
Dublin actress, playwright and director Ena May has, in this work of fiction, turned her considerable talents to the art of the Irish story. The result is a charming collection of pieces about growing up in mid-twentieth-century Dublin, as seen through the eyes of the child narrator, Eily Doolin.

Eily relates her own coming-of-age story in the late 1940s through nine interwoven tales and, in doing so, gives the reader a glimpse of Dublin's own mid-century growing pains as it moved from Joyce's early century provincial town to the modern metropolis it became by the end of the century. Eily is a spunky kid, possessing the kind of refreshing personality often associated with pre-pubescent children. In one story after another she falls into experiences that put her on the path to maturity. In fact, Eily has enough experiences-ranging from communal prejudices and adult philandering to sexual perversion, suicide, and patricide--to bring any kid quickly to maturity.

In most of the stories, Eily is more an observer of adult behavior and attitudes than a curious participant in, let alone seeker of, some new or forbidden activity. And since her point of view seems contemporary with the experiences, rather than retrospective from some later, adult stage, we cannot be quite certain just how much she understands them. She never comments on the meaning of her experiences, so that our understanding always seems to be greater than Eily's.

In "The Red Sandals," a typical story, Eily responds...