you want to do, rather than what you have to do.’ We citizens are now irrelevant to the super-rich and their state. The system needs to dupe us into giving it our seal of legitimacy every five years or so. That’s about the extent of our participation in the decisions that affect our lives. But the good news is that they are irrelevant to us. They either can’t or can barely offer us work or food. We can now do that for each other, and spend more time doing what we want to do. First we have to learn how to be free. Art and culture is how we do this.

Irvine Welsh

The Finally Tree

ANNE HAMILTON

MONDAY

I've found him, Ali. But . . .
But.

There was always going to be a but, and it was always going to be a big one. Alina wondered which of the big three D's it would be. Dead. Demented. Dispossessed. An irreverent trinity that she'd found fitted most of life's 'buts'.

On Inverleith Row, she checked the time and saw she was early; she always was. This was a pilgrimage. The plane, a train to Waverley, then the bus skimming the New Town, all were fuelled on her anticipation of entering the East Gate through its magical scent of nostalgia and anticipation.

I've found him, Ali. But . . . It was the soundtrack to her long journey home. Even as she'd dozed, read, stared from screen to window and back again, the rhythm propelled her: de dah de dah de dah; *I've found him, Ali but*; de dah de dah de dah. Unconsciously, she'd tapped her toes in time with it.

She bent to pick at a scraggly dandelion pushing through the cracks in the pavement. She blew on the fragmented petals, then gently separated them and began counting: *Fin's found Jamie, he's found him not, he's found him, he's found him not . . .*

It had to be that, didn't it? And, of course there was a *but*. Anyone who disappeared for twenty-five years

returned with A Story. If they returned at all.

Alina had never in twenty-five years regretted her decision that Fin should be adopted, never. Other events from back then she did question, though, and that text, that *but*, quite possibly meant she had been found out. Fin had been looking for his birth father for nigh on ten years, now, and naïve or stupid, as time rolled on without news, she'd learned to live with the risk.

'Ali . . . Ali . . . ? *Alina.*'

The voice penetrated. When she looked up, there he was, Fin, coming towards her. He reminded her of Jamie she realised with shock: floppy blond hair, and slim. Even down to the leather jacket – or was her mind playing tricks? Wishful thinking, perhaps. She put up her hand to wave and stood waiting.

'Ali. I thought I was going to have to chase you round and round the gardens and in and out the dusty bluebells.'

'Sorry, I was miles away. How are you? Is everything okay?' Alina searched his face; he looked nothing other than pleased to see her.

'Everything's fine.'

'Really?' *I've found him Ali, but . . .* Surely this was the – first – moment of truth. 'Really, Fin?'

'Oh, you mean my text?' Yes. So, er, did my "but" look big in that, Ali?' He raised one eyebrow, his party trick; Alina couldn't do it.

'Oh, very funny.' She relaxed slightly and leaned in to hug him.

'Coffee?' he asked. 'Inside or takeaway?'

A smattering of rain picked up speed, helped by a sudden gust of wind, and Alina shivered. A quick glance up at the sky, leached of all colour, made up their minds and they crossed towards the café.