

Strange
GIRLS
and
ORDINARY
Women

MORGAN MCCARTHY

Morgan McCarthy lives in Berkshire. She is the author of three novels: *The Other Half of Me*, *The Outline of Love*, and *Strange Girls and Ordinary Women*.

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For Cian

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ALICE

Alice Rooke, the doctor's wife, is preparing dinner for six. She is the only person in the kitchen full of fireless yellow light, flameless oven heat, though the mirror facing the window tricks her occasionally into glancing up in the belief that someone else is standing outside the window, looking in. But it is only ever her reflected self, following her usual routes across the large room. The Victorian tiles of the floor, a strict kaleidoscopic pattern of ochre, white, blue and red, have been perceptibly worn down into their most used paths over the years, and Alice likes to think of the women of previous centuries doing what she is doing; though the former pantry doorway is a ghost in the wall, the great old table's place is taken by a marble-topped breakfast bar, and the Belfast sink at which she washes the invisible chemicals off her vegetables is an expensive reproduction.

Alice doesn't know quite why it reassures her to call up an entirely imagined connection to the history of the house, but it does: the idea of standing not alone, but at the end of a queue, stretching right back into the beginning of things. It gives her a sense of *sense*; of the possibility that there is nothing