

The Postman's Letter: Martina Murphy

Daddy is firm but fair. There is no room for discussion despite the fact that I am nineteen and have my own opinions and ambitions.

It's 1950's Ireland and I am one of nine surviving siblings. My sister Hannah is my Irish twin, born within the same year. She is the eldest but I am the rebel. We laugh, we cycle, we dance. Dancing and boys. Some activities are timeless.

The boy has gone to England. I am obsessed. Daddy is relieved that he is out of reach as his family are drinkers and musicians and not a good enough match for me. I am in love and I love a challenge.

We work at a shirt factory and stay in a cheap boarding house during the week as it is too far to cycle to the city each day. It's cheaper than Daddy thinks because I have lied to him. It's all part of the plan.

Our wages help to fund his whisky habit although we don't begrudge him. He never talks about losing Mammy.

We have saved enough for the ferry to Liverpool but Hannah is having second thoughts. I bully her into writing the letter thinking that her beautiful handwriting might ease the blow slightly. Each letter slopes into submission at a perfect consistent angle as if each word is apologising on its own, leaning into each other for comfort.

Dear Daddy

By the time you read this letter, we will be in England.....

We know that he would never let us go despite the fact he left for America at a similar age. It's different for girls.

The letter is posted. The dirty deed is done. We are on the ferry unsure if the nausea is due to sea sickness or fear.

His legs are weary. The ancient bicycle needs some serious attention and his old bones feel every dimension of every stone his worn tyres contact. The lines of his shoulder strap have created parallel grooves into his thin flesh that could give a forensic pathologist clues to his profession.

His physical load is becoming lighter as his round is almost finished. He shifts the strap a little to relieve the pain on his bony clavicle. There is a single letter left to deliver. The handwriting is elegant and careful and strangely familiar but seems to be written with a trembling hand.

Martina Murphy © 2024