

A Short Story: A Fonder Heart [B2]

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ELIZABETH II

Siobhan sat [beaming](#) at her computer screen. She was on a Zoom call with her family in Ireland, who were getting on a flight the next morning to visit her in Los Angeles. "I can't believe it's been three years," said her younger sister, Aoife, with [tears](#) in her eyes. "It's going to be brilliant." "Oh, I know," said Siobhan, feeling equally emotional. The two sisters had been planning to meet in New York in early 2020, but the pandemic had interrupted their plans. Now, finally, the travel restriction that had prohibited European citizens from entering the US had been removed, and tomorrow she could reunite with her mother, sister, and her sister's two children. "Well, [we better go](#) to bed," said Siobhan's mother. "Big day tomorrow!" The family said their goodbyes. Then Siobhan called her best friend, Jacqui, to tell her how excited she was. "I thought your family [drove you crazy](#)," said Jacqui, laughing. "Oh no. Did I say that? No," said Siobhan. "Besides, it will be different this time. We haven't seen each other in three years and it will be their first time in LA. I have been planning this for months. I cleaned and decorated the apartment, so my mother can't possibly disapprove of it. I [reserved](#) tickets for Disneyland. And I got us a table at an exclusive restaurant in Malibu for our last evening. It will be great. I know it will." "Okay," said Jacqui, sounding unconvinced. "If you say so." The next day, Siobhan and her family reunited at Los Angeles International Airport. There were lots of [tears](#) and [hugs](#), and some [complaints](#) about the long flight and bad food on board. "Oh, the children are exhausted," said Aoife, referring to her six-year-old [twin](#) boys, Kevin and Connor. "Don't worry," said Siobhan. "You're here now, so you can all relax and enjoy yourselves." 'Relaxing' was the last word Siobhan would use to describe that first evening, however. As soon as they arrived at her apartment, the [twins](#) [threw themselves](#) onto her sofa – her new, immaculate white sofa. They began [to wrestle](#), [knocking over](#) a plant and [soiling](#) the [fabric](#), as Aoife [apologised](#).

"I thought your family [drove you crazy](#)," said Jacqui laughing. "Oh no. Did I say that? No," said Siobhan. "Besides, it will be different this time."

"I thought they were exhausted," said Siobhan, trying not to sound [exacerbated](#). "Oh, I think they're just [over-tired](#) now," said Aoife, separating the boys. "Well, you really should never buy a white sofa," said Siobhan's

mother. "It's so impractical." Siobhan stopped herself from responding. Her family were exhausted after their long flight. Things would be better tomorrow. But things weren't better the next day, or the day after that. Siobhan had [reserved](#) a table for brunch at her favourite café, but the [twins](#) refused to get out of bed because they were playing video games – so no-one ended up going. "You know what boys are like," said Siobhan's mother, making excuses for them. She always made excuses for them, which irritated Siobhan immensely. It's okay, Siobhan told herself. Tomorrow, they'd all go to Disneyland, and have a fantastic time. She'd paid almost \$1,000 to make sure of that! This time, everybody got up on time but after an hour at the park the [twins](#) started complaining. "I'm hungry." "It's too hot." "My legs are getting tired." Siobhan tried to accommodate them, but it was no good. Both boys had a [tantrum](#) and Aoife insisted that they go home to rest, after only a few [rides](#). "What a [waste](#) of money!" she told her friend Jacqui later on the phone, [whispering](#) so her family wouldn't hear her. "I can't believe how difficult they're being. They're driving me crazy." Despite the disastrous week, she was determined to enjoy her last evening with her family. The restaurant where she'd [reserved](#) a table was beautiful, with a patio where they could enjoy the ocean vista. "Oh, it's a bit windy out here," said Aoife, as they sat down. Siobhan ignored her. "What's everyone ordering?" "Hmm, I don't think I can eat anything here," said her mother, looking at the menu disapprovingly. "It's all a bit too exotic for me." Siobhan [took a deep breath](#) before responding. "Oh Mum, you can't live on meat and potatoes all your life. Expand your horizons!" "Speaking of expanding your horizons," said her mum, eyeing the waiter. "I think you have an admirer." "Mum!" said Siobhan, humiliated. "Well, you know, time waits for no one. Tick-tock!" "Baby o'clock," said Aoife, laughing. "What does that mean?" asked one of the boys. "Is Auntie Siobhan having a baby? I thought you said she was too old." Siobhan felt herself turn red. That was it. She'd had enough. She insisted they leave and go to an Irish restaurant, where her mother could eat her meat and potatoes, and where she couldn't hear her criticisms over the [loud](#) music. Siobhan had cried happy [tears](#) when her family had arrived and she cried with [relief](#) when they left. "They talked about coming again next year," she told Jacqui that night. "I don't know that I could tolerate another visit." "Oh, you'll have forgotten all the irritations by then," said her friend. "Please

remind me how bad it is," said Siobhan. "I tried to remind you this time! But you know what they say: absence makes the heart grow fonder." As Siobhan turned off the lights in her apartment, now a mess after the visit, she did have to admit she was already missing her family. Perhaps a visit next year wouldn't be so bad after all.

Glossary

- **over-tired** = esausti
- **tantrum** = capricci
- **beaming** = sorridere
- **we better go** = è meglio se andiamo
- **hugs** = abbracci
- **to wrestle** = lottare
- **knocking over** = buttare giù
- **soiling** = sporcare
- **rides** = giri
- **loud** = forte
- **waste** = spreco
- **relief** = sollievo
- **grow fonder** = affezionarsi
- **mess** = disordine, caos
- **reserved** = prenotare
- **tears** = lacrime
- **complaints** = lamentele
- **threw themselves** = buttarsi
- **whispering** = sussurrare
- **took a deep breath** = fare un respiro profondo
- **drove you crazy** = fare impazzire
- **twin** = gemelli
- **fabric** = tessuto
- **apologised** = chiedere scusa
- **exacerbated** = esasperata