

I'm just trying to remember my mum

I would be five if she were my age. I try to remember her at forty-one, but my memories are thin. My mother was made of many parts. She often terrified me, but I loved her.

She had long, thick, jet-black hair. She wore French Connection, and then sometimes this 1980s two-piece; bright yellow and dotted with small black spots. She baked constantly in that small orange pine kitchen, with the cat rubbing against her ankles. I didn't see her much; she was mostly there, her glasses steaming up when the oven door was opened.

There was no television. She occasionally sat on the grass with us on a green-checked, itchy rug as the orchestra of cricket's trilled. We would devour rock cake which had a jewel of red jam in the middle, whilst she read snippets about Tsarina Greeneyes, the wildcat queen. We would beg for more, but she would disappear into the garden with a broken wicker basket and blunt secateurs. Thomas followed her with quick leaps and purrs, eyeing us warily. I would return to the old quiet stone house and pore over damp, incomplete books about fossils.

Once a year in July, we went to London with my dad for his work, carrying discreet suitcases packed with mysterious treasure. We would stand obediently behind a huge, dark mahogany desk, while expensive-looking people scrutinised it with thick tortoiseshell magnifying lenses, going hmm and aah. My father was a clever man. Now he can't recall what he once did.

Mum loved London, the glamour of it, the V&A. Her blue eyes twinkled with memories. We took our roller blades to Hyde Park and skimmed for hours through the hot evening sun and late into the night. Our parents would tell us we might get locked in and have to clamber over the tall iron gates at the edges. Now I'm a parent, I know it was a ploy to get us to leave and go to bed. Nights were humid, and I would toss and turn, listening to the sirens and taxis hooting.

But really, she loved our house in the middle of the fields. Ingleborough, turning purple in the evening. Turner painted this valley she told us repeatedly. The noise of curlews called frequently before August, then their cries moved elsewhere when the drum mowers drove them from their homes. We would pick hundreds of mushrooms from the fields in late September, finding their white heads peeking up through the morning dew. I liked peeling off their thin velvet skin and running my fingers over the papery pink-brown gills underneath. Sometimes worms would be wiggling in them, and they were quickly thrown back. She made soups that lasted for weeks, until we grew sick of them and went back to rock cake.

Then there is the tawny owl she called Rembrandt, who still cries from the pine wood next to the house, wondering where she has gone. My father says she's upstairs getting ready, and I just nod and say "probably", again.