



CHAPTER

1

THE CALL

RING " " RING
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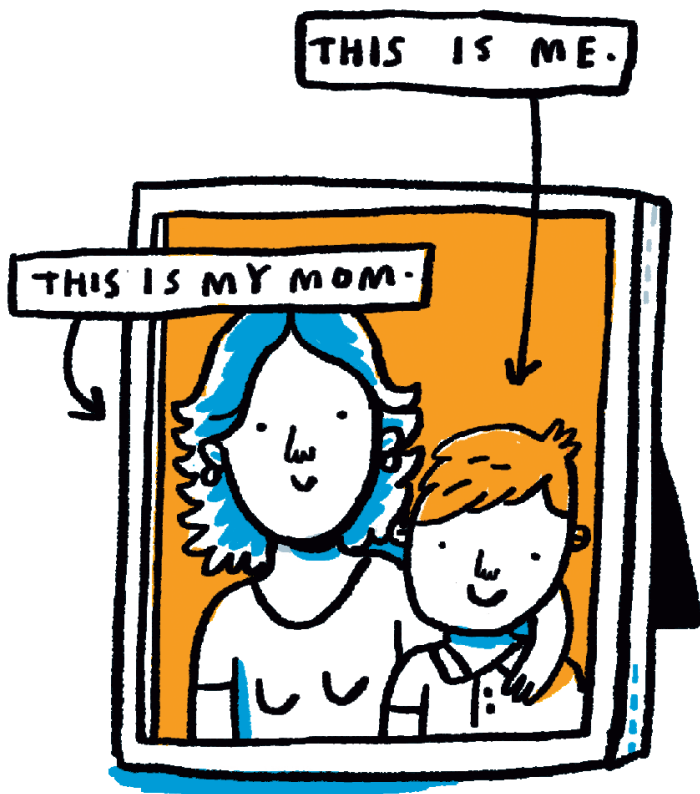


This is the house I grew up in.

It is on the top of a hill in a little town called Castro Valley. That's a real place. You can look it up.

This is really what my house looked like.

My mom and I lived there.



Since it was just the two of us, I had a lot of responsibilities: I did the dishes, packed my lunches, cooked our dinners, washed the laundry, dusted, vacuumed, and cleaned out our rabbits' litter boxes.

(I wanted a dog. We had rabbits instead.)

It was also my responsibility to answer the phone. I liked answering the phone, even though it was never for me.

One afternoon the phone rang, and it was for me.

It was the Queen of England.



“Hello?” I said.

“Hullo,” she said. “Can I speak to Mac?”

“Speaking,” I said.

“Mac, this is the Queen of England,” she said. “I would like to ask you for a favor.”

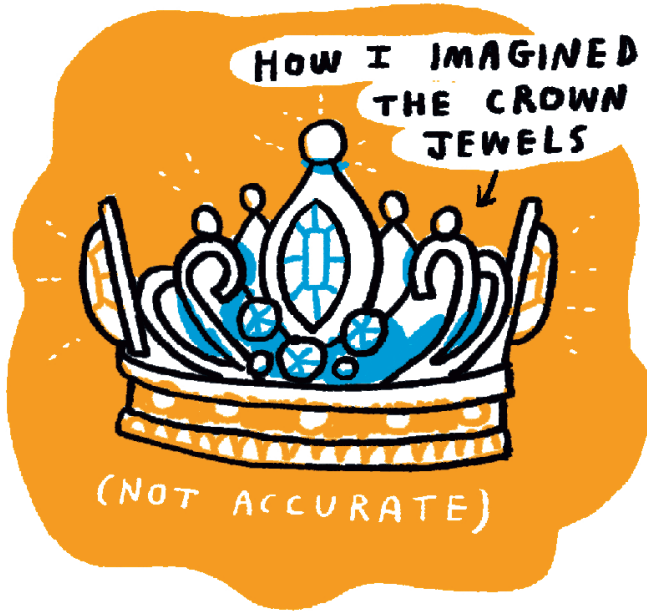
“OK,” I said.

Whenever somebody asks you for a favor, it is a good idea to ask them what the favor is before you say OK.

But I had never talked to a queen before.

So I said OK.

“Wonderful,” said the Queen. “I will tell you a secret. Last night, somebody stole the Crown Jewels!”



“No!” I said.

“Yes!” said the Queen. “This is the favor: You shall find the missing treasure and bring it back to me.”

“Wow!” I said.

“Yes!” said the Queen.

This was very exciting.

But I had a question.

“I have a question,” I said.

“I hope it is a quick question,” said the Queen.

“Why me?”

The Queen of England sighed. “That is a stupid question.”

“My teacher says there is no such thing as stupid questions.”



The Queen of England frowned. (I could tell she was frowning, even over the phone.)



“That is just something teachers say in America. But I am not a teacher from America. I am a queen, from England.”

“Oh,” I said. “OK. But still. Why me? I am just a kid, and I don’t even live in England.”

Castro Valley is in California. You’d know that if you looked it up.



“Mac,” said the Queen. “You are the smartest kid in your class. You have straight As in every subject, except handwriting.”

“I’m working on that,” I said.