

## The Grass Isn't Always Greener!

by Stuart Finegan

“You’re not going.”

“I’m eighteen, mother, stop treating me like a child, I’m sick of it!”

“How dare you, after all I’ve done for you?”

The atmosphere in the kitchen was toxic. They’d started arguing as soon as Niamh had got in from work. It was late in the evening, she was exhausted after her bus had been cancelled, and she had to walk across town in the cold and rain. This was the last thing she needed. A single mother with three girls, one of whom wanted to leave home and work abroad.

Her eldest daughter, Ciara, had inherited her stubbornness from her mother’s side of the family. A tall, confident girl who had grown up quickly after her father had abandoned his young family. Her days started as soon as her mother got out of bed and began preparing to leave for work, and usually finished when Niamh returned late in the evening. Tasked with preparing breakfast and dinner for her younger sisters from whatever food was left in the cupboard, she often went without, so they didn’t.

“I just want you safe,” her mother whispered.

“Then why don’t you listen to me?”

“I haven’t got the money for the bus, let alone the ferry, Ciara.”

“I’ve got my own money, I know you’re worried about me, but I’ve been thinking about this for ages.”

The last of the turf stolen from Kelly's yard was all they had to burn. The girls knew not to complain about the cold, so they made up games by exhaling for as long as they could to see each other's breath. Despite having three cleaning jobs, money was tight, and Niamh was often forced to take food or fuel she knew she couldn't afford.

"I don't want you making the same mistakes I did. Are you listening to me Ciara?"

Her mother wiped the kitchen counter twice, then a third time in frustration, though it was already clean. Ciara continued to play with her sisters, purposely ignoring her mother. She knew she was angry by the tone of her voice. Her jaw tightened as her mother wiped the counter again, the cloth squeaking against the already-clean surface. The sound grated on her nerves.

"I am listening," Ciara snapped.

Suddenly standing up, her chair scraped loudly across the tiles.

"Mother, I've been listening for years. To your stress, your struggles, everything you couldn't do because you had to look after us. But I'm not you, why can't you understand that?. I want something different to the life you have."

Niamh finally turned to face her. The harsh kitchen light deepened the exhaustion etched on her face.

"You think I didn't want a different life?" she whispered. "You think I wanted this life? I'm trying to stop you walking into the same fucked up future"

"I'm not walking into anything Mother!" Ciara cut in, her voice rising. "I'm trying to get out. Out of this house, out of this town, out of feeling like the only thing I'm allowed to do is survive."

Her younger sisters froze, wide-eyed, their game abandoned mid-laugh. The room felt too small, the air too hot despite the cold.

Niamh pushed her bottom lip up to cover her top lip.

"You're not ready Ciara. You think you are, but you're not. And I won't let you make a mistake one day you'll come to regret."

Ciara felt the anger rage inside her.

"You can't stop me," she said, grabbing her coat from the back of the chair. Her hands shook, but she didn't care. "I'm eighteen, this is my life and I'm going."

"Ciara, don't you dare walk out that door," Niamh's cracking between fear and fury.

But Ciara was already heading in the direction of the back door. She paused only long enough to look back at her mother, who looked tired, scared and clinging desperately to the only thing she felt she could still control.

“Look Mam I can’t stay here anymore,” she said quietly, her eyes still burning with anger.  
“Not like this anyhow.”

“Maybe there is a beast Ciara... maybe it's only us not him?”

Ciara pulled the door open. Damp cold night air flooded in, carrying with it the scent of rain and the distant hum of the rush hour traffic. Without another word, she stepped outside and slammed the door behind her. The echo lingered long after her footsteps faded into the unknown evening darkness.