

What the Eye Cannot See

Category: Scars

written by Aine Greaney | April 11, 2024

Now, whenever I trace my finger over my forehead scar, I time travel three thousand miles away—not to Dr. G’s small-town office or even to that dirt road where I split a part of my forehead open.

Back then, the late 1960s, three generations of us lived on our ancestral farm that sat in a hollow behind our rural Irish village. I was seven, maybe eight. That evening, my father was away at work and our live-in Grandma dispatched me and the family bike to return an umbrella that she’d borrowed from a village neighbor. A school night. Winter. So I had to get there and back before dark.

About half way down our bóithrín, or dirt road, the umbrella got trapped in the bicycle spokes, and I flew, head first, over the handlebars—splat!

How much blood? I don’t remember. But from that fall, let’s fast forward to a grassy sheep track—that shortcut my mother and I took across the fields to the village. By now, the two street lights were lit. We bypassed the roadside phone box where we could call a doctor. I followed Mother to a spot across the street from one of our two village shops.

The cold made my gash throb. The winter trees drip-dripped. At last, one by one, the shop lights dimmed. A young man, the new shop help, appeared, keys jingling as he crossed toward his brown Ford Escort.

We crossed the street and he started at the sight of us, a woman and a kid suddenly there at his car. Can you give us a lift into town?

In town, Doctor G’s breath smelled yummy—probably from the family supper he’d just left to answer the front door to a woman in her Sunday coat and a child with a bleeding head.

In the chair I had a bottom-up view of Doctor G’s neck and face. Elbow in. Elbow out—the way Grandma sewed her tweed skirts. The pain stopped.

Did Doctor G drive us home? Or did my mother and I walk through those damp, silent streets to summon the town’s taximan?

What the eye cannot see, the heart does not grieve.

Oh yes, this is what I should tell myself about this scar that you can barely see now.

But no doctor can swap away the memory of standing next to a petrified woman in the village shadows, counting time and praying that a shop man could deliver us.

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