Praise for

KATHY LETTE

'Funny, loud and uninhibited'
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Cosmopolitan

'Utterly outrageous, irreverent and screamingly funny'
Jilly Cooper

'Disarmingly perceptive'
Sunday Times

'Zippy, smart-mouthed… plenty of laughs'
Evening Standard

'Funny, irreverent, smart'
Guardian

'Kathy Lette can turn from raunchy farce to the most tender emotion in a trice'
Stephen Fry

'No one has a turn of phrase like Kathy Lette'
Deborah Francis White

'Kathy Lette is hysterical'
Eric Idle

'Deliciously rude and darkly funny'
Nicole Kidman

‘With her renowned clever wit and masterful (mistress-ful) wordplay, Lette delights us all yet again. Read this and know you are in the hands of a wise feminist who makes you laugh out loud!’
Suzie Miller

‘In a moment when women’s voices matter more than ever, Kathy’s wit and clarity feel timely and necessary’
Isla Fisher

‘Hilariously unruly. I loved every fierce, frothy line of feminist inspiration’
Tina Brown

‘Breaking a taboo on every page, these are funny feisty women and I love them’
Carol Vorderman

‘This is Kathy Lette at her finest – every line is perfectly crafted and it had me laughing out loud from page one’
Adam Hills

‘An absolute riot! Proper escapist fun that I thoroughly enjoyed’
Jane Fallon

‘Funny, super sharp and bang on message – Kathy Lette knocks it out of the park, again!’
Arabella Weir

the

SISTERHOOD RULES

ALSO BY KATHY LETTE

Puberty Blues
Girls' Night Out
Hit and Ms
The Llama Parlour
Foetal Attraction
Mad Cows
Altar Ego
Nip 'n' Tuck
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Till Death, Or A Little Light Maiming, Do Us Part
The Revenge Club

KATHY LETTE

the SISTERHOOD RULES



An Aria Book

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For my beloved maestro, Brian O'Doherty. Anam cara.
And with undying love to my own three sensational
sisters, Jen, Liz and Cara.

THE SISTERHOOD RULES

1. **SUPPORTIVE.** Be a human Wonderbra – uplifting, supportive and making her look bigger and better.
2. **PROTECTIVE.** Think of yourself as a big pair of knickers: you've got her arse covered.
3. **EMPOWERING.** Remind her to think big. She doesn't need a man's seat on the bus; she needs his seat on the board.
4. **ALWAYS TAKE HER SIDE AT WORK.** If sacked by a bad boss, say something along the lines of 'He clearly took an IQ test… and failed', possibly followed by 'Hey, why not start our own company?'
5. **MASSAGE HER EGO.** 'No, your bum does *not* look big in that…' The only important thing about a backside is that you don't talk out of it.
6. **NEVER BE JEALOUS.** The colour green suits no female complexion.
7. **NEVER LET A PENIS COME BETWEEN US.** It's forbidden to go after a sister or girlfriend's hubby or crush. Men come and go, but the sisterhood stays faithful forever.
8. **HONESTY.** Tell her if she's being cheated on; if a partner's gone straight from puberty to adultery, she should know.
9. **ALWAYS TAKE HER SIDE IN A BREAK-UP.** Try saying something along the lines of 'Your ex is

as useful as a solar-powered vibrator on a rainy day.' Or 'How do you get rid of cockroaches? Tell them you want a long-term relationship.'

10. **COCKTAILS**. Two sisters walk past a cocktail bar – well, it could happen! If she needs to cut loose and get drunk, be her wingwoman.
11. **WINGWOMAN**. Never leave her when she's drunk too much. Don't let her dance naked on a table top either. Nor do the school run topless. And don't ever, ever let her drive when tipsy. No police officer will understand that she needs her car with her at all times just to make sure it doesn't leave her for a younger owner.
12. **BE THE WIND BENEATH HER BINGO WINGS**. Women suffer from facial prejudice; we get judged on our looks in a way that men don't. No wonder ageing to women is like kryptonite to Superman. But don't let her go under the knife. A woman should never pick her nose – especially from a catalogue. Remind her that she wouldn't want a bloke who only wants her because she's silicone from tonsils to toenails. He should read between her lines – her facial lines, that is.
13. **LOCKED LIPS**. Be her confidante and keep her secrets forever.
14. **LLL**. Love, Loyalty and Laughter: this is the sisterhood creed. Stick to each other like a nylon dress in a heatwave.
15. **THE SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL**. If you aren't lucky enough to have biological sisters, don't forget you do have the Sisterhood – a network of fun and fabulous girlfriends. But a sisterhood of sisters? There's nothing more powerful. So go right now and thank your dear mum for giving you the best gift imaginable.

PART ONE

Sisterhood Rule

Love, loyalty and sisterly solidarity.
Be a human Wonderbra – uplifting, supportive and making her look bigger and better.

ONE

'Mum's missing.'

My blood ran cold, like some heroine in a Dracula movie. It was the first time I'd heard my sister's voice in five years.

'I should have guessed it was you. The sky went dark and all the neighbourhood pets are running around in circles.'

Since Verity's betrayal I had become fucktose intolerant – the condition of being completely unable to tolerate other people's fuckwittery. Especially my twin sister's. It was the phrase I now lived by, and not just because it was needlepointed onto my throw pillows.

'I wouldn't have rung if it wasn't an emergency.' My sister's voice rose half an octave, losing much of its polished intonation in the process. 'Mum didn't turn up for dinner last night. I've rung the neighbours. Nobody's seen her for a week.'

My heart flopped like a hooked fish. 'Did you call Melissa?'

'Of course I did, Isabella,' Verity rebuked, her voice brittle. 'Mum cancelled rehearsals at the last minute and Mel had to get a replacement in for the Birmingham gig.'

The deadening weight of anxiety settled on my guts. Our workaholic mother cancelled a concert? And without

consulting her manager? Unheard of. I'd once seen her conducting Mahler's Fifth Symphony with her leg in plaster. A single mum at twenty, Nicole raised us alone, against all the odds. ('What do you call someone who uses the rhythm method?… Mother!' was her quip de jour.) As kids, we got used to trailing her from one concert hall to the next: an endless architectural itinerary of huge, sooty, cocoa-coloured Victorian mausoleums or brutalist, futuristic buildings, first in Australia and then all around Great Britain and Europe.

We were often babysat backstage by tipsy bassoonists or left to sleep in the orchestra pit. Too busy to cook, Mum only ever served leftovers. The original meal has never been found. She was always about ten years behind with the ironing too. By the time she got around to pressing our clothes, we'd grown out of them. Mum used to say that behind every successful career woman was a laundry of dirty washing and crinkled school uniforms.

'Actually, Mum didn't turn up for our book club this week either,' I blurted. 'I tried calling but no answer. I just presumed rehearsals ran late. You know what a perfectionist she is. Plus it usually takes her a few days to get back, so I wasn't worried.'

'I just wanted to check that you hadn't heard from her before heading over there,' Verity interrupted crisply, poised to hang up.

'I'll go. I'm closer.'

'Maybe geographically… but not in any other way.'

My stomach bungee-jumped. 'That's crap, Verity! Mum and I are incredibly close.'

'It broke her heart, you know. Giving up a music scholarship to join a rock band.'

My guts clenched even tighter. When I told my mother I was forfeiting my scholarship to music college and moving out to live with a drummer, she was appalled. 'You're giving up your degree for an illiterate yobbo?'

'Mum, Johnny graduated from the University of Life.'

'Yes, with no grades.'

Turned out she was right.

The tree limbs outside the window of my tiny, pocket handkerchief Kilburn garden were necklaced with freshly spun spiderwebs. I felt as trapped as the small insect I could see struggling there.

'And you think what you did didn't break her heart, Verity?' I retaliated.

I thought back to the baroque, grotesque drama of it. Mum and I were hollowed out by the magnitude of my sister's betrayal. I'd produced industrial amounts of tears and snot. I cried so uncontrollably I was almost declared a protected wetland habitat.

'It may have escaped your notice, Isabella, but our mother conducts operas. She understands grand passion.'

If my eyes could have shot out fatal rays like the ones in comic books they would have zapped right through the phone and incinerated her on the spot.

It was hard to believe that Verity and I had come out of the same mother, and at the same time. Even before Verity's unforgivable treachery, we were the classic odd couple. Verity, a serious, intellectual child, went on to a successful career as a musicologist lecturer at King's College and a renowned critic with an internationally bestselling book on style to her name. The woman's so pernickety, she'd put paper down under a rocking horse. I, on the other hand,

am your classic shambolic bohemian. Verity always says that my clothes don't look bought – but donated; as though I walked through a charity shop covered in superglue. While I regularly eat tuna straight from the can like a cat, she has an olive oil sommelier. She Instagrams about work–life balance, gut microbiome, ice baths and hot yoga workouts. These days my idea of burning calories is when my toast catches fire.

'Isabella?'

If I had to endure her voice a moment longer, I feared I would self-destruct in one big, howling implosion. Slamming the handset back into its cradle, I snatched up my car keys and wrenched open the front door.

Even though it was mid-June, London lay damp, cold and grey as a graveyard before me. I'd just prised open the door of my battered old Volkswagen with a butter knife – my car is held together by hope, rust, parking tickets and string – when I remembered that I had a pupil in the music room.

Leaving the car door flapping, I dashed back inside to find the student whose name I could never pronounce wrestling a diminished arpeggio into submission.

'Sorry… Shit. Um, Fear… cray… Far… quoir… Friggin'-Whatever-Your-Unpronounceable-Name-Is, today's lesson's cancelled. No charge, obviously.'

The tall, rangy bloke I'd been teaching for the last year and a half every Saturday morning at 9 a.m., looked up from his guitar fretboard, frowning. His strawberry-blond hair sat atop his head like a cumulus cloud. 'It's Fiachra,' he corrected.

'My mother's missing.' As I articulated the words, fright slammed through me. 'I have to go find her… Which means

seeing my sister… For the first time in five years… Which is why I'm doubly flustered.'

'And why's that now?' my perplexed pupil asked, in a soft Irish burr.

'The woman's a vile, duplicitous, despicable worm,' I elaborated.

The cumulus cloud trembled as he ran his hand through it. 'So, um, don't hold back. Tell me what you really think of your woman.'

'God. Shit. Sorry… You probably think I'm bitter, cynical and twisted – and well, you're abso-bloody-lutely right.'

He laid the guitar across his lap. 'My six sisters are always at each other. I'm sure it's not as bad as you think.' He swept a straggle of buttery hair behind his ears, the strawberry strands like a smudge of jam across his forehead. 'So, what's the craic? Why are you so dark on her?'

Why was I confiding in a nerdy geek with an unproduceable Gaelic name who wore ironed jeans, white trainers and a beige cardigan? I could feel my heartbeat in my throat. I managed to fish out the terrible words from somewhere between my tongue and my toenails. 'Because… she stole my husband.'

TWO

I turned into my mother's Hampstead driveway so fast, the car wheels threw up noisy gravel, before slamming the brakes hard. Verity had commandeered the driveway, of course, her black Mercedes gleaming smugly by the rhododendrons behind my mum's beloved old Citroën. I reversed, cursing, and headed on up the hill, finally managing to squeeze my pockmarked rust-bucket between a huge, hybrid 4 × 4 and an electric car about a half a day's trek from my mother's house.

I jogged back down the road, dug the spare key out of my pocket and speared it into the lock. The front door gave a familiar squeak as it yielded. The warm, comforting scent of Mum greeted me. Kicking off wet shoes, I took in the scratched antique wooden furniture in the hall, the paint-clogged Georgian woodwork and flowery ceiling decorations with their whipped cream plaster confections.

'Mum!?' Bounding up the stairs, two at a time, I steeled myself. What if her body was lying prone on the carpet? But bathroom, spare room, bedroom – all proved reassuringly empty. Her light pink, fluffy slippers, lying askew on the