

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

If Only You Knew

by Stuart Finegan

Get out from under my feet Sean, I don't have time for you now.

Can I show you this? I found it down by the river under the bridge, look Mammy.

Mind up I've boiling water in my hands, go outside and get the others in for tea.

*

The middle one of five, Sean had to fend for himself. His younger siblings still hadn't managed to master the spoken word, while his older two sisters were cruel and taunted him relentlessly about his ginger hair and big ears. They had their own room. Sean shared with the others in the tiny two-bedroom house on Somerset Road. While the younger two slept, he used the streetlight by the window to look at the books he'd borrowed from the library. The pictures told the story.

*

Sean viewed school as a place of warmth and food. Mrs O' Rourke always gave him extra, as he waited patiently at the back of the line. A loner by nature. He easily drifted between the desperate need to be liked and a shyness to avoid looking anyone in the eye. The thought of holding down a conversation terrified him. The old cast iron radiators under the windows ensured the skinny ginger haired boy stayed warm during the day. The others in his class were too preoccupied with their own insecurities to fight over who sat in the corner.

*

She wasn't ignoring him. Holding down two part-time jobs and ensuring five kids had a roof over their heads and food on the table wasn't easy. Her exhausted appearance was that of an older woman, despite her young twenty something age. Left to fend for herself in a harsh conservative community, this wasn't the life he had promised her.

•

Not now Sean.

But its only...

Don't make me come over to you Sean...remember what happened the last time.

Can I read it to you...please Mr Heaney dropped it off the bridge today, it landed on the stones so it never got wet.

Your sisters are due home from school Sean and I've got to be at work in an hour, so maybe tomorrow OK...Sean don't look at me like that, you can read it to me tomorrow.

*

Be it Tuesday or Friday, Sean's typical day was spent watching line after line of falling rain wash down the classroom windows. Like all good daydreamers he had a fantastic imagination. It rains a lot on the North side of the city.

*

You're a go-between Sean.

What do you mean sir?

Your neither here nor there.

I don't understand.

Why don't you have friends?

I do sir.

Things aren't great at home are they?

Can I ask you something sir?

What?

Can you teach me to put pen to paper please?

You can read and write can't you?

Yes sir, but I found this by the river and I'd like to reply.

Where on god's earth did you get this?

He dropped it sir, he lives over by the old mill.

And what do you want me to teach you?

To write like him sir.