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**THE END OF YESTERDAY IS THE BEGINNING OF  
TOMORROW**

Sample Translation by Alexandra Roesch



**Romance**

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## Synopsis

Gillian is approaching thirty, and, a few months post-breakup and lacking any affordable alternatives, is still living with her (now ex-) longtime college boyfriend. Her parents can't fathom how she could have let a good marriage prospect slip through her fingers so close to the big three-zero, nor what it is a 'digital editor' actually does, and see Gilly as the black sheep of the family - certainly compared to her sister, Heather. Four years her senior and already married to a doctor by the time she was Gilly's age, Heather has already moved out to the outskirts of London, and has been popping out another baby every two years since. But Gilly, newly single for the first time since she started university, isn't sure if that's the path she wants to follow in life.

Upon finally managing to find a flat in Camden she begins settling into the comfort of her new, independent life. And yet within a few weeks of her moving in, all the residents in the building receive an official notice informing them that the owner of the property has passed away, and that the heirs plan to sell the house to investors, who want to put it on the market as luxuriously renovated apartments.

Is this some kind of twisted joke? Gilly has only just found a real home, and now this! She approaches her surly neighbour, the elderly Mrs Dewbre, who is notable for her colourful clothing, bright red hair, and flamboyant sunglasses. But Mrs Dewbre is entirely uninterested in either Gilly's plight or a discussion about the gentrification of the area, let alone about the future of the house, and dismisses her brusquely.

Frustrated by this experience, Gilly is initially shy of approaching any of the other tenants. Then, one day, she encounters Vincent, a law student living on the ground floor, who volunteers (mostly to impress Gilly) to submit an official plea to the heirs to buy them some more time. Gilly agrees eagerly with Vincent's offer, overwhelmed as she already is with the recent upheaval in her personal life, on top of the demands of her (underpaid) work at the online magazine, *In London*, which is undergoing major changes in a bid to stay competitive. She soon sets about spreading the news to the other tenants.

The Fishers, a childless couple living on the first floor, are thrilled with Gilly and Vincent's plan, but Owen, the reclusive documentary filmmaker who lives across the hall from them, rebuffs Gilly's attempts to engage him.

Gilly knocks once more on Mrs Dewbre's door. Gilly feels sure that her eccentric neighbour will be pleased at the thought of an extended lease; after all, it's surely challenging to adapt to new circumstances at her age. But what appears, at first, to be an indifferent reaction from Mrs Dewbre swiftly swells into genuine anger. Who does Gilly think she is to take this matter on as her own? After all, she's only recently become a tenant, and has no idea of the house's history. Nobody here does, she claims. None of them know the true value of this place.

This time, Gilly refuses to allow herself to be deterred. Intrigued by the old lady's words, she begins to research online. What exactly is the history of this house?

United by a common adversary in the form of the investors, the tenants, aside from Mrs Dewbre, grow closer, turning into a proper household community. Now the inhabitants exchange greetings, extend invitations to tea, and lately even Owen has been glimpsed sporting a slightly friendlier demeanour. Gilly and Vincent go on a date, discover that they have little in common, and decide to remain friends, instead.

Meanwhile, pressure mounts at the office when Gilly becomes part of a taskforce aiming to transform the online magazine, *In London*, into *Hidden In London* - a hip platform aimed at a young audience, catering to both tourists and locals with a strong social media presence. Hearing her boss's speech about the untold stories waiting around every corner, Gilly recalls Mrs Dewbre's words. From this point onwards, she leverages her job to delve into the archives, unravelling the story of 19 Tolpuddle Street. She unearths a newspaper article from the 1970s detailing the eviction of squatters from the house. The article even quotes one of the squatters. After this, the city council sold the house jointly to Gilly's recently deceased landlord and - to her surprise - to Mrs Dewbre. This could complicate matters for the investors, provided Mrs. Dewbre rejects their offer. Gillian confronts the elderly lady, but she remains evasive.

In her search for exciting places in Camden and the surrounding area for *Hidden In London*, Gilly amasses plenty of research material - books, copies of records from the archives and so on. To her surprise, Owen lends a hand helping her carry a few boxes into her flat. Upon learning that Gilly is genuinely curious about and investigating the history of the house and the local area, Mrs. Dewbre opens up a bit. She announces that she is finally ready to share stories from her time as a young woman in Camden. Stressed and lacking any sort of certainty and security, Gilly has been starting to have some doubts: ought she just to find a new flat? Is she cut out for being single? Has she bitten off more than she can chew with *Hidden In London*? But this breakthrough in her connection to Mrs Dewbre gives her a new burst of energy. Owen, too, seems to have been inspired: he suggests they commemorate the house by making a short film featuring current as well as the former residents of 19 Tolpuddle Street.

Gilly and Owen grow closer as they work on the project together. Gilly feels simultaneously free and safe with him, and he feels the same. The research is progressing well, and the interviews with former residents are very promising. Meanwhile, Gilly falls head over heels in love with Camden during her explorations (on which Owen sometimes joins her) and realises that she never wants to move back out to the suburbs and commuter towns.

Seeking interviewees for their film, Gilly recalls the newspaper article she found from the 1970s and manages to trace the lead squatter quoted in it – Roxy, the bassist of a punk band. She recounts how, just before the eviction, the band's lead singer, Oz Walsh, mysteriously disappeared. Gilly and Owen sense a connection. Perhaps, they think, this is a matter of gentrification rearing its ugly head, and the scandal might be of use in putting together a case for saving 19 Tolpuddle Street. Riding the high of their discovery, Gilly and Owen kiss. Because suddenly, it looks like there's a chance to save their home. And even if not, through their work on the film, they are adding to a kind of cultural memory of a part of the city. And, while they're at it, they spend the night together.

Gilly and Owen become a couple. They don't dwell much on the future, not when it seems irrelevant to the present moment. Gilly is engrossed in *Hidden In London*, Owen in editing the film. Together, they embark on a quest to find Oz Walsh.

With Roxy's help, they manage to locate him just as they're about to wrap up the film. Gilly and Owen drive up to Manchester, where Oz now lives, in order to incorporate his story into the film.

But when they find Oscar (as he now calls himself), he tells them a completely different story to the one they had expected to hear. It's a story, not of the eviction, but of the great love of his life, a love that changed everything for him, then turned around and left him from one day to the next.

Finally, the film is finished. On a balmy summer night, Owen invites the entire neighbourhood to watch the film, projecting it onto the wall of the house. The film concludes with Oscar Walsh's interview. Behind Mrs. Dewbre's tinted glasses, tears stream down her face. The film is a resounding success. After all the neighbours have gone home, Gilly and Owen go knocking on Mrs. Dewbre's door, determined to finally hear her story.

*Mrs. Dewbre's story is interwoven with the narrative from the very start through flashbacks. In these flashbacks, she is Philippa (Pippa) St George: her name before her very brief marriage to Paul Dewbre.*

Eighteen year old Pippa is on the verge of finishing school. Once she does, she will be expected to pursue a respectable course of study (like her brother, Digby), and then marry someone equally respectable - preferably one of Digby's friends from the elitist Bullingdon Club. Her life is that of the sheltered daughter of a wealthy family of good social standing. One evening, her friend, Henrietta, persuades Pippa to go to London in secret. There's a new music scene emerging that Henrietta has heard of, and they want to go to a concert.

Pippa has only ever been exposed to the elegant, sophisticated side of London. But now, in the dark, London appears to her to be grim, dirty, and threatening. The ugly face of recession can be seen on every corner, as can poverty, unemployment, and a general lack of prospects.

The concert turns out to be completely different to what Pippa and Henrietta were expecting. The club is small and dark, the music loud and aggressive. And yet, Pippa finds herself strangely captivated by the singer's angry yelling, even if she does feel terribly out of place. By the time the band play their last song, Pippa is sweaty, exhausted, and feels strangely liberated.

After the concert, the frontman of the band (*The Definite Endings*) makes a disdainful remark to them. Pippa and Henrietta, after all, embody everything he seeks to rebel against. Pippa finds herself strangely affected by this, and tries to defend herself. Oz, somewhat condescendingly, explains the state of the country to her. For the first time in her life, Pippa questions her upbringing, and everything associated with it.

From then on, Pippa sneaks away from home more often, accompanied, at first, by Henrietta, but then more often on her own. She and Oz grow closer, share kisses, fall head over heels in love. Oz brings Pippa to his place in the squatted house at 19 Tolpuddle Street. Though aghast at first, Pippa is won

over by Oz's efforts to make the place beautiful and comfortable for her, casting aside all her concerns. That night, she and Oz make love for the first time, and life could not be sweeter.

So all-consuming is their happiness that they completely forget how different their respective worlds really are. Although Pippa leads a secret and exhausting double life, she still excels in school and is accepted into Oxford to read English literature. Oz is happy for her, already busy figuring out ways to see her regularly, despite the distance.

But Digby has slowly started to suspect something. One day, he follows Pippa to London, sees her with 'that filthy *punk*' who wears ragged and torn clothes - the complete opposite of a respectable match for her. Digby reveals his discovery to his father, who is horrified, and declares that something must be done. And so, the next evening, Digby and his friends set out to find Oz.

Pippa, meanwhile, decides that she has fulfilled her parents' expectations. She has faith in the hearts of the people whom she believes love her unconditionally, and as a sign of her devotion to Oz, she dyes her hair a bright red. Her parents are horrified - in their eyes she has not only lied to and betrayed them, associating with the scum of society, but is now also destroying the family's reputation with her appearance.

Oz is waiting for Pippa. They had planned to meet - she had hinted that she would have a surprise for him (her red hair) -, and were intending to go to the club together. But Pippa never shows. It's late now, already dark, and eventually he sets out alone. Digby and his friends are lying in wait for him; they surround him, never revealing themselves, and insult and spit at him.

Pippa's parents inform her of their decision to send her, the very next morning, to a sanatorium in France. Her studies will be postponed for at least six months. Pippa, having no money of her own, is at the mercy of her parents' whims and cannot meet with Oz as they had agreed.



Digby and his friends begin to beat and kick Oz. He hasn't got a chance fighting off four strong young men alone, and they descend into a frenzy of contemptuous fury. They beat Oz relentlessly, hitting him with increasing ferocity as he lies on the ground, curled up in agony.

Pippa resists, with words and with tears, but her parents remain unyielding.

Oz lies unconscious in a side alley.

The next morning Pippa is dragged, kicking and screaming, into a car.

The next morning Oz is found, severely injured.

Pippa is carted off to Brittany.

*The final flashback chapter is a composite montage of parallel narratives: Digby's perspective, Pippa's struggle against her parents, and Oz's fight for his life. We return to the present without learning the conclusion of the various narratives.*

Owen and Gilly realise that Oscar Walsh and Philippa Dewbre's separation was the result of a terrible misunderstanding, and they intend to reunite them. Gilly entices Oscar with an interview for *Hidden In London*, and when, shortly thereafter, Oscar and Mrs Dewbre come face to face, it becomes clear that the pangs of their love have endured to this day, even if Oscar is still deeply hurt that Philippa abandoned him on the worst day of his life.

Mrs Dewbre now begins to explain everything: After a year in France, her spirit was broken. She returned to England to search for Oz, but her father showed her photographs from the night Digby beat Oz up and warned her that, should she ever approach him again, things might not end so well for him. In order to protect Oz, Pippa kept her distance from him, and completed a semester of study to receive the money from her trust fund. She met Paul Dewbre, dropped out of university, and married him. After only a year of marriage, they divorced, but she kept his name as she no longer wanted



anything to do with her family. Broken-hearted, she bought a flat - the same one she shared with Oz, this being the only way she had to feel close to him.

Oscar hadn't had any idea who it was that beat him bloody that night, and he is deeply moved by the sacrifice Philippa made for him. Now it's his turn to tell his story. He recounts how he was taken to the hospital, still unconscious, where he lay in a coma. He survived the ordeal, but required care for the next year, forcing him to leave behind his music and his life to move back into his parents' tiny council flat in Manchester. He explains that he tried to seek her out, until he found out she had gotten married. He left behind London and everything else that reminded him of her once and for all to start anew elsewhere and seek the happiness he once found with Pippa. He never managed to find it again.

Philippa and Oscar may have missed half a lifetime with each other, but the other half lies ahead. But the residents of 19 Tolpuddle Street, still face eviction. The investors plan to coerce Mrs Dewbre into selling by forcefully evicting all the other flats in the house. But the house community has decided they will not to leave the house to its fate. The day of eviction dawns and they are all still there: the Fishers, Owen, the flatshare downstairs, and Gilly - all of them. And not just that: Gilly has shared the story of the house - and therein Oscar and Philippa's story - on all *Hidden In London's* social media channels, urging followers to join them in saving the house. When the investors arrive with the police, that place is rammed with people, and old recordings of *The Definite Endings* ring out across Tolpuddle Street. Banners hang from the windows. The investors make a bid appealing to the residents - especially to Mrs Dewbre - one last time, but she grabs a microphone, leans out of the window, and declares that the investors will be waiting a long time because she has already transferred ownership of her apartment to the foundation she works for. She crows that the apartment will not be sold even after she dies. Slamming the window shut, it's not quite the 'definite ending' she had envisioned, as she forgets to switch off the microphone, and her muttered "Damn pigs, go to hell" echoes across the entire street.

With no prospect of acquiring Philippa's apartment, the investors lose interest in 19 Tolpuddle Street. The documentary, which is projected onto the house wall once a week, gains some notoriety through *Hidden In London*, and Gilly and Owen decide that they still have plenty of time to consider the shape of their future together. The story of Philippa Dewbre and Oscar Walsh has shown Gilly that turning thirty isn't necessarily an important milestone. That maybe it's all about living your own life. Preferably with Owen at her side.

**Sample Translation**

*The Present Day*

**Chapter 1**  
(pp. 9-20)

If there's one thing you ought to know about me, it's this: I fall in love quickly and out of love slowly. That's the way it's always been, and it's outside of both my control and my understanding. I'll give my heart away in an instant, falling as swiftly for people as for objects, places and moments. And once I've given my heart away, I never take it back until it's too late.

For example: seven and a half minutes ago I fell soul-deep, head over heels in love-at-first sight with a flat at 19 Tolpuddle Street in the London borough of Camden. Not just with the flat, but with the whole Victorian house - the red brick facade, the intricately carved white window frames, the shallow bay windows on the first and ground floor, the wisteria curling over the portico, the rust-coloured door with a brass-plated number 19 (the '9' hanging slightly crooked), the squeaky gate to the front garden and the gnarled apple tree there. Perhaps most of all, I'm in love with the rent price, which, unlike every other dump I've viewed in the last few weeks, wouldn't account for two thirds of my monthly salary.

"I'll be in touch, Gillian," says Andrew, the estate agent, shaking my hand.

"I really am very, very interested," I reply, smiling at him in what I hope is a charming way. I add another, "Very," for good measure.

"Noted."

I've already taken a few steps away when I turn around one more time. "Very!" I shout again, just in case I hadn't convinced him quite enough of my interest.

He gives me a thumbs up, and in the same moment I turn back to face forward, I collide headfirst with a man.

"Sorry," he mumbles, just as I chirp, brightly, "Oops, I'm sorry, that was an accident!" He's wearing a beanie, but he's already striding hurriedly past me and I don't catch any more than that.

I rub my shoulder. That'll certainly bruise. Oddly enough, I have a sudden feeling that this bruise might be a good omen, that this bruise will bring me luck. This bruise is a message to the fates or to whomever else that Gillian Sallow has had enough bad luck for a little while, and that she deserves this flat.

When I then see the beanie guy push open the gate to number 19, nod at Andrew, and pull out his key, I'm certain of it. This time, it will work. It *has* to work this time.

I fall in love again on the way home, this time with a song - bam! Giving my heart away again. I listen to it on repeat all the way from Tolpuddle Street to the Chalk Farm Tube stop, and again as I duck my head to allow the doors to slide shut on a Northern Line carriage packed to bursting point with rush hour commuters. The song drowns out the noisy rattle of the train and, pulsing alongside my bruised shoulder, heightens my sense of hope that this apartment might finally be the one to free Luke and me from our emotional bind.

I'm still listening to the same song as I navigate the aisles of Sainsbury's, scanning the shelves for an appealing ready-meal that aligns with Luke's new dietary requirements.

As soon as I enter the flat, I connect my phone to Luke's Bluetooth speaker, so I can continue blasting the song even in the bathroom. I can't hear half of it over the noise of the shower, but I've memorised the lyrics by now, and I'm singing along full force as I dry myself off and towel my hair.

I look around for my bathrobe, but can't see it anywhere. Then I remember that I put it in the wash in a fit of manic activity and that it'll be hanging on the drying rack in the living room.

I step out into the hallway, hair piled atop my head in a towel, just as the key turns in the lock and the front door swings open. Luke is back. Luke finished work early, and now he's here and he's staring at me.

I fell in love with Luke in a heartbeat, too. It was a boozy night at a club in my third year of university, and he looked devastating, standing at the bar in his leather jacket. I was drunk in that euphoric sort of way you can be in your early twenties, where you feel as though the whole world is at your feet, a wondrous array of possibilities just waiting for you to reach out at grab them. The sort of feeling that makes you decide to do a semester

abroad in Spain or take an unpaid internship in New York. Or stumble into a seven-year relationship.

And now Luke is standing there in his tight, sweaty sportswear, looking at me, and I'm like a very naked deer caught in the headlights, frozen in the hallway of our flat. Or rather, the hallway of *his* flat. Luke is my ex. The flat is his.

"Hi," he says over the music, still out of breath. Luke has been jogging the six miles home after work every night since we broke up. I've quickly discovered that it takes me less time to fall out of love with someone's body odour than with the person themselves.

I try to formulate a reply, but instead just keep opening and closing my mouth. Even though Luke and I shared a bed - and all that implies - for seven years, that self-conscious feeling of embarrassment comes right back after a break up. Especially since he's been getting himself in shape - probably to up his dating-game - while I can't even remember the last time I shaved my legs.

"I... uh... hi... I..." I stammer out, awkwardly covering my chest with my arms.

Luke turns away, chuckling softly, the same chuckle I once gave my heart to - and a burst of laughter escapes me, too, because it's all just so ridiculous. Not my nakedness or his out-of-breath post-workout stretching routine, but the whole situation we've managed to manoeuvre ourselves into over the years, just because our relationship got so weighed down with familial expectations and societal conventions that we somehow lost first our own selves and then the plot.

Falling out of love with Luke took a long time. It was a gradual, creeping process. The doubts were the first things to surface. I can't pinpoint the exact moment, but it must have happened at night - because these things always happen at night, when you're left alone with your thoughts and all you can hear is the spinning gears of your own mind, and the snoring of the person whom you got together with when you were way too drunk, and young enough that youthful insecurity made the prospect of being someone's, *anyone's*, girlfriend seem more appealing than being alone.

And then, one evening, I voiced my doubts. At first only to my trustworthiest friend, Sameena, whom I've known since primary school, and who did actually spend her early twenties doing a semester abroad and various internships in the great metropolises of the world.

But once you speak something aloud, it's there. It's real, and it won't go away anymore. Not even when you've been with someone for seven years, not even when you thought you wanted to get married, start a family, buy a house out in the suburbs - or rather, thought you should. The memories are all a little blurry. Not even if you're approaching 'the big three-zero', as my father likes to call it, truly making it sound like the beginning of the end.

When I finally mustered the courage to talk to Luke, he did not react with shock or despair, as I had expected. Quite the contrary: he seemed genuinely relieved and readily suggested we stay friends but go our separate ways. I wasn't sure, for a moment, whether to be offended or not. After all, I thought, I had been a pretty great girlfriend to him for seven years. But then I recalled that, on paper, Luke had also been a pretty great boyfriend. We broke up that evening. The bit about going our separate ways - well, that's still a work in progress.

We told our families two months ago. Mine reacted with disappointment and incredulity (because they consider a man who launched a successful IT start-up for medical databases a perfect catch), while his reacted with understanding and their best wishes for our happiness.

I duck behind the sofa (my bed since our break-up) into the open-plan kitchen to hunt around for a fresh pair of underwear, sheltering from Luke's gaze.

Luke has finished his stretching routine and chugs a pint of water from a glass we stole from our local pub years ago because it was still half full when they called closing time. That was back when all glasses in the world seemed half full to me. Luke's hair sticks to his sweaty brow. "How was the flat?" he asks, pointedly switching off the bluetooth speaker. I would have done it myself already, had I been more clothed, just for the sake of preserving the fragile peace in the house. And also because the song I've been blasting is not at all Luke's taste.



The day Luke took up jogging was the day I dove headfirst into the maddening business of flat-hunting. I knew, of course, that the London housing market was awful, but it's a sobering realisation on the best of days that your editor's salary, which you had thought perfectly adequate, really won't get you far. And on bad days ... let's just say that I've had to scream into the sofa cushions more than once - this also partly because my sister, Heather, will enumerate all the benefits of living in the outskirts of the Greater London area after every rejection. Lower rent prices ("You could even buy a place! Maybe together with Luke? Don't you want to see if it can work out with him after all?"), easier access to nature ("Rob and I have taken up Nordic walking!"), greater proximity to family ("Wouldn't you like to be more present in Jack and Rosie's lives?"), and in any case, she tells me, you won't miss a thing once you've left the Big Smoke – quite the opposite.

"The flat was great," I say. "Affordable. Right in the middle of Camden, walking distance to Chalk Farm. Almost too good to be true."

Luke sighs again. "It would be great if it finally works out." His exhaustion is audible – not the physical kind, but the emotional. He sounds like how I feel. It's draining, the way we're still stuck in this limbo state, neither of us able to take a step in any direction despite having established our new boundaries.

"Believe me, Luke, I'd prefer not to be sleeping on our sofa either."

"*My* sofa," he mumbles.

And he's right, of course. Everything in the flat is his, strictly speaking, even the sofa cushions I scream into periodically.

"Maybe you just need to put in a little more effort at the viewings," he suggests in that typical way of his that used to sound helpful. Lately it's just been coming across as condescending, but I'm probably being oversensitive. Living in close quarters with an ex for months on end takes a good deal of compromise, after all - almost as much as seven years of a relationship. Besides, Luke hasn't pressured me a single time to accept my parents' offer to move into their guest room back in Surrey, for which I truly am grateful.

"I'm really doing my best," I say, finally managing to contort myself into a shape that allows me to pull a t-shirt over my head.

"I believe you. It's just... I've been starting to wonder whether Heather might be right."

"Heather? When did you talk to Heather?" I straighten back up, slipping on my joggers. Once upon a time, both Luke's joggers and mine were relegated to the job of lounging on the sofa. Now Luke's newly-utilised joggers are making mine seem slobbish, lazy, and generally not living up to their potential.

"She called the other day to ask how I'm doing." He shrugs.

"Why would she do that?" My sister hasn't called me a single time to ask how I'm doing since the breakup. If Heather ever calls, it's only to guilt me for not being involved enough in her children's lives. Or to ask me to bring her some expensive toiletries when I visit, because it would seem there *are* some things you end up missing, living out in the idyllic suburbs.

"Well, I've been thinking about it, thinking maybe she's right. Maybe you just don't want to grow up."

"Excuse me?" Why is my *sister* discussing *my* willingness to do anything with *my ex*?

"It's just that you didn't want to commit to anything, you don't want to move into your own place..." I bite my tongue, reminding myself to keep the household peace. After all, we broke up on mutually amicable terms, even if we had rather hoped to be able to fully close that chapter sooner. The fact that our current situation is driving us both to the brink of madness in no way gives him the right to ally with my sister, especially when remember him being just as reluctant to *commit* as I was.

"I absolutely want to move into my own place," I tell him, emphatically. "Very much so. I even flirted relentlessly with the estate agent so I'd have a better chance than the consultant guy who had the slot before me."

Luke's expression darkens. "Oh wow, Gilly. That really is below the belt."

"Huh?" I was only joking. But I suppose that's part of breaking up with someone. You don't share a bed anymore, usually don't share a home anymore either, why should you still share a sense of humour?

"Throwing your flirtations in my face - I would never rub it in your face if I'd met someone."

“Oh, so that’s why you want to get rid of me?” I wiggle my eyebrows suggestively to make it clear this time that I’m joking. Where would Luke even meet someone? Jogging along Borough High Street, huffing and puffing along through the throngs of red double-deckers?

He looks down at the floor, silent.

Was I just saying that neither of us could take a step in any direction? Well, apparently that actually only applies to me. In that moment I feel suddenly small, pathetic, just like my joggers, just like Heather sees me.

“Are you serious?” The realisation of what he’s saying sinks in slowly, accompanied by a flush of unpleasant heat spreading throughout my body. He’s perfectly within his rights, of course, but I hadn’t expected it to happen so soon. An image flashes, suddenly, before my eyes: Luke in his workout gear, stopped at a red traffic light. A female jogger joins him. They exchange glances as they jog on the spot, smile shyly at each other... I might laugh if the whole situation weren’t so incredibly humiliating.

“It’s nothing serious,” he says sheepishly, which doesn’t make it any better.

“In that case, I need to go to the bathroom. Gonna shave my legs.” I’m still trying to figure out how that could possibly have come out sounding even the slightest bit threatening, when I hear my phone start vibrating from somewhere.

“Your phone,” Luke says, unnecessarily.

“Oh?” I don’t mean to sound vexed, but the past few minutes have really made it abundantly clear that it’s high time I find my own flat. I dig frantically through the pile of my clothes on the sofa, lifting sofa cushions and sending a flurry of important tax documents I painstakingly organised flying all over the coffee table in my haste.

“Always leaving your stuff lying around.” Luke groans, but he helps me search, and that creates a moment of what could almost be called familiar unity. “So chaotic.” But then he pulls my phone out from the pocket of my jeans and hands it over.

“Yes?” I say into the phone.

“Gillian?” A male voice says. “It’s Andrew.”

The estate agent? My pulse quickens, and I rub absently at the bruise on my shoulder. My lucky bruise, the one that guy with the beanie gave me. My new neighbour?

"Oh, hi Andrew." I try to control my voice as best I can.

"The estate agent," I whisper to Luke, who crosses his fingers at me in response.

"I'm calling about 19 Tolpuddle Street. You were very, very interested, if I recall correctly?"

"Yes! Very!"

"We had actually already confirmed the flat for someone else," he says.

"Oh," I respond, and Luke's shoulders drop in disappointment.

"But there was... how best to say this," Andrew continues. "There was a small complication."

"A complication?" Softly, I tell Luke: "There was a complication."

"What kind of complication?" Luke whispers back.

"It's nothing important. It's just that..."

It doesn't matter. I can deal with any and all complications if it means I can move out of Luke's flat. "Nevermind, whatever it is, I'll take the flat." Mould on the walls? A rodent infestation behind the stove? Wild techno parties in the front garden? It shall be my favourite complication.

Andrew laughs his faux-genial estate agent laugh. "Alright, Gillian. I'm glad to hear it. Would you like to drop by to sign the rental contract?"

"I'd love to," I say, a warm wave of relief washing over me. A sense of calm settles inside me. This is a new start. *My* new start. Just as we're about to hang up, curiosity gets the better of me. "Andrew?" I ask. "What was the small complication?"

"It... ah... it's one of the tenants. Mr Ecclestone, the landlord, trusts her judgement. And even though this applicant had impeccable references and a suitable salary, she objected to him rather vehemently."

This tenant rejected the businessman-consultant guy? I almost burst out laughing, making a mental note to thank her. "Well, if that's all," I say.

Luke is still shifting, nervously, from one foot to the other, trying to read my expression. My lips curl upwards into a cautious smile, and his echo

mine. My smile grows into a grin, and I reach up a hand to cover my mouth when I hang up and squeal.

"Well?" Luke asks.

"I got the flat."

"Seriously?"

"I got the flat!" I repeat.

"Congratulations!" Luke claps, thrilled for me and relieved in equal measure.

"I got the flat!" I can't believe it. "I got the flat! I got the flat!" I crow again and again, jumping up and down until Mr. Chakrabarti from the apartment below us knocks on the ceiling with a broom.

"You got the apartment!" Luke is cheering now, too, and, in an oddly euphoric moment reminiscent of our intoxicated early twenties, we hug.

[...]

***1974***

**Chapter 5**  
(pp. 47-58)

Philippa Genevieve St George - Pippa - was well aware of her own ancestry, and of all the civic responsibility that came with it. She was proud of her father, Algernon St George, proud of the political and economic ideals he advocated for in Parliament as a Member of the House of Lords.

Pippa held her mother, Cordelia, in high regard, too. She had raised Pippa and her brother both with a great deal of love and the right degree of discipline, and had never pushed them off on a nanny, as her best friend Henrietta's mother had. But then, Henrietta's mother suffered from migraines, and Pippa knew nothing of migraines, so she couldn't judge.

Pippa was particularly proud of her brother, Digby, who was now in his second year at Oxford reading Politics and Economics. She couldn't wait to follow him to university herself when she finished school at the end of this year. Granted, she could no more attend the prestigious Magdalen College, as it didn't admit female students, than she could join the House of Lords. But then she didn't care much for politics, in any case. She would rather start a family and attend charity galas, like her mother. Her mother's life appeared, to her, to be significantly more pleasant than her father's, who was always getting worked up about unions or the indolence of the working classes, who were always seeking handouts without ever giving back to their country. Oh, they could complain perfectly well. But actually doing something to change their situation? They didn't have the guts for that. They claimed to be disadvantaged, without ever making the effort to take their fate into their own hands. It drove her father and Digby mad. Sometimes Pippa had trouble believing that her world really was only half an hour by car - forty-five minutes by train - away from the sort of dirty, grey, troubled council districts of London where such people loitered about.

Even though she wanted for nothing, Pippa had been bored in recent weeks. Digby had returned to Oxford just after New Year's Eve, leaving her



to face the grey January of this still nascent year on her own. 1974. It still didn't feel real to her. Her father was busier than ever, as February would bring a new round of elections and things were not looking good for the Conservatives. To top it all off, her best friend, Henrietta, had been grounded for her poor academic performance in school just before the holidays, her punishment only suspended for the festive days. And so, apart from school, and dinner with her mother at six o'clock, her life had been absent any distractions.

But today, Digby was coming home to visit for the weekend with two of his friends from the Bullingdon Club. This evening there was to be a celebratory dinner, and tomorrow they would play golf. Pippa didn't care much for golf - found it rather boring, actually - but in the company of the young men, it became something different. The special attention Montgomery paid her was becoming more and more evident every time they met, but it was Caspian, with his elegant demeanour, who had turned Pippa's head somewhat. Regardless, Montgomery and Caspian both, or even Cecil, Digby's best friend from school, who was studying at Cambridge, instead - they were all dashing fellows, as Henrietta would say, and Pippa could hardly complain at the choice.

After school, she immediately peeled off her school uniform to don the new dark blue Valentino trousers and matching blouse with pretty lace collar that she had received for Christmas. Then she waited, eager for a bit of diversion in this grey winter.

Her room on the first floor of the grand house overlooked the entire driveway. The record playing on the turntable was her favourite, by the *Bay City Rollers*, and she surveyed her reflection in the window, pleased with how the outfit accentuated her slender figure. She'd like to have a bit more in the way of a bust, she thought, but Henrietta was always telling her how much she envied her narrow waist. She had teased her brown hair up a little, the way she had seen it in *Vogue*, and tied it back with a velvet ribbon.

Headlights suddenly flashed out from between the old oak trees lining the road before disappearing again behind the massive trunks. Could that be Digby's dark green Jaguar? Yes, a moment later she saw the car turning into the driveway.

Pippa abandoned her post at the window and ran down the steps.

"They're here, Mum!" she called out into the drawing room, where she suspected her mother was.

Two minutes later, she was leaping into Digby's arms.

"So fierce," he said, laughing, but he pressed her tightly to himself. His duffel coat was cold from the short journey between car and house, and he smelled of a mixture of cigarettes and winter air. "Let's have a look at you." He held her at arm's length, nodded, smiled, and turned her about on the spot. "No, no. This is hardly what someone looks like when they've died of boredom."

Pippa giggled. She had written her brother two letters, called him several times at his dormitory, begged him to come home for a weekend visit soon. He, too, had called her, and helped her pass the time as best he could whenever his timetable and duties at the Club allowed.

"Are the pretty young ladies of the house not being suitably entertained?" asked Montgomery, brushing her hand with his lips. Pippa's cheeks warmed. She liked these sorts of old fashioned courtesies. "A tragedy."

"It's time you get yourself to Oxford." Digby handed his coat and hat to the housekeeper, Mrs Matlock, who had been working for the St George's since Digby's birth.

"Phillipa." Caspian, too, gave her a smile. Was it possible he had grown even more handsome since last she had seen him? And he had used her full name, as if she were a proper young woman, not just a girl of seventeen still attending Wycombe Abbey School. Pippa felt suddenly small, and at the same time like she had been raised to a new, higher status.

"Welcome, welcome." Pippa and Digby's mother stepped into the entrance hall. She was almost floating. Pippa saw the strange expression with which Caspian gazed at her, and was instantly aware of the fact that before her stood three young men, while she was still a teenager, still in school. Even if their difference in age was a mere three years, it still made a palpable difference. The golden glow inside her dimmed into something cold and hard. It didn't soften, even when Digby hooked his arm in hers and steered them into the drawing room.

"Montgomery brought you something," he told her while he mixed drinks for everyone but Pippa at the bar. "Monty?"

“Oh, yes.” Montgomery blushed as fiercely as Pippa had when he had greeted her, pulling a small box from the inside pocket of his jacket. “It’s from the best chocolatier in all Oxford. First-rate stuff,” he said as he passed it to her. “A forbidden sweet for...” he left the rest of the sentence hanging, because Digby cleared his throat jokingly and pressed a crystal glass with a measure of amber-coloured liquid in it into his hand.

Pippa tugged the red bow loose and opened it. A single praline lay in the box, sparkling with gold dust. “Thank you,” she murmured, lowering her eyes just as she ought to upon finding herself the focus of attention.

“Montgomery, you’ll spoil her,” her mother said, likewise accepting a drink from Digby.

“Ah,” He waved her comment away. “But some beauty deserves to be spoiled.”

“I wish Algernon were here to hear that,” she sighed, but the playful smile she threw Digby’s way - no, Capsian’s way, rather - suggested she wasn’t being entirely serious. After all, Pippa’s father could hardly be blamed for the economy going down the drain, or the general murmurings of inflation and recession. Someone had to stop it all, and who better for the job than Algernon St George? And if the Tories lost the re-election, she shuddered to think what other problems they would face, besides inflation and recession. So she supposed it was all for the best that he pour his energy into politics; she and her mother could overlook his absences and inattention to them.

Soon enough, these were precisely the topics of conversation Digby and his friends began discussing. They were talking of the miners in the Midlands, who were striking because they had nothing better to do than to push their already troubled country into further difficulties. Everybody had to roll up their sleeves and do their part. Digby’s part would be successful completion of his studies, whereupon he would enter politics proper to make a *real* difference. The Tories’ ambitions under Ted Heath, he thought, didn’t go anywhere near far enough, which was why they were in this mess in the first place. And what with the rising price of oil - well, one could either sit idly by and wait to see what happened or act now. Pippa wasn’t entirely sure what the one had to do with the other, but Digby was a student at one of the best universities in the world, and studying politics and economics,

at that. Who would know about these things if not he? And Montgomery and Caspian were in complete agreement with him, so Pippa, too, nodded along sagely.

She liked listening to the three of them talk. When her father had guests over the discussions were frequently held behind closed doors and she was only summoned to table to make polite conversation with one of the elderly gentlemen. It was different with Digby and his friends. Here, she could learn something.

Pippa's father came home in time for supper, for a change. The large table in the dining room was set with a veritable feast. Going by the amount of cutlery there were to be four courses, and Pippa was only a little disappointed when Montgomery seated himself beside her. He had brought her a present - proof that he was an attentive, generous man. What more could she want? She observed him secretly out of the corner of her eye as he spread the cloth napkin over his lap and nodded to the attendant offering him a glass of Champagne.

"Pippa, if you like..." her father said, smiling softly. He looked exhausted, like he did every evening of late.

Immensely satisfied, Pippa cast a glance at Caspian and raised her own glass flute, condensation beading on the rim.

"I'm glad to have you all here. And glad you waited for me to dine," he father said, nodding at her to indicate she could take a sip.

The Champagne fizzed pleasantly at the back of Pippa's throat. It wasn't her first time drinking alcohol. She and Henrietta had got tipsy on wine together a handful of times before. Port, especially, which was wonderfully sweet and got you drunk even faster than Champagne. It was on one of these occasions that she had told her best friend about Caspian and Montgomery, too. They had traded stories - though, really, Henrietta had the stories, and Pippa had more curious questions than anything else. Pippa was more shy than Henrietta, who had no qualms approaching boys and flirting with them. Sometimes Pippa wished she had that kind of self-confidence, but at the same time, she rather enjoyed being courted and wooed and won. It took a lot longer, yes, but the feeling was much the same in the end.

The chandelier cast a warm light over the gathered group, falling over Caspian's sharp, defined features, Digby's shock of dark blonde hair, his grin when Montgomery bent to whisper in Pippa's ear how enchanting she looked tonight. It lit up Montgomery's dark curls, his eyes, which were slightly too small, and his narrow lips. But then, it wasn't all about appearances. And he was by no means unattractive. Besides, Pippa liked his spicy, musky scent. It was new and exciting to be so aware of the distance between them, and his company was anything but unpleasant, even if Pippa's heart didn't thrill at the sight of him.

Pippa sat back into her seat, relaxing, and began to enjoy herself properly, no longer glancing over constantly at Caspian - except for one time when their eyes met, and she thought she detected a spark in his, and then a second time, when he let out a hearty laugh at something her mother had said. A joke she had missed, because Montgomery had just been asking what her favourite subjects were at school.

"English and French," she replied once Caspian's deep laugh quieted.

"And that's what you plan to study?" Pippa nodded.

"English Literature, that's the dream." It was the truth, but her mother had also counselled her that it was a course of study that wouldn't scared anyone off. Pippa wasn't entirely sure how she could ever have scared anyone, with her doe eyes and willowy neck, but she preferred to keep it that way, anyhow.

For dessert there was creme brûlée, served with port. This time Pippa did not receive a glass. "Would you like a sip of mine?" Montgomery asked quietly, passing her his glass. She rotated the glass subtly, ever so slightly, so as not to put her mouth in the same place where Montgomery's had been. "Do you like port?"

She nodded. "I like everything that's sweet," she admitted. She worried for a moment that it might come across as childish, but Montgomery smiled.

"Well then, come on. Have another sip."

Pippa giggled quietly and cast a quick glance around, even though she would be old enough to drink soon, anyway. But nobody was paying her any attention, so she took another sip of the sweet dessert wine. And then another, as it seemed to please Montgomery. When he reached out and

brushed her hand with his, it felt nice. It felt nice, too, when his hand grazed her hip. When he rested it on her leg, though, she slid a little to the side.

“Don’t worry, I can be patient,” he murmured, and Pippa was glad he was so thoughtful and understanding.

That evening she fell back onto her soft bed, the excited murmur of conversation around the dinner table still buzzing in her ears. The loud laughter of the men, her father’s grave statements about the mood in Parliament, and Montgomery’s conspiratorial whispering, which had made her feel like he was truly paying attention to her, taking her seriously. Lying there in the quiet, she asked herself why she hadn’t just let Montgomery keep his hand where it was. Was she too prude? Had it made her seem much younger than she was? She would talk it over with Henrietta.

“But I’ve got so much better!” Pippa could hardly believe it. Her brother comes home for once for the weekend, and now she’s supposed to sit out their game of golf? It was outrageous. More than outrageous, it was insulting.

“It’s not going to be a casual game. We’ve got a lot to discuss...”

“I’m perfectly capable of joining the conversation,” she snapped. She knew, of course, that she was lowering her chances of being taken along by behaving like this, but she didn’t care. Just yesterday they had been treating her like a young woman, and today —

“Politics isn’t something for girls,” Digby said.

“Why not?” asked Pippa, chin raised. “Why should it be only for you lot?”

“This isn’t empty talk and the latest gossip, Pippa. These are serious subjects.”

“I don’t mind that.”

“But I do. And it’s my game, I decide. You stay here.”

Pippa just barely managed to refrain from stomping her foot in frustration. Caspian and Montgomery stepped into the entrance hall, just then, and she didn’t want to cause a scene.

Montgomery shrugged apologetically as he passed her, shaking out his golfing gloves. Even he seemed not to mind that Pippa was to be left

behind. She thought again of his hand on her leg. Was this her comeuppance for rejecting him?

Back in her room, Pippa tossed her tweed jacket onto the floor in a fit of pique. This weekend had been supposed to provide a welcome break from the monotony of cold, damp, foggy, grey days. Instead, she was being confronted with the harsh limitations of the options available to her here. She wanted to do something! Go shopping, play golf, stay out dancing. The stifling constraints of an English country life, even aristocratic country life, were painfully clear to her.

She dropped onto her bed, picked up the receiver of the phone on her nightstand, wedging it between her shoulder and chin, and dialled the Wentworths' number.

"Hello, it's Pippa. Is Henrietta available?" she said when the housekeeper picked up.

It took a moment before she heard Henrietta's voice. Her friend would have to earn back the privilege of a phone in her bedroom with better marks.

"Hi, darling," Henrietta sang into the telephone.

"How long are you still grounded?" Pippa asked.

"I'm so damned bored! It's unbearable."

"If you're saying 'damned', it *must* be serious. I thought your brother and his friends were there today?"

Pippa huffed. "Apparently I'm not welcome." She told Henrietta about the incident with Montgomery. "Do you think that's why they won't have me?"

"I think that's all a load of bullshit. Men..."

Pippa could hear the housekeeper issuing a reprimand in the background.

"Bullshit," Henrietta repeated, even more loudly. Then she added, more quietly, "Are you up for an adventure?"

"What do you mean?"

"We're going to a concert. Tonight."

"Tonight? I thought you were grounded."

Henrietta was whispering, now. "I'll sneak out. Anthony will pick me up at the end of the street."



Anthony was Henrietta's older half-brother, Mr. Wentworth's son, born out of wedlock, raised by his mother in London and generally considered a bad influence. Pippa had thought him to be very nice and friendly on the two occasions on which she had met him.

"But what if they catch you?" Pippa was whispering too now, even though she was alone in her room.

"Well, so what if they do?" Henrietta mused. "They can ground me. Oh, wait! I'm already grounded. Seriously, Pippa, I won't let myself be locked away forever. We're only young right *now*. The exciting things are happening *right now*."

"What kind of concert is it?" asked Pippa, not entirely convinced.

"It's a new music scene. Anthony calls it 'Street Rock'. Sounds exciting, if you ask me."

Pippa considered. If she really wanted to go to this concert tonight, she would need an excuse. Her parents weren't like the Wentworths. They would notice Pippa's absence straight away.

"Come on," Henrietta said on the other end of the line. "Just tell them the conditions of my house arrest were loosened, and that you're staying over at mine."

"I don't know..." But then she saw Digby's face in her mind's eye. Heard him telling her 'no'. She felt the ghost of Montgomery's hand on her thigh, and, whether that was the reason for her exclusion from their game of golf or not, decided she didn't want a repeat experience tonight.

"Okay?" she said cautiously.

"Perfect!" Henrietta cheered, a little too loudly, and then immediately lowered her voice. "Be down at the gate at seven. We'll pick you up." And with that, she hung up.

[...]

**Chapter 15**  
(pp. 152-162)

That evening, Pippa understood the rage in the music. Maybe she wasn't angry at politics, at social norms, at all the other things, but the noise, the shouting, the jumping around and moshing in the crowd still felt like a release valve. She didn't hang back when the entire club chanted "fuck this shit!" together, she even raised a fist into the air, earning her an approving look from Henrietta, who usually only had eyes for Pete.

There was a young guy next to Pippa, about her age. He had bright red dyed hair, which he had styled using pomade or something similar to make it stand straight up from his head. He was bouncing around erratically, and Pippa had to keep dodging him to avoid being bowled over.

When Oz stripped his sweaty t-shirt off during a guitar solo, Pippa was momentarily distracted, and the guy clipped her on the shoulder, causing her to stumble and grab onto Henrietta to keep from falling.

Pippa's first instinct was to back off, allow herself to be pushed further to the edge of the crowd. But when the guy veered dangerously close to her again she found herself shouting, "Hey!"

Heat rose to her face. She was startled by her own boldness. Would he get angry? No, nothing of the sort. He didn't even acknowledge her, just continued jumping and jostling. Once more, he collided with Pippa, though less forcefully this time.

On stage, Oz launched once more into the chorus. And with the sound of his calls of "Moral destruction" echoing through her head, Pippa felt her anger, thus far always successfully sequestered somewhere in the pit of her stomach, rise to the surface and burst outwards. She jumped, completely intentionally, into the red haired guy next to her, banging into his shoulder. A moment later she was sure she had gone too far, bracing herself for his anger, but he simply crashed into her in turn. So she did it right back.

“Yeah,” he grinned at her. Then he knocked against her again, and she against him, and he against her, and she against him. It was a game. It was a back-and-forth. And then he pushed her. Not hard, but enough to make her take a step back. So she shoved back, harder, because somehow she knew that was what he wanted. She could feel the sweat soaking his t-shirt under her hands, but she didn’t care. Because she was fighting back: she wouldn’t allow herself to be pushed around and barged into, or be kissed or touched against her will. Instead, she let it all out. Even if it meant she would wake up with a bruise on her shoulder tomorrow, it felt good. It felt relieving. More than that – it felt liberating!

When the song ended, Pippa had to stop to catch her breath. She grabbed Henrietta’s beer and took a big gulp to quench her thirst.

“Are you having fun?” Henrietta asked, grinning knowingly.

Pippa wasn’t sure she would call what she was doing ‘having fun’. More like ‘getting by’. But she was certainly fully in the swing of it when it came to ‘getting by’.

It wasn’t as if Pippa suddenly felt any more at ease in the club, or as if she liked the music any more from one moment to the next. It wasn’t as if Oz’s naked chest had suddenly stopped being so disconcerting to her, or as if she weren’t filled with horror at more or less everything in sight as she squatted, hovering over the toilet in the dark to relieve herself. It wasn’t as if the lukewarm beer tasted good to her tonight, or as if she wasn’t glad that the *Definite Endings* didn’t do encores on principle. It wasn’t that, no. But all of the ‘why’s of her previous visits – why these clothes, why this music, why the anger - had, surprisingly enough, turned into ‘okay’s. Okay, that was just what they wore. Okay, that was just how they sounded. Okay, so they were angry. Pippa could even sort of understand that now. Okay, so... okay, so now she knew what Oz’s nipples looked like.

The last chords faded, and Henrietta practically flew towards the stage. Pete pulled her up to join him and kissed her, sparking one or two unsavoury comments. Pete just flipped the audience his middle finger. Somebody threw a beer can, but fortunately it was empty and missed its target - if there had been one - by several metres.

Pippa found she was surprisingly fine with the idea of playing second fiddle for the rest of the night. Not having a soul in the world to care about

her had the one great advantage that it offered her peace. But Henrietta seemed to be taking the promise she had made Pippa seriously, at least for the moment, because she was gesticulating in her direction and dragging Pete along behind her.

“Did you enjoy it?” Pete inquired, after asking Roxy to get him a beer.

“Yes,” Pippa said, and she meant it. They weren’t the *Bay City Rollers* or *Simon & Garfunkel*, that was for sure, but neither Simon nor Garfunkel had ever made her feel free.

“Pippa really threw herself into it,” Henrietta said.

“I saw.” Roxy had returned from the bar and handed each of them a beer, even Pippa.

“Thanks,” she mumbled, and they clinked their glasses.

Henrietta, as Pete’s girlfriend, had become a part of the group automatically. And as Henrietta’s plus one, the same applied to her, to an extent, even if she only understood about half of the things the band members said. Just now they were talking about a boutique in Chelsea that was being renovated.

“*Too fast to live, too young to die?*” Roxy said, as if the name were common knowledge. It was only now that Pippa noticed she had an Irish accent.

“I’ve read about that one,” said Henrietta. “Is that where you got your clothes?” Turning to Pippa, she added, “We have to go check it out.”

“We make most of them ourselves,” Roxy said. “But we should go back there some time. Oz said Malcom was looking for musicians.”

“I’ve got no desire to be Malcom’s little project,” Pete replied.

“Just to see what he’s up to,” Roxy assured him placatingly, adding something about someone with the ridiculous name ‘Sylvain Sylvain’, and about how you had to see music, fashion, performance, and society as interlinked - words she had likely copied verbatim from Oz, Pippa felt sure.

That sense of belonging to the band that she had felt only lasted for as long as they were standing together, though. As soon as they all began going their separate ways, nobody bothered about Pippa anymore. Not that she had expected anyone too, and after a little while Henrietta and Pete couldn’t keep their hands off each other anymore. Roxy turned back towards the barkeeper, and Johnny had bummed a cigarette off a guy in extremely

tight trousers who seemed to be well known around here and was - there was no other way to put it - sweet-talking him into writing something about the band in his magazine. She hadn't seen Oz since the final song of the gig which was probably one reason why she felt too comfortable in her own skin.

Beer in hand, Pippa made her way outside, where she encountered Anthony standing by one of the fire pits. He waved at her, and she took it as an invitation to join him. He offered her a cigarette, which she thanked him for and declined.

"Forgot that you're you for a moment." He grinned.

What was that supposed to mean? "How's that?"

He shrugged. "Well, just with your hair down and your outfit..."

Pippa looked down at herself and made a face involuntarily when her gaze caught on the tear that Henrietta had cut into her cuffed jeans without her permission that afternoon with a pair of nail scissors.

"You said you wanted me to help you with your outfit," she had said. But Pippa certainly hadn't meant that she should cut up her clothes! But then, she supposed it had served its purpose if it made Anthony forget who she was. She was almost tempted to accept the cigarette after all, just because she liked the thought of fitting in here. She still remembered the last time, which had also been the first time, she had smoked a cigarette, though, vividly. It had been in Henrietta's bathroom, standing by the open window. They hadn't managed to light it at first, because they hadn't known they had to take a pull while they lit it. Then they had both had a fit of coughing and eventually got dizzy.

"Did you have a good evening?" Anthony asked, lighting one for himself.

Pippa nodded.

"We're not so bad once you get used to us, eh?" He grinned.

"Nah," said Pippa. She looked over at Anthony, who really bore hardly any resemblance to Henrietta. She took after her mother, he after his father. And although it might exceed the scope of their acquaintance, she asked, "Anthony? Does it feel strange that you father has a whole other family?"

He laughed. "Does it feel strange?"

"Well." Now she was sure she had crossed a boundary. "He didn't want to marry your mother, right? Instead, he and Henrietta's mum..."

"My mum didn't want to marry *him*," Anthony interrupted.

"Pardon?"

"My mum wanted to live her life. Make her art. She couldn't have done that as Mrs Wentworth. Not the way she wanted to, anyway."

Pippa was astounded. "Your mother chose for you to grow up without a father?" Without a wealthy father, at that.

"He could have stayed. But that wouldn't have sat well with his conservative upbringing."

"But surely... wouldn't it have been better for you..."

He cut her off again. "You know, I see it like this: He didn't want to be together on her terms. She didn't want to be together on his. And isn't it better to have grown up like I did than in a family that's happy on the outside but where everyone secretly despised each other?"

It was such a simple realisation. Such a straightforward fact that, once spoken aloud, it vibrated through Pippa like the *Definite Endings* music. Things her mother had said. That her father was always away - but surely, there was a good reason for that? That he never paid her any attention - but was she more important than his work? That she was lonely - but wasn't Pippa, too?

"They would have been lonely on their own together," murmured Pippa, the realisation staggering.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing." She had to sit down.

There was a wooden board laid atop some car tires a few metres away, and she settled down on it in the dark. She watched from a distance as Henrietta and Pete engaged in their tongue acrobatics, having moved outside now. She sat and thought, contemplating above all else why people like her and her mother, who had everything - and she really meant *everything* - were still unhappy enough to resort to lies and deceit and the like in order to feel alive.

Her own lie was by no means comparable to adultery, of course. And with one's own son's best friend, at that. And when one's own daughter... Pippa shook herself free of the thought quickly.

"I was wondering if we'd finally managed to scare you off for good," came a voice from beside her.

She looked up and into Oz's mocking face. He had thankfully put his t-shirt back on and was now wearing a leather jacket over it.

"I'm here for Henrietta," Pippa said, to avoid any misunderstandings, nodding in the direction of her best friend, who seemed to be likely to crawl into Pete at any moment.

"Of course," Oz responded, seating himself next to her, without ever asking if she wanted him to.

She shifted slightly to the side to give him some space, as well as to create some distance between them.

Oz chuckled softly. "Apologies, one probably needs to ask Lord and Lady Better-than-you/ holier-than-thou of the Noble Steed for permission before sitting beside their precious daughter," he said. "Only allowed after the third date, right?"

"Oh, shut up," Pippa said, surprised by her own frankness even as it gave her a kind of security. Why should she treat this inflated wannabe-rebel with decency when he obviously had no regard for it?

"In all seriousness, is that how it works for you lot?" he asked, still sounding as condescending as ever, but also curious. "Does someone approach your parents and bid - I don't know - their handsome annual income and ask for your hand?"

"Even if they did," said Pippa. "What's it to you?"

"Nothing, I was just wondering if you have any say in it, as the auction item."

"I'm not..."

"It's just a joke," Oz said, but she couldn't find anything funny in it. Because, of course, there was no auction. That was utter nonsense. And yet she knew very well that she was expected to marry appropriately, respectably. It was in her interests to do so, in a way.

"I honestly don't understand what your problem is with the idea that other people might not see things exactly as you do," Pippa said.

Oz raised his hands defensively and was about to say something, but Pippa wouldn't let him speak.



"What's so wrong about wanting a good life for yourself? Or for your daughter, for that matter? What's so bad about expecting a guy to make a good impression on your parents first and put in some effort in a few dates, instead of just giving him what he wants straight away?"

"*Giving him what he wants?*" Oz asked. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh, you know," Pippa said, uncomfortable at the direction the conversation was moving in.

"So, you want a guy to win you and then he gets your body as a reward?"

"Well, is he supposed to get my body right away?" Now it was Pippa's turn to laugh.

"That all sounds exhausting."

That was so typical. "Well, if it's too much effort for you to indulge me for a few evenings then I regret to inform you that I'm not interested." As if she had ever been interested in him. Which was exactly what it sounded like she was saying. This conversation was getting more embarrassing by the minute.

"Not for *me*," Oz corrected. "Exhausting for *you*."

What nonsense was he spouting now?

"Always trying to judge whether a guy's done enough work to deserve you, instead of just doing what you'd like to do. Being put on a pedestal like that, only to end up playing the obedient housewife ensuring the survival of the gene pool."

"No, of course, it's obviously better to throw yourself at any passing man." Pippa's gaze slid automatically to Henrietta and Pete, and she felt a little guilty for it.

"Why are you so harsh on yourself?" Oz asked.

"Wanting to be won is pretty much the opposite of being harsh on myself."

"I meant playing along with this game where first you're made to feel like you're the most precious thing in the world, only to then settle with a husband who'll look down on you his whole life because you're just a pretty accessory."

"How dare you!" Pippa exclaimed, jumping to her feet. "How dare you talk about my life like that!"

"I'm just saying," Oz said, shrugging. "I think you'd get more out of it if the guy sees you as an equal from the start. I think that's worth skipping a few fancy dates for."

"And you're that guy, are you?"

"Not the guy for you, but yeah. You're my equal."

Pippa stood there for a moment, unsure. She wanted to be furious. Wanted to hurl plenty more things at him, but the events of the last week had stirred something up inside her. Had rewired something.

Montgomery *had* put in the effort. He *had* complimented her, charmed her, referred to her as a prize and tried to win her with his attentiveness. And then? Then he had disregarded her wishes and tried to get his way regardless.

Her father had won her mother, she knew that. Her mother had told her the stories often enough, of how he had taken her to the finest restaurants and given her expensive gifts. And yet it obviously hadn't been enough.

Pippa sat back down. "I was in Oxford last weekend, and there's this pub there that used to have a bar where only men were allowed in. It burned down. My brother thinks it was the feminists." She didn't even know why she was telling him this.

"Then I think they did right," Oz said. And he said it with such conviction that Pippa relented to the voice in her head that sounded a lot like Henrietta, and that didn't like the thought of being excluded just because she was a woman.

"I think I'd like to go to a co-ed university," Pippa murmured.

"I think you should go to an all-male university, just to shake up the stuck up elites a bit," Oz said, and the fact that he thought her capable of stirring up anything in this world put her, momentarily, in high spirits.

**[END OF SAMPLE]**