

Sunburn

Chloe Michelle Howarth

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“Absolutely gripping . . . A romantic, funny, and painful exploration of the cost of being true to yourself.”

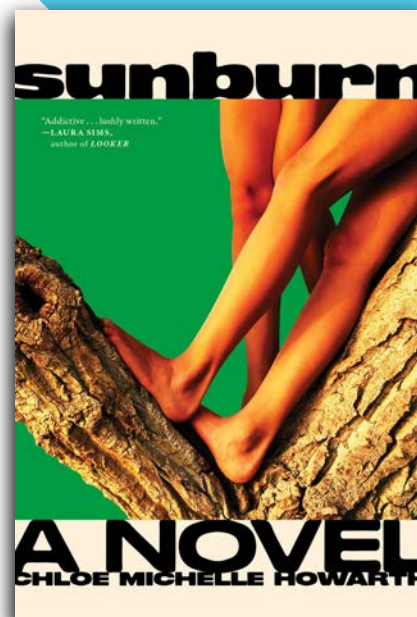
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Beautifully written ... it's enchanting.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A poignant, slow-burning portrait of queer youth.”

—*Foreword, STARRED review*



INTRODUCTION

For fans of *Normal People*, a queer, coming-of-age debut of impossible first love, first loss, and first heartbreak . . .

It's the early 1990's in the small town of Crossmore, Ireland, and Lucy knows what she's expected to do. Fall in love with the son of the farmer next door, marry him, pray for children, and never, under any circumstances reveal the truth—that she doesn't think marriage or motherhood or staying in Crossmore is for her. That the reason she knows this, is because of her close friend, Susannah.

For years, Lucy buries her obsession, until one summer, right before graduation, when her friendship with Susannah escalates. Now, Lucy will do anything to keep their secret safe. Their relationship is both the best and worst thing that's ever happened to her—Lucy loves Susannah, but every day, it feels like Crossmore, Lucy's mother, and their social mores are closing in. And when Susannah decides she no longer wants to hide, Lucy must make a devastating choice.

Tender and heartbreaking, *Sunburn* portrays the realities of growing up in a small rural town—from the long, hot summers, to the pressures of a conservative, traditional community where everyone knows each other's business. It'll leave you aching for your own first love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Sunburn* depicts the excitement of first love alongside the trials of coming of age as a queer person in a very specific setting. Do you think that Lucy and Susannah's relationship would have unfolded differently in another place?
2. How is Lucy's sense of self affected by her environment, in Crossmore and then in Dublin?
3. To what extent is the dynamic between Lucy and Martin complicated by social expectations?

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4. The novel deals with complex and seemingly unhealthy mother-daughter relationships. Discuss this, and consider the impact of these relationships on Lucy and Susannah, and their relationship.
5. To what point is Lucy her own obstacle? Do you think she can or should be judged for struggling to choose between her relationship with Susannah and the stability of her teenage life in Crossmore?
6. Discuss the portrayal of teenage female friendship in the novel.
7. How does this depiction of growing up queer in a small Irish town in the 90s compare with other imaginings of 90s queerness in literature?
8. Lucy maintains that she loves Crossmore throughout the novel, despite her complex personal experience there. Why do you think this is?
9. What's next for Lucy and Susannah? Do you think their love is sustainable or do they - especially Lucy - view each other through the rose-tinted lenses of first love?

Click below for scenes from *West Cork* . . .



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloe Michelle Howarth is an Irish writer who grew up in the West Cork countryside. The landscapes, culture, and people of rural Ireland have served as an inspiration for her writing. She first became interested in literature as a teenager, and in 2015, she moved to Dublin to study English, Media, and Cultural Studies in IADT Dun Laoghaire. Chloe currently lives in Brighton. This is her first novel.

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