

'A gripping detective story' *Sunday Telegraph*

THE LONDON EYE MYSTERY

What goes up must come
down . . . mustn't it?

SIOBHAN DOWD



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Acknowledgements

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Also by Siobhan Dowd

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About the Book

Monday 24 May, 11.32 a.m.

Ted and Kat watch their cousin Salim get on board the London Eye.

The pod rises from the ground.

Monday 24 May, 12.02 p.m.

The pod lands and the doors open. People exit – but where is Salim?

Has he spontaneously combusted? [Ted's theory.]

Has he been kidnapped? [Aunt Gloria's theory.]

Is he even still alive? [The family's unspoken fear.]

Even the police are baffled. Ted, whose brain runs on its own unique operating system, and his older sister, Kat, overcome their prickly relationship to become sleuthing partners. They follow a trail of clues across London in a desperate bid to find their cousin, while time ticks dangerously by . . .

Winner of the NASEN Children's Book Award, the CBI Bisto Book of the Year Award and shortlisted for the Red House Children's Book Award

THE
LONDON EYE
MYSTERY

Siobhan Dowd

RHCP DIGITAL

For Donal

INTRODUCTION

by Robin Stevens

Crime fiction for children is currently experiencing a wonderful golden age. There are so many exciting, clever stories being written today, but it's important to remember that Siobhan Dowd got there before the rest of us. *The London Eye Mystery* was first published in 2007, and it still stands as one of the most intriguing and bold crime novels around. It's a whip-smart puzzle with unforgettable characters and a hugely satisfying resolution; it's a funny book that still manages to deal with some incredibly deep and sensitive subjects; and it's also a love letter to modern London. It tells the story of twelve-year-old Ted Spark, whose cousin Salim goes missing on the London Eye. The adults - police and parents - are bewildered, and it's up to Ted and his sister, Kat, to solve the case and save Salim.

Good mystery stories - and *The London Eye Mystery* is one of the best - are like magic shows. You look one way, distracted, while the sleight of hand happens just out of your line of sight. You *could* have seen it, if you'd just looked round at the right moment, but of course you didn't think to. A mystery writer must play fair, but also play tricks: all the clues must be laid out in plain sight, while at the same time the reader is persuaded to ignore them until it's too late. That's what Siobhan did so elegantly in *The London Eye Mystery*: not a single clue that Ted uses to get to the truth is left out of the book. Not a word is wasted, not a step is missed. Every reader *could* solve the mystery, but very few do on first reading. Read it again and you'll realize that it's the perfect puzzle.

It's also - and this is just as key to its success as the mystery element - a beautifully realized story of a family in trouble. The Sparks are messy, at odds with each other, each struggling with their own problems that get in the way of solving Salim's disappearance. Siobhan understood people so perfectly that all her characters come to life, straight off the page. I'd recognize Kat, Aunt Glo and Salim if I met them on the street, and I *want* to meet them. But no one is quite as real as Ted himself. You step straight behind his eyes - you're in his unique, sparky brain with him, seeing both the limitations and the advantages of what he calls his 'syndrome'. All good detectives have to be different - they need to stand apart from the people around them to see a new side of a case - and Ted's a detective as different and as memorable as Holmes or Poirot. It's tough to make a sympathetic character out of someone who struggles to understand other people's emotions, and it's a mark of how good a writer Siobhan was that she did it effortlessly.

Tragically, Siobhan Dowd died in 2007, leaving many stories, including her own, unfinished. She's an enormously tough act to follow, a writer as intelligent as she was warm. In *The London Eye Mystery* she created a benchmark for the genre and for children's fiction. It's a story that will endure just as she deserved to.

ONE

A Giant Bicycle Wheel in the Sky

MY FAVOURITE THING to do in London is to fly the Eye.

On a clear day you can see for twenty-five miles in all directions because you are in the largest observation wheel ever built. You are sealed into one of the thirty-two capsules with the strangers who were next to you in the queue, and when they close the doors, the sound of the city is cut off. You begin to rise. The capsules are made of glass and steel and are hung from the rim of the wheel. As the wheel turns, the capsules use the force of gravity to stay upright. It takes thirty minutes to go a full circle.

From the top of the ride, Kat says London looks like toy-town and the cars on the roads below look like abacus beads going left and right and stopping and starting. I think London looks like London and the cars like cars, only smaller.

The best thing to see from up there is the river Thames. You can see how it loops and curves but when you are on the ground you think it is straight.

The next best thing to look at is the spokes and metallic hawsers of the Eye itself. You are looking at the only cantilevered structure of its kind on earth. It is designed like a giant bicycle wheel in the sky, supported by a massive A-frame.

It is also interesting to watch the capsules on either side of yours. You see strangers looking out, just like you are doing. The capsule that is higher than yours becomes lower than yours and the capsule that is lower becomes higher. You have to shut your eyes because it makes a strange

feeling go up your oesophagus. You are glad the movement is smooth and slow.

And then your capsule goes lower and you are sad because you do not want the ride to end. You would like to go round one more time, but it's not allowed. So you get out feeling like an astronaut coming down from space, a little lighter than you were.

We took Salim to the Eye because he'd never been up before. A stranger came up to us in the queue, offering us a free ticket. We took it and gave it to Salim. We shouldn't have done this, but we did. He went up on his own at 11.32, 24 May, and was due to come down at 12.02 the same day. He turned and waved to Kat and me as he boarded, but you couldn't see his face, just his shadow. They sealed him in with twenty other people whom we didn't know.

Kat and I tracked Salim's capsule as it made its orbit. When it reached its highest point, we both said, 'NOW!' at the same time and Kat laughed and I joined in. That's how we knew we'd been tracking the right one. We saw the people bunch up as the capsule came back down, facing northeast towards the automatic camera for the souvenir photograph. They were just dark bits of jackets, legs, dresses and sleeves.

Then the capsule landed. The doors opened and the passengers came out in twos and threes. They walked off in different directions. Their faces were smiling. Their paths probably never crossed again.

But Salim wasn't among them.

We waited for the next capsule and the next and the one after that. He still didn't appear. Somewhere, somehow, in the thirty minutes of riding the Eye, in his sealed capsule, he had vanished off the face of the earth. This is how having a funny brain that runs on a different operating system from other people's helped me to figure out what had happened.

TWO

News of a Hurricane

IT STARTED THE day the letter from Aunt Gloria arrived.

Aunt Gloria is my mum's sister. Mum calls her Glo and Kat calls her Auntie Glo. Dad calls her Hurricane Gloria because he says she leaves a trail of devastation in her wake. I asked him what this meant. Did it mean she was clumsy like I am? He said it wasn't so much *things* that she upset, which wouldn't be so bad; more people and emotions. Does that mean she is evil? I asked. Dad said she didn't do it on purpose, so no, she wasn't evil, she was just a handful. I asked him what being a handful meant, and he said it meant being larger than life. When I tried to ask what being larger than life meant, he put his hand on my shoulder. 'Not now, Ted,' he said.

The morning Aunt Gloria's letter came was the same as any other. I heard the post drop as usual on the doormat. I was on Shreddie number three, and the radio weather forecast was saying it was set fair but with a risk of showers in the southeast. Kat was eating toast standing up, wriggling. It wasn't that she had fleas, although that's what it looked like. She was listening to her weirdo music on headphones. Which meant she wouldn't hear the weather and wouldn't wear a raincoat or bring her umbrella to school. Which meant that she would get wet and I wouldn't and this was good.

Dad was hopping round in one sock, complaining about how the washing machine had eaten all his socks and he was late. Mum was looking through the laundry bag for a spare.

'Ted, get the post,' Mum said. She was in her nurse's uniform and even I know that when her words come out short and sharp like that, you do what she asks, even though I hate leaving my Shreddies to turn to mush.

I came back with six envelopes. Kat saw me and snatched them off me and picked out a big brown envelope and a small white one. I could see our school emblem on the white one. It is like a squashed-up X and over it is a bishop's hat, which is called a mitre. Kat tried to hide it behind the big brown envelope, but Mum saw her.

'Not so fast, Katrina,' Mum said. When Mum calls Kat Katrina, you know that trouble is coming.

Kat's lips pressed up tight. She handed over the post, all items except the brown envelope, which she held up for all to see that it was addressed to her, Katrina Spark. She opened it and a catalogue came out. It was called *Hair Flair*. She walked over to the door, head nodding.

I ate Shreddies numbers seven through seventeen.

Dad started humming the theme tune of *Laurel and Hardy*, his favourite thing to watch on TV. He'd got the other sock on and was buttering toast and his hair stood on end and Mum would have said he looked 'the spit' of Stan. 'The spit' is a way to say 'exactly like' but don't ask me why. Anyway, Stan has brown hair and Dad's hair is fair, like mine, so he doesn't look *exactly* like Stan at all.

'*Katrina!*' Mum bellowed.

The eighteenth Shreddie fell off my spoon.

'What?'

'This letter from your school . . .'

'What letter from my school?'

'This letter. The one you tried to hide.'

'What about it?'

'It says you were missing last week, without a sick note. Last Tuesday.'

'Oh. Yeah.'

'Well?'

'Well, what?'

'Where were you?'

'She was AWOL, Mum,' I suggested. Kat and Mum stared at me. 'AWOL, like in the army,' I explained. 'Absent Without Leave.'

'Get stuffed, you creep,' Kat hissed. She went out and slammed the door after her.

The radio programme switched back to the news.

'Turn that thing off, Ted,' Mum said. I fiddled with the knob, but she pulled the plug out of the socket instead. There was silence. I heard Dad munching some toast.

'She's going off the rails, Ben,' Mum said to Dad.

'Off the rails,' I repeated, thinking of train accidents. I suppose Mum was saying something about Katrina being AWOL. Maybe 'off the rails' was another way of saying 'skiving', which means not going to school when you should. But I didn't dare check, not with Mum in that mood.

'Off the rails, and nobody cares,' she said.

'I used to bunk off at her age,' Dad said. 'I'd spend the day riding buses and smoking fags in the park.' My twentieth Shreddie nearly went down the wrong way. The thought of Dad with a cigarette in hand was very strange. He never smokes now. Dad tapped Mum's shoulder and when she looked up at him, he kissed her on the middle of her forehead. It gave off a funny squeak that nearly put me off the rest of my Shreddies. 'Let's discuss it tonight, Faith. I've got to run. There's a meeting about blowing up the Barracks.'

Mum's lips went up a bit. 'OK, love. Later.'

I should explain here that Dad is not a terrorist who goes around blowing up the places where soldiers live. He is a demolition expert and the Barracks was the local name for Barrington Heights, the tallest tower block in our south London borough. It used to be where people who are socially excluded lived. Being socially excluded is a bit like being excluded from school. Instead of a head teacher

telling you you have to leave, it's more that everybody in the rest of society acts like you don't exist. And you end up with all the other people who are being ignored. And you're so angry that society is treating you like this that you take drugs and shoplift and form gangs in revenge. And the people in Barrington Heights used to do all those things. Dad said it was not that the people were bad to begin with. He said the building was sick and made them sick too, a bit like a virus. So he and the council had decided to move them to new homes and blow up the building and start again.

Dad got his jacket on. He said, 'Goodbye, Ted,' to me and went out. Then Mum sat down again and went through the rest of the post. She got to the last piece, a pale lilac envelope. I saw her holding it to her nose and sniffing it, as if it was edible. Then she smiled. Her lips went right up, but her eyes went watery. This meant she was sad and happy at the same time.

'Glory be,' she whispered. She opened it and read what was inside. I ate my last three Shreddies, numbers thirty-five through thirty-seven. She put down the lilac sheet of paper and ruffled the top of my head, a thing she does sometimes which makes my hand shake itself out.

'Hold tight, Ted,' she said. 'A hurricane's coming.'

'No, it isn't,' I said. 'We're moving into a large anticyclone.' I'm a meteorologist, or will be when I grow up. So I know. Hurricanes die out halfway across the Atlantic. They rarely hit Britain. Even the one in 1987 wasn't technically a hurricane. The weatherman called Michael Fish, who is famous for getting it wrong, actually got it right. It was only a bad storm and it had no name. A real hurricane is always given a name. Like Hannah, which gusted up to 160 miles an hour in 1957, or Hugo, which flattened half of South Carolina in the USA in 1989. Or Hurricane Katrina, a category-five storm which devastated New Orleans in 2005. (I am sure it is no coincidence that

one of the most catastrophic storms of all time has the same name as my sister.)

'I don't mean it *literally*,' Mum said, whisking my empty cereal bowl away from me. 'It's Hurricane Gloria who's on her way. My sister. Remember? She's coming to visit us, along with her son, Salim.'

'The ones who live in Manchester?'

'That's right. It's been more than five years since we saw them, Ted. I just don't know where the time's gone.'

It sounded like she thought time was something that comes and goes like the weather. I shook my head. 'No, Mum,' I explained. 'Time doesn't *go* anywhere.'

'It does in this house, Ted. Down a bloody black hole.'

I blinked at her, trying to figure out if she might have a point. She laughed and said she was joking and ruffled my hair again. 'Go on, Ted. Off to school with you.'

So I went on my zigzag way across the common, thinking about time, black holes, Einstein's Theory of Relativity and storm warnings. I imagined Hurricane Gloria building up force as it drew nearer, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake. My thoughts were so good that I nearly ended up walking into the pond on the wrong side of the common and got to school only just on time. 'Down a black hole,' I said to myself as I ran across the playground. My hand shook itself out. 'Down a bloody black hole.'

THREE

The Hurricane Approaches

THAT NIGHT MUM read out Aunt Gloria's letter. I tried to find it so I could quote it word for word but Mum said it had probably been thrown out because our house is too small to hoard things. I remember it went something like this:

Dear Faith (that's my mum),

I want to make up. I am sorry we argued last time I visited. Salim and I are about to move to New York City, where I have been offered a job as an art curator. Please can we come and stay with you for one or two nights in the half-term holiday on our way to the airport? I know your house is small but we can squeeze in somehow. Salim says he can sleep on the ironing board.

Kat has just told me that this is not in Aunt Gloria's style. Aunt Gloria, she says, writes with much more elaborate words. According to Kat, she lets it all hang out. I am not sure what this means. Kat wrote down what she remembered of the letter and this is her version:

Darling, dearest Faith,

I'm so sorry not to have been in touch more. Life has been horribly hectic and the years have flown by like so many swallows in the sky. I really regret how we argued last time. It has been eating away at my soul. I can hardly remember now what it was all about, but I was a total mess then, having just split up with Salim's dad and not yet having discovered Transcendental Meditation. I am much more centred now.

I have some exciting news. I've been offered a high-powered job as an art curator in New York. Isn't that fabulous? Salim and I have decided to go for it. Salim is thirteen now and very grown up. He is not happy at school here. He only has one friend, who's half Asian like him, and the other boys pick on them. So it's the Big Apple for us, a big exciting adventure in our fascinating voyage through life. Can we drop by your place on the way? Just for a night or two, darling? I know your house is small, but Salim is dead keen to meet his cousins again. He says he can sleep on the ironing board!

So the only thing Kat and I both remember is the part about the ironing board.

After Mum read out the letter, Dad groaned and put his head in his hands. Kat said Auntie Glo sounded insane and I said that Salim must be tiny if he could expect to sleep on an ironing board. This made Kat, Dad and Mum laugh. My hand shook itself out and a bad feeling went up my oesophagus. I'd been caught out again. It was like the time I'd asked why footballers were still being kept as slaves when slavery had been abolished, after a newsreader announced that a Manchester United star had been bought by another club for twelve million pounds.

When they all stopped laughing at me, Dad said did we have to say yes and Mum said yes, we did. Kat asked where everyone was going to sleep. Mum said that Aunt Gloria must have Kat's room and Kat said no way, Mum. Mum said Kat would just have to lump it and it served her right for having skived off school, because a girl who skives isn't entitled to make a fuss about sleeping on the couch for a night or two.

Kat folded her arms and her lips went inside her teeth.

'What about Salim?' I said, eyeing where the ironing board was propped against the kitchen wall.

'He'll share with you, Ted. We can blow up the lilo.'

I looked at Kat. I knew from the way her face was that she was angry. I wasn't angry, but I felt a bad pain starting in my stomach. It was the thought of a strange boy coming into my room at night and having to hear him breathe when the lights were off and him seeing me get changed into my pyjamas and not being able to listen to the shipping forecast late at night like I do when I can't sleep.

'Uh-huh-huh,' I said, with my hand flapping.

'Too right,' said Kat. 'Uh-bloody-huh-huh.'

'You'll probably end up arguing again,' Dad said to Mum. He sounded like a weatherman when he's predicting a really bad storm. I have looked in the thesaurus for the right word and it is 'gleeful'.

'No we won't,' said Mum. 'Because I won't let it happen. Not this time. I'll just take a deep breath every time she says something annoying and in my mind's eye I'll meditate on the shape of a teapot. And since she'll be doing the same, we'll get along fine.'

I tried meditating on a teapot in my mind's eye but all I saw was hot water spilling from the spout and coming straight at me like a scalding hot tsunami wave. Which is how the thought of Aunt Gloria coming and Salim sleeping in my room made me feel. A real hurricane would have been much better.

FOUR

The Hurricane Makes Landfall

AUNT GLORIA AND Salim came at 6.24 p.m. on Sunday 23 May, the start of our one-week half-term holiday. It was a fine day with some scattered showers, moving northeast. Kat and I watched as a black London cab pulled up outside our house. Aunt Gloria came out first. She was tall and thin with straight black hair, cut to her shoulders. (Kat says the style is called a bob.) She wore tight jeans and dark pink sandals. You couldn't help notice her two big toes sticking out from the gap, because they were painted with matching dark pink nail polish and were very bright. But the thing I noticed most was the cigarette holder she had in her hand. A long, slim cigarette was stuck in the end and it was lit. A trail of smoke floated up from it.

Kat said Aunt Gloria looked like a fashion editor. Kat has never met a fashion editor so I don't know how she knew this.

Salim was tall and thin with jeans on, like his mother. He wore an ordinary backpack and wheeled Aunt Gloria's suitcase on wheels behind him. His black hair was cut short. His skin was brown. Kat says it was not just brown but caramel. She says I should say that he was very good looking. She is always thinking about whether people are good looking or not. I think people just look like who they are. I suppose I am ugly because nobody has ever said I am handsome. People are always saying how pretty Kat is so I suppose she is. To me, she just looks like Kat.

So I don't know if Salim was handsome, but he looked like his thoughts were not in the same place as his body,

and I liked this about him. I think this is how I often look too.

He and Aunt Gloria walked up to our front door through our front garden, which Mum says is the size of a postage stamp. In fact, it's three metres by five and I once worked out that it could fit 22,500 stamps. Before they had a chance to ring the doorbell, Mum flung open the front door.

'Glo,' she said.

'Fai!' Aunt Gloria shrieked.

There was a muddle of arms and laughing and I wished I could go up to my room. Behind them Salim stood looking on. His eye and my eye met. Then he lifted his shoulders, gazed up at the sky and shook his head. Then he smiled straight at me, which meant that he and I could become friends.

And that felt good. I only had three other friends and they were all grown up. They were Mum, Dad and Mr Shepherd, my teacher at school. I didn't count Kat as my friend because she was rude to me most of the time and interrupted me when I spoke.

'Ted,' Mum was saying, 'say hello to your Auntie Glo.'

I looked at Aunt Gloria's left ear. 'Hello, Aunt Gloria.' I put out my hand for her to shake. She dragged me into a hug that smelled of cigarettes and perfume and made my nostrils itchy.

'Hello, Ted,' she said. 'Just call me Glo, won't you? That's what everyone calls me.' I escaped from between her arms. 'God, Faith,' she went on. 'He's the spit of our father. D'you remember? Dad in his suit and tie, even on holiday? Ted's the image of him.'

There was silence. It was true that I wore my school trousers and shirt every day even if I wasn't going to school. It's what I liked to do. Kat was always on at me to put on a T-shirt and jeans and be 'normal and chilled' but that made me want to wear my uniform even more.

Salim said, 'No, Mum. He looks a right cool dude. The formal look's all the rage again, didn't you know?'

'Hrumm,' I said.

'The look's a disguise, Mum. It hides the rebel within - right, Ted?'

I nodded. It felt good being called a rebel.

'Hey, Ted, shake hands?'

As I shook hands, we were eyeball to eyeball and I felt my head going off to one side in what Kat calls my duck-that's-forgotten-how-to-quack look. 'Welcome to London, Salim,' I said.

Kat pushed me aside. 'Hey, Salim,' she said, holding out her hand. 'That's some accent you have. Is that how *yers folk tourk oop north?*'

'Hey, Kat,' said Salim, taking her hand. 'Is that how *yauw lot tork darn sarff?*'

Everyone laughed their heads off, which is not what literally happened but I like the idea of laughing heads becoming detached from bodies through extreme hilarity, so it is a good way to describe things. I didn't know what was funny but I laughed too. Mr Shepherd says it's a good idea to laugh when others do as it means you can fit in and become friends.

'How come you talk all south-Londony,' Salim continued, 'and Ted sounds like the BBC?'

'That's a very good question, Salim,' Mum said. 'Not even Ted's neurologist can explain it. But come through to the kitchen, everyone. Dinner's ready.'

In the kitchen Mum had extended the table to its full length of nearly two metres so that six could fit around it, but as the skinniest person, I had to squeeze in at the far end with my back to the patio door. Mum had covered the surface with a white tablecloth and had made me lay it because that was my job. Then Kat went round checking I'd put everything the right way round. This was unnecessary as I'm very good at laying tables. I think of the knife, spoon