



# Black Cat in the Window: A Family Album with Much Love and Squalor

*Liam Ó Murchú*

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There is a large floor of broken boards, covered here and there with bit and pieces of broken linoleum. I cannot see the walls or what's above them, but there is a woman at a fire who keeps looking at me, and a man on a chair reading a paper, who keeps looking at me.' Born in a fourth-floor tenement, the youngest of twelve, Liam was the son of a Dublin Fusilier and a flaxmill worker. Although half his siblings were dead before he was born, he does not 'look back in anger' but at people's tough resolve not to be bitter about life's lot and see the next generation through to better times. Set in the territory of Frank O'Connor on Cork's north side, this is not another sorry tale of childhood poverty. It is a memoir of courage and endurance, telling an often uproarious and always poignant story. Alive with the yowling of cats and scurrying of rats, the ghosts of Blarney and Shandon Street appear – ex-soldiers, money lenders, fruit-sellers and women overwhelmed by children, drink and galloping consumption. For some it ended with their head in a gas oven or with long tresses floating through the weir grass on the quiet waters of the River Lee. 'A black cat in the window' - was it a sign of luck? With six alive at least there was a chance. Despite the taboos of a strict time there was still some sex in a damp climate, some great heroes and heroines, and a bicycle in the hallway was a sure sign of upward mobility.

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