

Not My Problem
Ciara Smyth

Andersen Press Limited (2021)

Reviews

- [Kirkus Reviews \(April 1, 2021\)](#): “Sixteen-year-old Irish student Aideen Cleary faces some big obstacles. After walking in on perfectionist classmate Meabh Kowalska, daughter of the school principal, crying in the toilets, Aideen gets roped into a drastic plan to help her fix her problems. Aided by Kavi Thakrar, a witness to Aideen’s pushing Meabh down the stairs—part of their harebrained scheme—Aideen soon finds herself running a favor-for-favor business for the student body. She silently struggles with her own home life while solving the issues of others to cope with her feelings of helplessness. Smyth paints a snapshot of someone who appears to have everything sorted but on the inside is falling apart at the seams. Aideen begins somewhat rough at the edges and soon becomes a character readers can easily root for: Between her mother’s drinking problem and her own failing grades, Aideen deals with issues faced by many young people. A spark of emotional authenticity runs throughout, making the narrative engaging and enjoyable. The language used is very Irish, featuring sentence structures and colloquialisms that set the cultural scene in a completely natural way. Aideen and Meabh are both lesbian, and while Aideen mentions experiencing some homophobia in the past, it is not the focus of the story; ethnic diversity is similarly part of the background texture. A noteworthy take on vulnerability and seeking help that doesn’t offer platitudes.”
- School Library Journal (Reviewed by Francisca Goldsmith, Lib. Ronin, Worcester, MA , Apr 01, 2021): “In this witty and engaging novel, Irish author Smyth creates a flawed teen girl, Aideen, who makes a credible journey from self-protectively tough to ready and willing to face her main problem: her single mother’s neglectful alcoholism. When Aideen makes a snap decision to help the principal’s overachieving, overscheduled, and generally disliked daughter, she begins doing secret favors for classmates in return for them owing her their help. She develops unexpected feelings for one of her clients and makes a new friend in Kavi, who is chatty and humorous but also has his own problems as, Aideen discovers, everyone does. The story unfolds effortlessly, detailing both suspenseful and hilarious moments, as does real life. Populated with believable high school friends and very few adults, Aideen and most other characters are white, and Kavi is Indian. Here, Aideen’s lesbian identity is not a plot point, but a detail that gives her authenticity. VERDICT This engaging novel will hook readers immediately. Recommended for all collections serving teens.”

- [Q&A With Ciara Smyth](#), Not My Problem (July 26, 2021) “ Representation and visibility can be powerful for students who are struggling with their identity. What is one thing you hope high school students take away from this novel?”
“ I get lovely messages from young lesbians who are relieved and heartened to see that word on the page and that means so much to me, it was something I did not expect when I started writing. But I’d like to think that anyone reading the book will see that sexuality or identity is only one thing that people struggle with because we are fully complex human beings. I like to write stories about LGBTQ+ kids after the coming out. Because we go on to have more stories than just that one.”

Awards

- [Waterstones Children's Book Prize for Older Readers](#) (Winner), 2022
- [Children's Book Ireland Awards](#) (Shortlisted), 2021
- [An Post Irish Book Awards Teen & Young Adult Book of the Year](#) (Shortlisted), 2021
- [Yoto Carnegie Medal](#) (Nominee), 2022
- [Rhode Island Teen Book Award](#) (Nominee), 2023

Response to challenges

[Fox35 Orlando \(March 23, 2022\)](#): Moms 4 Liberty Brevard is working to have 19 books pulled off the shelves in school libraries across the county, saying they are not suitable for students. ... The Brevard County School Board is not making any decisions on the 19 books Moms 4 Liberty is calling into question. However, they are looking into changing the policy into how books are pulled off shelves, which is part of curriculum. Instead of having a committee at each individual school that has the book in question on the shelf review the book and make a decision, they are going to make it so that if a book is found inappropriate in one school, it’s inappropriate in all. They will hold a meeting sometime soon to figure out the logistics of how to make that happen.

Reference list

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