

# Happiness' Snapshots

## by A. F. Harrold

Happiness was sat on her bed, cross-legged, with her friend December mirroring her at the pillow end.

In between them was the shoebox filled with old photos belonging to Ness's mum and dad – old glossy rectangles of colourful, stiff paper. They were mostly of her parents and grandparents way back in the past, back in the last century.

The girls were having a sleepover and this was their favourite way of failing to go to sleep.

They loved to dig in and rummage and compete with one another to find the most embarrassing picture, which wasn't hard to do because all the fashions and hairdos and moustaches (oh! the moustaches!) were so stupid.

As they pulled out photo after photo they'd laugh and roll about, and sometimes Deck would say, 'Who's that?' and Ness would take the photo and squint and dig around in her mind until she realised it was actually ... her dad, as a teenager! And then they'd roll about and laugh even more.

Oh, he might be bald now, but back then ... well, 'big hair' didn't get nearly close enough.

With each photo they held up, the girls promised themselves they would never look so daft. They'd watch out for each other, they said, as the years went by, and if ever one of them was even half-tempted to wear a pastel-coloured jumpsuit ... *Slap!*

Ness liked the other oddness of the photos too, besides the fashion failures. How although they were of her mum and dad and her grandparents, they were actually pictures of strangers.

Sometimes, when Deck wasn't around, she'd look at them with a strange dizzy sense of peering down a deep well – these were photos of people who did not know that she, Ness, existed, who did not, in the moment of being photographed, have even an inkling that she'd ever exist.

And then Deck waved a picture of a little girl, stood on a beach somewhere wearing nothing but a plastic bucket on her head. And Ness exploded as she recognised her mum's smile and, a split second later, the bedroom door burst open.

'Will you be *quiet!*' Mrs Browne shouted from the doorway.

She slapped the light switch, plunging the room into silence and almost-darkness.

Only the night lights on the bookcase glowed.

'You should both be asleep by now,' she snapped. 'It's late. I've got an early start.' 'Sorry, Mum,' said Ness. 'We were just—'

But the door slammed before she'd finished, and as they heard footsteps stomping away Deck waved the seaside photo in her hand and they both collapsed in tears of laughter.

Happiness rolled off the bed.

And December laughed even more.



Illustration (c) Emily Gravett

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