

Modern

Day

Hero



Meabh Me Cormack

"Mam, I will be fine on my own" I said. It was a Saturday morning and my Mam and my sister Erin were in the family's Ford Focus on our way to my Gran's. "You're only twelve, and besides, who knows how long we will be at Erin's Irish dancing feis" Mam replied while I scouted out the window. "You'll have a great time, and besides, your Dad might be able to pick you up early after work" Mam said brightly. I just glared.

Twenty minutes later we pulled up outside Gran's white bungalow. It was very plain with its lace curtains which had gone a bit discoloured over the years and the small patch of grass out front needed weeding. I trailed up the steps and knocked on the door. A few seconds later the door flew open and a small woman with grey curls framing her face beamed at me. "Aoi!e!" she exclaimed, like she hadn't seen me in years. "Hello Granny" I replied. "Come on in, you'll catch your death of cold out there" she flustered, even though it was late April.

We stumped into the dimly lit beige sitting room. It had two brown leather sofas, a wooden coffee table and an ancient television. "Tea?" asked Granny as she hustled around the small kitchen. "Yes please" I answered and flopped onto the sofa. "So..." Granny called from the kitchen. "I was wondering, since you are here, you might be able to help me." She entered the sitting room and handed me a mug and sat down opposite me. "You see," she continued, "the attic up there is very untidy-". I sighed. "And I was wondering if you would be able to clean it for me." Granny smiled sweetly at me. "You know, I'm getting old and I'm not as healthy as I used to be. I just wouldn't be able to get up that ladder" Granny explained in an upset tone. "It's all right, I'll do it for you" I said, and before I could change my mind I trudged out of the room.

I stood beside the rusty ladder peering into darkness. "You better bring this" Granny handed me a torch and I began to climb. Every rung I stepped on gave a creak. "Oh, there will be some chocolate-chip cookies waiting for you when you have finished" called Granny, in a sing-song voice. "Thanks" I replied sarcastically. "Your welcome" was the last thing I heard before I was swallowed into

darkness.

I fumbled with the switch on the torch before a blue glow filled the small space. I recognised a few chairs and some old clothes and toys. I walked over to an old chest of drawers. A layer of dust a few inches thick had settled on top. I blew it, but ended up having a sneezing fit as the dust flew around me.

Suddenly the reality hit me of how long it was going to take so I began to sort things out. A few minutes later I had organised clothes and toys into trunks and had managed to get rid of the majority of spider-webs. While searching for more old clothes to use as rags, I came across an old wooden crate with a bed sheet dragged over it like it had wanted to remain hidden:

I lifted the sheet and peeped inside, and found some old clothes. Very old, not from when Mam was young, but from when Granny was young. Cardigans and long skirts to your knees in all the colours of the the rainbow were a few of the items inside the crate.

I rifled through the crate and found more clothes, like jumpers and shoes, picture books which had faded, small stuffed animals with matted fur and an old necklace. It had a silver chain and a locket which said "Eleanor 1926 - 1941" on the back. At the bottom of the crate I found an old memorial card. It had a picture of a young girl, only a teenager on it. She was smiling, and you could see she was trying to keep from laughing. Underneath it read "Eleanor Mary Thomson 1926-1941, killed in Dublin on January second when a building collapsed. May she rest in peace.

"Who was this Eleanor" I thought "and why does Granny have her things in her attic. Suddenly Granny called my name "Aoife, are you alright?" I got such a fright I turned around and tripped on the bedsheet and went sprawling across the room. "What was that?" Granny called anxiously. "I'm alright I groaned. I got up and made my way downstairs."

For the rest of the day I felt very uncomfortable. Thoughts like "who is this Eleanor" and "how does Granny know her kept swirling through my head.

At half-five, Mam came to collect me. Eirín had done well in her feis and was walking around the house with a smug look on her face.

For once, I was too occupied to care.

Finally, I decided to tell Granny I found Eleanor's things. While in the sitting room, watching the television, I blurted out "I know about Eleanor!"

Granny got such a fright that she spilt her tea onto her knit cardigan. "What" she gasped, her mouth hanging open. "I found the box, upstairs." Now I started I couldn't stop. "Who is she?" I demanded.

Mam grabbed my arm and whispered sternly into my ear "stop it now, Aoife." I shook her hand off and repeated "who is she?". Granny sighed, and staring at the floor mumbled "she was my sister."

I looked around the room. Mam was shocked, her tea held up to her mouth like she was going to take a drink but, instead, got stuck half-way. Even Eirín was shocked and had stopped giving out about not being able to watch her programmes. Granny cleared her throat and told us this story...

Granny grew up in Sligo with her younger brother James and her older sister Eleanor. Their Mother took care of them while their father worked on the farm. One day, they received a telegram saying that their Aunt had taken ill. Their Mother could not go as she had to take care of James who had a fever and their father had to take care of the farm. Eleanor volunteered to go because she said she was old enough. Their Aunt lived outside Dublin so Eleanor managed to get their on the back of a horse and cart with a kind farmer. Granny remembers, before she left, their Mother gave her a half-crown coin.

While she was there, their Aunt took a bad turn so Eleanor had

to go to Central Dublin to get her medicine. Not knowing there had been a German air raid, she set off on her journey. When Eleanor got there she could see the destruction. Burning buildings, injured people and screaming children. She felt guilty not helping people so Eleanor began to calm children and help those who had minor wounds.

She entered a building in order to help more people but, it collapsed, and she was killed. Granny and her family received a telegram that Eleanor was dead, and shortly after the funeral they moved to Mayo.

Tears were sliding down Gran's cheeks. "I'm sorry I never told you, it's just that we were too upset to talk about her. That's why we moved to Mayo." Before we can say anything, she stuck her hand into her pocket and pulled out a crumpled letter.

"I got this this morning." She handed Mam the letter and I peered over her shoulder. It read: Dear Mrs Bridget Hawkins, your sister, Miss Eleanor Thomson shall be awarded a World War Two medal in the Mansion House on the eight of May, (VE Day), for the part she played in saving the lives of innocent civilians when there was a German air raid on January second 1941. The President shall present the medal at four o'clock. "Wow", said Mam, and after a pause she said, "well I guess we have to receive the medal."

So twelve days later, Mam, Granny, Erin and I piled into the family car and drove to Dublin. It was a long drive, but finally we arrived at the Mansion House. Before the ceremony started, Granny pulled me into a corner and told me "you should go up and receive the medal." "What?" I gasped. "I can't do that Granny, she is your sister after all." "I know, it's just, I wouldn't have found the courage to be here if you hadn't found the crate." She stared intently at me and before I knew what I was saying I replied with "of course, I will receive the medal."

Then the ceremony began and after many people said things about World War Two

the President stood up and gave a speech about how honoured, and proud, he was to be standing there, and on behalf of the people of Ireland, thank you. Soon it was time for me to collect the medal. I made my way onto the stage and stood next to the President. I shake his hand and looked over at Granny. She had tears in her eyes.

I collected the medal and went back to my seat. A few more people got their medals and soon the ceremony was over. As I was about to leave, someone tapped my shoulder. I turned around and saw a girl, she must have been a teenager, with amber curls and emerald eyes. She smiled and asked "Eleanor's grandniece?". I nodded. "Your Granddavit saved my Grandmother's life."

"My Grandmother was caught in the German air raid. Eleanor rescued her, but when she said she was going to go back, my Grandmother got upset because she thought Eleanor would be killed. Then, Eleanor said "I shall give you something important to be so that you know I will come back as this means very much to me." Eleanor was killed then, but my Grandmother never forgot her."

The girl pressed something into my palm. "This is what Eleanor gave my Grandmother" she said. I opened my hand and saw the half-crown Granny's mother gave Eleanor. I looked up to see the girl leaving. "Wait!" I called. "What's your name?". She turned and smiled. "Eleanor" she said.