

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Talking

by Mary Brannigan

It was love at first sight when Maura arrived in the big city from her rural home. Her parents went to live in Dublin when the girl was ten. They reached their destination at night when the twinkling lights made the place seem like fairyland. Compared to the darkness of the countryside by night the city seemed so alive.

The little family settled in a small house just a couple of miles from the town centre, so all the interesting art galleries and museums were within easy reach. So many new things to see and do thought the girl. They spent the next few days exploring the city's attractions. One evening they went to a funfair in their local area and Maura's heart soared at the sight of the giant ferris wheel.

She was looking forward to starting at her new school and talking to the other children who'd always lived in this magical place. She had so many questions to ask them. So, two weeks after the arrival in Dublin she turned up for class in her brand new uniform. After taking her place at the designated desk in the second row the lesson began. She'd been introduced to the others by her teacher as a girl from Northern Ireland.

The first thing she noticed was the strange accent of the nun in charge. She'd never heard anything like the funny way the woman pronounced her words. But she listened hard and was soon able to follow the lesson. During the course of this the teacher periodically asked individual students to answer questions. They all spoke in this odd accent till it was Maura's turn to answer. As she replied in her broad Ulster brogue she heard some sniggers from the back of the room.

This was the beginning of her troubles. At break time she joined a small group in in the schoolyard and tried to enter into the chatter. The others stared at her asking her to repeat her remarks, after which they laughed long and loud.

Then one of her classmates said with true Dublin racism "you're a bloody little foreigner". The girl couldn't understand it, she was Irish the same as them. This progressed to the others ignoring her when she tried to join in their games. Maura felt isolated and lonely, and her joy in this new home town was diminished.

By the end of the first term she had decided she must somehow learn to speak in this new accent. She tried hard to copy their pronunciation, but it was difficult because they refused to talk to her. The girl needed conversation to practice their mode of speech. Added to this, when she went home from school the parents reinforced her old accent by chatting in their accustomed way.

After a year she was using some of the new phraseology and continued this at home, till one day her mother said "don't bring that awful Dublin speech into this house". So at school she was taunted for speaking like her parents, while at home she was reprimanded for talking Dublin. The child was in a cleft stick. Eventually, the other students began to thaw towards her as she continued to imitate their speech patterns. But because of the conflict between home and school she never fully mastered the accent of her new city. Instead she began to talk in a combination both forms of speech.

By the time she grew up and moved to England this new pigeon talking was well established. But at least here there were so many people from different countries that she didn't stand out. Except when the occasional English person asked "what part of Ireland are you from, I've never heard an accent like yours"?