



# Get shorty

Fancy yourself as a writer? Well get those fingers tapping for the 2011 *RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland Short Story* competition. **Donal O'Donoghue** reports

Writing a short story should be easy. After all, how tough can it be to patch together 2,000 or so words into a ripping yarn? So, last year I had a go. With a broken leg there wasn't much else to do, except read yourself to death or drown in the bathos of afternoon TV. There was also the incentive of a story I tripped over online, about a woman who had broken her leg and lived to write two novels. By some twisted logic I reckoned that if one broken leg can yield a novel, then a busted ankle and leg should be able to generate a fistful of tales.

Eventually I ended up writing two rather dodgy stories and reading three hundred rather good ones. These were the entries in the inaugural *RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland* short story competition. For three days I slit paper envelopes, piled up the contenders and wondered at how many different ways people could write about extra-marital affairs or unwanted pregnancies. Job done, the postbag was dispatched to the Penguin Ireland offices, where further adjudication decided the final

outcome.

But back to the chalk face. Over the years I've met many authors, from the great to the Jeffrey Archer. One thing that many shared was the dilemma of how to begin (for Jeffrey it was how to end). Usually when the time came to sit down at the keyboard, the writer could find a million reasons not to: from socks that desperately needed to be rewashed to the cat that truly needed to be taken for a walk! All this, I discovered, was true (I borrowed the neighbour's cat). So for inspiration I read through a series of tips from famous authors on how to begin. My favourite was to arm yourself with well-sharpened pencils. But my guide was the dog-eared 'write about

what you know'. So I did. Two thousand words about being laid low in a hospital ward for three days.

A friend read it, said it lacked conviction and suspiciously eyed my leg encased in plaster. I changed tack and penned a tale about a killer on a train. At least I think it was a killer. It certainly was a train. In the end, I suspect my confusion didn't help matters and the friend suggested that I stick with the day job. It was just after lunchtime.

The winning short story in the *RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland* competition will be published in the *RTÉ Guide* and on TEN (The Entertainment Network) and the winner will be presented with a special trophy and prize.

**Rules:** All entries for the 2011 *RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland Short Story* competition should be original, unpublished and previously not broadcast short stories in English of 2,000 words or less. Manuscripts must be typed and cannot be returned. Entrants name and contact details (address, phone and/or email) should be on a separate page. The closing date is 6pm, July 15. **Send your entries to:** *RTÉ Guide/Penguin Ireland Short Story Competition, Box 1480, RTÉ Guide, RTÉ, Donnybrook, Dublin 4.*

