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Killing Cupid

Written by Louise Voss

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LOUISE VOSS AND
MARK EDWARDS

Killing Cupid

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Prologue

Alex

It was the sound of Kathy's body hitting the concrete that kept me awake at night afterwards. It was like a hard-boiled egg dropped from a great height onto a wooden floor. A muffled thud, something splintering, a crack. And then the great silence that followed.

From my position up on the fire escape, I couldn't see her. The moon had slipped behind a cloud. I peered down at the black shapes, thought I saw something dart over the back wall – a cat, a small fox? – and that fleeing creature woke me from my stunned state and made me move. There was only one thing to do.

Panic.

The metal steps were slippery from the rain that had fallen that afternoon, and as I walked backwards down the fire escape I slipped and banged my knee, scraping skin, hissing a curse that seemed to echo around me. With tears in my eyes I stood upright and looked out across London, at the jumble of shapes silhouetted on the horizon. The city looked different now. More dangerous. Another secret – mine, my latest – crawled through the city and joined the

millions that hid in London's nooks and basements and hearts.

Back inside Kathy's flat, I tried to gather my thoughts and work out what needed to be done. Had I left fingerprints? What had I touched? I'd come in from the pub, stood by the window, taken the beer that my temporary friend had handed me, chilled and cracked open, a wisp rising from its neck.

There was the bottle, standing on the table by the window. I picked it up and took it with me, tucking it into my jacket pocket. Had I touched anything else? Had I? My thoughts were drowned out by the rush of fear. I had to get out. Using my sleeve to cover my fingers, I opened the door of the flat and peered up and down the stairwell, leaving the light off. Surely the neighbours would hear my heart? I heard a noise through the wall and froze. Then, trying and failing to make myself weightless, I completed my journey down the stairs, out into the night.

I stopped by the gate. Her body was just around the corner. If I took a few steps to the right, I might see it. I . . . shit, how did I know it was actually 'a body'? She might have survived the fall. It was possible. She could be merely paralysed. Merely. I had to check. Looking around again to make sure no one was coming, I dragged my heavy legs – I felt like I was wearing antique diving boots – to the corner of the house and peered around the corner. I could see her on the floor – a dark shape, motionless, about twelve feet away. There were no sounds, no whimpering, no laboured breathing, sounds that would have told me she was still alive. Though she could be unconscious. I mean, Jesus, if she was still alive, of course she'd be unconscious.

I crept closer, and as I did, the security lights came on,

lighting up the whole world, pointing a blazing finger at me. Here's Alex, everyone. Over here.

I jumped backwards, banging into the wall, stumbling and almost falling. But as I spun away I saw all I needed to see: her head cast at an unnatural angle, neck broken – it was unmistakeable – and her eyes, open, staring. Right at me. My stomach lurched, and I fought it. That would be the worst thing I could do – splattering my dinner and DNA all over the yard. I turned and walked, head down, eyes half-closed, thinking if I can't see anyone else they won't see me, and made my way out onto the pavement and along the street. I forced myself not to run, though I was desperate to, wanting more than anything else to flee, to sprint, to put as much distance as possible between me and that dead woman. But I could imagine some curtain-twitcher glimpsing this man running from the scene; a man that police wanted to help them with their enquiries. So I made myself walk, calmly; just a bloke on his way home from the pub. I walked all the way home.

When I got there, I shut my bedroom door behind me and tried to work out if I'd made any mistakes. And most importantly, I thought about how Siobhan would feel when she found out. Because that was what mattered to me most.

Siobhan. My love. The woman I'd die for.

The woman I'd kill for.

PART ONE

1

Siobhan

Wednesday 10.30 pm

I've got to take out my contact lenses, they're sticking. I hate those moments between taking out my lenses and finding my glasses – I feel so myopic and helpless. I gave myself a real fright last night: I'd removed my lenses in the bathroom then realised my specs were beside the laptop in the living room. When I went out into the hall to get them, a figure loomed up at me. I jumped out of my skin and nearly screamed – before I realised I'd been scared by my own blurry reflection in the hall mirror.

'Come on, Siobhan,' I said under my breath. 'Sort yourself out.'

Talking to myself again . . . But I guess I'm still not used to living alone. I get jittery at night, when the walls make strange sounds, or voices float in from outside. Or when Biggles suddenly thumps down on the duvet, mewing, as if he's somehow fallen off the ceiling. It's pathetic, I know, to be so afraid of nothing. The product of an overly fertile imagination and too many TV crime reconstructions, I fear. And

that's no excuse for my astounding ability to mislay my possessions, which is the other thing currently bugging me.

It was bad enough when I left my keys in the front door for hours the other week – Mum's speciality: ringing me up nearly in tears, wailing that she's torn the house apart and can't find them anywhere, until I ask her if she's checked the door. So for me to then go and do it too – oh help, I'm turning into my mother.

Found my glasses. They were in my coat pocket.

Anyway, the writing class . . . I didn't think it would be so scary. I mean, I've done readings and things before, but somehow having responsibility for your own students is much more terrifying, even if it is just an evening class at the local college. I wonder what they thought of me? I tried to project an air of authority and confidence, even though my fingernails were carving curves into my palms.

'OK, I think it would be a good idea if we all introduced ourselves,' I said, feeling sorry for them already. I know it's necessary, but it's always so excruciating. Somebody once described it as the Creeping Death. You sit there and wait, trying to mentally rehearse what to say, as your turn creeps closer . . . At least as the teacher, I could go first.

I was about to begin, but I caught the eye of one of the two guys present. He was slouching right at the back, like a schoolboy, two rows behind everyone else. It made me want to laugh, the way he was half-grinning at me, sort of smug and 'Hey, look at me, aren't I a rebel?'

What a prat, I thought, and made him come forward to join the group. He skulked a bit nearer, giving me what he obviously thought was a smouldering look, but which actually just looked as if he was swallowing a belch. Although when I studied him more closely, I saw he wasn't bad looking.

I gave them my carefully prepared spiel, trying to make it sound spontaneous:

'Hi, I'm Siobhan, this is the first creative writing class I've taught, so please be gentle.' They all laughed softly, which helped me relax into it a bit more. 'I live locally; I'm thirty-five . . .'

'Any children?' asked an elderly woman at the front.

'No kids, no husband, just a cat,' I said, too willing to offer information. As if they cared about the cat! I'm amazed I didn't volunteer to tell them about my chosen method of contraception and that I hate anchovies . . .

I couldn't resist telling them that I'm a writer – although that is relevant, so I didn't feel bad about it. Told them I'd had a novel published a few years ago. I suppose I was hoping at least one of them might have heard of me, but they all looked blank, so I ploughed on:

'. . . and now I do bits and pieces of freelance journalism, mostly for women's magazines. I play tennis and have a weakness for eighties music . . .

'Oh, this is hard!' I simpered out loud, willing myself to shut up. 'Someone else go now?' Before I start telling you about that nasty yeast infection I had last month, or the flying ants nesting behind my kitchen units . . .

The others took their turns. There was Barbara, a retired dentist's assistant; Jane, a city worker in an expensive suit; Mary, a middle-aged woman with two grown-up sons; Kathy, who told us straight away that she was a lesbian, mainly – I guessed – because she thought it would shock the more mainstream women who went before her. She had a glint in her eye that appealed to me – in a non-lesbian way, I hasten to add.

Then came Brian. He kept scratching his head, and colossal flakes of dandruff were frosting the shoulders of

his leather jacket. The poor guy also had a slight stammer and the charming habit of rubbing his nose then wiping his hands on his trousers. He was really giving me the eye, too. Ugh. And he told us he writes fantasy novels. Uugh.

Then it was the Rebel's turn. His name was Alex, and he wasn't exactly forthcoming.

'I work for Bookjungle.com,' he said, 'selling other people's books and wishing I was writing my own. That's it.'

So, only six of them. But it might be fine. Jane was great, really sparky – I bet her writing's good. And the gay one, Kathy, seemed quite interesting. Alex acts like he's allergic to all of the other students, sitting as far away from the rest of them as possible and wrinkling his nose whenever they speak.

No decent men, though. I must say I did have a small fantasy about some gorgeous late-thirties guy with devastatingly sharp prose and a wicked smile, whilst also being sensitive and modest . . . Alas, I fear that both my male students will be purveyors of the 'aren't I wonderful' school of writing. The blokes so often are. Throw in some tepid one-liners – or in Brian's case, six thousand headless Snark warriors – and they think they've got a best-seller on their hands.

Poor scrofulous Brian – he was probably christened 'Poor Brian', bless him. I'm sure he's a sweetheart really, for all the ogling and acne. Not that Alex was much better. Thinks he's the dog's bollocks. He was ogling me too, but in that way men sometimes do when they don't remotely fancy you, they just want you to fancy them.

Anyway, I told them they had to keep journals, and that I wanted them to start by writing up a recent, important conversation. Alex asked if I would look at what they'd written, so I said, 'No, it's private. You can write anything you like. You can even write about me, if you want.'

It was a joke, but Alex jotted something in his notepad, eyebrows raised. He'd better not, the little bastard.

By the time I'd talked them all through the wretched paperwork that the college requires – register, assessment forms, syllabus, etc. – it was nearly time to go. The class ended on a bit of a downer for me, with the question I'd been dreading ever since mentioning I was a writer: Mary asked me when the next book was coming out.

Like some kind of production line. I couldn't bear to explain that I only got a one-book deal, and they never renewed my contract. I know I'm going to have to admit it at some point, when we get to talking about submissions to agents and so on; but for now I just told her it was coming along slowly. 'That difficult second novel . . .' Clichéd, but true.

Thursday

I feel so low this morning. I never realised it before, but the thing I hate most about being on my own is waking up alone. I miss Phil's body in the bed with me. I miss him when I get up in the night for a drink of water, then go back to bed and he's not there to wrap my cold legs around. I loved the solidity of his chest, heavy with sleep, almost burning hot. His skin always felt somehow softer when he was asleep, and his breathing was steady and comforting, in a way that Biggles's fluttery little cat breaths never are.

Later. Went for a soya milk decaf at the High Street Starbucks – I just had the urge for one – and who do I bloody well bump into? Phil, of course. He was just passing the door as I came out.

'I thought you were boycotting Starbucks,' he said.

'I am,' I said, and we both stared at the coffee in my hand. He can still make me feel so inferior. 'I am, on principle. And The Gap. It's my own little anti-capitalist stand. It's just that since I'm detoxing, I'm off dairy, and they don't do soya cappuccinos at the Italian coffee shop.'

Phil just smiled in that rather patronising way of his, and I thought, no wonder I only miss him when he's asleep. He's far too smug when he's awake. Asleep, snug; awake, smug.

To change the subject, I asked him how Lynn was. I guess I must have been desperate to change the subject.

'Fine,' he said. 'We're going away to Portugal next week.'

I had an instant flash of them on a beach with pale sand, Phil rubbing suntan lotion into Lynn's back. Hopefully they'll get so sunburned they won't be able to have sex. Still, sunburn fades, doesn't it? Unlike . . . oh, bugger it, Siobhan, stop. Be strong. Bring back that image of Phil with sunburn. That's it. Now picture yourself slapping it.

2

Alex

My day off. Simon and Natalie were at work, and being in the house on my own with nothing to do made me feel like a polar bear at the zoo. I roamed from room to room, unable to rest or concentrate on anything; spent hours flicking through photos of people I barely know on Facebook, stopping every now and then if an attractive friend of a friend caught my eye. I was so bored that I decided to do a bit of housework, put some washing on.

Checking my jeans pockets before shoving them in the machine, I found a folded-up tenner. A sign from God for me to get off my bored skinny arse and go and do something. Anything. I decided to get on a tube and see where I ended up.

On the way to the station, my thoughts returned to the writing class. I've been thinking about it a lot over the last few days. I'm glad I took the plunge and signed up. The hours at work pass quicker now I have something to look forward to. Okay, they don't exactly skip by, but previously they moved like a wounded soldier dragging himself across a battlefield. Writing this journal makes me feel better too.

Getting my thoughts onto paper – or, more accurately, onto the computer screen; paper is so old-fashioned – stops them festering in my head.

I wonder what my fellow students will write about in their journals? It's not hard to imagine. Brian will be writing his in the guise of a mythical character from one of his fantasy stories: Brian the Bloody Awful, roving the land and bewitching lusty maidens with his magic staff. Kathy will detail her lipstick-lesbian affairs in her journal: blow by blow, or lick by lick, accounts of Sapphic escapades. I'd love to read it. Barbara will stick pictures of her grandchildren in hers, confusing it with a scrapbook, and write long poems about Des Lynam. I can barely remember the names of the other students, so nondescript were they.

Unlike the teacher.

Siobhan. She came into the room with a knowing smile on her face, unhooking her bag from her shoulder and studying her new students in turn. Her hair was cut in that short, boyish style that I like, and she had big, bright eyes, though I couldn't quite work out their colour. They seemed to change as I looked at her – or maybe it was just my opinion about them changing: blue – no, grey – no, green – no, hazel. She said she was 35 – I've always thought I'd like an experienced older woman. She also said she had no husband, and I wondered if she was divorced. She was too attractive not to have been snapped up at some point. There was something in her eyes that betrayed pain, disappointment. But she looked confident, standing there in front of us, as if whatever trials she'd been through had made her stronger. I like that. I like women to be strong. Intelligent. The kind of woman who can put up a fight when she needs to. I couldn't imagine ending up with a wimpy girl. I would have been shitting myself if you asked me to stand up – or

sit on a desk – in front of a group of strangers, but Siobhan clearly took it in her stride.

I'm sure that her eyes lingered on me for an extra beat when she looked around the class. She touched the bridge of her nose, as if she was pushing back a pair of glasses. A part-time contact lens wearer, like me. The gesture made me think she wanted a better look at me, that she was evaluating me. When she spoke and introduced herself, her voice was musical, but quiet. I had to lean forward and concentrate to understand what she was saying. It was night music; a lullaby. I noticed Barbara fiddling with her hearing aid.

When my turn came to speak, my voice trembled with nerves and I only managed to get out one sentence before coming to a halt. I'm sure this didn't make Siobhan think badly of me, though. She's a writer: she's almost certainly into sensitive men. I was sad when the class ended, because it meant I had to say goodbye to her for a week. Still, that week is almost up now. I'll see her again in a few hours.

The tube train got stuck in a tunnel just outside Oxford Circus. The lights flickered and electricity hummed through the carriage. Nobody looked at anyone else; nobody said anything.

There was a crackly, inaudible attempt at an announcement and I could feel myself getting hot, tense. Nobody else seemed to have even noticed that we'd stopped. I had an image of that scene in *The Rats*, passengers traipsing through the tunnels, savaged in the dark by razor-teethed rodents.

The woman opposite gave me a look. She chewed the inside of her cheek for a moment then said, 'You okay?' She was American.

'I'm fine.'

'It's just that you made this noise . . .'

I felt my cheeks heat up.

I put my head down, concentrated on the litter. The train lurched into motion and I got off at the next stop. I waited till the next train came along.

I eventually emerged from Leicester Square station. I needed something to read and immediately thought of the second-hand bookshops on Charing Cross Road. I trawled around the shops, scanning the tables, picking up yellowed paperbacks, sniffing them and putting them back again. I like second-hand bookshops for their cheapness, but there's something revolting about them too. The thought of all those greasy fingers handling the pages, all that dead skin gathering in the folds. Examining one book, I found a squashed spider between the pages. Perhaps someone had used it as a bookmark.

I passed a pleasant couple of hours wandering in and out of shops, until I found myself in a pokey bookshop back near the tube. If I don't find anything here, I decided, I will spend my money on alcohol. Which was when something caught my eye.

It was lying on a table. The title was *Tara Lies Awake*. The author, Siobhan McGowan. My teacher. I tingled. It felt like a sacred moment, and I lifted the book with slow reverence, stroking the hardback cover like it was a holy artefact. Siobhan's book. I flipped open the cover and the scrawled pencil mark told me it was only £2. I would have paid a lot more for it. Without any hesitation, I took it up to the counter and practically threw my money at the old bloke behind the till.

'Hey, your change . . .' he called as I pushed the door open.

Out in the street, my change now safely in my pocket, I looked at the cover. There was a naked woman on it – artfully done, of course. And there, on the inner flap of the dust jacket, was Siobhan herself. She was a few years younger, with a broad smile on her face, but . . . well, I've got the book lying open in front of me now. She doesn't look as good in the photo as she does in real life. It looks a bit posed, fake. When she stood up in front of us in the classroom she seemed real. I mean, of course, she was real, but . . . oh, I don't know what I'm trying to say. I suppose what I mean is that although Siobhan looks good in the picture, she could be any woman. But the woman who stood in front of us in the classroom last week seemed special.

I stopped at the off-licence on the way home and bought a bottle of wine, then shut myself in my room with the book and stayed there all evening.

God, the dreams I had after reading *Tara Lies Awake*. It's so erotic. So . . . sensual. Or is it sensuous? I'll have to look it up. Don't want to say the wrong thing when I discuss it with the author, do I? Whatever, it's damn sexy. And beautifully written. Sexy and beautiful – and surely a book is a reflection of its author? I saw a hint of it last week in the classroom, but only a hint. I expect she has to hide it in front of most people. It can be dangerous being that passionate. You have to keep it in check, wear masks. But I feel like I've learned so much about her from reading the book, and I can't wait for her to show more of herself.

Siobhan's novel is about this woman called Tara who is a virgin until she's 21. She's always been scared of men and relationships, and then she meets this guy called Luke. He's married, and older than her. And they fuck. Christ, do they

fuck. I've been around the world. I've been to Bangkok where girls are supposed to know every trick in the Kama Sutra. But I bet those Thai girls wouldn't have heard of some of the things Tara and Luke get up to in *Tara Lies Awake*. The book is written from Tara's perspective after the affair ended. She's lying in bed, thinking about all the stuff they did, touching herself. She ended the relationship because of his wife, but she still craves him. And on the last page, there's a knock at the door.

And that's how it ends.

Oh Siobhan, you seem so calm, so placid on the surface. But underneath . . . I know what's inside you.

Oh Siobhan.

I want to be inside you.

Imagine how thrilled she'll be when I turn up with her book tonight. No – wait, though, I won't take her book along with me. That's too unsubtle, and one of the others might ask to borrow it and I won't be able to say no. I don't want to let the book out of my clutches. I have uses for it. So what can I do to make Siobhan happy?

Of course. It's obvious . . .

3

Siobhan

Well. That was quite an evening.

I got to college early – I wanted to be the first one there, rather than drifting in with the other students as I did last week. I want to project more authority. I dressed up a bit more this week, too, I'm not sure why. Maybe because I feel a little more confident now I know that they aren't the world's most intimidating bunch. So I put on my high boots and my fishnet tights. Decided against the denim mini-skirt – too slapperish, with the fishnets – but went for my knee length black cord skirt, and a polo neck. It must really be true, what they say about attractiveness being all about confidence. I felt pretty good.

As I walked past the main office area, Betty the receptionist called out to me: 'Ms McGowan? Someone left this for you.'

She reached over the desk and handed me an envelope; wrapped in a pink ribbon, no less. I mean, who puts a ribbon round an envelope? I thanked her, and she gave me a knowing look over the top of her half-moon specs. I didn't want to open it then and there, so I went into the disabled

toilet and locked the door, before ripping open the envelope. I'd thought it would be a card, so I was surprised to pull out a single, typed sheet of A4, in one of those fancy fonts meant to look like handwriting.

I was even more surprised at the heading: 'Bookjungle.com:' it said. 'This reader, Aparkinson, has awarded this product * * * * *.' Five stars. It was a review of *TLA*.

'Sublime, erotic masterpiece,' was the sub-heading. I quickly scanned the page, superlatives jumping out all over the place at me. It was a rave review, so glowing it was almost neon. In fact – and I never thought I'd say this – it was almost too glowing. Pleased as I was, it was embarrassing, too. Like that creep at the gym that time, who kept going on about how sexy my calves were. Nice to have the compliment, but a bit much really.

I couldn't even think who Aparkinson was, until I saw the note at the end:

'Dear Siobhan, I read your book. In case you don't look at Bookjungle,' (As if! All authors look at Bookjungle.) 'I thought you might appreciate my posting. I really loved it. All the very best, see you in class. Alex.'

Alex – the boy rebel. How weird! I wouldn't have put him down for a pink-ribbon gushy kind of guy. But I had wondered if he fancied me.

He might not, though. Perhaps he just genuinely loved the book. It's very sweet of him.

I wasn't quite sure how to react. I mean, what was I supposed to say? Thanks?

I re-read the review more slowly. I can't say I wasn't chuffed – it's been years since anyone posted a review of *TLA*, not since that bastard who proclaimed it, 'Unreadable – the worst book I ever read,' and gave it no stars.

It was, admittedly, lovely to see such a nice one, and to

know it's on the Internet for all to see. I kind of wish he hadn't put his name, though, so the other students, when they eventually – and inevitably – look it up, don't discount it because they know that he knows me.

Can't resist transcribing a few choice quotes:

'The central character, Tara, is incandescent, shining on the page, the kind of person we all dream of meeting in real life but so seldom do; we cannot help but fall for her.'

Aah – sweet!

'The prose is rich and sweet as marzipan, but never cloying, never too much. Instead, we are happy to gorge ourselves on these delicious words, to get drunk on sugar, to be giddy like E-numbered-up children.'

Hmm, that's a bit OTT.

'Sex scenes are notoriously difficult to get right, but McGowan seduces the reader in the same way the handsome Luke seduces the lovely Tara; a verdant eroticism moistens these pages, as sexy as hell, as blissful as heaven.'

Yeah, baby! Love it.

Anyway, I slid the review back into the envelope and put it, plus ribbon (Biggles will enjoy playing with it) back into my bag, and exited the toilet, glad that there wasn't a queue of cross people in wheelchairs waiting outside.

When I got into the classroom, I expected to see Alex, waiting cockily for my reaction, but the room was empty except for Poor Brian. It was funny, because when he clocked my boots and the tights, his eyes opened so wide you'd have thought I was naked.

'H-h-h-hello,' he said, gulping like a cartoon character who's just swallowed a pikestaff.

We chatted for a bit – I asked him a bit about his fantasy book, but I have to admit that it sounded as if he was

talking in a foreign language, with all the place names and weird aliens and so on. I told him that I'd loved *The Blind Assassin*, and that had a sci-fi story within it, but he hadn't even heard of Margaret Atwood!

Then he glanced towards the door, and for a moment I thought he was going to lunge at me; he had this rather worryingly expectant look in his eyes. Or else do a runner. But to my astonishment, he produced a copy of *TLA*! That's doubled my annual sales figures then. I wonder if they've all gone out and bought it? I hope so. But I wasn't sure what he wanted me to do with it – he sort of waved it at me.

'Would you like me to sign it?' I asked, and he blushed gratefully, nodding. I duly inscribed it, and the poor chap looked as if he was about to die with gratitude – but it was a lot more straightforward than Alex's big gesture.

The others all arrived together, just as I was handing back the book to Brian. I smiled briefly at Alex, but didn't make real eye contact with him. I felt a bit . . . flustered, I suppose. Like he somehow had one over on me now – although of course that's silly. I don't know what it was, but as soon as I saw him, I felt uneasy. When I looked at him, skinny and cockier than he seemed last week, the review and the pink ribbon seemed a bit inappropriate. I casually leaned over and pushed it right down to the bottom of my handbag, so it was hidden. I suddenly wanted him to be unsure as to whether or not I'd even received it, and I decided not to mention it at all, unless he asked me outright. Perhaps I'll thank him, next week, without making a big deal out of it.

At the end of the class, I could see Alex beginning to loiter behind the others as they filed out, chatting. Only Kathy was left, so I wandered over to her desk and told

her how much I'd enjoyed the piece she'd read out earlier.

'I'm so glad you liked it!' she said, her face lighting up. She looks really pretty when she smiles, under that harsh jagged haircut. I subtly edged my shoulders round until my back was to Alex, and he wasn't in my line of vision at all – although I was somehow still very aware of him there, lurking.

'Actually,' Kathy said after a minute chatting about the task, 'I was wondering if I could have a word?'

Phew, I thought – a reason to ask Alex to leave. But when I turned back around, he was marching out of the classroom, without a farewell.

I turned back, and Kathy was standing there, beaming – with a copy of *TLA* in her hands! I couldn't believe it, and started to laugh.

'I'll be able to retire on the royalties soon,' I said. 'It's brilliant – you're all buying it! I knew there was a reason I should take up teaching.'

Kathy laughed too, and good-naturedly handed me a biro. 'Loved it,' she said. 'I really couldn't put it down.'

'Thanks,' I said, blushing. Her praise somehow felt more valid than Alex's overblown words and Poor Brian's stammered compliments, and I felt foolish for over-reacting, even in my own head, about Alex's review. At least I hadn't made a fool of myself by mentioning it in any way. And having three of them comment on it definitely diluted the impact.

I wonder if there's any chance that Kathy fancies me too? She certainly seems to glow when she talks to me. But perhaps I'm just being arrogant.

I left the college feeling far more cheerful than of late, all the evening's words of flattery echoing around my head.

Perhaps it wasn't too late to get another book deal after all. I must have some talent, to provoke such a reaction. I'd just forgotten, that's all.

Either that, or I've got three new admirers! Can't be bad, however you look at it.