

BOOKS

Wild Atlantic Way anthology has some surprises

First Chapter

Anne Cunningham



This week there's an anthology of short stories, all situated on the coastline of the Wild Atlantic Way, there's crime from a major figure in Irish books and publishing, as well as a very successful author in her own right. There's a memoir and kick-ass motivational book from a champion athlete with a lesson for all of us in overcoming obstacles. And Molly the Maid, star of Nita Prose's highly successful debut *The Maid*, is back with another dead body showing up in the Regency Grand Hotel. A dead body of someone she knows.

Wild Atlantic Way Anthology, Mary Heeran White, SWS Publishing, €9.99

Set along the majestic west coast, this anthology of short stories has some surprises. Like, for instance, an embittered woman who poisons her 92-year-old mother by mixing rat poison into her gravy granules. Not so much 'aah, Bisto' as aah, Mephisto, perhaps. Then there's the frigid wife in a forty-years long sexless marriage having trouble with the nosy neighbour, the cops and especially with her husband's prolonged bout of indigestion, that she prays fervently to all the saints she's ever heard of for a cure. And you can't have a good ol' Irish short story anthology without including a will. Because where there's a will there's a family and in one story in this volume, it's the wrong guy that gets the good land on a farm, and the son who's toiled all his life on it who gets the rocks and bog. All stories are stamped with the dramatic western landscape in this entertaining anthology.

Three Little Birds, Sam Blake, Corvus, €13.99

In Blake's tenth novel we encounter Dr Carla Steele, forensic facial reconstruction expert, who is given a skull that's been found in the fictional Lough Coyne in Mayo. It turns out to be the skull of a woman, a murder victim in an unsolved fourteen years' old case. Carla likes to visit the sites where remains are found as she feels it helps her in her work, so she heads off to the village of Coyne's Cross with her partner, a forensic psychologist. While spending a weekend in the village, the body of a local woman is found hanging from a tree, badly mutilated. Shortly afterwards, this woman's sister is also found murdered and then a local girl goes missing. There's plenty of action and intrigue, not to mention lightly worn but

meticulous research on the part of the author to keep the reader engaged right to the end.

Sam Blake is the nom-de-plume of literary agent and founder of the writing.ie website, Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin, who has tirelessly championed the cause of dozens of emerging Irish authors over the last twenty years. Since her debut, *Little Bones*, in 2016, she has proven herself to be up there with the best when it comes to crime/noir novels. This novel is grim in parts (very!) but it's an utterly immersive thriller.

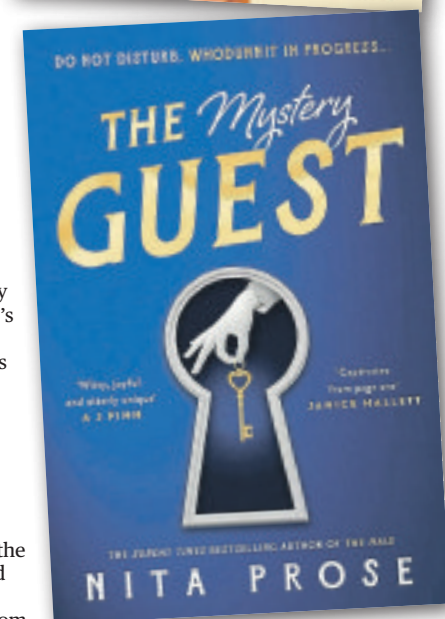
Perfectly Imperfect, Ellen Keane, Gill, €19.99

Ellen Keane is a gold medallist in the Paralympics as well as a superb dancer, as she proved in last year's bout of *Dancing with the Stars*. She's a great interview subject, having recently guested on the *Late Late Show* and she's a determined woman who's teeming with confidence. But that wasn't always the case. Being born with just one arm immediately set Ellen apart, and her schooldays were fraught with feeling like an outsider who would never fit in anywhere. Swimming was to give her not only a way to be accepted as a remarkably talented and dedicated swimmer, but also opened the path to the Paralympics, where she did herself and her country proud.

This memoir describes her journey from timid youngster to world-class athlete and seriously good twinkle-toes. But it's not just a memoir, this is a motivational book for anyone who's holding back on developing their potential, full of tips and tricks on how to be brave enough (she uses the word 'brave' a lot) to get going and keep going in achieving your goals, whatever they might be. She figures if she can do it, anybody can.

The Mystery Guest, Nita Prose, Harper Collins, €14.99

Nita Prose's debut novel, *The Maid*, published in January 2022, has since sold a staggering two million copies and attracted the favourable attention of the likes of Stephen King and Lisa Jewell. It's also been optioned for film by Universal Pictures. Not many fiction debuts can boast such a runaway success. And now Molly, the maid in the Regency Grand Hotel, is back and needs to use her curious and off-beat talents



to find out why a famous writer drops dead in the Grand Tearoom of the Regency Grand Hotel. The first thing Molly discovers is that she knows the writer, or at least she used to know him. And he used to know her, too.

When Molly was a child, her beloved Gran, now deceased, was sometimes left with no choice but to take Molly with her when she cleaned in the local big house, belonging to the Grimthorpes. The dead man is the very same Mr Grimthorpe. And through some strokes of bad luck, Molly and a colleague are considered to be the prime suspects in what transpires to be a murder case. She must find the killer, and fast. Not just a straightforward story, this is a novel with plenty to say about social class and division of wealth and about how people in jobs such as Molly's are routinely overlooked. But it's the very invisibility of Molly's job that will help her to crack the case. It's a delight.

FOOTNOTES

This coming weekend is Galway's Midwinter Music festival, marking the centenary of the death of Gabriel Fauré with music from the great composer in concerts on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. See musicforgalway.ie for details.

Belfast's Out to Lunch Festival, which commenced on 6th January, continues until the end of the month with plenty of superb events taking place this week up until Sunday. See cqaf.com for details.

Also on this weekend is Dublin's Tradfest, a must for traditional and folk music lovers, featuring the likes of Stockton's Wing, Janis Ian, Ralph McTell and many more. See tradfest.com for details.