

You loved your last book...but what  
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new  
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

---

**Opening Extract from...**

# **The Tryst**

Written by Monique Roffey

Published by Dodo Ink

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

# THE TRUST

"A throbbing  
homewrecker of a tale."

**DBC Pierre**



**MONIQUE  
ROFFEY**

“Not a shade of grey within a mile of this book. What makes *The Tryst* an unexploded virus isn’t just the quality and brightness of Roffey’s writing on sex, even as it uncovers inner glades between flesh and fantasy where sex resides - but the taunting clarity of why those glades stay covered. A throbbing homewrecker of a tale, too late to call *Fifty Shades of Red*.”

**DBC Pierre**, author of *Vernon God Little*

“*The Tryst* is a sly, feral, witty, offbeat erotic novella that unsettles the reader, even as it arouses. There are sex scenes of breath-taking audacity. What would any of us do if an irresistible sex daemon broke and entered our domestic lives, leaving havoc in her amoral wake? Monique Roffey knows that the real question about human desire is whether we even recognise our deepest yearnings. How can anyone resist what they have never even dreamt of?”

**Rowan Pelling**, editor, *The Amorist*

“I’ve read *The Tryst* and was enormously entertained and impressed. It’s wild and witching, at once contemporary and atavistic, with an anarchic sexual energy running through it and a startling frankness, not only about sex, but about love and relationships, gender and power. . . . a daring write and a consuming read.”

**Bidisha**, writer and broadcaster

“While *The Tryst* offers magic and sensuality aplenty, it lays bare the violence that heteronormative couples will do to ‘others’ to keep the home system stoked. It can be read as a fable about intimacy and erotic power. Disturbingly, it can also be read as a fable about the socially established vs. the disposable.”

**Vahni Capildeo**, poet, Forward Prize winner, 2016

“A Midsummer’s Night Dream meets erotic thriller in this captivating romp through the senses. I found myself laughing, crying and getting beautifully hard as Jane, Bill and Lilah’s stories twist and turn through the night and beyond. Monique Roffey perfectly captures the inner worlds of both the unfucked housewife and the archetypal slut in this wonderful tale exploring the power of sexuality, erotic magnetism and the changing face of human relationships.”

**Seani Love**, Sex Worker of the Year, 2015

“*The Tryst* summons your inner whore and demands she be honoured”

**Empress Stah**, cabaret theatre performer

“Monique Roffey’s *The Tryst* successfully straddles mythology and erotica to create a journey towards pleasure.”

**Suzanne Portnoy**, author of *The Butcher*, *The Baker*,  
*The Candlestick Maker*

“Sexy, lyrical and unashamed, *The Tryst* is a powerful slice of modern erotica which blends sexual magick with today’s hectic world of male-female relationships.”

**Vina Jackson**, author of *Eighty Days Yellow*

“Sexy as hell. A cross between the work of Angela Carter and Anais Nin, *The Tryst* weaves the urban and the modern with dark myth. Roffey is a risk taking and masterful storyteller.”

**AJ Malloy**, author of *The Story of X*

**Monique Roffey** is an award-winning writer. Her last novel, *House of Ashes*, received widespread praise and was shortlisted for the Costa Fiction Award, 2014. *Archipelago*, winner of the OCM Bocas Award for Caribbean Literature, was published by Simon & Schuster in the UK, Viking in the US, and translated into 5 languages. Her second novel, *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle*, was shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the Encore Award. Read more about her at [www.moniqueroffey.com](http://www.moniqueroffey.com).



First published in 2017  
by Dodo Ink, an imprint of  
Dodo Publishing Co Ltd  
Flat 5, 21 Silverlands, Buxton SK17 6QH  
[www.dodoink.com](http://www.dodoink.com)

All rights reserved  
© Monique Roffey, 2017

The right of Monique Roffey to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events or locales is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP record for this book  
is available from the British Library

Proofreader: Tomoé Hill  
Cover design: Rodrigo Corral  
Typesetter: Ben Ottridge

ISBN 978-0-9935758-6-0

Printed and bound by TJ International,  
Trecerus Industrial Estate, Padstow, PL28 8RW

# THE TRYST

MONIQUE ROFFEY



for  
Jan Day  
and  
Kian de la Cour



“Her mouth is tiny like a narrow doorway, a graceful ornament. Her tongue is sharp as a sword, her words soft as oil. Her lips are red as a rose, sweet with the sweetness of the world. She is dressed in crimson, adorned with all the jewels in the world, with 39 pieces of jewellery. Those fools who come to her and drink this wine commit fornication with her. And what does she do then? She leaves the fool alone, sleeping in his bed, while she ascends to the heights.”

The Zohar

**1.**

**MIDSUMMER**

## THE TRYST

### JANE

She had pointy ears. Or that was how I imagined them when I first saw her; that's what sprang to mind. She was also curiously hairless, no eyelashes, and her eyebrows were pencilled on. No hair on her arms either, I checked, and her skin, as a result, was more like vinyl upholstery. Smooth and pearly, it stretched over plump limbs and the curves of her face. Her eyes were pear-coloured and slanted upwards, her teeth small and white and neat. Her hair was dyed a flamey red and cut into a bob. The combination made her appear boy-girl. Or perhaps even child. Yes, something about her skin was that new, almost newborn. But her most striking feature was her height, or lack of it.

Lilah Hopkins was freakishly short. She glowed as if lit from within, as if burning with lamp oil, or with the same mysterious phosphorescent substance inside a firefly.

We went to meet Sebastian that night. He'd phoned to see if Bill and I might like to meet for a drink. It was a Sunday evening, a Sunday for God's sake. How could anyone say I'd set it *all* up: I didn't. Not this part. It was a Sunday evening, good and honest, and our journey out was on a whim.

"Let's go out," we said to each other when Sebastian rang; it had been a quiet weekend and I was on the brink of suggesting a trip to the pub myself. Sebastian mentioned a bar he knew, somewhere easy for us all to meet, one of those gastro-pubs, very nondescript. Lots of dark woods, tables, ochre walls, a bar with a stainless steel top, a central island. The place was half-empty when we arrived.

## MIDSUMMER

Sebastian was already at the bar, eyes roving the room. I sensed he'd been a bit cooped up and was using us as a prop to get out. No matter. We were using him too in a way and Sebastian is good company, doesn't mind being used. Sebastian is a handsome man, dark curly hair, dark eyes, a cigarette permanently crushed into the side of a grin. He wore battered Caterpillar work boots, a checked flannel shirt over jeans.

Sebastian and I were old friends. We met long before I met my husband Bill, long before I went on my travels. We were part of a small and intimate group of friends, each of us ambitious, aspiring writers or poets, actors and artists. Through our twenties and early thirties we talked and smoked and drank and took drugs and rowed and flirted and fancied and fucked and loved and unloved and dumped each other, swapping partners over and over again. Once or twice Sebastian and I ended up in bed. The first time was glorious, a night I'll remember when I'm seventy years old. The second time was so awful, after a long and booze-fuelled night, I was forever cured of my lust for Sebastian. After that, our friendship became less ambiguous but we remained close. He married a jazz singer, but it didn't last long. Sebastian was recently divorced.

The men hugged and slapped each other's backs.

I kissed Sebastian on both cheeks.

"The longest day of the year." Sebastian held up his pint in salutation.

I had forgotten it was the year's high point, the twenty-first of June, the evening of the summer solstice.

"No wonder you wanted to get out," I teased Sebastian.

"Damn right."

## THE TRYST

Bill put his hand on my shoulder and ordered us some drinks at the bar. He smelled of sandalwood, a dim scent rubbed into the oakiness of his skin: Bill's smell. He stood close to me, almost touching. He was proud to be seen with me, and I with him. We were together then, very much together, our last hours, before things changed for good.

"You two look well," Sebastian even commented.

We nodded. We *were* happy, pretty happy on the surface of things. We had both showered and made an effort with our clothes. Bill wore a favourite pink shirt, me a skinny-rib cotton polo neck with the sleeves cut away; we were both sun-kissed and lightly freckled from being in the garden. We stood together, blissful in our coupledom; we showed it off.

We found a table in a corner. I sat back, not really listening to the men's conversation. I cradled a glass of merlot to my chest and withdrew. I was happy to let the men talk. They got on well enough. I like that relaxed feeling brought on by alcohol, enjoy the way it slows things down. I was content on the banquette. It was my turn to scan the room which had filled a little since we arrived. I didn't see her then, no red-haired woman caught my eye. There were a few other similar groups in the pub that midsummer evening, mixed gatherings of men and women talking and drinking. Nothing struck me as unusual. I sipped and scanned and daydreamed as I'm prone: my downfall.

It was humid in that bar. The skies bulged and had bled water the day before and the sun had raged that afternoon, then the skies were fierce and empty. It was close, very close in that bar and the heat brought

## MIDSUMMER

about a tender shine on our faces. My daydream quickly became sexual: a man, faceless, followed me downstairs to the bathroom. Without speaking to each other he had me up against a wall, where he pulled up my skirt, his mouth on my neck, his fingers sliding inside me. I sipped my wine. The man slipped himself into the river inside me. My lips were hard against his forehead, his teeth sunk into my shoulder, both of us trying to muffle the mayhem of arousal.

I kept a dim and remote ear to Bill and Sebastian's conversation while this faceless man held me. We fucked slowly and then less slowly and then faster and harder and then we fell crashing into a cubicle. I braced my legs against the walls of the cubicle and he danced inside me. God it was wonderful, a key in a lock, a piece of my puzzle fitted neatly. We embraced and laughed and fucked in that hot, dark space, downstairs, rhythmic and urgent and ridiculous. My pussy swelled at these thoughts. My nipples hardened. I crossed my legs and sighed and moaned a little. Eventually, I noticed the men's pints were low and rose to buy the next round.

\*

When I returned, to my surprise, a woman had joined us. She sat next to Sebastian on a stool drawn in from another table. I assumed she'd just walked in, that she was a friend Sebastian had recognised. Immediately, I was aware of the change this woman provoked in the men's behaviour. Both were far more animated, more upright. Sebastian was visibly more alert, but then this is

his way when it comes to women; Sebastian is an alpha male, and charming with it. But my husband too was more alive; Bill had even turned a little pink in the cheeks.

I sat down and coughed loudly.

“Oh, yes. Jane, this is Lilah. Lilah, Jane,” Sebastian explained, without glancing at me. His eyes were dilated.

“Well, hello there,” this small woman drawled. She was compact, somehow perfect in her dimensions, all curves. I was stunned, staring at her too. She was so . . . bright, her hair beauty parlour red and those ears, subtle and yet blatant, worn with considered intent and daring. I wanted to speak about them immediately, ask about them.

“I’m Lilah. Lilah Hopkins. Pleased to make your acquaintance,” her speech was somehow quaint and outdated.

Lilah smiled breezily at me, avoiding eye contact. Her body language implied she knew Sebastian well, that they were familiar: already that vixen was working us. Sebastian gets around so I assumed this woman beckoned from another part of his social life. I was more than a bit put out. Now I could no longer dream away the evening as I liked, sit happily while the men conversed. The atmosphere in our little group had altered. Now a conversation was taking place, one Lilah was conducting. The men were enjoying it. Lilah lit them up. I had to join in. That, or be isolated.

My husband and Sebastian. Two men I knew well, men who were important in my life: men who loved me. Both men were allies. Yet somehow, because of this Lilah-With-The-Ears and mesmeric curves, the way she made

## MIDSUMMER

them behave, all on edge with wonder, Sebastian talking too much, and my husband all awkward and out of himself, this knowledge was perceptibly undermined.

I remained quiet, observing Lilah, who was talking, talking, talking, beaming, laughing, flirting, all at once. I was immobilised. What did she have that I didn't? What had I lost, and when? Or had I ever possessed it? There was a look in her eye, somehow sly and over-willing. She might do anything, do it then and there. She made us all nervous. Maybe I watched her just like the men watched, unsure of her, half-trusting, half-succumbing. Our reserve dissolved in her effervescence: Lilah had us all enthralled.

I noticed her accent was American. Alabama, she informed us, rather too emphatically. She had been telling the men an involved and far too personal story about herself.

"I was adopted, you see." Her pear-green eyes flashed. "Found on the steps of a church in an itsy-bitsy basket, a pink crocheted blanket over it. Found by one of the good sistahs, Sistah Liz'beth, a saintly person. Found first thing on a Sunday morning, just like a dewdrop. No note. No one knew anything about me. Was taken to the orphanage."

Sebastian nodded with great concern, gazing at her cleavage.

"I was adopted by a fine specimen of a Southern woman. My mama's a redhead just like me, that was why she took me. Wanted a baby who would blend with her looks, who could pass as hers. Mama was a beauty, oh yes. But she married a violent man and we



## THE TRYST

soon departed his company, took the pick-up truck and ran for our lives. She married again, but it didn't work out. My mama's a brave and courageous woman. Five husbands. Five ceremonies. Five deadbeats. Goddamn them to *hell*."

Lilah laughed with contempt. She wore a crimson shirt, tied in a knot at the midriff, a stone-washed denim miniskirt which revealed her short curvy legs. Chunky cork-heeled platforms on her feet. Her finger and toenails were painted black and there were silver bangles and bracelets up her arms, a silver stud in her nose. Her voice was soft, slurred, a practiced and ladylike Southern drawl. Somehow, my immediate dislike and mistrust turned to neutral. I began, like the men, to gape at Lilah. She was a harmless intruder, a naïf. Her brash and over-direct Americanness said it all. I thought she was a novelty, a gay addition to our jaded group. My guard slipped: how did she manage that? I sipped my wine and it went to my head and then I was away again, daydreaming myself into another fantasy with another faceless man. Fancy that, under those circumstances. I was pulled away from those critical moments. Alcohol; I like it like my parents had liked it. I'd inherited a love for intoxication, for getting numb. Did Lilah know this about me? That I liked to drink, slip off into the ether?

Lilah Hopkins talked an awful lot. She twisted her short red hair into tufts, revealing bald underarms. Her eyes twinkled and she curled both hands around her rum and coke, holding it like a child. She wriggled on her seat,

## MIDSUMMER

tugging at her too short skirt. And she glared at the men in such a blatant sexual manner I nudged my husband in jest. But he didn't nudge me back. Lilah was – well – she was astonishing to behold: wild, reckless with her observations, funny. She swore a lot too, said words like 'fucknuts' and 'asshole'. Everything was 'freakin' this' and 'freakin' that', just like a New York cop. It never occurred to me she might be mixing it all up or making it all up. Her acting was faultless. And, as a result, we were all paralysed, nodding at everything she said. Sebastian showed no sign of leaving. And Bill? Bill was speechless. I didn't know how to play things. And Lilah was doing something strange: constructing a little pyramid of peanuts on the table in front of her, a sculpture she added to, as she talked, with some precision.

"The winters are mild where I come from," she drawled. "But I wish it were summer all year round. Boy, does it rain in the late summer months, Goddamn and hell does it pour and the humidity gets unbearable, like hell's kitchen some days. Sit in a tub full of ice cubes, I do sometimes. Then there are the storms, and the tornadoes; they can whip the earth up into the sky. I come from a place of extreme weather. Twisters, hurricanes. How's your winter here? I'm *dreading* it, I must say. Gonna buy myself a rabbit fur coat, all snug, hole up in it. Gonna buy mitts and a long sheep's wool scarf."

Lilah giggled and her whole body squirmed, as though live fish were jumping under her clothes. There was fluidity in the way Lilah moved and spoke. Like she had a talent for the spoken word; she enunciated her words as though reciting lines.

## THE TRYST

I sipped and watched and listened to her anecdotes about Alabama. I was in no mood to compete. Lilah looked younger than me by at least ten years. There was something in her eyes which warned me off, something steely-soft, a curl on her lips; also, the rise of her breasts, the way she held them so upright, something about it all said *you're out of your depth*. I didn't gauge her then, her ferocity or potential. Even though she began to make my stomach swim, my veins heat, I didn't assess her accurately. But then, who could? Lilah was something entirely new.

The change she provoked in my husband fascinated me. Bill was devoted to me, had been devoted since we met. It was love at first sight for him. He had never, ever, openly admired another woman in all our time together. But he was gazing, wide-eyed, at Lilah. My dear husband: my other kidney, my sound, reliable, decent, wholesome, utterly faithful husband was checking Lilah out.

She laughed with abandon and again she was a child poured into a womanly outfit. Her knotted shirt exposed her ample breasts. Her miniskirt showed off her rounded hips. This tiny Lilah woman was so damned unselfconscious, that was it. Lilah was bold, unbounded. I even began to like her. I uttered her name under my breath, *lilahhopkins*; I'd never met a person from the southern states of the USA. She seemed incredible, and yet also cheap, like a novelty bar of soap.

Her teeth, though. They were small and neat, yes. Like her ears, they were a little pointy. Oh what manner of creature was she? I didn't see her fully that night in that nondescript bar, barely guessed.

## MIDSUMMER

“Gonna buy me some sheepskin boots, too.” Lilah winked at Bill.

I watched Bill for his reaction.

“Gonna snuggify myself, just like a bear cub in a cave.” She giggled again. I found it hard not to groan but I was somehow on the back foot. She held the men’s attention like I never could.

Then – Bill flirted. He got drawn out, a first by all accounts. I watched him incline his head and body towards Lilah, as though trying to make himself more attractive. He smiled broadly at her, in a way he usually only smiled at me; he blushed whenever she made a risqué comment. He laughed when she laughed, in fact he laughed at almost everything she said. I watched as Bill peered, thoughtful, into the amber of his pint. I didn’t interfere. God, I could have decided to take Bill away, intervene. I could have wrapped the whole evening up with a yawn. Retreated to Sunday evening, to our comfortable world. Returned to our universe, our home, which hummed of two individuals who lived, slept and shared their existence. Headed back to a place of communion, to The Beach Boys in the afternoons and breakfasts in bed. Instead, I watched my husband flirt and Sebastian make his interest in Lilah obvious. Sebastian used all the force of his infamous charm, his eyes dancing over Lilah and his face glowing with expectation of a conquest. Strangely, he wasn’t having much luck. It was Bill who Lilah watched.

Then Sebastian’s chest erupted with a bleeping sound; his mobile phone had been tucked in his top pocket all night. He took it out and turned away to speak, walking a little away from us, jamming one finger in his ear.

## THE TRYST

He looked annoyed to be so interrupted. I should have made signs to leave then, said our goodbyes to Lilah and Sebastian, taken Bill home, gone back and gossiped about her, how weird she was.

Instead, I excused myself and went to the Ladies, leaving Bill and Lilah alone.

\*

In the Ladies, I peed. I was woozy and woolly-headed, thinking, as I sat, tights around my ankles, skirt around my knees, about Lilah and Bill. And then, about Bill. A tug of war had struck up in me in recent months. It was a war I didn't want; it was making me lose weight. I couldn't placate myself at all. I had no one else to turn to, discuss it with. A row raged over and over, in my head. It went like this:

Do you love Bill?

Yes.

Really love him?

I adore him.

Is he attractive?

Yes.

Then what's wrong?

I don't know. Nothing's there. The love is pure, like no other I've ever known. Too pure.

Too pure?

Yes. Like a love nuns have for God.

What?

Love like a vocation, like a calling. I love Bill like that. Am I the only one who loves like this?

Go ask your friends.

MIDSUMMER

It makes me sad.

Why?

This love has smothered the sex-instinct, cancelled sex out.

What?

I don't want to fuck Bill.

What?

Yes, I know.

Why not?

I don't know. We have been living a celibate life; have done so for the last two years. Maybe longer.

Really?

Yes.

Is this normal?

I don't know.

He's very appealing.

I know. But not to me, not like that.

Other women would like to fuck him.

I'm sure they would.

Are you sure you feel this way?

Yes.

How could this be?

I don't know. Eros isn't part of our relationship.

Surely it was once?

No.

Never?

No.

Then, what happened?

I don't know.

I was miserable with guilt. It was unusual this love I had for Bill. I'd had an inkling of it when we met but

## THE TRYST

never knew how strong this conflict would become. The more I lived with Bill, the more I loved him. I loved him too much: I loved him unfathomably. But I didn't dream of him, not in the way I dreamt of other men, like the faceless man I had just dreamt up in the bar. I had pondered this conundrum for a long time. No answer came. I was trapped inside a monogamous world, inside my marriage, and inside myself. I lived within multiple cases, just like a Russian doll. By day I battled with myself. By night my dreams were besieged by carnal fantasies. Morning dreams too: I would wake with a man I had maybe noticed the day before on the tube, except in my dream he was fucking me from behind, my hands gripping the iron of our bedhead. Or else he was spreading me across a table, my legs parted, my hands flat on the oak. The man was kissing the back of my neck. Or he was pulling at my hair. In my dreams I never saw his face. He was a shadow man, his cock always erect, his hands always firm. Often I would wake with my fingers reaching towards the wetness between my thighs. I wouldn't turn to Bill; I would pleasure myself later, when he was downstairs, spreading my long legs.

\*

I rose and pulled up my tights, zipped back my skirt.  
I opened the door.

In the bathroom mirror, I studied myself. I was forty-two years old. I'd enjoyed being 'pretty' in the full bloom of youth. I was pale-skinned. My brown eyes were clear,

## MIDSUMMER

my dark hair shone: an 'English Rose' I'd been called, many times. My face was changing though, undergoing life's grand metamorphosis. All the signs were there: age spots, newly settling crow's feet, grey wisps of hair. My neck was beginning to lose its smoothness. I stared, wanting to step aside, leave behind the image I saw there. I thought of Lilah and Bill, how they were so alive to each other. There and then it came to me: Lilah was the solution.

I left the bathroom and walked back to where Bill and Lilah were engrossed in conversation. I fancied I walked with stealth, as though it was me who had turned predator. I imagined I was sauntering, but in fact I may have stumbled a little from too much wine. Yes, like both my parents, alcohol was part of my downfall. Sebastian had left abruptly, having to meet whoever had called, a drug dealer if I knew Sebastian. It was closing time; the bar had thinned and had that atmosphere of everyone having to leave. I looked at my watch.

"Gosh, it's late," I murmured. "They're going to throw us out. Pity. It's the longest night of the year."

I draped my arms around Bill's shoulders, used my intimacy with him. I smiled and sat down next to my husband, lowering my head across the table, looking deep into those green slanted eyes. What on earth was I thinking? I still don't know. *Oh God, oh God.* I smiled at Lilah as I said: "The night is still young. Why don't you come back to our place?"