

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Remember a Time, Fail to Recall

by Stuart Carruthers

06:46am Saturday June 3th.

Don't slam the door Cian, you'll wake the house.

Are we walking towards the coalfields?

Not today. See over there beyond the school building, that's where we are headed this morning son.

I think it might rain grandad?

Maybe, but we are hardy men. Tie your laces properly it's a long way to Toir Hill.

Will you tell me the story of when they found you Grandad? it's my favourite.

I was twelve then Cian, the same age as you are now. Ok, but lets get out onto the bog first, its our secret and there two many round here who can't keep their mouths shut.

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I remember gripping his hand as hard as I could. I can feel its warmth now, as the hairs on my arm stand tall. The tips of my fingers carefully touch the scars and bumps of a hard working life spent cutting turf in Flannery's bog. That particular sound he made when his right boot hit the cold morning tarmac road. The skeleton like frame of a countryman bent double from years of back breaking work. Patrick Finegan.

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Mind your step Cian, if you fall into the ditch I'll struggle to get you out and I,ll never hear the end of it.

Will you tell me the story now?

Are we alone?

I think so?

Who's that over there?

That's Mr Mulcathy my history teacher, don't worry about him, he's deaf.

So grandad, what would have happened if the car hadn't stopped that morning?

I try not to think about that son, maybe someone else would have stopped and taken me in. Looking back now I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on that frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. You should have seen how they dressed me in them days son. Jesus wept.

Was everyone dressed the same?

No they dressed you in whatever rags they had at the time Cian, sure look at me now.

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Every day at various times I still hear his deep emotional voice. Often when standing waiting for the bus, he will pass me by. I don't bother turning to catch a glimpse. The tall man in the grey overcoat will return soon. I've memorised that story. Often, when I'm drunk I sit and talk to him. Ask him why. Why did he put his trust in the boy who couldn't read or write? The boy of no relation. In the wardrobe upstairs his grey coat resides. Within its deeps pockets his memories remain. A steel nail, bookies pencil, a key to a door I've not yet found.

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Cian isn't the surface of the bog just a magical place?

Grandad you never mention her name, or his. Why?

Cian sometimes it's best not to dwell on the past. That Friday I can still see that blanket of snow as it slowly emerged from behind the factory. Your great aunt and I were alone. Days before they had went to the ale house and never returned.

Why did she stay?

Maybe she hoped they would return, but the snowstorm was coming.

Who did she look like, my mother?

She had striking red hair, brown eyes and a smile I still see today Cian.

Grandad when did you know you had to leave?

Mrs Symons from next door saved me. All I remember was falling onto the cold white cobbled street, I must have banged my head and then I was in her arms.

Why didn't she look after you?

They had their own troubles Cian.

And what about the rain coming grandad.

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I always knew when he didn't want to answer my questions. Despite his loving nature, inside I grew to learn that he was a troubled soul. I never seen him cry. He would always stop talking, fidget with the tips of his fingers and lower his eyes to avoid yours. Once when drink was taken, I asked him about that day when as a child he stood on the side of the road as a twelve-year-old child, alone and if he felt afraid. I made sure only he heard my question. He never answered. I could tell by his facial expression I had touched a nerve.

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Cian, one day you'll return here to Toir Hil with your children and you can tell them of our adventures.

Can I tell them your story?

Maybe, but promise me you won't mention how they left me.