

There was once this girl and her name was Siobhán. She lived in a big house in Dublin with her father. It was a great house, full of interesting rooms and corners, full of old magazines and old machines and old, old toys and teddy bears. Siobhán spent hours and hours exploring the rooms and halls, and she always found something new. She loved the house.

Her mother had died when Siobhán was only three. She had no sisters and no brothers, no uncles, aunts, or cousins, and no grandparents. There was just Siobhán and her father. He was a nice man, but he was very quiet and sad, and he kept himself to himself. He read to Siobhán sometimes. He brought her home a new book every Friday. He smiled whenever he saw her looking at him, but he never spoke to her about her mother. In fact, nobody ever spoke to Siobhán about her mother.

Siobhán was ten now, and she could not remember her mother's face. She had searched every corner of the house. She found her mother's old books and a scarf and a pair of mad green shoes, but she never found a photograph.



Siobhán could remember her mother's hands. Her hands combing Siobhán's hair, her hands peeling an apple, holding the steering wheel, pulling up Siobhán's sock, and her hands on her lap when Siobhán was brought into the dark room to say goodbye to her. When Siobhán closed her eyes, she could see her mother's hands doing these things and other things but, no matter how hard she tried or how long she kept her eyes closed, she couldn't see her mother's face.

She could remember her mother's voice. And she could remember some words.

"Cat and spuds for dinner, Siobhán. How does that sound?"

"Yeuk."

"Yeuk, cat? Or yeuk, spuds?"

"Yeuk, cat."

"Okay. We'll have chicken instead."



And she could remember her mother singing, "Did you ever shove your granny off the bus?" She could hear her mother, but she could never see her face.

The empty space where her mother's face should have been was like a pain, a giant unhappiness that Siobhán carried with her everywhere.





When she saw other mothers hugging their children, or buttoning their coats, and even when she saw her friends' mothers yelling at her friends, the pain grew in her chest and pushed up tears to her eyes. And, as she got older, the pain got worse and worse, because her mother seemed to be going further and further away.

Other children liked Siobhán. They liked sitting beside her in school. She never argued, and she never whinged or grabbed and broke things. She made them laugh. She would cross her eyes and say the things that adults love saying.

"Money doesn't grow on trees."

"It's raining cats and dogs."

"I have eyes in the back of my head."

Her friends all knew that Siobhán's mother was dead, but none of them knew how sad she was. She never told them, and she never let them see.

When she tried to talk to her father about her mother, his face would fill with worry and sadness, and she'd stop. He hugged her once and said, "Sorry." They had a pizza and watched telly together. It was nice, but they didn't talk.