

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE AWARD-WINNING  
*THE DEEPEST BREATH*

# THE LONELY BOOK



MEG GREHAN

# **THE LONELY BOOK**

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PRAISE FOR MEG GREHAN'S *BABY TEETH*

A *Kirkus* YA Book of the Year 2022

Shortlisted: An Post Irish Book Awards 2021

Nominated: Carnegie Medal 2023

“Emotionally rich and gloriously queer”

– *Kirkus*, starred review

“By turns realistically sweet and thorny”

– *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“This enchanting work is an excellent addition to  
LGBTQIA+ and verse novel collections.”

– *School Library Journal*

“Skillfully charts uncertainty, temptation and  
the course of a strange, desperate love.”

– Imogen Russell Williams, *The Guardian*

PRAISE FOR MEG GREHAN'S *THE DEEPEST BREATH*

A *Bank Street* Best Children's Book of 2022  
with Outstanding Merit

A *Booklist* 2021 Editor's Choice

Winner: Judge's Special Prize,  
Children's Books Ireland Awards 2021

Shortlisted: Waterstones Children's Book Prize 2020

“Heartwarming and tear-provoking”

– *Booklist*, starred review

“Wholesome, powerful and essential”

– *Shelf Awareness*, starred review

“I spent most of this beautifully written verse novel blinking  
back tears. ... I felt genuinely distraught to have finished it.

Amazing to think it's only Grehan's second book.”

– Sarah Webb, *The Irish Independent*

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First published in 2023 by  
Little Island Books  
7 Kenilworth Park  
Dublin 6W  
Ireland

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for mum  
growth and resilience and love love love  
thank you  
for everything

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The best thing about summer  
Is getting to hang out at the shop  
At Birch Books  
Mum  
And Mama  
And Charlotte  
And me  
Annie

The shop feels extra-magical in the morning  
When we open the doors and the windows  
And the sun streams in  
And the books  
Welcome us  
And the smell of paper envelops us  
And we get to work  
Dusting or sorting or stacking  
And Mum checks out the day's stack

How do I explain the stack?  
Well  
You see  
Every single day  
When we arrive at the bookshop  
Right there  
Sitting proud and excited  
On the counter  
Is a stack of books

Different books every day  
Books about animals or witches or different worlds  
About politics or geography or nature  
And every day  
We accept our magical mission  
To find the books  
Their owners  
Their people  
Their readers

My moms own the bookshop  
They owned it even before I was born  
Sometimes  
They say it was their first  
Baby  
And we laugh

They named it Birch Books  
Because they had their first kiss  
Under a birch tree

They love the bookshop  
All its dusty corners and  
Wobbly shelves  
Every stack of books  
And every tinkle of the bell  
Above the door

It's my home  
My second home



And how lucky I am  
To have two  
Stacked right on  
    top  
    of  
    each  
    other

My sister  
Loves the bookshop too  
Of course she does  
She especially loves  
Helping people choose books  
For people they love  
I swear she knows  
Every book in the  
Whole shop  
And she always  
Knows the  
Exact right  
One  
For everyone

My sister Charlotte  
Is what you  
Might call

*Girly*

Though she hates that word  
She likes dresses and long hair and glitter  
She likes books about love and princesses

She is sixteen years old and very pretty  
She is my sister  
And I love her

Charlotte is always reading  
She loves the shop  
I think in her mind  
It is our real home  
And the apartment above  
Is just where we sleep

She loves helping people pick out books  
She loves talking about books  
Sneaking them upstairs to read into the night  
Organising them neatly  
Displaying them prettily  
She loves books  
She loves our bookshop  
She loves us  
She loves us a lot  
Just like we love her  
My moms are very different  
Mum is tall and thin and has hair down to her bum  
She wears floaty skirts and long scarves  
She likes thrillers and mysteries and books that  
    make you leave the light on at night  
She likes dark coffee and smelly cheese  
She loves our Mama more than anything in the world  
Except us

Except us  
She loves us like a lion  
Like a tiger  
A dragon maybe  
She loves  
Ferociously

Mama  
Is softer  
She is squishier  
She is shorter than Mum  
And has hair that falls in neat curls to her shoulders  
And the biggest best smile I think I've ever seen  
She likes romance books and books set years and  
years ago  
My Mama is always smiling  
She glows  
She has dark skin and kind eyes and  
She loves gently  
Warm hugs and kisses on the forehead  
She loves  
Gently

We are a family  
Perfectly formed  
We are made of love

Our bookshop  
Is under our apartment

Just down the stairs  
And it means the world to us  
We spend all day there  
Most days  
Sorting and unboxing and recommending  
Charlotte and I get to sit on the beanbags and read  
Read anything we want  
We must have read  
Half the shop by now  
We love it  
It's part of our family

My moms opened the shop  
When they were young  
Only in their twenties!  
Way before I was born  
It's hard to imagine  
Them so young  
But I like to try  
I like to think about them  
Young and in love  
Getting the keys for the first time  
Holding hands as they walked through the door  
Laughing together as they built shelves  
And filled them with  
All the best books

They are still like that  
Holding hands

Laughing together  
They are still full of love  
For each other  
For the shop  
For us

The magic started  
Around two years in  
My Mama says  
They started noticing  
Books  
Appearing on the counter  
Out of nowhere  
They would put them away  
But they'd reappear just a minute later  
They would ask each other  
'Hey  
Why did you put this here?'  
But the other would swear that they didn't

Then the customers would arrive  
Asking for a book  
Just like the mysterious book on the counter  
And it would happen  
Again  
And again  
And  
Again

Eventually  
More and more books would appear  
Every morning  
A small stack would sit on the counter  
Waiting eagerly  
To be sold

Mum says  
The shop wanted to help  
And they accepted its help  
Gratefully

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## ABOUT MEG GREHAN

Meg Grehan is originally from County Louth but now hiding away in County Donegal in the north-west of Ireland, with a very ginger girlfriend, an even more ginger dog and an undisclosed number of cats (none of whom is ginger). Her first book *The Space Between* won the Éilís Dillon Award at the 2018 Children's Books Ireland Awards. *The Deepest Breath* won the Judge's Special Prize at the 2020 Children's Books Ireland Awards and was shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize. It is published in the USA by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and in France by Talents Haut. *Baby Teeth* was a *Kirkus* Best YA Book of 2022 and was nominated for the 2023 Carnegie Medal.

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## ABOUT LITTLE ISLAND

Little Island is an independent Irish press that publishes the best writing for young readers. Founded in 2010 by Ireland's first children's laureate, Siobhán Parkinson, Little Island books are found throughout Ireland, the UK and North America, and have been translated into many languages around the world.

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*Savage Her Reply* by Deirdre Sullivan

**YA Book of the Year**

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*Savage Her Reply* by Deirdre Sullivan

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**Judges' Special Prize**

**KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards 2020**

*The Deepest Breath* by Meg Grehan



**We are a family  
Perfectly formed  
We are honest and open and ourselves  
We are together together together  
We are made of love**

**Annie loves helping out in her moms' bookshop. But she knows something is troubling her older sibling, and her moms seem worried too. Even the bookshop is upset.**

***A loving story about gender identity, family, and the magic of books***

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**"Heartwarming and  
tear-provoking"**

***Booklist*, starred review**

**"Wholesome, powerful  
and essential"**

***Shelf Awareness*, starred review**

**"Written with such  
heart and tenderness"**

**Sarah Webb,  
*The Irish Independent***



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