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CRECHE WORKER WHO HALTED PARNELL SQUARE ATTACKER ON THE ORDEAL — AND THE AFTERMATH



‘I hate just how much 15 seconds has changed my whole life’

Photo: Steve Humphreys

CATHERINE FEGAN

A creche worker who stepped in front of an attacker with a knife to protect children has said she would do it all again, even after suffering life-changing injuries. Leanne Flynn (38) was escorting 13 children from school to a nearby creche on Parnell Square East, Dublin, in November, 2023 when Riad Bouchaker (52) began stabbing them. Ms Flynn immediately intervened, interrupting Bouchaker's attempted killing spree and saving the lives of the children in her care.

One victim in the attack who was stabbed in the heart is a five-year-old girl who is now non-verbal, uses a wheelchair and cannot swallow safely. Ms Flynn also suffered life-threatening injuries, including two collapsed lungs, a severed diaphragm, damaged stomach and punctured spleen. In an exclusive interview with the *Sunday Independent*, she described her anger towards Bouchaker and her frustration at the level of crime in the capital. Bouchaker was convicted earlier this month of the attempted murder of three children and of intentionally or recklessly

causing serious harm to Ms Flynn. He will be sentenced in October. "I'm very angry," she said. "I've never hated anyone in my life, but I do hate him. I hate what he took from me. I hate the time away from my kids that he took. I hate just how much 15 seconds has changed my whole life. "There is no doubt in my mind that he intended to kill the children that day. And I know if I hadn't intervened there would have been multiple deaths." Ms Flynn, who has been unable to return to work since the attack, hit out at politicians for failing to

tackle crime in the city centre. "I do not feel safe in our city," she said. "Normal people have to navigate the streets of Dublin every day of the week, and it's not safe. "People are being robbed, pickpocketed. Every normal, hard-working person in Dublin has to have their wits about them every day of the week going through the city. "Why are our streets not safe? I'm angry that those questions are not being answered." [► Full interview, page 7](#)

Dublin man who murdered nurse in Budapest revealed

ALI BRACKEN AND MAEVE SHEEHAN

The Irishman convicted of murdering an American nurse in Budapest is a former company director raised in Killiney, south county Dublin. Lorcan Tadgh Murphy (38) was brought up in Killiney, and his family later moved to Dublin 4. They are not believed to have been present in court when he was found guilty during the week for the murder of Mackenzie Michalski (31) in November 2024. He was sentenced to 14 years in prison and will be expelled from Hungary for 10 years after completing his prison sentence. The verdict is not "legally binding", the Hungarian courts service said, and Murphy's defence has filed an appeal. Kenton Reichen, Ms Michalski's former boyfriend — with whom she had been in a relationship for six years — told the *Sunday Independent* that he and Ms Michalski had been on good terms, that they were on a break in their relationship at the time of her murder and that he regrets not travelling to Budapest with her. Mr Reichen said of Murphy: "I travelled over once, to see the guy face to face. There is nothing behind those eyes. There's a darkness there. It answered a lot of my questions." [► Full story, pages 8 and 9](#)



● Lorcan Murphy was found guilty of murdering Mackenzie Michalski

Brendan O'Connor

Here's to the little things we notice when we ditch the outrage

Whisper it. It has happened. We have switched off. Not the news, specifically. We still follow it. But we have switched off reacting so much. Maybe it's torpor from the heat, but something subtle has shifted in us. We've got off the roller coaster and realised there's a whole world going on out there. So America's war on Iran can start up again and we don't lose our minds about it. We are concerned about the petrol-prices aspect of things, because we will need petrol to go for spins over the summer and to ferry kids around. But we are curiously unmoved by the Trump show right now. We can't even get worked up about

a heatwave. One heatwave was a misfortune, two looks like carelessness, but three somehow looks like a dreamy summer. Even the prospect of RTE at the Public Accounts Committee on Thursday couldn't get people foaming at the mouth. Somehow, Donald Trump endeavouring to corrupt an already pretty corrupt sport by making a phone call to sort out a red card can't really ruin our day. Sport sorted that one out anyway. Indeed, the general bother about the match-made-in-hell that is Trump and Gianni Infantino doesn't seem to matter any more. The magic of the games and the fans has brushed away those concerns. Somehow, it's OK to just enjoy football as football and luxuriate in the

Cape Verde of it all, the Messi of it all, even the Wonderwall of it all. This summery switching-off from the feed of outrage and indignation often allows room for other concerns to slip in. When people are out and about, living their lives for a change, they start noticing their environment and wonder why so much of it is so shabby and dirty for a rich country, and why there are kids on e-scooters whizzing everywhere. And they realise that these things are important too. One thing that struck me this week was a letter to the *Irish Times* from Lucinda Murrihy. She told how her seven-year-old gets excited about going for the weekly grocery shop. He is autistic, has an intellectual disabil-

ity and does not speak, but he loves the routine of going around the shop, standing in the rear section of the trolley while his mother packs the groceries in front of him. Halfway round the shop, they stop at the rice cakes, and he decides if it is a pink-pack day or a green-pack day. He beams with pride as he helps lift the groceries on to the conveyor belt. Recently, a well-intentioned staff member told Lucinda her son could no longer travel in the trolley due to safety concerns. What struck Lucinda was not the safety concern, but that no one asked the obvious follow-up question: "What alternative would make his participation possible?" She concludes the letter by saying

that "inclusion doesn't fail when a disabled child can't adapt. It fails when we stop at 'no' instead of asking: 'How can we make this possible?'" Sometimes, when we switch off our daily diet of outrage, it might give us the time and space to consider all the other little things that matter too. Like how the whole world can be in a trip to the supermarket.



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Photo: Steve Humphreys

‘I’ve never hated anyone in my life, but I do hate him. I hate what he took from me’



Leanne Flynn stepped in front of a blade to protect children in her care. She speaks to Catherine Fegan about the scars left behind

Whenever she is alone for too long, Leanne Flynn plays it over in her head. In the corner of her eye, a stranger lingering just a moment too long. Seconds later, the glint of a blade. A lunge towards a little girl. A tussle. Blood. Children screaming. “I go over it second by second,” she told the *Sunday Independent* this week. “When it’s broken down into seconds, you think, ‘What if I had one more second to do that? Or what if had been standing in a different spot? Could I have got to him quicker?’ I think of everything if I’m on my own. Things I should have said, things I should have done. Everything. I think of everything.” More than two years after she stepped in front of a 14-inch blade to protect 13 children in her care, the 38-year-old wonders if she could have done more. Her actions on November 23, 2023, when 52-year-old Riad Bouchaker embarked on a stabbing spree outside a school in Dublin’s city centre, saved the lives of every child there that day. She was the first line of defence during an attack that horrified the nation. Ever since, Ms Flynn, who was collecting the children from school that day to walk them to a nearby after-care creche, has shunned the limelight. After a month in hospital, she retreated to the privacy of her home in Finglas. There, with the support of her partner, Anthony, and her two children, she is trying to rebuild her life and come to terms with the injuries inflicted on her that day. This is her story.

***** Even now, after everything that happened, Leanne describes it as her dream job. Five years into her employment, she had a role as afternoon creche manager, a boss she loved and a group of children she treated like they were her own. Twice a day, Monday through Friday, she walked across Parnell Square to collect lines of junior and senior infants from the local school. It was a four-minute walk for an adult, a slow, chatter-filled 15 minutes with children holding hands. “It’s so busy all the time, so you would have your wits about you,” she said. “You see people drunk, you see people arguing and fighting or asking for change or whatever, but nothing like this. Never.” The day had already felt disjointed. Grieving the recent death of her mother, she was running late after finalising funeral expenses. When she arrived at the school, she was playing catch-up, hurriedly checking the parents’ WhatsApp group for absences and sorting tables and chairs. A colleague who normally started her shift at the collection point outside the school on Parnell Square was already there. “When I got there, the kids were coming out,” she said. “We stuck our head around the door, waved to the teachers and did what we always did.” One by one, 13 children stood against the railings, zipping up their heavy coats against the November chill, talking loudly across different classes. “That’s when I clocked him,” said Leanne. “I think growing up in Dublin just gives you a sixth sense. I could spot someone who was on drugs or someone who was drunk. I logged him as being there, but there was no sense of panic. I just noted it.”

Bouchaker was standing by the bus stop to her right. Leanne noted his presence, assuming he might be looking for a missing Leap card or waiting to meet a friend. Then she bent down to zip up a little boy’s coat. “The minute I bent down and got halfway up with his coat, he just came straight away,” she said. Bouchaker moved towards the end of the line, dropping into a low crouch as if to speak to a child. But he didn’t speak. Instead, he raised his hand, and Leanne’s eye caught the flash of a blade. “He just went straight in,” she said. “But as he got closer, he brought the knife up so I saw the silver of the knife, and I was like, what is he doing? And then he just started jabbing. So I, I actually let out a roar. I was like, ‘What are you doing? Get away from those kids!’” Without thinking, she lunged, grabbing Bouchaker from behind and pulling him away from the children.

“As I pulled him back, he looked at me,” she said. “It was like a kind of a shocked look, as if he didn’t expect it. It wasn’t like I frightened him, it was more like he was confused. He looked at me and his eyes went really wide. I always remember his eyes being really big. And they obviously had colour, but whatever colour they were, my brain stuck on black.” Bouchaker brushed her off, sending her to the pavement, and instantly turned back to the children. Leanne, unaware she had been stabbed, scrambled back to her feet, grabbed him a second time and wrestled him to a standstill. “I just got straight back up and grabbed them [the children] again and was shouting,” she said. “And I was like, ‘Somebody help me, he has a knife’, because I was thinking there’s nobody helping, like what’s going on?” “But again, it was a split second that seemed like forever. I wasn’t frightened of him. I was more so frightened for the kids. I just wanted him away from the kids. I just kept thinking, get him away, get him away, get him away.”

A young boy, accustomed to helping Leanne manage the youngest infants, stood at the front of the queue. Catching his eye, Leanne yelled one word: “Run!” Gripping the hands of the smaller infants, he sprinted up the pavement to safety, leaving the scene just as the crowd converged on Bouchaker. “I was pulling the kids out of the way, and then I was thinking they’re going to run out into the roads,” Leanne said. “They’re going to think they have to go back to the creche, which is three main roads to cross. I had glanced back and saw all the other adults around him. So that’s when I had moved up the road with the kids. “I told them to stop, so they stopped at the pillar outside the hotel. I said, ‘It’s OK, you’re safe’. There were four of them at the pillar, and there were another two of the little girls sitting on steps behind me, but they were like just sobbing with blood all over their hands.” It was only when the adrenaline began to fade on the steps of the nearby Hotel Saint George that Leanne realised she couldn’t breathe. She looked down at her hands. They were covered in her own blood. She had been critically stabbed in the chest, her spleen destroyed, her diaphragm sliced, and both lungs collapsed. “At first, seeing the blood on my hand, I thought it was just a cut,” she said. “But

when emergency services arrived, a paramedic cut open my fleece. My boss was there at the scene at that stage, and the look on her face made me realise how bad it was. They put me in the ambulance, and I was thinking, why are there all these people here for a cut?” When Leanne’s father reached the scene, the ambulance door was flung open. “I remember seeing him [Bouchaker] on the ground,” she said. “There was a policeman standing over him. I couldn’t see his face, but I knew it was him. So I was like, OK, he’s down. He’s not near the kids. I passed out after that.” Leanne had managed to call her partner from the steps outside the hotel, telling him she had been stabbed. Panic-stricken, Anthony left his workplace in Leixlip and sped towards Dublin. Meanwhile, radio reports on the car stereo announced a major incident in the city. “I went straight to the Mater,” said Anthony. “All the roads were closed and then, as I’m coming in, the traffic is building and building and I’m flying down the bus lanes and doing whatever I had to do to get there. When I reached the Mater and the public order unit was there, I knew something really serious had happened.”

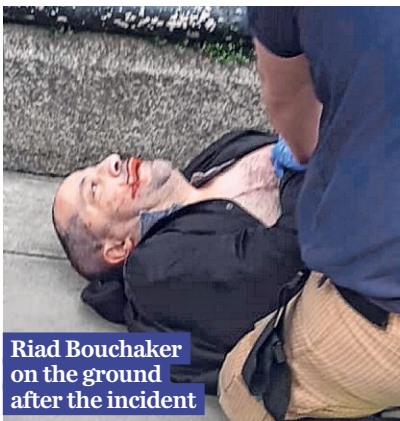
By the time he got to see Leanne, she was in a critical condition. “When I walked into that room, every available doctor was in there,” he said. “The amount of wires coming out of her was frightening. She looked beat. Completely beat. The doctor came and said they needed to take her away immediately. She was losing so much blood. I signed whatever forms they gave me and I said, ‘Go, take her’.” Before Leanne was taken into the operating theatre, Anthony was given a moment alone with her. “I’ll never forget it, because I went over and she was out cold,” he said. “And I just whispered in her ear. I said, don’t even think about it. I said, ‘Leanne, you have two kids — whatever about me, you have two kids’. And she was out of it, but she starts crying. Actual tears. That’s how I knew she could hear me.” Outside, on the streets, riots had already broken out. “I’m standing in a room on the top floor of the Mater looking towards town,” said Anthony. “And all I can see is orange and black smoke. The whole place was on fire.”

Leanne spent a month in the Mater, enduring critical drops in her condition, an induced coma and body temperatures so high she had to be packed in ice sheets. Due to severe lacerations to her vocal cords caused by emergency intubation, she could barely speak to Anthony when she finally woke up. “When I did wake, Anthony was there,” she said. “I just turned to him and said, ‘Are all my kids still alive?’ I said, ‘Don’t lie to me, and he said, ‘Yeah, they’re all alive.’” During her weeks in the dark hum of the intensive care and high dependency units, the physical torment began to pale in comparison with the psychological isolation. “The hospital was probably the loneli-

est I’ve ever felt in my whole entire life,” said Leanne. “You’ve too much time to think, almost. I literally couldn’t lift my arm, so I felt trapped in my body. I just wanted to be back to the way I was, and it wasn’t happening. And then you’re like, what am I going to be like when I get out of here?” “The damage that had been done was too serious. It was Professor Ann Brannigan who put me back together. I owe her my life. But, to be honest, it was Layla and Josh [her children] who drove me on. I needed to be home with them.” Layla was three-and-a-half at the time and had never been apart from her mother. She now suffers from profound separation anxiety, begging Leanne to “promise to think of me every second” whenever she leaves the room. Josh was eight, and after absorbing the rumours and gossip of the schoolyard, spent weeks harbouring the terrifying fear that his mother had died. “Eventually, we had to smuggle him in to see me,” said Leanne. “He was so worried. And then once he kind of saw me and knew I was OK, he felt a bit better.” At that point, Leanne did not know the extent of the injuries suffered by the first little girl Bouchaker stabbed. His blade went through the child’s heart, and she has been left with life-changing injuries. As get-well-soon cards began to arrive from the staff and children at the creche, Leanne scoured the names, noting any that weren’t there.

I had to learn to walk again... They had to do everything for me

“I knew from memory that she was hurt,” said Leanne. “But I didn’t know the extent of it. And when I got the cards and stuff, I was looking at names, and Anthony was telling me she was OK because he didn’t want to upset me. I knew myself that it was serious.” Leanne was released from hospital a few days before Christmas, 2023. “I had lost so much weight,” she said. “It took me a full year-and-a-half to properly recover. I had to do physiotherapy. I had to learn to walk again. I couldn’t shower without help. I couldn’t lift my arm. They had to do everything for me.” Today, the physical impacts are there to stay. Without her spleen, her immune system is severely compromised, forcing her to take daily precautions against basic infections. Severe surgical scar tissue prevents her from wearing certain clothing, and her stomach muscles frequently lock in violent, painful spasms. A routine task like lifting a basket of laundry or carrying a weekly shopping bag is impossible. The emotional landscape is even more complex. Diagnosed with severe PTSD, her mind remains on heightened alert in public spaces. “I can’t do the bus any more,” she said. “I had to get a car purely for my own sanity, just to transport me and the kids safely.”



Riad Bouchaker on the ground after the incident

After the initial media frenzy, Leanne and her family were left to pick up the pieces alone. Apart from Sinn Féin’s Mary Lou McDonald, she says not a single government official or politician ever reached out to offer support or counselling or check on the welfare of her traumatised children. “Not one,” she said. Disappointed by the lack of action in relation to crime in the city centre, Leanne said she wants civic leaders to face the bigger, uncomfortable questions regarding the safety of Dublin’s working-class communities. She questions why the legal system allows individuals carrying weapons to go unchecked, and why penalties for having a knife were not increased overnight.

“I do not feel safe in our city,” she said. “Normal people have to navigate the streets of Dublin every day of the week, and it’s not safe. People are being attacked, left, right and centre. You get off the bus, and you’re stepping out on to blood on the pavement. “People are being robbed, pickpocketed. Every normal, hard-working person in Dublin has to have their wits about them every day of the week going through the city. “How many incidents have happened from then until now? Why are people angry? I would do what I did again no problem, but the question is, why? Why should anyone have to do it? Why are our streets not safe? I’m angry that those questions are not being answered.” Earlier this month, when Bouchaker was found guilty of all eight counts at the Central Criminal Court, the overriding feeling was one of relief. “I was thrilled it was all eight counts,” said Leanne. “There was that relief that it was all eight. I was so happy for all the families. There was a lot of hugging.” However, the verdicts did not wash away her burning anger. Instead, weeks of sitting just feet away from her attacker in court solidified a deep resentment. “I’m very angry,” she said. “I’ve never hated anyone in my life, but I do hate

him. I hate what he took from me. I hate the time away from my kids that he took. I hate the independence that he’s taken away from me. I hate just how much 15 seconds has changed my whole life. “There is no doubt in my mind that he intended to kill the children that day. And I know that if I hadn’t intervened, there would have been multiple deaths. I hate him for that.” Leanne would love to return to her job, to “her children” in Parnell Square and the life she had before, but the reality of her injuries means that may not be possible. “I’m working since I’m 16,” she said. “I’ve always done stuff. I’ve always had a routine. And at the time I asked them [the doctors], they said not under any circumstances can you go back. And now I’m almost stuck in limbo. “My immune system is compromised, and going back into childcare where you pick up everything from kids is not a runner. Then there are all the physical things I can’t do. I can’t even pick up Layla. But I’d love to go back. I’d love to go back with my kids. I love my kids.”

Today, Leanne wears a small silver ring adorned with delicate angel wings. It was given to her a year after the attack by a mother whose child was in the line that afternoon. The media quickly dubbed Leanne “The Angel of Parnell Square”, a title she rejects with immediate discomfort. “I have thought about the word ‘hero’ a lot,” she said. “To even be thought of so highly is lovely, but are adults not supposed to do what I did? Are adults not supposed to protect the youngest and most vulnerable? Even with old people as well, you’re meant to help them. That’s the way I was brought up, anyway. “We did our job as far, as I’m concerned. To anyone who helped and stepped in, I’m very thankful that they did. But this narrative of he did this and she did that, the conversation shouldn’t even go that far. “We did our job as adults, we protected the children. And that’s where the conversation ends. Anyone who helped, we’ve done our job.” Knowing the agonising physical and mental toll of the last few years, would she step in front of a blade again? “Yes,” she said. “A million per cent. I’m not afraid of him. If it meant that he didn’t get my kids, then yeah, I would do it. I think we should remember that there were 13 kids there that day. “I’m so happy they’re OK, and I hope they get to move on with their lives and forget that day. But not all of them are that lucky. Their lives are changed forever. And their families will carry this for the rest of their lives, the same way my family will.”

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● The scene on Parnell Square following the serious stabbing incident. Photo: David Conachy