

The library is cold today. The library is dark today. I sit at my desk, still, as a figure walks past in a perfect straight line. She goes forward, her feet pattering on the ground - until she comes to a corner. She turns left.

I study here a lot. You can watch people. It's almost full down in the atrium. People take shelter from the October wind, even as it blusters through the building and forces them to keep their coats on. I like to peer over and evaluate their outfits; usually, the most stylish people look coldest. It's raining outside and it beats rhythmically on the library's roof.

The walls have a nice echo to them, so when people walk up from behind, I hear them coming from a while off. I pretend that I'm not interested in them by hunching over my laptop intently. Then, when they have passed me, I look up at their backs. They keep walking. I keep watching. They don't see me.

Everything around me is fine geometric structures. Straight lines and straight shapes that are supposed to keep your thinking straight. But I haven't read anything today and I'm not thinking straight.

I started this morning with the sunniest intentions. I was going to envelop myself in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, note two chapters, then get a nice start on my essay plan after a €10 lunch salad. Now my neck hurts from looking at my phone for hours and there's a gnawing pain in my stomach because it's 17:32 and I haven't eaten and I don't deserve to either. Sometimes stories pop up on my Instagram which show my friends laughing in the rain on Westmoreland Street or chatting on the Arts Block couches.

These stories are like fresh snow on Christmas morning. There's a promise beneath them, if I can get to it. I swipe up feverishly and it's—nothing. Again. Nothing. Again. New post from Ciara Keogan. Ciara's a girl I knew at school; she was cooler than me and stupider too. She's out with the gals, presumably last weekend. But then she could be out any day of the week, knowing her. I tap the heart on the screen twice. Like.

Hold on. I can hear footsteps coming towards me. I put my phone down and look at my laptop. It displays a word document: notes I made yesterday, covering my tracks to the people walking past. Time for some anonymous typing.

Footsteps. Loud. Masculine footsteps. He's passed now. A beautiful boy. Tall. Beige polo jacket. Doc Martens. I see him a lot here. Once every few days the same girl comes up to his

desk and they complain about their tutors. I heard him outside a lecture hall once talking with another boy about how he treats women. Well, he says. They want to be looked after, he says. That's all they want, he says. I was on the sofa opposite him; he didn't see me.

It's been a while for me. Since sex, I mean. It's been too long since I tried to get kissed, even. You have to try. Penises don't just pop up like adverts—not since I deleted Tinder. And even if they did you wouldn't want it like that. It's not whack-a-mole.

It's been four months since the last time. Yeah yeah. You remember. Ciaran, the country boy with the Limerick accent. He pushed in the queue in Doyle's for me and then he bought me a drink and after that I felt like I owed him something. After we finished, he was looking at me, really romantic like, but I called him a culchie as a joke and he looked away, down to his feet. He tried to deflect it, act like he wasn't offended, but he was. Upset. I felt like an idiot.

What I should've said is:

"It's alright, I'm a culchie too now. We had to move to Wicklow in my last year of school because my Dad lost his business"

But that's too bloody South Dublin. I should've said:

"I'm a posh Dublin girl, hating buggers is part of my cultural heritage."

To show him I could be ironic about it. That I knew what I was like and that it was okay. But how could I think to say the right thing at the right time?

He didn't say anything nice to me either. And he didn't message. Culchie. Christ, you think you can't do any worse than a rugby boy until you meet a GAA boy. And all the others here at Trinity are English and more Nigel Farage than Mick Jagger. Remember the one I went to No Name Bar with. He was alright till I took the piss out of Brexit. Thought that was a winner. Nope. Next one will be another guy making me watch bloody Leinster Rugby matches, just like Dad. If there is another one. Don't get left on the shelf, Mum once told me.

I hear the wind beating into the ceiling window. I peer into the atrium for a second and everyone down there is stooped over their laptops. Tipper tapper on their keyboards

together. I sit back down in my chair. Goosebumps on my arms. It's chilly in here today. I shouldn't put my jumper on, though: it doesn't look right.

I check Facebook messenger. No notifications. Swipe up. No notifications. Open Gmail. No new emails on murphyele9@tcd.ie. Nothing on ellzbellz1998@gmail.com either. They wouldn't miss me here if I died: I haven't got involved in enough societies. You'd get that email from the staff that always goes around when there's a death.

Subject: *Death of a Student*

*Dear Students and Staff,*

*We sadly inform you of the death of a student. Ellie Murphy, a third-year student in English Studies, passed away last week. Ellie was a promising Junior Sophister who planned to become a Journalist after college.*

They'd be nice about me for sure. Because they wouldn't know that I won't ever make it as a journalist. They'd give me the benefit of the doubt. Don't speak ill of the dead, granny said, when they announced that the paedo priest died. If I topped myself they'd be lovely. They'd say:

*If you are experiencing mental health issues, please contact...*

And so on. They follow a formula, right? The emails for when staff and students die, I mean. There must be guidelines. They never say suicide, for sure. They wouldn't say that. Suicide. Killed, by her own hand. Took the easy way out. Topped herself. There's no nice word for it. But then it's not a nice thing, so why would there be a nice way to say it?

Almost two years since Jack killed himself. I remember the apartment in halls when I found out. I was sitting at the kitchen table. Saw it on Facebook and I literally couldn't believe he was gone. Sounds like a cliché, that—'literally couldn't believe it'. It was so bloody horrible, and I can't even think of an interesting way to express it. But it's true: I couldn't believe it. I stared at my screen for a minute flat. Didn't think. Stared so long I could see each pixel on the page. I said 'WHAT?' out loud and I meant it. I'd no idea what was going on. There was no food in the apartment. I had to wipe off my tears and go over to Jessie's to ask if I could have

some beans on toast. I hadn't even spoken to Jack properly since fifth-year, barely knew him anymore.

Last time I saw him, a few months before college, he was walking with his parents on Killiney Hill. I was out with Dad because it was sunny, and I saw a figure in a Hollister tracksuit-top at the crest of the hill. I thought: that's Jack.

He didn't see me. If I walked past him on the path, I would've said hi. I wouldn't have told him I always thought that he was kind, because I wouldn't have needed to. Maybe my Dad would've said something to his Dad—some South Dublin Dad chat. It would've been a bit awkward and then we would've been away. And that would have been nice.

Because everyone knows someone, don't they? There was a girl in my sister's year, at the Protestant school. Eve something? Or was it a different school? She seemed so lovely. All of that stuff whirring around her head, and all she seemed was lovely.

Ciaran said something about one of his friends. Walking back to his, the night we slept together, he said:

"This is the pub my Da took my friend and myself to after Limerick were in the All-Ireland"

And I said:

"Is your friend in college?"

He said

"No. He's not around any more. He --."

Then he looked away. He had the same look on his face when I called him a culchie: frowning, but turning his face away so I couldn't see it. Like he didn't want me to see him feeling. I wish I hadn't bloody said it. But he changed the subject right away. He was kind of like that during sex—unhappy, without showing me why. Or maybe I'm imagining that.

He was kind really, but he didn't like me. He didn't like my humour, obviously.

There's a crash in the atrium. I jerk up and peer down towards it. A girl with pigtails and a raincoat leans over frantically at the far end of the room. Bends her back to pick up what crashed: a laptop. Around the atrium, eyes are fixed upon her. She turns around with the laptop in her hand and says nothing—she knows she's being looked at. All the eyes dart back to their work as one. Like a shoal of fish when you swim after them. She's almost performing, putting the laptop back into the charger, showing everyone it's okay. Nothing to see here. I sit down before she can see me.

A week ago, some lad spilt a bottle of Lucozade up here. He didn't get the cleaners — too embarrassed probably — just got some paper towels. The floor was sticky and sweet-smelling until the next morning. It made him look worse, clearing it up by himself. Nobody helping him out or making a joke about it.

I felt sorry for him, because you know people would talk. They wouldn't say anything, but they'd talk. Straight onto the group chats. 'Jesus, did you see the lad who split his Lucozade everywhere?' That's what this library is: a place where people always talk but never speak.

Instagram. Three new posts. One is Bill Withers. One is a girl from college on holiday in America last summer. Caption: an American flag and 'Sunshine'. One is from Oxfam Ireland, about modern slavery in Libya. She looks gorgeous. The girl from college, I mean. Hair back, sunglasses resting on her hair, pretty pearly smile. I like it.

I look up. It's so dark outside now; the library's lit even worse. In this light, the concrete doesn't so much turn a darker shade of grey as a dimmer one. It fails to reflect the lamps and you almost have to squint to see there's pillars and walls there, not just holograms. The wind and the rain are doing their worst out there. I catch my face in the mirror made by my laptop screen. Haggard. *A mirror tells me I look old and haggard in the face.* I'm frowning without meaning to. I look like someone to avoid, that's how I look, to be honest. But then, I'm badly lit. If I was well-lit, I could be happy.

If I was gone, they'd have some dynamite stuff to say about me. Probably they'd do an exclusive family funeral and my friends would do remembrance drinks for more of a laugh. Somewhere in Killiney, not Wicklow. Couldn't drag people down there for that—it's depressing enough already.

I'd have to write a note. I wouldn't want them to feel bad about it, but I'd want to leave something to the world. It would have to be well-constructed.

*I'm sorry to burden you but*

No.

*I'm sorry to put this burden on you but*

Better.

*I don't feel like I can go on living like this*

No. That's such a cliché.

I'd have to create something that would fit with it all. The eulogy: *A Life Cut Short*. The dim light falling on my desk, and the envelope resting there: *To My Parents*. The spectacle of it.

But there's no such thing as a good suicide note. Even Kurt Cobain, even Virginia Woolf: they're barely coherent. They're just lost—nothing else. What Jack did to his family. What he did to all of us. If he'd just...

He was never that expressive, though. He never plucked up the courage, at that party, even though we were both plastered. To kiss me, I mean. We left the house and we were out in the garden for ages, listening to the music humming far away. Talking for so long I started to sober up and come back to earth. He kept trying to talk deep, but he couldn't do it, he couldn't express himself. We got down to the end of the garden, behind the hedge, and he said:

"There won't be a night like this again", looking wistfully at the hedge.

And I laughed — not because he was wrong; he was right — but because I felt so giddy just to be there. He looked like the lead in a high-school movie, casting his gaze romantically like that. And I took the piss out of him a bit, and then we talked more. It was funny. But he came back to it eventually.

“It’s a beautiful night”, he said.

And so it was. It was one of those bright midsummer nights when it never gets dark until it’s too late to care. One of those nights that only come around when you’re sixteen. I was only wearing a crop top and a skirt, but I didn’t feel a chill at all. It was the drink sure, but there was more to it than that. We were warm together even though we were the only two outside.

“Yeah, it is”, I said.

He must have been telling himself to say that and then make the move, because he was painfully silent for a few seconds and then he said it again:

“It’s a really pretty night”.

He looked me square in the face. I was stunned still, no idea what to say. I thought he was going to kiss me then as we locked eyes, but he waited, and waited, and waited, and then— nothing.

Maybe if I’d stopped thinking and just kissed him. But I didn’t have that kind of confidence. It’s so hard to do what you want to do. We waited, and we looked at each other, and we did nothing -- and then he broke eye contact. It was him, not me. I’m sure we would’ve kissed if he’d just looked at me another two seconds. One of us would’ve got the message. But it couldn’t have happened like that, because it didn’t happen like that. I heard he shifted another girl a couple of weeks later, and I shifted another boy the next time we were at a party together. And that was that. I never expected anything to come of it, and it didn’t. Nothing came of it. Nothing could’ve been different.

Laughter. Two boys are messing around at the top of the stairs. It’s the beautiful boy in the beige polo jacket again. He’s with a friend, whose back is turned to me. His friend feints a punch at him and he flinches, then they both burst out laughing, louder than they should in the library. He floats his shoulders left and right in a boxer’s stance as he grins and says:

“Right, sound, see ya this weekend then.”

He hears the same from his friend and then he’s away, pitter patter down the stairs and out of view. His friend walks towards my desk and catches my eye, smiling, as he passes. I smile back and watch him walk away from me. Then he’s just pitter patter as well.

Everyone’s filtering out of the library now. I close my eyes for a second, hearing but not seeing footsteps as they tap away down the stairs. The echo here sounds like water flowing down a stream. I take a moment to appreciate what’s around me. Unsteady silence, broken constantly by footsteps, the tapping of keyboards, and the wind breaking against the building. And the rain, too, coming down hard, giving us all it can. The library is full of these little noises. It’s alive—all of it. All of us—we’re alive.

I exit my word document and pack my laptop away, then zip my coat up. I skip past everyone who’s studying late and then down the stairs. A can cracks open; the smell of Red Bull seeps into the air. I get to the exit and leave the carpeted floor for the concrete porch.

I’m there a moment alone in the square as the wind shakes the trees down to its roots and the raindrops fall like bombs on the campus concrete. That’s it: it rains, it rains every bloody day. On Jack, on me, on everybody. Looking up into the low clouds, I smile. Then I step out, letting the raindrops bounce off my shoulders.

Let it throw everything it can at me. Let it do its bloody worst.