

LRDIS

We know
books

Sally Rooney was born in 1991 and lives in Dublin. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, *The White Review*, *The Dublin Review*, *The Sting-ing Fly*, Kevin Barry's *Stonecutter* and *The Winter Page* anthology. Her first novel, *Conversations with Friends*, was the most popular debut in the 2017 end-of-year round-ups. Her second novel, *Normal People*, was released to wide critical acclaim in 2018. Rooney was shortlisted for the *Sunday Times* EFG Short Story Award for 'Mr Salary' and was the winner of the *Sunday Times*/PFD Young Writer of the Year Award.

Sally
Rooney

Mr
Salary

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Stories

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Nathan was waiting with his hands in his pockets beside the silver Christmas tree in the arrivals lounge at Dublin airport. The new terminal was bright and polished, with a lot of escalators. I had just brushed my teeth in the airport bathroom. My suitcase was ugly and I was trying to carry it with a degree of irony. When Nathan saw me he asked: What is that, a joke suitcase?

You look good, I said.

He lifted the case out of my hand. I hope people don't think this belongs to me now that I'm carrying it, he said. He was still wearing his work clothes, a very clean navy suit. Nobody would think the suitcase belonged to him, it was obvious. I was the one wearing black leggings with a hole in one knee, and I hadn't washed my hair since I left Boston.

You look unbelievably good, I said. You look better than last time I saw you even.

I thought I was in decline by now. Age-wise. You look OK, but you're young, so.

What are you doing, yoga or something?

I've been running, he said. The car's just out here.

Outside it was below zero and a thin rim of frost had formed on the corners of Nathan's windshield. The interior of his car smelled like air freshener and the brand of aftershave he liked to wear to 'events'. I didn't know what the aftershave was called but I knew what the bottle looked like. I saw it in drug-stores sometimes and if I was having a bad day I let myself screw the cap off.

My hair feels physically unclean, I said. Not just unwashed but actively dirty.

Nathan closed the door and put the keys in

the ignition. The dash lit up in soft Scandinavian colours.

You don't have any news you've been waiting to tell me in person, do you? he said.

Do people do that?

You don't have like a secret tattoo or anything?

I would have attached it as a JPEG, I said. Believe me.

He was reversing out of the parking space and onto the neat lit avenue leading to the exit. I pulled my feet up onto the passenger seat so that I could hug my knees against my chest uncomfortably.

Why? I said. Do you have news?

Yeah yeah, I have a girlfriend now.

I turned my head to face him extremely slowly, one degree after another, like I was a character in slow motion in a horror film.

What? I said.

Actually we're getting married. And she's pregnant.

Then I turned my face back to stare at the windshield. The red brake lights of the car in front surfaced through the ice like a memory.

OK, funny, I said. Your jokes are always very humorous.

I could have a girlfriend. Hypothetically.

But then what would we joke about together?

He glanced at me as the barrier went up for the car in front of us.

Is that the coat I bought you? he said.

Yes. I wear it to remind me that you're real.

Nathan rolled his window down and inserted a ticket into the machine. Through Nathan's window the night air was delicious

and frosty. He looked over at me again after he rolled it up.

I'm so happy to see you I'm having trouble talking in my normal accent, he said.

That's OK. I was having a lot of fantasies about you on the plane.

I look forward to hearing them. Do you want to pick up some food on the way home?

I hadn't been planning to come back to Dublin for Christmas, but my father Frank was being treated for leukaemia at the time. My mother had died from complications after my birth and Frank had never remarried, so legally speaking he was my only real family. As I explained in my 'happy holidays' email to my new classmates in Boston, he was going to die now too.