

PUBLIC

By Madelaine Kinsella

The stickiness on the tables sits like a stale varnish.
Somehow it adds value for us. How it feels like our
Nan's house, full of antwacky ornaments, with the charm
of a winter grotto. The warmth. We sit around a booth,
telling stories with long, crackly introductions

about our adolescence spent trying to get served. Wanting
to make my mark on a pint glass in lipstick. Trying to remember
a fake date of birth in an effort to grow up too quick and
the publican, raising her brow at me, like a bemused, wise
Auntie. No chance, girl. We talk about how we were

the forgotten children of pubs. On the outskirts of
the adult's conversation. Being allowed full fat coke,
Just this once, to keep us quiet. We share anecdotes
like avant-garde poetry, forming our own literary canon.
The best lines live here.

From wetting the baby's head to the wake, it sees all
of life. Public houses that feel as old as our accents.
These are our listed buildings. A house for the public.
A home for us and ours. Somewhere that brings us
together. Something that overruns a glass.

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