

boyfriend, a Nigerian. In 1966 for an Irish Catholic to welcome a Nigerian into her family was quite remarkable.

So I ask myself today whether I have learned too late the lessons and legacy of my wild Irish mother. Have I learned too late that though she and I need words for recognition, there are those to whom the heart has no tongues and their hearts are true and good—like my daughter's? Have I learned too late that my mother had an appreciation for the reality that was hidden, and could address it in her own way. The motto for Murphy is brace and hospitable; perhaps foolhardy should be added to that. She did not pick or choose her fights; life was one long battle and whether she laughed or cried she was in it all the way. A redhead till she died in 1976, today I marvel at her quixotic manner and bless her for the blood which courses through my veins.

Postscript: On September 13th, 1997, I went to the funeral of Monica, my mother's sister. While standing at the gravesite, my whole family got a great chuckle. At the base of Mother's tombstone, next to Monica's, growing in splendid lively green, were three healthy tomato plants. Where we had planted flowers with liberal sprinklings of compost, tomatoes had sprung up. Thanks, Mom.

Patricia LeSage Cockburn is the mother of a 21-year-old boy and a 19-year-old daughter. In the summer of 1996 she went to Belfast to work for Habitat for Humanity and found that digging ditches made her as happy as she's ever been.

¹A *shilleagh* is a stout cudgel, made of oak or blackthorn.

SHEILA STEWART

The Ladies and the Bomb

The Royal Doulton figurines standing on the mantelpiece aren't touched by the bomb exploding outside. The policeman and his family who live across the street are away in Spain. On television in Costa del Sol they see their house is destroyed. Not an ash falls on the white skin, coiffured hair, or ruffled dresses of the ladies. The one in the yellow dress tilts her head to the left, her hand brushes her cheek. The one in the green pinafore and matching hat lifts her skirt to reveal her many petticoats. She raises her eyes demurely as the front window shatters.

Sheila Stewart's poetry is forthcoming in A Room at the Heart of Things, edited by Elisabeth Harvor (Véhicule Press). She is currently a literacy worker living in Toronto. This poem first appeared in WRIT.

LESLIE FINE

The Widow's Progress

Life and dreams once fully shared
forever gone.
Alone in home.
Shadowed echoes of memories.
She flounders to rebuild her world,
knowing it can never be the same.

Nerves frayed from months of nursing,
him, with battered brain suffering
ordeals of its malignant tumour.
Barely leaving bed-side.
Her sleep, short naps of release,
in fear she might miss a lucid moment.

Support at hand by saddened ones,
yet oblivious of their being.
Focussed fully on him, hoping her love
can redirect persistent fate.

Last breath once drawn, she covers his body
with warmth drawn from her, clinging
in hope to prolong dying days of summer.

Drugs now required to haze
the emptiness of her bed.

Slowly she tackles hurdles of loneliness.
Tears creep to corner of eyes
which she tries to conceal from others
who know the depths of her chasm.

A new pattern has to be cut
for garments to fit days ahead.
Points on compass have changed
to fresh directions, strange and unknown.
Areas she would never chosen to explore.

Self-sufficiency is slow to form.
She will survive granted time.
The great provider.

Leslie Fine started creative writing in 1993 and has been published in three anthologies in England, as well as in the White Wall Review.