



LUCY TALLIS

Lucy lives in Bristol with her family, a zoo of animals and a library of musical instruments. She has been a teacher all her life. Other than her main subject – maths – she’s taught dance, creative writing and she’s even turned her hand to the piano.

Growing up in a bustling city, but descended from country folk, Lucy yearned for the freedom of the countryside. Disobeying her parents, she climbed tall trees and looked towards the horizon. When Lucy writes, she likes to remember the stubborn character she was as a child: the child who said no to authority, who saw things further afield, who just needed to work out how to get there.

About Chicken Boy

Jethro’s really messed up. He wants to lose his virginity off his home turf. Best friend Rowen discovers her boyfriend’s done the dirty; she wants to get the hell out of the city. A perfect union. The two friends take a road trip down a muddy lane. It’s chaos and craziness, humour and pain. Jethro finds Anna: gorgeous and seductive, but dangerous. He has to run away. Then there’s Harriet: bold, brave and driving Jethro to distraction. Chicken Boy follows Jethro through the final break before university. It’s abject madness, but he learns a lot about himself and who he wants to become.

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CHICKEN BOY

Chapter One

Friday 16 June – 11.57pm

‘Rowen!’ I shout. She’s over by the fireplace, chatting with that tall girl. ‘Rowen!’ I swig my beer and fall into cleavage. The owner holds drinks in both hands. With a look of disgust, she steps back.

‘Arschhole,’ she snarls.

I growl, stagger and take another swig. I’m dancing now. Arms wide, body moving. Bashing. Girl in the corner wears a short dress. She has long legs. Laughing with friend. Through the crowd, I find her.

‘Hi, Jethro.’ She kisses my cheek.

‘Fancy a shag?’

‘What did you say?’ she shouts.

‘Fancy a shag?’

Girl in corner looks at friend.

‘What did he say?’

Girl shakes head. ‘Nothing.’

‘Go away, dickhead,’ friend tells me. I am pushed.

Side over to Brett. ‘All right, mate?’ He’s DJing. ‘All right?’

He nods.

‘Music’s shite.’ I laugh. Brett nods to the beat.

Stop it, Jethro.

This room is too busy. I need to sort myself out. Push someone and I’m down on the sofa. I take a long, slow breath, heart beating fast. I take another breath. The beat of the music is fast but I breathe in time.

That's better. What now?

Swig of beer.

A pair of nice legs is dancing in time with Brett's music. I kick the legs.

'What?' voice shouts.

I grin. 'Nice legs.' Face scowls. Face comes close to mine. 'Why don't you just ...'

I push and stagger away. Find the downstairs toilet. Sit on toilet lid, head in hands.

Breathe.

Calm down.

The toilet door flies open and Rowen squeezes in. 'There you are!' Bouncing to the music, Rowen grabs my wrist and yanks. 'Dance with me!' I throw heavy arms around her neck.

'No,' I say. I slide down the wall and my face lands on the toilet seat. I am laughing.

'Get up.' She's hard-tickling me. It hurt; makes me laugh. 'Up, Jethro. You're not going to find a girlfriend this way.'

She's right.

'On it,' I slur, my eyes half shut. Still have beer in hand. I roll over and pour it into my mouth.

Rowen tuts. She leaves.

Must find her.

The kitchen is hot and busy and I can hardly breathe. There is hot, heavy weight against me. Nice girl? No. Very tall girl. Like a drugged wasp, her voice is a low rumble in my ear. I swat the noise. 'Off.' It's back. I swat it. 'Off.' I am laughing. See the back door and push away from the worktop. Going outside.

Pushed.

I turn. 'What the ...?'

'Virgin!' It's a drunken voice. I take a running leap. I'm pummeling. Pummeling the voice. Pummeling the word. Pummeling the world. I receive a sharp punch.

'Yeeeeow.' It hurts.

Stagger away.

I'm outside.

It's a milky, hot evening and the garden is peppered with people. A girl lies in front of me. Her long, pale legs end in a pair of clean white Converse and I stand and stare.

She'll do.

But I need a piss.

Pond. I let out a satisfying stream of hot piss then turn and watch the girl. She is flirting with a guy whose legs are American-football wide. He would crush me in a fight.

I shrug and look around. Where are all the girls?

Just breathe, Jethro. Calm it.

I can't calm it. Nearly eighteen. Not cool to be a virgin. Got to get on with it. Where are all the girls?

There's a weird guy leaning against the house. He's not a girl, but he has beer. That's the same. This guy looks rough. I walk over and snatch his beer.

'Where are all the girls?' I ask. He doesn't answer me. I sidle closer. He has a roll-up behind his ear and I nick it. Stick it in my mouth; I lean towards him. I'm rocking. 'Light it, mate,' I mumble. He doesn't. 'Light it.'

I take the cigarette from this guy's mouth and light my roll-up. Place the cigarette back between his dry lips then poke him. He rocks. I flick his cheek. Nudge him in the leg. He doesn't do anything. Nudge him again. He grunts.

I tut and take two large drags on the roll-up and a long swig of his warm beer.

Head goes. Slipping. I sink against the wall and suddenly feel the cold stone floor against my cheek. *Don't lose it.*

Crawl back through the open door and push my way through the legs. Brett's music is an ambulance siren in my ear and I want to get away from it. I'm on the floor, behind the sofa, Artex swirls swirling.

Rowen leans over me. 'Get some water.' I swat her. She steps over me, a black light in a rose ocean. She is cross. I like it when she's cross. I am Fat Laughing.

'You're a shit best friend,' she tells me when she sits down next to me with a pint of water.

'What do you mean?'

'No fun.'

I pull her towards me and kiss her.

She laughs. 'You're such a dick, Jethro.' She scoops up my head and leans over me. 'Just drink this.' But I don't want to drink water: I want to get laid.

‘No.’

‘Drink it.’

I pull Rowen close. Water spills. ‘You promised to help me.’

Why is Rowen laughing?

‘I promised to help you find a girlfriend. This isn’t “finding a girlfriend”.’

She’s right.

I’m up. I stagger into the hallway and look up into the light.

Morag McCormack.

Morag, leaning over the banister.

Go away, Morag.

Must go upstairs. Lie down.

Climb the stairs. Drink beer.

Don’t say anything to Morag.

‘Hello, Morag.’

Morag is at the top of the stairs. I fall on the carpet and touch her. She feels soft and warm. I slide down, sinking. Morag’s wearing polyester trousers. Nice trousers, big girl, warm smile, down with me. Nice moustache. I touch Morag’s face. It’s a happy face, raisin eyes with glasses. I’m sinking. I’m sleepy on the carpet. Morag is with me. Sleepy. My trousers. Where are you going, trousers? Trousers, I think you are stuck. My bootlaces. I will undo my laces.

Just kiss me.

Chapter Two

Saturday 17 June – 9.43am

Awake.

There’s a washing machine in my stomach and it’s on the spin cycle. Morag McCormack, the girl with the hairy back and skin the colour of batter, lies on top of me, prostrate as if dead. I push. Morag begins to stir. I do not want Morag to stir because I do not want to speak to her.

There is only one thing I can do: move slowly. Very, very slowly.

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I am sitting on the kitchen worktop, legs swinging against the cupboard door. In the next room a guy from Year Twelve hangs lifeless over the side of the sofa. On top of him, a miniature female is asleep. A girl I don't know shares an armchair with the weird guy from last night and Brett and Rowen sit at the breakfast table, heads down, hands clasped.

'So, what do you think?' I ask them. I've been explaining my theory.

Rowen lifts her head. 'What do we think about what?'

'Guys, come on.' I flick on the kettle. They need coffee. 'I'm serious. I think I may have shagged Fat Morag.'

Rowen rolls her eyes. 'She's not fat, Jethro.' She lowers her head. 'Anyway, you're such a dick.' I can tell she's suffering. Her usually straight hair is kinked and fuzzy. Her olive skin looks ghostly pale.

'Brett, man?' I beg. But Brett looks like he's going to puke. He's banging his forehead on the table and rocking backwards and forwards. 'Do you think I shagged Morag?'

He lifts his head. 'Saw you, dude. It was pretty revolting.' His head lands back on the table, ginger fringe flopping over bloodshot eyes.

'Seriously, guys? I can't remember a thing.'

I scroll through memories. There was the heat in the lounge when everyone was dancing. I know the kitchen was rammed. Then there was that bloke who shouted at me. And the garden: that weird guy with a cigarette.

I don't remember much after that.

The stairs. Her face. The floor. Darkness.

Rowen slaps me on the back. 'At least you've done it. You can stop banging on about it.' Brett and Rowen perform a weak high five.

'Do I bang on about it?'

'Yep,' they say in unison.

'You guys are totally taking the piss, right? How can I have lost my virginity and not remember?'

'Errm ... let me think ... ' Rowen scratches the side of her face. 'Because you're always drunk?'

'I need a cigarette.'

Rowen pulls skins from her shirt pocket and takes tobacco from Brett's hand. She's taunting me.

'Twos-up on that,' I tell her.

‘Nope,’ she says. ‘You’re an adult now. You’ve got to take responsibility for your own cigarettes.’

‘Yeah, dude,’ Brett says. ‘For all you know, you could be a father.’

He’s got to be kidding. I laugh, but it’s not that funny.

I look around the room. I don’t know who owns this house but it’s trashed. The carpet is smeared with takeaway pizza and the worktops are covered in cans and bottles. The patio doors are open and a sleeping boy lies half in, half out. His fingers are stained, and next to his hand, the carpet is singed. It looks like someone threw wine on the burn because there’s a soupy mess leaking from the singe.

With his head still on the table, Brett points his finger in the air. He waggles it to get my attention.

‘What?’

‘She told us it went on for hours, dude.’

I wish he’d shut up. ‘Really?’

‘Yeah, like *hours*.’

‘Shit, really? Was I any good?’

Brett does a fake yawn at my question.

‘Yeah, but was I?’

‘Dude, you were awesome.’

‘I knew it. Pass us your skins, Row.’

She holds them out. ‘Come and get them if you want them.’ I jump down, walk across the room and snatch them from her. ‘I’m seriously worried,’ I whisper to her.

Rowan shrugs. ‘What’s there to worry about? This is something you’ve been working towards for, like, *ever* and now you’ve achieved your goal.’

I guess she’s right. I sit down and make a cigarette.

Brett groans. Rowen kisses him. She’s gentle. ‘You want another cuppa?’

He shakes his head. ‘Give me five and I’ll go and get breakfast.’ His eyes are closing and Rowen lays her head on his shoulder.

I am alone in a room of people and it doesn’t feel great. I need a friend.

I hear someone on the stairs. Slow, steady steps. They are heavy steps and they could belong to Morag. The thought of meeting Morag this morning makes me feel unwell. I cannot see Morag. She is not my friend.

‘Rowen. Outside?’ I whisper.

‘Eh?’ She’s buried in Brett’s clothes; her eyes are closing.

‘Come out the back.’

She nods, pushes back her chair and gets up. I step out on to the paving stones.

In the suburbs, the sky is light grey and the air is challenged. We sit on the concrete and she passes me her cigarette. I take a massive drag.

‘Do you seriously think I could have lost my virginity? You’re not taking the piss?’

She shrugs and kisses me on the cheek. ‘You’ve done it, big boy.’ She looks at the fields in the distance. ‘Now shut up and get on with your life.’

I lean my heavy head on her shoulder. There’s perfume on Rowen’s jumper and I breathe it in.

I take another long, hard drag and then I grin.

I guess I’ve finally done it.

Chapter Three

Sunday 18 June – 1.13pm

I must have fallen asleep. My head is on the kitchen table and my lip is firmly glued to the corner of Nana’s Marie Claire. An article, *The Best Kissing Tips and Tricks*, lies open. I hear the key in the back door and I look up. The shape of two humans is visible through the mottled glass. One is the height of my mother but appears to be dressed in clothes my mother wouldn’t wear. The other must be male because it is extraordinarily tall. This better not be the father figure she’s been threatening me with for the last four months. In the usual fashion, because the lock needs sorting, the key rattles and rattles. Finally, the handle squeaks down.

‘What’s with the pink glow?’ I ask Mum. Her nails match the colour of her handbag.

‘No reason.’ She is grinning.

The reason for her pink glow stands next to her. He’s a lion in blood-red trousers and in the three seconds I’ve known him, I’ve discovered his balls are bigger than mine.

‘So, this is Jethro?’ A hand thrusts into my face. ‘Nice to meet you, Jethro, I’m Dan.’

I do not want to shake the hand that will crush me and I do an extremely good job of ignoring it. ‘New jeans?’ I ask Mum. The jeans are slim and smart.

‘Bought them in Amsterdam.’ She twirls. ‘Like them?’

‘Sure. They look good.’

‘Thank you.’ I know what’s coming next. Mum will want to give me a friendly hair ruffle. This is something she does when she gets overexcited. It is very annoying, and it will be especially annoying in front of a tall stranger with big balls.

She’s on her way and I form my defence: I block her with my hands.

‘Not appropriate, Mother.’

She laughs and gives my hair a quick ruffle.

Dan is watching us as he moves to the sink. He picks up a baking tray resting on the top of a pile of washing up and stubs his Marlboro in the pooling water. The cigarette fizzes. When he sees me staring, Dan looks at me. ‘Is there a problem?’ He pulls out another cigarette, puts it to his lips and taps his pocket for a light.

I shrug.

‘You have a problem with my smoking?’

I shrug, again.

‘But your mother smokes.’

Mum?