

## Ghosts

Elaine Malik was a half-Indian girl, and her mother Maxine was all Irish, and they rented the house next to ours on a ghost estate - one with unfinished houses built for families to come back to. We were right on the edge, where the universe of Ireland dips into the Atlantic.

Elaine was six and I was seven-and-a-half but she was taller than me. She had to live in half her house because the other half was still ghost. Still had empty rooms, unfinished floors and bare grey concrete. Elaine said her Indian half family lived in nice houses by a river where people washed and swam and women cleaned bright pink saris. She said one day she would take me there, and I looked back at my house, the only one bright with light and television.

What we liked best was to run around the half built houses pretending to be people that lived in them. Elaine would play hide and seek with her dad in India and I played with my cousins in America. Elaine's mother Maxine was always shouting after us and her words ran into each other with wine.

One time it got dark, all damp and sticky, and Elaine's mother hadn't called us. I could see the light in my house but not in Elaine's. So we went to find her, through the empty rooms and the black spaces for doors, the roofs of stars and the open windows like lost teeth. Think of them as big pumpkins, Elaine said, like Hallowe'en, except without lights inside. I thought of witches and ghosts.

We found Elaine's mother in the garden slumped against the wall they didn't need, getting cold and waxy. She fell over, Elaine said, and banged her head. She was always doing that. Come on, I said to the ghost children who had gathered, help us

carry her back into the half house. They just stood there, so we shouted louder;  
our voices carried away by the wind across the ocean.

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