

Do you see me?

You disliked me, I fear, perhaps from first glance.

You see hair too polished. Coloured, cut, straightened.

You don't see years of frizz, hair ties, of baby fluff and sour breastmilk regurgitated.

You see make-up, overdone.

You don't see a mask that covers fear, of new things, new places, new people.

You see my clothes, fresh and tight.

You don't see years of the wrong shoes, the wrong skirts, the wrong socks, the wrong words, the wrong actions. But you see the peg, the wrong shape, always.

You see me smile as the flat figures around the room check me over and grasp at conclusions so ironically in contrast to who I think I am.

You see, all you see through your earthy glasses is a piece in the wrong box. A piece that will not be part of today's jigsaw.

You don't see prize winning. Neil Gunn. You don't see 14988 leather bound words, written by a previous person, titled *The Figure of the Author*, sitting lonely on a bookshelf, hidden by the present.

Who do you see?

You don't see the hard and leaky boobs filled to the brim with milky determination. You don't see the yeasty spores floating through tears and drips. You don't see the milk as it pours and sprays from what is left of a nipple destroyed by an innocuous mouth.

You see Steiner babies, the wronged, the educated, the literary.

You don't see shitty nappy buckets full of organic dyes, emptied and hung proudly in the cleansing sunshine. You don't see a tiny dot curled in a bed. A bed that floods with vomit. You don't see a virgin tummy filled with a poison protein.

You see the oscillators and the vessels, the fancy words and the quick thinkers. You don't see that to process is a process. You don't see the anxiety fighting to take over all thinking space.

You don't see the milk disappear. You don't see the affirmation that it is gone. You don't see the maternal comfort blanket. A' graidh, it's not gone, you're not letting it flow.' You don't see the collar of a dog that cannot bark.

You don't see the tears of a story that cannot simply be poured onto a piece of paper in a musty room filled with strangers, their pencils turning to gavels the longer we write.

You see a shiny new notebook, a fancy pen, a lack of substance.

You don't see the pills, the empty bank accounts, the lies, the black empty eyes that don't see you, the 999 call.

You see a story about a door, you see the careful curls of calligraphy turn to scratchy marks. You see boots that are too big, the wrong style.

You don't see the family waiting room with no door, screwed down chairs and tunnels in the bricks. You don't see the flashes of turmoil in the art proudly displayed on the cold, close walls. You don't see the face. Blank. The files. Many. The forms. 'He does not have to stay, but he must not leave.'

You see keenness but no spark.

You don't see the mental hospital, with corridors, wide and imposing, pretending to be homely. You don't see the wards with their friendly Highland names and locked doors. You don't see visiting. Taking the baby, leaving the child. You don't see the panic of realising that he. Is. One. Of. Them. You don't see them check. Every 15 minutes. They check.

You dismiss. She doesn't understand. She doesn't get it.

You don't see the sobs, hysterically shaking through a being. He sees. You don't see the guilt that you cannot hide it from him. You don't see his inquisitive brown pools. He sees. He knows. He remembers.

You don't see the clock, ticking by, sleep refusing to shut down the thoughts. You don't see food move around a plate, moved to the bin. You don't see the compliments. 'It's the breastfeeding, melts it right off.'

You don't see the shake that starts down deep. You don't see it spread to every corner of body and mind.

You don't see the doctor's surgery, the GP, the smile, the veil that hides the ruins. 'I can sign you off work but you seem ok'. She doesn't see. The 20 little faces, the routine, the escape. She doesn't see. That would be giving up.

You don't see her leave.

We're not that different. I didn't see either.