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**A fresh, timely and laugh-out-loud debut romantic comedy about a woman in a straight, long-term relationship who realises she might be bisexual.**

Georgina is a sensible 26-year-old with a routine: 1) schedule dates with long-term boyfriend, 2) teach piano to inept children, and 3) repeat until dead. Perfect.

But when one night she deviates from her usual timetable and sees the indie lesbian pop band Phase, Georgina realises: 1) she longs to play her own music again, 2) she wants to be just like them, and 3) their drummer is really hot...

Scared of losing her happy straight life, but feeling a new sense of belonging in the gay scene, she does what any rational person would do: she splits herself in two. She'll be Gina by day, George by night. It's going to take painstaking scheduling, a versatile wardrobe, and an ambiguous haircut, but maybe Georgina really can have both?



LILY LINDON is a writer and editor living in London. She studied English at Cambridge, where she wrote, directed, and performed in theatre and comedy shows with the Footlights, at the Edinburgh Fringe, and across the US. She then worked at Penguin Random House, where she published the Vintage Classics' *Love Letters of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West*. Currently, she's an editor on creative writing courses at The Novelty and hosts Wit Lit, an interview podcast about funny books. She won a Comedy Women in Print Prize for 'funniest sex scene', an award she is still hiding from her mother. *Double Booked* is her debut novel, which she wrote during lockdown in a doomed attempt to stay sane.

# DOUBLE BOOKED

Lily Lindon



Scan this QR code for a *Double Booked*  
themed playlist on Spotify!



An Aria Book

UNCORRECTED MANUSCRIPT

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This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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‘It is SO refreshing to read a book full of relatable,  
flawed, interesting queer characters... Fast paced  
and fun, Double Booked is the queer rom com  
I've been waiting for.’

**Laura Kay, author of *The Split***

‘This is right up my street - hook it up to  
my veins immediately, please!’

**Laura Jane Williams,  
author of *Our Stop***

‘Double Booked is a double whammy of wit’

**Helen Lederer, Founder of the  
Comedy Women in Print prize**

‘Whip-smart, horribly relatable and so  
perceptive. You will love it.’

**Hannah Tovey, author of  
*The Education of Ivy Edwards***

‘Has a real funny bone that comes  
through in every page.’

**Abigail Mann,  
author of *The Sister Surprise***

For my dad, Robert Lindon

# PART ONE





# 1

‘Sorry, can’t. I’ve got other plans.’

‘Georgina!’ scoffs Soph. Even over the phone I can see her sarcastic glare. ‘*You* know that *I* know that you *don’t* have other plans.’

It’s forty-two past three p.m. I’ve just taught my last piano lesson of the week and if I keep to my usual walking pace I’ll make it to the Tube before peak hours, saving me a sweet fifty pence.

‘It’s Friday,’ I recite, ‘so I’ll get a takeaway from Cod Almighty. One portion of fish and chips, ketchup on the side. Then I’ll have a bath, one medium glass of white wine, and—’

Soph joins in. ‘—lie back and watch *Friends*. I *know*,’ she moans. ‘But you don’t *have* to. You could change your schedule, come out with me and actually have some *fun*.’

‘Genuinely, what could be more fun than watching *Friends* in the bath?’

‘Oh, I don’t know, *anything*?’ squawks Soph. ‘Like, literally what I’m suggesting right now? Come to one of London’s best gay bars, see one of the most exciting up-and-coming indie pop bands perform live, and get all your drinks paid for by your generous and gorgeous best friend?’



I pretend to consider as I stride down the pavement. I remember to step over the dangerously wonky manhole cover, saving my most comfortable work heels from a scuffing. Well done, Gina!

There's a glimpse of spring sun this afternoon, a golden glow hesitating through London's usual gloom. To feel the warmth on my neck, I tuck Soph under my ear and twist my hair into a bun.

Then I see myself in a window and remember that I look *astorishingly* bad when my hair's up. It reveals my whopping jaw, the freaky freckles along my neck, the way my goofy ears stick out like a garden gnome's and, as quickly as I'd tied it up, I let my hair down again, back into limp brown curtains. It's not great, but at least it hides the ears.

'Surely there's someone more suitable you should go with? Have you forgotten which of your friends you're talking to? I'm *Gina*, the one who is very boring, very plain – and very straight.'

'The lady doth protest too much, methinks.'

'Don't start that nonsense again or I'll accuse you of reverse conversion therapy. Why can't you go with Jenny?'

Soph doesn't reply. I try to hear her expression but I swear she's avoiding my eye.

I slow down. I'll be furious if I miss that off-peak discount, but I guess comforting my best friend is worth fifty pence.

'You *were* going to go with Jenny,' I deduce, 'but you've broken up again.'

Jenny is the kind of open-hearted, unaffected woman who'd wear her muddy Arsenal merchandise to her own wedding. She and Soph are in a perpetual on-off relationship. A real-life Ross and Rachel.



‘Did she refuse to be in your *SophieSnob* videos again?’

Predictably, Soph explodes. I lean away from the phone to save my eardrum.

‘I don’t *understand*. Most women *gag* at the chance to be with me. I’m gorgeous! I’m funny! I’m smart! I’m famous! But Jenny won’t even do a photoshoot with me.’

‘Blasphemy,’ I agree.

‘Whatever,’ she sighs. ‘It’s just a shame. Couples videos are really popular and I’ve never been able to do one... Maybe I really am better at being single.’

Her glumness is infectious.

‘If you’d be embarrassed to have Jenny there tonight,’ I say, fiddling with the button on my outdated grey pencil skirt, ‘then you certainly don’t want *me* there. Your hideously plain chaperone.’

‘You’re not hideously plain.’ She pauses. ‘But I could give you a *tiny* makeover if you want?’

‘I’m at the Tube now,’ I lie. ‘Good luck!’

‘No you’re not. You’ve still got one and a half minutes.’

Damn it! Damn her! Damn my routine!

I pick up speed.

‘Why don’t you go with one of your party lesbians?’ I snap.

‘Because I prefer you!’

I wait.

‘And,’ Soph admits, ‘because they’re all on holiday in a Berlin sex dungeon.’

‘*There* it is. Goodb—’

‘Honestly,’ she says quickly, ‘it’s the best thing that could have happened. I’ll take some quick footage, then we’ll hide in a corner and judge the band. Just the two of us, Gee, like old times. *Pleeeeeese...*’



At uni, Soph and I fancied ourselves as talent spotters, going to all the gigs we could afford on student loans. She'd review them on her vlogs, I'd take inspiration for my own songwriting. Obviously, we haven't done that in years.

But salvation! I'm in sight of the Tube. I can taste my medium cod already. I'm about to hang up when a sudden softness in Soph's voice makes me stop.

'Please, Gee...? I know it's still difficult for you to—' She changes track. 'I wouldn't pressure you if I didn't think... But I really do think we'd have a fun night together. I miss talking about music with you.'

And, for a moment, I close my eyes and allow myself to imagine it: sitting with Soph in a secret corner of a neon bar, all makeovered, sipping a cocktail, watching from the shadows as confident women laugh with each other, listening as the band starts playing and...

'Nope,' I say, shaking my head and striding towards my destination. 'Sorry, Soph, but I can't. You'll find someone else, some beautiful lesbian to go with, and you can tell me all about it on the sofa on Monday. Tonight, I am going to a wedding with my other *Friends*.'

My finger is a millimetre away from the button to end our call when Soph plays her trump card.

'Pumpernickel.'

I drop my phone. Some banker walks into my back, shouting profanities. I pick the phone up and hiss into it.

'Really?'

'Really,' she says. 'Pumpernickel.'

Pumpernickel is our blood pact, used for calling in favours. It started in second year of uni when Soph had a delicious but indigestible pumpernickel bread and ravaged our bathroom,





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just as her crush arrived at our door. I took the blame. Since then, ‘Pumpnickel’ has been used to bribe agreement. I Pumpnickeled her into starting standing ovations at my terrible early gigs, she Pumpnickeled me into dumping exes on her behalf and we both used it to write each other’s essays. Pumpnickel cannot be denied.

Weirdly, reliefs flood through me.

Following Pumpnickel is like following the routine laid out for me in my calendar: it’s not my choice, and it’s therefore not my fault if something goes wrong.

‘I’ll be at yours at six,’ I say. ‘But I still want chips.’

After we’ve hung up, I update my digital calendar, deleting *Fish and Friends* and replacing it with a new event: *Pumpnickeled: going out-out with Soph*.

I stare at the screen, reading its instruction over and over again.

I realize I’m not just relieved.

I’m excited.



## 2

‘It’s five pounds for gays, eight pounds for straights.’

Good thing I remembered to bring change.

We’re at The Familiar, a gay bar in gay Hackney Wick. It is indeed familiar to Soph, who practically moved in when we all moved to London after graduation.

‘You should just pretend you’re a lesbian,’ she says, handing her fiver to the butch on the door. ‘Thanks, bab, how *are* you?’

While Soph has a heart-to-heart with the bouncers, the queue eyes her up. Soph is literally glowing tonight – the neon lighting casts artistic shadows on her dark brown skin, her sparkling black eyes are framed by glittery pink cat eyes, her short sequined dress gleams almost as much as her long, moisturised legs, and the gold cuffs on her braids glint like crystals when she moves. And *boy*, does she know it.

Meanwhile, no one gives me a second glance. Maybe it’s because their functioning gaydars tell them I’m as straight as a very straight thing. Or maybe it’s because, with my wall-paint white skin, mid-length mid-brown hair and ‘I haven’t been out in years and have nothing to wear at short notice’ mid-length black dress, I look plainer than a default avatar. I was too self-conscious to allow Soph to give me that ‘tiny



makeover'. You can't nail-polish a turd, after all, so I keep my eyes on the ground.

'Excuse me,' says a miscellaneous supermodel from the queue, 'aren't you *SophieSnob*?'

Soph curtsies and they all squeal. Oh, fresh hell.

'Oh my *God*, I've watched your channel since I was a *baby* gay!'

'Your sex tips genuinely saved my life!'

Thankfully, the bouncer shouts at them to get in line. Soph regally waves her camera and tells everyone to like, rate and subscribe.

It's weird seeing Soph in her lesbian habitat like this. Usually, when we're together, we slob out on the sofa, watching romcoms and gossiping about people we don't know. But here, at The Familiar, everyone thinks she's a legit culture critic, a queer connoisseur – and judging by their stares, very fit. My inferiority complex flexes.

The bouncer pulverises my hand with a stamp.

'It's a cat,' says Soph, seeing me prodding at it. 'Like a witch's familiar. Cute, right?'

'You should get yours tattooed. You'd save a lot of money.'

'Genuinely, very good idea.'

She herds me down the ramp into a dark passage lit by neon-pink cobwebs and winking pumpkins.

'I don't get it,' I say, poking a slimy wall and wiping it on Soph's shoulder. 'It's February. What's with the spooky stuff?'

'It's The Familiar.' She shrugs, wiping the goo back on me. 'It's witchy. Get on board.'

At the end of the passage is a gothic arched door with the drawn outline of a massive witch. She's split in half: angelic blue on the left, holding healing flowers; demonic magenta on





the right, with deadly potions. Soph takes footage posing in front of it. She tries to bring me in for a selfie, but I pretend not to hear.

The bar itself is even more saturated with camp Halloween decor. Ghost bunting screams at me. Glittering paper cats raise their backs. Silky bats flap into my eyes. Soph establishes us in a covert corner booth, under posters of a scantily cloaked hag. She returns from the bar with two signature cocktails, one blue Good Witch and one magenta Bad Witch. She hands me the blue one.

This irritates me. Just because I'm straight doesn't mean I'm boring.

I take a sip and choke. 'What percentage is this?'

Soph pinches my cheek. 'Thanks for coming along with me tonight, Gee,' she says.

I shrug. 'Thanks for emotionally blackmailing me when your cool lesbian friends were busy.'

'I promise I won't let any other queers bother you,' she says and winks outrageously. 'Unless you finally decide you want them to.'

I scratch my face with my middle finger.

Soph rolls her eyes and leans back, surveying her kingdom with satisfaction. Even hidden away in the corner, I swear passing eyes are drawn to her. Must be nice, to be attractive.

It's strange; when I (admittedly, very rarely) go on 'straight' nights out, I'd love to feel like random men weren't ever going to come over and bother us. Here, though, with no laddish men around, it hits differently to get ignored. Maybe it's because I trust women to have a better sense of taste? It's like getting unfavourably peer reviewed.

I don't want to let Soph down, but as yet another gorgeous







woman smiles at her, then sees me and swerves away, I feel like my presence is a massive cockblock. Hmm, bad choice of words. I need another drink.

Soph insists I go to the bar myself, regardless of how self-conscious I feel. It's even worse when I look up from the floor to see the bartender is offensively beautiful. She looks like Cara Delevingne, with a platinum buzz cut, dark eyebrows and hundreds of hooped earrings. Under her cropped vest, she has an eclectic patchwork of tattoos – a sun and moon, a howling wolf, something that might be a block of cheese (?) and a long sunflower growing down her side. Idly, I wonder how far down it goes...

God, it's hot in here. But, presumably because I'm neither gorgeous nor gay, the busy bartender keeps me waiting. What do I need to do to get served in here, tattoo a rainbow on my face?

A waft of Soph's Chanel. She leans on the bar next to me, nonchalantly nods her head, and instantly gets bumped to the front of the long line.

'A Bad Witch and a Good Witch please,' she says, making a drinks order sound cool and seductive.

The bartender starts hurriedly flipping cocktail shakers.

'Actually, two Bad Witches,' says my mouth. 'And make them doubles.'

I immediately realize my mistake.

'They're cocktails,' says the perfect bartender, barely glancing up from scooping ice. 'They don't come in doubles?'

Soph laughs and I pretend to join in, but I know this moment will be replayed in my nightmares. I cower back to our booth with a non-double Bad Witch. Soph raises a smug eyebrow at me.





‘Stop looking at me like that. I just wanted to try a pink one.’

‘Whatever, bab,’ she snorts. ‘You don’t have to justify your cocktail choice to me.’

Thankfully, a distraction arrives before I have to invent one. The bar lights dim and everyone turns to the stage. A spotlight follows a hooded cape, sashaying to the microphone. The cape is thrown off to reveal a buxom drag queen with a sparkly fuchsia gown, wig, and beard.

‘Good evening, magical darlings,’ she sighs, sultrily, ‘and welcome to The Familiar. I am Polly Amory, your compère extraordinaire.’

The audience whoops. I gather they’re familiar with her work.

‘I have a spell to summon our first performer. But – oh no! – where did I put my wand?’

She pats herself down, enjoying the process immensely.

‘Oh, I’m always losing things. My keys, my cards, my dignity. I’d lose my own head if it wasn’t tucked in.’

She pulls a phenomenally long wand out of her knickers.

‘Voila! Now I can summon a Drag King legend – and one of my many ex-lovers – Willy Nilly!’

I didn’t know Drag Kings were even a thing. Turns out they are very much a thing in The Familiar. He’s dressed like William Shakespeare and speaks in ye olde verse about how good he is in bed. He then does a striptease, seductively removing his ruff to reveal another underneath. When he finally whips off his pantaloons, his own little William has a little ruff too. For someone thrusting around a fluorescent green dildo in a paper skirt, he’s pretty good.

With a pantomime wink, Polly says, ‘Willy likes it ruff!’



The audience groans, then cheers Willy's retreating bottom. After Willy Nilly comes a very sincere poetry reading about how straight people are complicit in the patriarchy. I chuckle a bit out of nerves until Soph kicks me.

'It's the interval,' announces Polly, 'so have a drink, a wee, a flirt, and be back in ten minutes for our headline act... I know they're why you're all here in your best outfits. We'll be blessed by the presence of everyone's favourite girl group, *Phase!*'

My head jerks to Soph. The audience are squealing like hungry pigs. She takes an innocent sip of her Bad Witch.

Urgh. So *that's* why she lured me here tonight. Soph has been going on and on about this band. She saw them a few weeks ago at the The Glory and raved about how much I'd love them. 'They're so original, innovative, sexy, yadda, yadda, yadda.' But they aren't available to listen to *anywhere* online. Not that I looked much, obviously.

I tap my chin, feigning indifference. 'Aren't Phase the band where all of their songs are about, like, woo-woo occult stuff?'

'No,' Soph replies. 'All of their songs are about *astrology*.'

I glare at her.

'Trust me,' she says, 'once you see them, you'll believe anything they say.'

'Oh, please. It's going to take more than some amateur pop singers to make me believe in horoscopes.'

'Horoscopes are very gay,' says Soph defensively.

'No wonder I don't get it, then.'

Soph raises a perfectly plucked eyebrow at me. 'I want to interview them for *SophieSnob* and help launch their careers. I plan to make them dedicate a song to me.'



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'*Oh Sophie,*' I croon, in an improvised pop chorus, '*you're in luck, our stars tell me we're destined to fuck.*'

'Wow, you've still got it!'

My cheeks flush. I'm not used to drinking this much.

'You know,' says Soph more gently, 'you *could* just write your own songs again.'

I stab at the cocktail olive with my witches' broom-shaped umbrella.

'That was all a long time ago.'

'Oh wait,' she says, 'you've got something there.'

She picks at my collar and examines her fingers.

'Looks like... yes, it's... a massive chip on your shoulder.'

I push her off her bar stool. She just laughs.

'Seriously,' I say. 'It's not funny. I am not going to play piano again.'

'You are literally a piano teacher.'

'Exactly! Those that *can*, do. Those that can't, teach.'

'That's not what you said about your dad's teaching.'

It's a low blow. Even Soph seems surprised at her audacity. I pretend not to have heard her.

Instead, I stare at the stage, where a tall, handsome Black woman with short cornrows and a tight denim shirt is setting up a keyboard.

'That's Marsha Adomako,' says Soph. 'Phase's keys.'

My staring becomes intent. I bet she's better than I ever was.

Offstage now, she's checking her phone and explaining something to Polly Amory. The others in Phase must be late.

Just as I think that, as if following some performer cue, three people enter through the side door, bringing in a surge of evening air. The whole bar turns to them.

They're the strutting popular girls in a high school film.





They're the cowboys off to fight the sheriff. They're the superheroes arriving to save the day.

'Phase,' whispers Soph.

At the front is a curvy blonde who looks like Marilyn Monroe, but somehow *more* feminine. Elaborate blonde waves, snow-white skin, glossy lipstick. She's wearing a glamorous long red dress, cinched in at the waist with a buckled belt that perfectly matches her strappy heels. She carries her guitar case like it's a handbag. She reminds me of a Renaissance painting, or a vintage pin-up poster.

'The femme at the front is Isobel Evennett. Lead vocals and guitar. Behind her, with the pink afro, is Rudy Cooper. Bass.'

Rudy's curls are indeed dyed candyfloss pink. Her brown skin is heavily freckled and she's wearing baggy denim dungarees and a mischievous grin. Swinging her yellow bass guitar case, she does elaborate personalized handshakes with everyone she walks past. She looks like she's the main character in a Pixar film.

But my eyes are drawn to the person behind them. The third horsewoman of the lesbian apocalypse.

'*She* is Kit Tsuki.'

Kit is, quite simply, the most attractive person I've ever seen. Tall, toned, androgynous, she has smooth brown skin and messy black hair lying in an effortless halo round her face. She's wearing a battered leather jacket, ripped black jeans, and well-travelled boots, with no accessories except a nose ring and a simple silver chain clasped round her neck. Her cheekbones are so sharp I'm bleeding just looking at them and her smouldering eyes are lined with rock-star kohl. They're like black holes, pulling me in. And she's looking right at me.





For one second, I swear, we stare at each other. In that second, the world stops. My stomach flips upside down. My cheeks flush. I abruptly look away.

Well, *that* was weird. Must be a bad reaction to the cocktail olive.

Everyone watches as Phase casually catwalk across the room. But just before reaching the stage, Kit hesitates. She casts a momentary, but definite, look in my direction.

‘– like now!’ squeals Soph. ‘Don’t you see what I mean?’

I realize Soph has been talking this whole time and I haven’t taken in a word of it. I drag my eyes away from Kit to look at her.

‘Whaddyasay?’

‘Kit’s looking at me *all* the time. *Don’t look now!* Jesus, have some subtlety.’

Oh. Right. Obviously Kit was looking at *Soph*. God, I’m an idiot.

‘Do you like her?’

‘Like?’ Soph emphatically tosses her braids over her shoulder. ‘We’re basically in love.’

I laugh. Soph doesn’t.

‘Kit and I have always had an understanding,’ Soph insists. ‘It’s going to happen soon. We’re playing sex chicken.’

Maybe Soph *has* talked about Kit. I never remember specifics amongst the long list of people she’s ‘basically in love’ with.

‘Kit’s in a thing with Marsha,’ says Soph, leaning in conspiratorially. ‘Marsha says it’s an “open relationship”. Kit says they’re “just fucking”.’

I feel my cheeks redden again. The last glance we see of Phase before they head backstage is Kit casually brushing





something from Marsha's neck. My own neck tingles. I claw it away.

Lights fade on the bar, rise on the stage. Polly Amory returns, sparkly gown, wig, and beard now all bright purple.

'Hello again, my pumpkins,' she says. 'I know you'll want me to keep this short. So please welcome to the stage, four of my favourite ex-lovers... Phase.'

Phase stride onto the stage, godlike. Lit by glitter curtains, starry bunting, disco balls and pink and blue lights, they sparkle with self-assurance.

Marilyn Monroe/Isobel slides her fingers round the microphone and smiles coyly up from it.

'Hello, loves,' she breathes. The audience stops breathing.

'Thank you for having us back at The Familiar. Have any of you heard us before?'

The majority of the crowd raise their hands reverently.

'I promise that even if you've seen us before, you won't be bored,' smiles Isobel, 'because we never play the same song the same way. We improvise and adapt our pieces in a truly live experience. So please, put your phones away and be in this moment with us.'

Even Soph, who once live-Tweeted during intercourse, submits her phone to her pocket. What dark magic is this?

'We are Marsha, Rudy, Kit, and Isobel, and together...' She pauses and bites her lip. 'We are just a Phase.'

Marsha starts to play the keyboard introduction to their first number.

Those first urgent notes are like a bullet straight to my brain.

Way too late, I'm reminded why I shouldn't have come here tonight.





They're brilliant. Too brilliant. They're experimental, combining influences of jazz, rock, folk, blues, pop into a unique sound. It shouldn't work, but somehow, together, they make it perfect. They're exactly the kind of musicians I want to be. No, exactly the kind of musicians I *used* to want to be. And the jealousy and resentment and guilt and craving roars through me so hard that it winds me.

Phase sing out, steady and assured, in a hypnotic close harmony.

*'I've always known that I was born on the cusp  
I'm always too much or not quite enough...'*

I know I shouldn't lose myself to it; it will just be more painful afterwards. But it's as if the music is holding my face underwater. Adrenaline courses through me and I really am struggling to breathe. It's so *embarrassing*. I remember myths of sirens, calling to sailors to jump overboard. I have a mad impulse to cover my ears, but I don't want Soph to see.

Their voices are so right together. It's *all* so right.

And so I let myself drown.

Marsha closes her eyes, spreading her hands along the keys, Isobel's hands cup the microphone, Rudy embraces her bass, Kit's toned arms gently circle over her drums.

Everything else melts away.

*Please.* Just one more chorus...

But the song comes to an end.

There's a heavy moment of total silence. I close my eyes, trying to save this moment to my internal hard drive.

Only one thought of my own remains: I wish I could tell Dad about them.

Then the crowd starts to scream and the world rushes in again. I'm shaken awake from a deep sleep, disorientated, out





of breath, ashamed. I should applaud. I should whoop like the maniacs around me. Or at least tell Soph that she was right.

But I can't move at all, can't do anything except stay staring at the stage, desperate for them to play again and replace my awful personality with their perfect songs.

Isobel speaks softly into the microphone, at me.

'So tell me truthfully: when did you first accept your own desires? When did you first realize you weren't straight?'

I stop breathing.

'As a child,' she continues, tucking a blonde curl behind her ear, 'I wasn't taught about queer love. So I assumed that the intense feelings I had for a few friends was just the way everyone felt about pretty girls.'

The audience laugh and I remember I'm in a crowd. She's not talking to me. God, that was silly. The dangers of getting lost in music.

The audience are nodding and clicking their fingers. Clicking, it seems, is like gay clapping.

'Then, at my church, I heard two women sing about wanting to get married to each other and everything started to fit. That's why being part of a lesbian band is so important to me. I want to be a voice reaching out, giving alternatives to what happiness can look like. I will always be grateful to the community for welcoming me with open arms—'

'And legs!' heckles someone in the crowd. Isobel laughs and shakes her ringlets. Then, looking to the others first, she starts singing a slow, beautiful power ballad and I melt back into her voice.

*'Another lonely afternoon,  
For the Virgo in June...'*

The song is so bittersweet my throat aches. The pain of



the lyrics mingles with the tenderness of Isobel's voice. She's living every word and I'm there with her. I'm watching the person she loves kiss another, patiently waiting – longing – for her to change her mind.

The song ends and reality returns too abruptly again.

This time, Soph turns my face to her. After sharing a long look, she affectionately wipes the wetness away from my cheek. But we barely have a chance to compose ourselves before the mood of the room shifts completely.

Still in the aftershock of 'Virgo in June', Rudy leaps to the front of the stage, shouting an upbeat count-in and bursting into an electro-glitch-hop song. It has sounds of phone notifications in the chorus and keeps repeating something about a 'co-star', which I don't understand, but has the audience laughing even as they jump along. It's the kind of outrageously joyous, addictive song that makes you feel sure that everything is going to be OK. Soph pulls me to my feet.

When I've been 'out out' in the past I've been too self-conscious to really enjoy dancing, but something about the room and the song – and the fact I'm completely sloshed – makes my inhibitions slide away. Soph and I dance in our dark little booth and when the song finishes with a bang of confetti, we're delirious, whooping like we're on a sugar rush.

Then Kit stands up from behind her drums.

The room freezes. Kit stalks to the front of the stage, pushing her hair back from her eyes, and taps the mic lightly to check it's turned on. It is. Just like everyone else.

'This one's called "Mercury",' she says. God, she's got a perfectly husky rock-star voice. 'And it's just about sex.'

I swear a girl in the crowd faints.





DOUBLE BOOKED

Rudy's bass squeals, Isobel and Marsha hit a staccato riff, and Kit, back at her kit, leads on a fast tempo.

*'Don't make us*

*Come apart*

*Come over come over come over here...'*

Kit sweats. The audience sweats. Just standing there watching, I sweat like I've never sweated before.

Finally Kit plays a last loud cymbal and closes her eyes, sticks still held triumphantly in the air. She leans her head back, breathing heavily, as if savouring her exhaustion. She rocks forward on her chair, panting, eyes still closed, holding on to the built-up feeling for a moment longer. A blush spreads over my entire body.

But then Kit opens her eyes and the crowd explodes. They're shouting, weeping, and passionately making out – sometimes all three at once – and I can feel Soph's eyes on me. I know I should turn and grin back at her, but I'm still glued to Kit.

She's going to go so soon and I know I'll never see her again. If I can just capture the exact line of her jaw, the way the lights hit her skin, her hair, her eyes, maybe I can still imagine...

Phase take a brief bow and leave. The stage is emptied of its magic.

'Well, folks,' says Polly Amory, 'it's the end of the show, but only the start of the night. See you out there!'

The lights return. The speaker system blasts Britney Spears. Everyone carries on as if everything's the same.

But I stand still. I feel like Dorothy, seeing technicolour Oz.

I want to be as talented as Marsha. As graceful as Isobel. As fun as Rudy. As... magnetic as Kit. I want to be friends with them. I want to be part of them. I want to *be* them. I





want to be up on that stage, making people *feel* something. I want to smile back proudly at this adoring crowd, knowing that I belong here.

But I can't. It's time to go home.

I tell Soph that I'm going to the loo then leaving. I don't think she hears me, because she's spotted Jenny's football shirt across the room and they're doing some kind of make-up dance mating ritual.

Even though the loos are gender-neutral, the queues for the cubicles are bonkers long and I'm far from confident enough to wee into a urinal. But oh God, I'm actually bursting. Please, I can't wet myself in front of all these perfect women.

Drunken instincts make me waddle through the backstage door, searching for another loo. I press my ear to the Green Room door. Empty. I lurch through half-folded costumes and half-eaten snacks towards the en suite. *Hallelujah!*

But now I'm sitting down, I realize quite how much the world is spinning, how much I want to sleep. No, I must stay awake or Soph will think I've been kidnapped by lesbians with low standards. I try to concentrate on Phase's music, still playing loudly in my head.

'Don't make us come ap—'

Kit's voice, vivid as anything.

'Don't recycle those words on me!'

Wait, what?

'Marsha, calm—'

'Don't you *dare* tell me to calm down.'

I hold my breath. I intuit that now would not be a good time to step out of the loo and start fangirling.



‘An open relationship doesn’t work if we’re not open with each other,’ Marsha says. ‘I can tell you’re hiding something from me. Who is she? Is she someone I know? Are you *in love* with her?’

‘Marsha, you’ve misunder—’

‘No, *you’ve* misunderstood. This is over. I’m not seeing you any more and I’m not playing in Phase any more. You’re finally free to sleep around and never address another human being’s feelings, or your own. Good luck with that.’

Shoes scuffle. Kit calls out. Door slams. Silence.

I sneak open the loo door, peek around it. All clear.

Wondering what that was about, I wash my hands, splash my face, look into the mirror with its nostalgic light-bulb frame – God, I look terrible – see Kit sitting on the floor, check my earrings are OK, try to pat my hair into some kind of reasonable—

I spin round. Kit stares up at me from under a clothes rail.

‘I’m s-so s-sorry,’ I stutter.

‘No, no, it’s—’

She wipes her face hurriedly. Oh crapballs, she’d been crying. I stay rooted to the spot like an awkward tree.

She coughs. ‘Are you one of the other performers?’

‘I’m a musician,’ I autopilot, then realize what I just said. Crap! Change the subject.

‘Er – I really loved Phase,’ I say. ‘Tonight was my first time hearing you and you were...’ I search for the right words to express how much it meant to me. ‘Good.’

Kill me. But Kit smiles weakly.

‘Thanks, man. Sorry about the, er, encore.’

‘Oh, God, no, *I’m* sorry.’



‘Shit happens,’ she shrugs. ‘But I’d appreciate it if you didn’t tell everyone.’

‘I would *never*.’

‘No,’ she says, considering me. ‘No, I don’t think you would.’

She sighs, then jumps up and pulls a pack of cigarettes from her leather jacket. She offers me one. I shake my head instinctively. She shrugs, a little surprised.

‘Bad habit,’ she says, cigarette between her lips.

I stare as she lights up. I glance at the smoke alarm in the room, which has a plastic bag covering it. Normally Goody Two Shoes over here would have run away, calling the police and the fire brigade at the same time. But this feels like a test – a test I’m desperate to pass.

We stand in the quiet, watching the smoke drift out around her mouth. I make a mental note to take up smoking ASAP.

Then Kit holds out her hand to me.

‘I’m Kit, by the way,’ she says, cool as a cucumber.

‘I-I’m Ge-Geor-Ge,’ I say, stupid as a cucumber.

Her hot fingers grasp mine. I dare myself to meet her black eyes and my stomach backflips.

Kit is looking right at me, as if she knows me, and knows we’re the same.

‘It’s a pleasure to meet you, George.’

I stumble back through the dance floor to find Soph. She’d barely noticed I was gone because her mouth was locked on to Jenny’s.

‘Soph, I need to go home,’ I shout to their conjoined face. They come up for air and Jenny salutes me.



‘I thought you were having fun?’ whines Soph, breathless.  
 ‘Why don’t we go meet Phase?’

‘No! No, I need to go.’

‘But—’

‘Soph.’

‘But—’

‘*Pumpernickel.*’

She calls us a taxi.

And then there I am. Outside my flat, but with Phase’s songs looping in my head. And a secret from Kit to keep. And the tingling feeling of her hand in mine. And the sound of her voice, calling me George...

George! No one has ever called me George before. Gina, usually. Ginny, by my parents. Gee, by Soph. But never, ever George.

*George.*

I think I like it.

Humming the tune of ‘Mercury’, I fumble around with my keys.

But then someone on the other side of the door twists the handle and yanks it open.

A tall, bearded, bespectacled man stares at me. He has freckled white skin, and auburn hair everywhere that’s not covered by his knitted jumper. He’s baring his teeth like a puppy expecting a treat.

‘Gina!’ he shouts, with a Scottish accent and no consideration for the neighbours. ‘Welcome home! How were the lesbians?’

Then he picks me up in a bear hug and swings me all the way into our bedroom.

Ah, yes... This is Douglas. My boyfriend of seven years.