

Each month we will focus on an inspiring author based in or writing about Wales! You'll have an introduction to their latest book, what inspires them to write, and any advice they have for young writers!

# Get to know

## Catrin Kean



Catrin Kean was awarded a place on the Hay Festival Writers At Work scheme for emerging writers from 2016-2018. Her short stories have been published in *Riptide Journal*, *Bridge House Anthologies*, *The Ghastling* and *Syncopation Journal*. Her debut novel *Salt* won the 2021 Rhys Davies Fiction Award, the Wales Arts Review People's Choice Award, and the overall Wales Book of the Year Award. *Lace* is her second novel. She lives in the Garw Valley with her partner and three ridgeback dogs.

### Summary:

When six year old Mary's father dies unexpectedly, her mother struggles to feed her five children and has no choice but to leave Mary and her sisters in a Dublin orphanage while she trains as a nurse. When, a long time later, she finally goes home, Mary vows never to think about that place again. But the years of



cruelty and neglect have left deep emotional scars, and Mary realises she must face her trauma in order to be able to move on with her life.

### When did you realise you wanted to write, was there an 'eureka moment', and did any particular factors make a difference?

I have always written, from the moment I could make marks on paper. When I was six we were asked to write about our life. My story was so long the teacher had to stand on a chair to tape it to the wall, and still it draped along the floor. When I was eleven I won the school's Bardic poem and my friends carried me on their shoulders: it was one of the loveliest days of my life! ... As an adult I wrote for radio and television but always wanted to write prose, and the moment, many years later, where I first stood in front of an audience and read a section of a story that had been selected for an anthology (*Riptide*) was a wonderful one. I felt that finally I was doing what I really wanted.

### Tell us a little about *Lace*, what inspired you write this book, and what do you hope readers will get out of the story?

*Lace* is the sequel to my first novel *Salt*. The books are based on the story of my father's family, who were from Barbados and Ireland and who settled in Wales. I think it's really important, especially with the violence and hatred that is going on now, that people are aware that migration is not a recent thing – people have been arriving and leaving this island for ever.

### What are your favourite reading genres, and what book are you reading at the moment?

I love family sagas, ghost stories, literary fiction. I've just started reading *Archipelago* by Monique Roffey. I loved *The Mermaid Of Black Conch* so I'm looking forward to this one.

### Do you have suggestions of how to encourage children and young people to read more for pleasure?

I work as a one-to-one teaching assistant in a primary school with six year olds in Bridgend, and I really love the sessions where the children are introduced to a new book, are encouraged to discuss the story and then write a story of their own. Reading to children is a great way of sharing the pleasure of stories, and of course visiting libraries with children and browsing the treasures there.