

Flash Fiction 1st Place

A Turnaround for the Books - by Helen O'Leary

“Mind me floor,” Mags shouts from the kitchenette where she is tipping sudsy water from a bucket.

“Only me,” Orla says, negotiating her way across the tiles. “Fancy doing my house later?”

“No way Jose. Here give us that and I'll drop it into your room while you sign in. Number 5 is free today,” she says taking Orla's wicker basket.

Weird isn't it, Mags thinks, how she's on first name terms now with people like Orla and Catherine the Manager. Even Davie Smyth, the local town councillor knows her by name and has a joke with her when he comes around. Taking that first step through the doors of the Resource Centre has changed her life in so many ways.

It was trouble with Kylie, her youngest, that brought her here in the first place. Years of trekking up to the school listening to what her kids had or hadn't done, she thought she'd heard it all.

“Kylie's a lovely girl, but we're very concerned about the gang she's hanging around with.”

She didn't need Mr. Power to tell her that. The estate was a battlefield most weekends. And Kylie in and out the door again with that one Demi, dolled up like a tart.

But hearing that Kylie was cutting herself. That was the final straw.

Meeting Paula outside Tesco's, she'd found herself spilling out the whole story.

“Come down to the Centre and I'll show you around,” Paula had said.

“Sure, how could I walk in there with bloody Joannie on the desk wanting to know everything about everybody.”

“Don’t mind Joannie,” Paula had said, “that Centre’s done me a power of good, Joannie too.”

She’d linked her arm and before she could refuse they were sitting at the table a pot of tea between them, herself, Paula and Joannie.

“The low point can be the turning point,” Orla said when she’d eventually plucked up the courage to ask Paula to make an appointment for her.

Low point! So many fuckin’ low points! Pregnant at fifteen, father gone like the clappers. The years with Decko. The beatings. Jake, her eldest doing time.

But Kylie.

“No! Not this for her too!” She’d screamed a silent scream imagining an older Kylie, pregnant maybe, her sweet face battered and bruised, and she knew she had to stop it all happening again.

And she hasn’t looked back. Oh, it’s tough. Those sessions with Orla. There’s places she just won’t go. But she feels better in herself. Like for the first time in her life, she’s somebody.

Funny too, how one thing leads to another. Line dancing classes, herself and Paula nearly wetting themselves. Meditation, yoga and now a few hours cleaning work. Kylie, with help, doing better too.

“And the latest,” she tells Joannie, “Catherine wants me to be part of the committee going up to the school to talk about the services available in the Centre.”

Up to Mr. Power! With the committee!

Now there’s a turnaround for the books!

Helen O'Leary