

Sinhead O'Connor

I don't know how I'll ever not be angry

- 5 I love my stepmother. She's the sweetest lady on Earth. So when I say this, I mean it with kindness: the woman will never give you a lift anywhere.
- She's Protestant. They're way more practical. They don't have the guilt. No amount of big-eyeing or eyelash-batting or crying or foot-stomping or whining will result in you getting dropped off or picked up. So when I saw her car coming towards me down Beechwood Avenue with my stepsister crying in the
- 10 passenger seat, I knew my mother was dead.
- I'd just left my bedsit to walk up the road to my father's house, as was usual on a Sunday. I share the bedsit with C, my friend who once won a Halloween fancy dress competition although she hadn't dressed up. She is having an affair with the singer from the Fine Young Cannibals. Apparently he is fine and young and having her for breakfast, dinner and tea.
- 15 She'd gone to sleep the night before while me and Kevin stayed awake talking. Kevin was my boyfriend, but we're kind of back to being just best friends now. He plays congas. He's lovely and kind to me. We sit around of a Saturday night, chewing the cud, talking shite.
- We wandered into discussing how either of us might react if one or both of our parents died. That's the other reason I knew when I saw my stepmother's car. Blew my mind that something had told us the night
- 20 before and I was finding out only now.
- My younger brother, John, had been in the car. In my mother's car, not my stepmother's. Luckily he was not physically injured and was discharged from hospital into the care of my father. He was 16. He'd been in the back seat; there was another man in the passenger seat. He thankfully was not physically injured either. My brother had gone unconscious and woken in hospital to be told his mother was dead. By the time I got
- 25 to my father's house, he was there, lying in a bed. Or on a sofa – I don't remember exactly. None of us had seen him for ages. He never left my mother. The rest of us did.
- To my mother, any of us four entering the house of my stepmother was the ultimate betrayal. My mother never considered that betraying my brother mattered a shred. But the idea of betraying her was a crucifixion to him because he needed her love so much, and he was intensely upset about being where he
- 30 was now.
- Unfortunately my father and my younger brother have a horrible relationship. This is my mother's and my father's fault in equal measure. They used my brother badly. It led to a terrible series of events for which my brother got the blame and in which my father played the victim.
- 35 There had been a war between my parents over a certain material object, all of which were sought by my father very aggressively from the time my parents' marriage officially ended, ten years ago. Jewelry in particular. Capodimonte figurines. Portraits. Various other items. My mother hid some of the goods in the attic, others in the bank. Numerous attempts had been made to remove the goods from my mother's possession, none successful.

40 On the mantelpiece was their wedding photo. My father had torn it down the middle and put it back
together in the frame like a jigsaw puzzle. Everything she'd had on this earth was left to my brothers, so
my father had no say in matters concerning her possessions. She's dead, but the war goes on. Clever bit h.
She hadn't left my brothers her things because she cared about them; she'd done it to win the war. We
were all only collateral to her. That's all we'd ever been. At least, that's how it feels to me. You wonder how
45 on earth these people ever had sex enough to create four children when they truly hated each other so
much.

It was black ice. On the new road they're building in Shankill, by the church. She was driving to mass. A bus
skidded, or she skidded. I don't know. I'm not gonna press my brother on the details. She's dead.

50 We four kids went to her house. In shock. We rifled through everything in it like crows. In the front garden
we set fire to a biscuit tin that we'd loaded up with a literal mountain of Valium from all the bottles we
found. She's been eating and drinking it, as they say, for years. She didn't even need a prescription any
more. The chemist just gave it to her.

55 I took down from her bedroom wall the only photo she ever had up there, which was of Pope John Paul II. It
was taken when he visited Ireland in 1979. "Young people of Ireland," he had said after making a show of
kissing the ground at Dublin airport like the flight had been overly frightening, "I love you." What a load of
claptrap. Nobody loved us. Not even God. Sure, even our mothers and fathers couldn't stand us.

60 My intention had always been to destroy my mother's photo of the pope. It represented lies and liars and
abuse. The type of people who kept these things were devils like my mother. I never knew when or where
or how I would destroy it, but destroy it I would when the right moment came. And with that in mind, I
carefully brought it everywhere I lived from that day forward. Because nobody ever gave a shit about the
children of Ireland.

We four were delivered instructions from the funeral home – via my father, via my stepmother – along with
£50 to go to Dunnes and buy a dress "with buttons at the neck" to bury our mother in.

65 In the Dunnes dress shop we laughed hysterically. Crying-laughing. Found it stupidly funny that the sweet
girl helping us didn't know we were buying a dress our mother was gonna wear for eternity. The more
helpful questions she asked, the more we had to hold ourselves not to pee. Poor girl must have thought
we'd been released from the zoo. I guess we had.

70 In the church I felt really angry when all the people came to shake our hands. This was the morning before
the day of the funeral. We were sitting in the front row. We'd never seen these people when she was alive.
I was angry they hadn't helped us. Or her. I didn't know who half of them were. And the ones I knew made
me feel angrier. They'd known. Not the details. But they'd known. And they hadn't done a thing but came
now to shake our hands and tell us how sorry they were for our loss. I was tempted to ask, *Which loss in
particular?* But I didn't want to upset my big brother, Joe, any more than he was already. We've more
chance of actually raising our mother from the dead some Easter Sunday than ever getting back what we
really lost. Which is ourselves, years before now.

75 I screamed at God in the sky last night. Called Him all the cruel bastards under sun until I puked. It hurt real
bad, to say hateful things to Him. It's not the first time I've done it. His answers are always silent. It took me
a while to come to grips with that. I got annoyed in the early days. I thought the silence meant He didn't
care. So I'd scream more until I was all screamed out and could only be silent myself. I thought you were
supposed to hear His voice like in all the stories. I found out the fact is that He can't speak because He's
80 crying so much Himself. Who can speak when they're weeping?

85 In the funeral home, my father cried over my mother's body. Said, "I'm sorry, Marie," over and over. That made me angry too. Why sorry now and not before? Why no "I'm sorry" from either of them or the four of us. Why conduct a war and then say "Sorry" when someone is dead? I ran away, out of the funeral home. Down the road to Glathule and into Dun Laoghaire. I don't think I'll ever stop running. I don't know how I'll ever not be angry. Nothing is ever gonna be fixed now.

The next day as we were waiting in my father's sitting room for the funeral cars, I decided to smoke myself out of death. Decided that I would smoke and smoke all my life, as many cigarettes as it took to send me to my mother. I can't remember anything from the funeral but feet around the grave. I looked down. We all did. Crying.

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