

I Have No Mouth Six Years Ago

She was getting ready for bed when the doorbell rang.

Holding a carton of milk, about to fill a bowl of cereal, Evelyn had frozen. An odd, cold feeling had wrapped itself around her chest, tightened her shoulders. She stood still, unable to move and not quite sure why.

Who'd be coming around this time of the night?

Her parents wouldn't ring the doorbell. And Violet hadn't invited any of her friends over. Had she?

Evelyn set down the milk carton, found herself drifting out of the kitchen and walking slowly towards the front door. Curious who it could be, doing her best to ignore the dread coiling inside her.

It was probably just a friend of Vi's.

Or maybe a neighbour come to ask to borrow something.

Could be both Mom and Dad had forgotten their keys...

Violet, of course, was already at the door. Was standing there in the open doorway, where a man stood solemn. A police officer that loomed before a dark, quiet night.

The officer's gaze moved from Violet to Evelyn and back again.

His lips moved, and Evelyn's world crumbled.

She watched silently, her heart quivering and squeezing with every beat, as the officer told Violet everything. She heard the words, barely registered them beyond the fact. Her heart seized, was stabbed through by an invisible, jagged icicle. And all Evelyn could do was stand there. Silent.

The police officer offered his condolences, wrote something down on a tiny notepad and tore the page out, handed it to Violet.

And then he was gone.

Walking into the darkness, out of view.

Violet closed the door, braced herself against it.

When she finally turned to Evelyn, her eyes were watering and her lips trembling.

"No..." Evelyn shook her head, heart shattering. "It's a mistake. It's not... It's..."

It can't be real.

Violet pushed away from the door, tears rolling down her cheeks, and strode towards her sister. Evelyn took a hesitant step back, not wanting to accept it. A moment later, Violet's arms were around her, pulling her into a tight hug.

Mom... Dad...

A dam of emotion burst inside her.

She melted into her sister's embrace, choked out a wail, sobbed, broke apart.

"It'll be okay," Violet promised, voice shaking with her own agonised sobs. "I'm here. I'm here."

An hour later, eyes raw and bloodshot, tears dried up, Evelyn pretended to sleep. Head on her sister's lap, on the sofa with some empty noise coming from the television. Heart like shattered glass in her chest, she listened as Violet made one phonecall after another.

Grandparents. Aunts and uncles. Breaking the news to all.

A car accident. Mom and Dad. Passed away.

Gone.

Evelyn squeezed her eyes shut. Couldn't stop her body from trembling. Racked with soundless, tearless sobs.

Violet set her phone down, the last call made, and gently stroked Evelyn's hair. Giving what little comfort she could. All Evelyn could do was curl up, keep her eyes shut, force herself to breathe. In and out, in and out.

"I'm eighteen," Violet whispered. "I can be a legal guardian. No-one's going to take you away. No matter what happens, I'll protect you. You're not alone. I promise, you're not going to be alone..."

The next morning, Violet dropped out of school. She started her job search that same day.