

# Hunger: Ten Years Old

Excerpts from *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt. At this point in the autobiography Frank is about ten years old and living in Limerick, Ireland.

## Chapter 10

Malachy has another powerful idea, that we could go around Limerick like tinkers pushing Alphie in his pram into pubs for the sweets and lemonade, but I don't want Mam finding out and hitting me with her right cross. Malachy says I'm not a sport and runs off. I push the pram over to Henry Street and up by the Redemptorist church. It's a gray day, the church is gray and the small crowd of people outside the door of the priests' house is gray. They're waiting to beg for any food left over from the priests' dinner.

There in the middle of the crowd in her dirty gray coat is my mother.

This is my own mother, begging. This is worse than the dole, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Dispensary. It's the worst kind of shame, almost as bad as begging on the streets where the tinkers hold up their scabby children, Give us a penny for the poor child, mister, the poor child is hungry, missus.

My mother is a beggar now and if anyone from the lane or my school sees her the family will be disgraced entirely. My pals will make up new names and torment me in the schoolyard and I know what they'll say,

*Frankie McCourt*

*beggar woman's boy*

*scabby-eyed*

*dancing*

*blubber-gob*

*jap*

The door of the priests' house swings open and the people rush their hands out. I can hear them, Brother, brother, here, brother, ah, for the love o' God, brother. Five children at home, brother. I can see my own mother pushed along. I can see the tightness of her mouth when she snatches at a bag and turns from the door and I push the pram up the street before she can see me.

I don't want to go home anymore. I push the pram down to the Dock Road, out to Corkanree where all the dust and garbage of Limerick is dumped and burned. I stand a while and look at boys chase rats. I don't know why they have to torture rats that are not in their houses. I'd keep going on into the country forever if I didn't have Alphie bawling with the hunger, kicking his chubby legs, waving his empty bottle.

McCourt, Frank. 1996. *Angela's Ashes*. Scribner. New York, NY.

