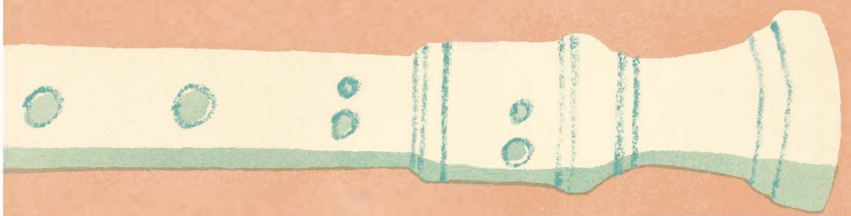


Gráinne O'Brien

SOLO



"*Solo* is a triumph. I absolutely adore it." Donal Ryan

Solo

a performance in which a performer has no partner or associate

Daisy's first love is music.
Her second was David.

As she starts her final year of school, dealing with a breakup, the betrayal of her ex-best friend, and her dad's illness, she feels more alone than ever.

Even music feels lost to her.

But when she unexpectedly makes a new friend, Daisy begins to find her way back to herself.



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Little Island
Books create waves

Cover by Anna Houlogne

SOLO

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Note on the Text

Here are some short explanations of words and phrases used in this book which you might not be familiar with if you don't live in Ireland.

The Leaving Cert
: the final exams students in Ireland take at the end of secondary school

Leaving Cert points
: Students receive points based on the grades from their Leaving Cert exams. These points determine a student's eligibility for university courses in Ireland.

Hurling
: a traditional Irish game played with a hurl or hurley (stick) and a sliotar (ball)

Grind school
: a private school which helps students prepare for exams

The Debs
: a formal dance for students in their final year of secondary school, similar to the "prom" in the USA

J-1
: a temporary Visa which allows Irish students to spend a summer working in the USA

Féile
: music festival

With love to my father, Paul,
Who always believed this would happen
Even when I didn't.

Dedication
an inscription or form of words dedicating a book to a person

This book is dedicated
To me.

Not me now.
Me then.

Sweet
Lost
Anxious
Broken-hearted
Girl.

I wish I could tell you
How hard

You laugh.

I wish I could tell you
How much

You sing.

I wish I could tell you
How loved

You are.

Solo

a performance in which a performer
has no partner or associate

Percussion

the striking of one solid object with or against another with some degree of force

Knock.
Knock.
Knock.

Again.
Again.
Again.

"She's asleep."

The words whisper into
My dreams.

The voices are telling
The truth.

How was it possible that I found enough peace
To sleep?

Knock.
Knock.
Knock.

The door is pushed open and there
They are.

All four of them.

Mother. Father. Brother. Brother.

A chorus of smiling faces
Seemingly unaware

That their presence is
Unwelcome.

Chorus

a body of singers, performing as a group normally, but not necessarily, in parts

They begin
To sing.

Happy Birthday to you! (Me)
Happy Birthday to you! (Me)
Happy Birthday, dear Daisy! (That's Me)
Happy Birthday to you! (Me)

All four stand
In the doorway

Holding their treats, waiting
Expectantly.

I know what to do.

The same thing I
Have done

Every year when I hear
This refrain.

"Oh wow", is all I am able
To say

As I feel a "smile" drag its way
Across my face.

None of us believes
It's real.

But if there is one thing I can do
It's perform.

Beat

the basic unit of time chosen by the conductor
when he or she beats time

I take my cake
And wait

To blow out the candles
And

Do what is expected
Of me.

They all deserve
That much.

This family, who only want to see
Me smile.

Who only want the best
For me.

I close my eyes and the
Wish

Has slipped out and I am
Furious

With myself that I wasted
My first

Adult wish
On him.

Eighteen years of age

An adult.
At last.

Rest
silence

It's been my birthday
For ten hours

My phone is
A traitor.

Silence stalks the
Well wishes

None of which are from
Him.

Family and acquaintances
And choir members

Are kind enough to
Pay attention

To their own phones informing
Them.

"Today is Daisy's birthday.
Wish her a Happy Birthday?"

It is impossible to forget things
Like birthdays.

I should be enjoying
This day

Revelling in the
Good wishes.

I stare at the screen and obsess
Over his silence

Funebre
gloomy

Knock.
Knock.

It's gentle.
Understanding.

My mother's face
Announces itself.

Slowly. Respectfully.

"Daisy," her voice overflows
With patience,

"Your brothers are going back
To college.

They want to celebrate
Your birthday."

And I hear what she is not saying.
It's time.

Time to get up.
Time to join them.
Time to move on.
Time to come out.
Time to let go.

Duo

a piece of music for two performers

Fiachra and Tadgh are my
Older brothers.

Twins. Born ten minutes
Apart.

Not a drop of
Pain relief

My mother likes to
Tell them

When they are being
Particularly Annoying.

I love my brothers.

They tumble through life.
Always together.

Dual beings. Friends,
Brothers, soulmates.

IIddeennttiiccaall pillars
Of strength.

They came into this world
Determined

To change it.

My brothers were born
Knowing

They were meant for
Something great.

Proof that perfect lightning can
Indeed

Strike ttwwiiccee.

They feel that anything can be
Achieved

As long as they are
together.

They did their best to include me
In their club

No one's fault that I could never be
A full member.

They love me as much as they are
Capable

Of loving another
Person

And it is only a
Fraction

Of how much they love
Each other.

My brothers live together.
And laugh together.
They joke together.

They love together.
They are together.

About the Author

Gráinne O'Brien is a bestselling author and a bookseller at Kennys, Galway, Ireland. She was a member of the Irish Booksellers Association committee and was named a Bookshop Hero by *The Bookseller* in 2022. She is the founder of Rontu Literary Service, an agency dedicated to supporting writers of fiction for children as they seek publication. She completed the MA in Creative Writing from the University of Limerick in 2018 and received Arts Council Agility Awards in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Her picturebook *A Limerick Fairytale* was published by The O'Brien Press in 2023. *Solo* is her first novel.

ABOUT LITTLE ISLAND

Little Island is an award-winning independent Irish publisher of books for young readers, founded in 2010 by Ireland's first Laureate na nÓg (children's laureate), Siobhán Parkinson. Little Island books are found throughout Ireland, the UK, North America, and in translation around the world.

You can find out more at littleisland.ie

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