

Visiting Ireland 1981

After Sharon Olds

I'm squinting into the sun
squeezing Chip, a Jack Russell.
One plait trails on my shoulder,
the other lost down my back.
I'm wearing my pink jumper dress,
split with a red frayed belt.
My mum stands in the middle -
her blonde curls tightly tonged,
her arm around my cousin
who is not squinting,
but smiling her 9 year old smile.
My dad's sister has her eyes closed
or is looking down, I can't tell.
Her long black hair is beautiful.
She will die from the drink.

After the photo is taken
it's time to leave.
My dad is pickled purple
from drinking in the pubs
his dad drank in 25 years before.
I want to tell my mum to leave
him there, get in our yellow
pick-up truck and take us home -
collect our cats and clothes
and drive and drive and drive.
But I can't. It will be another 4 years
of banging on my neighbour's wall for help
when my dad turns up,