



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí
Cork County Council

Seirbhís Leabharlainne agus Ealaíon Chomhairle Contae Chorcaí
Cork County Council Library and Arts Service



International
Women's Day

International Women's
Day 2023

Flash Fiction Creative
Writing Competition
"The Door Is Open"

First Prize

Laura O'Mahony

#iwd2023 #EmbraceEquity

THE FACE READER

By Laura O'Mahony

Mam is the only one I'd trust to say it to, but telling her, hearing myself actually say the words would mean admitting it to her, ... and to the world, and I'm not sure I'm ready for that yet. I drive the car into the farmyard and Conor wakes up, as though he instinctively knows that we have arrived at Grans.

That familiar jovial voice booms from the kitchen, "Come on in love, the door is open." Mam's door is always open. Always a welcome. I love coming home. Her kitchen a haven of peace and comfort. I think of all those times I sat at that big wooden table, she always knew how to solve everything, how to turn my teenage tears into laughter. But, now things are different. I'm not a teenager anymore, and light years away from laughter.

Conor runs to her, wrapping his arms around her ample hips.

"My goodness, my little man, is turning into a big strong man. Must be all those eggs I give to your Mummy!"

I can see a broad smile breaking out on Conor's face, something that rarely happens at home. When Brendan comes into the house, Conor immediately stops chatting, and when Brendan addresses him, he just nods an answer, keeping his eyes downcast. When the shouting starts, he hurries to his room, hiding under the bed, until I find him hours later, trembling, clutching Mr. Teddy.

Mam is baking, the smell of her lemon and sultana scones in the oven fills the kitchen.

“C’mon Conor, take the basket, and we’ll gather some eggs, while Mammy looks after the scones.”

Conor takes the basket, grabs Gran’s hand and skips out to the yard.

I think of Dad, her rock she used to call him. I know she misses him, but somehow, she always has a smile on her face. Always so strong.

On the kitchen wall, alongside their black and white wedding photo, I stand with Brendan, all smiles and full of hope. What day, I wonder, as I stare at our young happy faces did it all gone wrong. Was it the day our Grace died, the day he lost his job, or the day the house was repossessed. Ten years has made us like strangers. But like Mam I’ve learned to wear my mask, put a smile on my face and pretend all is fine.

Sometimes lately, I think Mam knows. I wonder has Conor said something even though I’ve told him not to say that Daddy gets cross sometimes, but Mam has that way of just knowing. I’ve noticed the way I turn around and she is staring at me, as if she is thinking of saying something, or like the last day, she asked me was I alright, and when I asked why she was asking, she said I looked a bit pale, but I knew she was lying. She is a face reader, and I have often heard her ask that question to a neighbour, only to have them burst into tears with relief.

The back door swings open, and I can hear the excitement in Conor’s voice before I see him.

“Mummy, Mummy, quickly, come out and see, granny’s chicks are about to hatch.” He pulls me by the hand, and I follow them out to the shed.

There in the warmth and the darkness, on a bed of golden straw are six eggs, and one with a large crack in it.

“Look, the chick is going to come out! She’s stuck, can’t you take away the shell and let her out. Please Gran, please take away the shell!”

“No, Conor, that’s not the way with nature, love. The little chick must do that for herself. It’s the effort she must make to get out of the shell that strengthens her, makes her muscles strong, so she can grow into a sturdy and solid chick. If I do it for her, she won’t ever thrive, but will be weak. She must gather her own strength to prepare her for her own life.”

“So, we just wait until she is ready to do it herself Gran.”

“That’s just about it now Conor. Your Mummy learned that too, like you Conor, when she was your age, and saw the cracks emerging in the eggs. Didn’t you love?”

She looks at me with tears welling in her eyes, and I know that moment, she has read my face, ... and she knows.



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Lá Idirnáisiúnta na mBan

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2023

Ficsean Mear Comórtas
Gearrscéal
'Tá an Doras ar Oscailt'

**An Chéad Duais
as Gaeilge**

Eilín Ní Chadhla

#iwd2023 #EmbraceEquity

FÁILTE AMACH

Le Eilín Ní Chadhla

DORAS AR OSCAILT. Léigh sé an fógra. Am lóin a bhí ann agus na boird beagnach go léir glactha. Shiúl sé go stadach i dtreo an cuntair. Ba léir go raibh sé ar an gcaolchuid, leice san aghaidh agus na héadaí air ró éadrom don lá fliuch gaofar. Bhí *giob geab* ó na boird, *cha cha ching* ón til agus ceol clasacach sa chúlra. Bhí an scuaine ag dul ar aghaidh go mall reidh. Éadramóg breá seacláide a bhí ar an tradaire aige agus é ag cuardach ina phócaí agus ag útamáil le pingíní. Ag druidim i dtreo an deasc airgid, ba léir nach raibh na pingíní agus an praghas ag réiteach le chéile. Mhoilligh a shiúl sular stop sé d'fhonn an sócamais mealltach a chur ar ais uaidh san áit ina bhfuair sé é. Bhí an fear sa bhléasar corcra ag éirí bréan den niúdar neádar agus chun béasa a chur air thosaigh sé ag brú aniar air. Ni raibh sé ag siúl áfach leis an stop obann agus nuair a thárla sé bhog an thrádaire uaidh, a bhí sínte os a chomhair amach aige leis an babhla súip le huachtar ar a bharr. Suas san aer leis an babhla sular iompaigh sé tóin thar cheann agus anuas ní hamháin ar an

mbléasar galanta ach d'éirigh leis teageagmhail suntasach a dhéanamh fós leis an léine buí a bhí faoi. Ar a a thuras go talam, roimh phléascadh in smidiríní ar an urlár cruu, d'fhág an babhla fuílleach agus dríodar an leachta bhlasta ar an mbríste liath a raibh an fithín pointeálta air.

Bhí cúpla soicind de chiúnas na marbh ann sular thosaigh an cleatair agus an liútar léatar. Ní raibh a fhios ag fear na bpinginí cé acu, rith maith nó droch sheasamh a bheadh níos fearr dó ach is beag seans a fuair sé an rogha sin a dhéanamh mar tháinig an slua go léir timpeall air ag liú agus ag bagairt air. Rug fear an bhléasar greim scórnaí air agus bhagair sé tachtadh air. Tháinig bean a raibh scáth baistí sínte roimpí amach chun tacú leis agus d'éirigh leis léasadh maith a thabhairt dó. Bhí seanfhear ann le bata siúil agus d'úsáid sé air é freisin agus léirigh an bhean, leis an patachán leinbh sa phram, chomh seiftiúil a bhí sí nuair a d'fholmhaigh sí é an buidéal bainne ar a cheann. Ní fada gur chuir lucht an chaifé fios ar na gardaí. Faoin am a thinig siad bhí an caifé beagnach folmhaithe. Bhí daoine fillte ar ais ag obair agus daoine bailithe leo toisc bheith as a gciall le heagla ach bhí greim an duine bhaite fós acu ar an vandal óg.

Tháinig lá na cúirte agus bhí ionadh ar fear na bhinginí nuair a tháinig sé chun solais go raibh sé gcomhluadar na n-uasal an lá cinniúnach sin sa caifé.

Nochtadh dó gurb é An Comhairleoir Ó Crócaire a bhí istigh sa bhléasar corcra,

an seaimpín a bhí ag saothrú leis na blianta chun Lár na Cathrach a fhorbairt agus a dhéanamh slán sábhálta do chónaitheoirí maraon le cuairteoirí . Bhí gach fothrach agus gach suíomh a bhí imithe chun báin, ceannaithe aige agus le cabhair ón gComhairle Cathrach bhí úineireacht aige ar an méid is mó den lár. Bhí na fiannaí go léir ann ar an lá agus bhí siad tiomanta don cheart a sheasamh agus labhair siad go láidir faoin mbligeardaíocht a chonaic siad ón gcúisí ar an lá sin istigh sa chaifé.

Phléadáil sé neamhchiontach. Labhair na dliadóir ar a shon. Mhínigh sí don chúirt nach raibh sé riamh i dtrioblóid roimhe seo agus gurb é seo an chéad uair dó os comhair na cúirte. Níor ghlach an Breitheamh Bigmot leis sin.

Leithscéalta, leithscéalta, a bhéic sé. Táim bréan de leithscéalta. Smaoinigh ar na daoine atá ag saothrú lá i ndiaidh lae chun an chathair a chosaint ó na leisceoirí atá ag maireachtaint as na daoine atá toilteanach éirí ar maidin chun dul amach ag obair Sé mhí sa phríosún a ghearrfaidh mé ar an bhfear seo mar cheact dóibh siúd atá ag ceapadh go bhfuil cead acu saol agus saothar na cathrach a mhilleadh. Chuir na meáin an-suim sa scéal agus bhí sé sna cinnlínte agus ar na meáin go léir an lá dar gcionn.

Is ar an dara lá dar gcionn a scaoileadh an fhís ar an idirín de gach a tharla sa chaifé agus chuaigh sé mearscaptha ar fud na cruinne. Ar *Lá Domhanda um Chearta Sóisialta* chuir fear na bpingíní failte mhór roimh an dliadóir ó Amnesty

International .Ceannaíonn sé éadramóga seacláide ó am go ham agus tháinig an leabhar amach. Tá an-éileamh air. *An Doras Dúnta* a thug sé air.



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**Highly
Commended**

Paddy O'Connor

#iwd2023 #EmbraceEquity

THE DOOR IS OPEN

By Paddy O' Conor

The door is open. For too long it has been closed. Locked against me. It was my own fault really: I can't blame her, and I won't. Not for a single minute. I was the one who went off the rails. She did not close the door. I did.

I treated her badly; I admit that. I was just so caught up in my own life that family became less and less important for me. Truth to tell, they eventually ceased to matter at all. There was a time where I loved being at home, a time when she meant the world to me. I was happy to just be in her company. We used to have such fun and laughed a lot together. Then the lure of bright lights gradually drew me away. We seemed to have nothing to talk about anymore. I began to see her as dull and boring. I suppose it's the usual story, really. I found solace in the company of the lads in the pub. Sure, I knew I was drinking far too much and spending too much money on drink and gambling, but she never complained. Often, when I stumbled through the front door late at night, I would see the loneliness in her eyes. Maybe I was a coward, or maybe I did not care enough, but I never tried to talk to her about any of this.

I'll have to admit that I was enjoying the sense of freedom. I felt that I had been cooped up for too long. I needed to be out and about. Oh, I knew all too well that the neighbours talked about how I was carrying on. It must have been quite a shock to her friends and siblings that I could treat her so shabbily. Her older brother tackled me once about the situation. He was shocked, he said, as were the rest of the family, at the change in me. I sat and listened but offered no excuses or explanations. How could I? Even I could not really understand the change in me.

I was spending a fair bit of time betting online at this time. I had opened an account with a well-known bookmaker and for a time I seemed to have found the Midas touch. Of course, if she came into the room when I was backing horses or looking at online dating sites, I immediately shut down the laptop. If

she asked any questions, which she did only on very rare occasions, I would simply say that I was doing research. Eventually she just gave up asking anything.

Then, gradually, my luck turned. I began to lose money- I just seemed unable to back a winner. While, at one time, I had over a thousand euro in my account, it slowly, inexorably, dwindled to twenty, to ten, to nothing. And I had nothing left in my bank account to top it up. I did not even have enough left to buy a pint. That night I went to the pub as usual and joined the lads but when it came to my turn to buy a round, I just mumbled something about not feeling well and left.

I wandered aimlessly around town for an hour or so. I saw people in dirty sleeping bags lying in doorways. I looked at others queueing for tea, coffee or soup from charitable organisations.

It was then I realised the mess I was making of my life and how much she was suffering as a result of my selfishness. I thought back over the years, remembering how close we had been and how far I had drifted from her and the relationship we once had. As I walked towards the house, I was tormented by the realisation of the suffering I had caused. I went up the path and opened the front door. She was there, reading quietly by the fire. The silence was like a dark shadow.

“I’m sorry.” was all I could say, as I tried to hold back my tears. “Why have you never locked the door against me after all I have done?”

“Why would I do that?” my mother replied. “I would never close the door to you. Welcome home son. It’s so good to have you back at last.”



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Helen Simcox

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BLEAK NOVEMBER

By Helen Simcox

Marie opened the blinds to a dull November morning. She was glad to be leaving it all behind for ten long weeks; this time tomorrow she would be winging her way to sunny Australia. She couldn't wait to see her daughter Amy, and meet her son-in-law Darren for the first time. Amy's baby was due in two weeks' time and Marie was looking forward to spending time with her first grandchild.

She couldn't believe her little Amy was going to be a mother. Amy had been a shy child but when the teenage hormones kicked in, she became a bit of a rebel with spiked hair, face stud and dodgy boyfriends. How she managed to get enough points for nursing was a mystery to Marie. When she qualified, she headed to Perth where she met her flying-doctor, Darren.

A hectic day lay before Marie, with all the last-minute things that had to be done. She had an appointment with the hairdresser at eleven, then to her sister Joan's for lunch and she couldn't go away without visiting her dear friend Annie. Annie was only fifty-eight and recovering in respite having suffered a stroke and unable to speak, and Marie found it heart-breaking to see her friend like this. She'd had a health scare herself earlier in the year when she found a lump in her breast, but was relieved when the mammogram showed it to be a benign cyst. Shortly after Marie had the opportunity to take voluntary redundancy from her job and without hesitation took it and intended to make the most of her retirement starting with the trip to Australia. She had worked hard to bring Amy up on her own and now it was her time to enjoy herself.

Marie's phone flashed and she picked it up.

"Well Joanie what's up with you?"

"Just checking if you're still on for lunch."

"Looking forward to it," Marie told her sister.

“How are the nerves holding up, Mars? If you want to back out, I’ll take your place.”

“Nothing is going to stop me from going on this trip, Joanie.”

“See you later so, bye.”

“Bye.”

Marie switched off her phone and went to make herself a cup of tea. The cat jumped up on the window sill as she filled the kettle, and she remembered she had to take him over to her niece who had volunteered to look after him while she was away.

“Come on, Fluffy, the door is open” she called.

He sprinted past her and over to his cushion. She was missing him already.

The doorbell rang and she answered it.

“Morning Marie, a registered one for you,” the postman said.

Marie signed for it. Making her way back to the kitchen she tore open the envelope and took out the letter and read it. She felt her legs go weak. She sat down reading the words out again.

We regret to inform you that an error was made in the reading of your mammogram last April. It is vitally important that you contact the hospital on receipt of this letter.



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Sue O'Connor

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WHAT I SEE WHEN MY CHILDREN ARE GONE SWIMMING

By Sue O'Connor

The door is open to our locker in the swimming pool's changing room revealing little man ties slain in the corner, jumpers jumbled into submission and hair ties crowing the pile. Little necks gone from small blue shirts with a sleeve dashed by a marker. The temperature remains tropical indoors as Tuesday afternoons fall into weeks fall into months as the seasons reveal themselves outside.

Runners lie muffled by socks stuck in their throats. Three different sizes; we bought them recently. Tiny, little bones in hands clasped mine as we trundled to the shoe shop. The tight ribbon arched the foot as the sliding block tingle-touched top of toes. Requests to stay still, stand straight as they squirm and wriggle. Box fresh shoes emerged from the back room. Remember those shoes, we will say to each-other as this pattern will look out from photos in years to come,

The runners now have mud snaked onto one side from hiding from seekers, clambering trees; the higher the better, pummelling through daffodil hills via the brief snowdrop appearance. Scrapes from leaping on walls and chatting to friends sitting on pavements, oblivious to the cold snug of concrete.

The burble of swimming lessons in the background whistles to a finish. Cold, wet bodies penguin back to me. We head to the showers where the moody

water emerges. They close the door to me in a mini mutiny. Towels sloth over doors as the foam froths out from under the doors. Knocking parents cajole their emperors who have seized the power. Eventually doors open, towels over bodies and feet flip flop back to the changing rooms. A line of droplets follows the spine. Water escaping down over ears as I furiously towel. Clothes onto bodies barely dried. A scramble to put on socks which seem to have shrunk a size. The runners are last. They scrunch their toes now cosy in cotton.

The lifeguard appears at the cubicle door.

“Your eldest has passed her final level. This week will be her last week,” she said.

I knew but didn’t really believe that there was an end to these swimming lessons.

“But, but, is there another level she can do,” I said, the Stockholm Syndrome, well and truly had a hold of me.

“No, we need to make room for the next level coming through.”

“Of course,” I said sanity fighting its way to be heard in my head. It will mean one less person in our weekly drama of the spinning plates. Rinse and repeat. Her brothers will stay on but her time has come. I look down. Her runners are nearly as big as mine. On a squashy level I probably would fit into them.

“Of course,” I repeat to myself as the lifeguard walks away, her ponytail swinging good naturedly left to right as goes to other families to give them similar news. A dad ruffles the hair of his 9-yr-old. Similar news. The father gets on with the business of scrolling through his phone while his son pulls his hoody over his head.

I reach down and sober up the two other pairs of runners. The boys put them on and I see my daughter drying her hair, her bag straps slung over her

shoulders singing. I look at her before parenting tornado catches me again and I swim with the current of questions about food, and swimming levels, and pushing and I close the locker door.