



Ma, He Sold Me for a Few Cigarettes: A Memoir of Dublin in the 1950s

Martha Long

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"Not for the faint of heart, Long's story is a gritty, grueling, and heartbreaking testament to one girl's unbreakable spirit."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

When Martha Long's feckless mother hooks up with the Jackser ("that bandy aul bastard"), and starts having more babies, the abuse and poverty in the house grow more acute. Martha is regularly sent out to beg and more often steal, and her wiles (as a child of 7, 8) are often the only thing keeping food on the table. Jackser is a master of paranoid anger and outburst, keeping the children in an unheated tenement, unable to go to school, at the ready for his unpredictable rages. Then Martha is sent by Jackser to a man he knows in exchange for the price of a few cigarettes. She is nine. She is filthy, lice-ridden, outcast. Martha and Ma escape to England, but for an itinerant Irishwoman finding work in late 1950s England is a near impossibility. Martha treasures the time alone with her mother, but amazingly Ma pines for Jackser and they eventually return to Dublin and the other children. And yet there are prized cartoon magazines, the occasional hidden penny to buy the children sweets, the glimpse of loving family life in other houses, and Martha's hope that she will soon be old enough to make her own way.

Virtually uneducated, Martha Long is natural-born storyteller. Written in the vernacular of the day, the reader is tempted to speak like Martha for the rest of a day (and don't let me hear yer woman roarin' bout it neither). One can't help but cheer on this mischievous, quick-witted, and persistent little girl who has captured hearts across Europe.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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