



Tom

Thomas Johnson? Well, perhaps. Or maybe Thomas Bell? Or Thomas Noname? Or Thomas Nowhere? Yes, Mr Nowhere, that's Tom. Unable to talk or read, to understand speech or sign his own name, at the age of 24 Thomas is in limboland, and always will be – the only certainty is that he lives with Alex. His parents did their best to see him right, to straighten out his future, but they were almost powerless as adoption societies, social services, fostering committees and anonymous bureaucrats used him as a punch-bag. Whack! this way – whack! that way – 'Who cares about Thomas, it's the files that count.' So when he was settling down with the Bell family in Swinton, happy and growing for the first time ever, while Alex and his mum Patricia pleaded and cried – they came for Tom with an order, and carted him away. Leaving Tom as a nomad, too old to be adopted, without a name, Mr Nowhere. But now he's back with Alex.







Alex

The house is hushed now. Only the sound of Andrew gulping, and gunfire on a distant TV; even cats Max and Milly have gone to sleep outside in the shed. Alex folds Andrew back in his cot with a soft 'good-night', then picks up part of the six-foot pile of ironing and drops it on the kitchen table. In her practised hand the iron caresses a set of Jungle Book pyjamas, smoothing out the wrinkles from a day of bumps and scrapes. Alex smiles slightly at a fleeting memory, before reaching for a pair of children's jeans. She's managed to iron two inches of the pile. Only five foot ten inches to go before bedtime. So much ironing for so many children. And so many memories. Perhaps she was recalling one particular memory – of a young girl wandering into a hospital ...