

Born in 1954 in Dublin where now she lives, Dunne studied English and Hispanic literature at Trinity College, and worked as a teacher. She campaigned for divorce legislation in Ireland, and is politically involved in order to improve the life of women in Ireland, one of the main themes of her work. Her first novel *In the Beginning*, which was translated into several languages, and shortlisted for an Italian book prize, was very successful. The writing in this book, vivid and stinging, gives a realistic psychological presentation of the characters. She has her own definite style, which, even if it comes from the flourishing Irish fiction, wraps the reader in the story. As a female writer in a land well-known for its male authors, she contributes a new and important voice.

"Prologue" (unedited) of *In The Beginning* (1997)

In the beginning there is a family. It is not in any way remarkable. It is a very ordinary family, just like yours and mine.

In this family there are five people. The father's name is Ben. He is forty-five, thinning on top, soft around the middle. He has his own business and brings home the bacon. He is fond of his children and does not beat his wife.

Rose is the mother. She is forty-two, a little weary after twenty years of war with her waistline. She is a loving mother, an efficient home-maker and she doesn't cheat on Ben.

There are three children. Their ages range from six to seventeen. They are of great importance to themselves. But for our purposes, for the moment, they are simply The Children.

This unremarkable family goes on living from day to day. Ben and Rose often ask themselves – Is this all there is? But they do not ask each other.

One day, Ben comes into the kitchen. He is looking for Rose. She is boiling eggs.

'Rose.'

He has used her name very little recently, so she looks up, surprised.

'We have to talk.'

The world collapses, years spiral into turmoil, lives are shattered. Rose knows now that all these disasters were once heralded by that phrase. We have to talk.

'I've got to get away for a bit. I think we need a break from each other, just for a while. I'm sorry to do it like this, but I'm just not happy.'

Rose watches the eggs. She is fascinated by the way they bubble to the surface on a geyser of boiling water. One of them has just split and is oozing a gelatinous whiteness into the troubled water. She knows now that it will be all watery inside.

It is a morning made for clichés. We have to talk. My knees are turned to jelly. I couldn't believe my ears. We decided on a trial separation.

Rose looks into Ben's face to see if there are answers there, any clues to explain the bag packed and ready at his feet.

'Now?' she asks stupidly.

He shrugs.

'I don't see any point in waiting. This has been coming for a good while. You know that.'

Does she? Is this what he has meant by his long silences, his growing dissatisfaction with business, his restlessness? She is aware that something has been bubbling underneath for some time, but perhaps a holiday, a weekend away together without the children...? Now it seems that it is not so easily fixed, whatever it is.

She feels quite calm. She turns off the hob and wipes the splashes away, trying not to look at him.

She believes that it is so with all the great crises in people's lives. The moment passes without any great drama. The drama comes afterwards.

She is aware of the moment, of him, of herself, of the now quietly steaming saucepan of eggs. She knows all these details are engraving themselves behind her eyes, to be replayed over and over again. She pulls her gaze away from the comfortable, the familiar. She focuses on Ben.

'Can't we talk? Do you have to go now, before we've even had a chance to discuss it?'

He makes a gesture of impatience.

'I've been trying to talk to you for years. I must get away to clear my head. I'll call you when I get back.'

She knows that he is determined, also exasperated.

'Aren't you even angry?' he demands. 'Throw something, thump me if you want, but for Christ's sake, react.'

'No, I'm not angry,' she says. 'I don't know what I am, but I don't want to thump you.'

Ben starts abruptly for the door.

'This is final, isn't it? This isn't just for a while?'

Ben turns towards her, his face white.

'I think so. I don't love you any more.'

And now he is gone. The door closes quietly behind him. Rose calls to the children that it is time to leave for school. She puts their lunch-boxes on the table and another day begins.

Catherine Dunne, "Prologue" (unedited) of *In The Beginning* (1997) – **ONLINE VERSION**

<http://www.festivaletteratura.it/en/archivio/schedaautore.php?autid=105>

http://www.atlantisjournal.org/Papers/24_2/pvides.pdf



GIST: John's neighbors have been awfully quiet, lately. Even the children haven't been making any noise. Now he's curious. What could be going on?! **FIND** these words in the text / title, **COUNT** them, then use the **PULLDOWN** menus to **CHOOSE** the correct numbers next to the words. Be careful! The nosy neighbor on their other side has included something not in the text / title. **YOU HAVE A TOTAL OF 5 MINUTES.**

3/three

Catherine

Pearl

5/five



DETAILED: John thinks he saw the man of the house next door walking out determinedly with a suitcase. Is he leaving on a work-related trip, or is he just plain leaving?! Now John's curiosity is piqued, so help him out. **READ** the questions twice, then **READ** the text and title twice **WITHOUT** looking at the answers, then **ANSWER** the **TRUE (T) | FALSE (F)** questions **WITHOUT** looking back at the text. Everything you need to know is in the text. That nosy neighbor is still slinking around like a weasel, so be careful ... he might have inserted a trick question, or two! **TICK** the correct answer. **YOU HAVE A TOTAL OF 15 MINUTES.**

1. After Ben leaves, Rose just continues on with her daily life. T | F
2. Rose gets so mad at first that she just wants to thump Ben. T | F
3. Rose was boiling some eggs when Ben tells her that they have to talk. T | F
4. Ben wants to talk, but Rose is too impatient. She's boiling eggs, and has to watch them. T | F
5. Their three children are named Ben Jr., Catherine, and Egbert. T | F
6. Ben and Rose's family is quite ordinary; he has a business, and she's a home-maker. T | F
7. Ben thinks that their separation will probably be for good. T | F
8. Ben beats Rose now and then. T | F

EXPRESS YOURSELF: How would you describe the atmosphere in the kitchen, and why? (UNGRADED)

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