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Eighty Days White

Written by Vina Jackson

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Eighty Days White

Vina Jackson



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The Girl with the Teardrop Tattoo

Had I known about its meaning, I might not have gone ahead with the tattoo. But by the time I was made aware of its significance, it was too late and I'd already become known to friends and strangers as the girl with the teardrop tattoo.

I had dreamed of getting one for years. Somehow it was one of those things – like getting a job and maybe one day falling in love – that I felt would be an inevitable part of my future. It was simply a matter of waiting for time to pass until the preordained day arrived. I felt more certain about the tattoo than I did about finding a job when I finished university, or even falling in love.

So when Neil finally disappeared and Liana and I found ourselves alone outside the weathered door that nestled inconspicuously amongst a bevy of retail stores, vintage boutiques and cafes, it seemed obvious to me that the time had finally come. On the pavement outside the door stood a simple white sign, which read 'Tattoo Parlour' in large black italics.

I had lingered here before, had even worked up the courage to push the door open a few times, but I had never been inside. I had often dreamed of walking in, flicking

through books of drawings, confidently selecting the one that would suit me best, lying back in the chair and having it done. But I always backed out at the last moment, believing that someone like me, the living, breathing picture of a good girl, would be laughed out of the shop by the pierced and tattooed cool kids that I imagined ran the place.

'Come on then,' Liana said, brushing past me and stepping inside. She had always been the wild one of the two of us, and did not seem to carry even a shadow of the self-doubt that possessed me like a disapproving second skin, no matter how hard I tried to shed it.

The door led to a flight of steep, rough, concrete steps, painted red, now chipped, with a metal handrail up the left-hand side that had the thick heaviness of something that might have been salvaged from a plumbing supplies warehouse. I took hold of the rail gingerly, as though it was the lifeline that might carry me away from the person that I was and towards the person that I wanted to be, and followed Liana up the stairs.

At the top was a studio, its walls painted a deep red and covered in photographs of tattooed limbs, sketches and posters of old heavy-metal and rock bands. I was heartened to see a battered print of Jimmy Page and Robert Plant with guitars in hand. Whoever had decorated the place had taste.

The tattooist ignored us entirely when we entered, until we had been standing in front of him at the front desk for a few minutes. Liana coughed and eventually he introduced himself. His name was Jonah, and he hailed from New Zealand, but had owned the studio in Brighton for fifteen years, or so he told Liana who was attempting to charm him with a stream of chatter.

Jonah was bald and dressed almost entirely in leather, besides a thick metal belt that jangled when he stood up. Both of his arms were covered in tattoos from his knuckles to his shoulders which bulged out from his vest.

'You girls been drinking?' he asked, peering at us with a suspicious eye.

'Oh, God no,' Liana replied. 'Just a glass for courage. We've been planning this for years.'

'You got ID?' he continued.

I could hear the muffled sound of an old-fashioned kettle whistling through a door to the side. It swung open, and another man appeared. He was much younger, probably in his early twenties, and could have been Jonah's son. They had the same mouth. Lips like Mick Jagger's, so full that I couldn't decide whether the feature was handsome or not. Either way, it gave them both the sort of sleazy look that Liana seemed to love and which made me nervous. He leaned against the doorframe and began to roll a smoke, staring at Liana as he ran his tongue along the cigarette paper.

'Come on, Jo,' he said. 'These two look like sensible girls. Don't be a mean bastard. If they've got the money, they get the tat.'

Liana cast him an appreciative smile.

Jonah snorted. 'No ID, no ink. I don't have time to deal with pissed-off parents.

'You know what you want?' he added, barely glancing at our student cards as we handed them over for inspection.

We were both over eighteen, and had been born only a month apart – her on the 21st May and me on the same day in June. A pair of Geminis, on the opposite ends of the

cusp, a fact that Liana's hippyish mother believed was the explanation for our friendship.

'Yes. We're both getting the same.'

Jonah raised his eyebrows as if to suggest that this fact was another obvious sign of our idiocy.

Liana immediately volunteered to go first, winking at me as she slipped behind the curtain that separated the inking equipment from the rest of the studio. Her long skirt swayed around her calves as she moved, flashing her slim ankles. She was so naturally thin that she was closer to bony, and she dressed in loose-fitting, bohemian style, wearing the sort of clothes that Neil said reminded him of his grandmother's curtains, but she moved with the sort of swagger that made her attractive in a way that far outshone the sum of her parts.

Her form was clearly not lost on the cigarette-rolling man, who did not make the slightest effort to hide his appreciation of her backside as she sashayed across the room.

'I'm Nick,' he said, still staring at the space that Liana had just inhabited, as if I didn't exist at all.

'Lily,' I replied, under my breath.

'Pretty name,' he said in a bored voice.

I ignored him.

I hated my name. To me it was further proof of my status as a good little rich girl. Pure, boring and practically virginal. If I had to have an old-fashioned English name, I wished my parents had at least picked one I could shorten into something that sounded off-hand and rakish, like Jo or Jac.

Nick lit his cigarette and blew smoke into the air and I

held my breath, refusing to give him the satisfaction of making me cough.

We didn't speak a single word to each other until Liana was finished, and I hurried behind the curtain as she exited it, keen to get the experience over with in case I changed my mind.

'Let's see it, then,' I heard him say to her as I left the room. She giggled in reply, and I imagined her lifting her skirts far higher than necessary and extending her leg to display her bare skin, and Nick responding with a gentle caress.

'Same for you, then?' Jonah asked without looking at me. He was bent over a tray of metal instruments, preparing a new needle.

'No.'

'No?' He looked up and met my eyes. A hint of a smile played across his thick lips. 'Thought you said the two of you had been planning this for years.'

'I want something different.' I was suddenly sick to the teeth of doing what other people wanted. Even Liana, as much as I loved her.

'You sure about that?' he asked, as I told him what I had in mind. The idea had come to me only moments earlier, as I took a final glance at the posters on the walls before heading through the curtain.

'Positive,' I replied.

'Fine.'

He motioned to the chair alongside him and I climbed up into it. I briefly considered asking him for a painkiller, or anaesthetic, like the kind you get at the dentist. But I guessed that Jonah would sneer at the idea even if he was

able to provide such a thing, and besides, I didn't wish to appear weak, undecided or to miss a single moment of the experience. The tattoo was going to be so small, I reckoned, that it would be no more than a mosquito bite, surely, sharp and annoying.

I was wrong.

I almost screamed when the needle pierced my skin and I gripped the handles of the chair in which I was sitting tightly as the ring of pain radiated outwards, numbing my cheek and then my jaw until even the nerve endings in my fingers buzzed and jerked as if I was a frog on a dissecting table who's been jolted with electricity in front of a snickering classroom. My imagination was already running wild.

I closed my eyes.

Just as the pain was beginning to ebb or, at any rate, I was getting used to it, the second bite of the buzzing needle hit me. I drew a sharp breath as the hidden smells of the parlour assaulted my senses: indistinct chemicals, the dry odour of all the invisible dust suspended in the air, the manly fragrance of Jonah leaning over me, his old leather vest, the stale whiff of ancient cigarette smoke mixing with fresh, and even Liana's bargain perfume, though she was still waiting in the other room, behind the multicoloured curtain, nursing her ankle and her new tattoo and no doubt flirting with Nick.

The muted sound of Jonah's apparatus slowly faded as my mind finally began to process what was happening, segregating the sensation, isolating the pain until it felt as if it was part of another dimension, miles away, nothing to do with me any longer.

'How's it going, darling?' Liana cried out.

I snapped back, returning abruptly to the realm of reality and mumbled, 'OK . . . I think.'

Jonah took a step back and looked down at his work.

'Almost done,' he said. 'Just have to fill it in.'

'Black, please, not blue. I just don't want it to be blue.'

'Yeah, so you said . . .'

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him pick up another needle, and carefully slot it into his instrument. I took a deep breath as once again his heavy hand lowered itself to just below my left eye, an inch or so outside my perimeter of vision.

This time, the pain was not as sharp. Fuzzy, even soothing. Almost pleasant.

I'd always enjoyed visits to both the doctor and the dentist, and this was surprisingly similar. I found the sensation of relaxing in the chair and having an expert loom over me soothing somehow, and I took a strange sort of comfort in the spartan surrounds of the room, the cold shine of the sterilized equipment and the movements of Jonah, so precise and methodical. The touch of his gloved fingers was as gentle as an insect alighting on my cheek.

Besides the initial shock and burn, it wasn't as awful as I had expected. I basked in the glow as Jonah busied himself, his eyes just inches away from mine, every pore in his ruddy cheeks magnified under my close gaze, his features deformed as in a fairground mirror, a cartoon caricature, this stranger who was marking me for ever.

'I'm just going out to pick up some more cigarettes, OK?' Liana shouted out, followed by the sound of parlour's doorbell ringing.

'Won't be long now,' Jonah said, carefully wiping a tissue

around the area he had just marked. Cleaning up. The pungent smell of chemical disinfectant rushed towards my nose as he did so, strong and overpowering.

Now the pain was just a distant memory, a blurry warmth serenading my still slightly drunken senses. But I felt more sober than ever. I'd done it! I had a tattoo.

A wave of apprehension swept across my mind as I thought of what my parents would say. Then again, I knew this was exactly why I'd had it done, why on the spur of the moment I'd proposed to Liana that we both have tattoos there and then as we walked down the North Lanes after an afternoon of celebrating the end of term.

I was fed up of being Lily from the Home Counties, the dutiful daughter, the boring one. I wanted to stand out, to be different. To do something no one would have expected from me for once.

'Here we are,' Jonah said, holding out a small mirror in front of me.

I opened my eyes.

It was perfect.

A minuscule teardrop, falling from my left eye, to which it was still connected by a thin black line.

Dark black against my white skin.

Now I no longer looked like Snow White, which is what both my parents and my relatives had always affectionately called me until I was twelve and had rebelled loudly once and for all against the nickname, and they'd never used it to my face again. I hated Disney movies with a vengeance.

'It's beautiful,' I said, as Jonah dabbed some cream over the area and taped a piece of plastic dressing in place under my eye.

'I hope you still feel the same in twenty years,' he answered.

I gathered my things and walked out of the store.

Liana and Nick were both puffing away, standing on the pavement, looking out dreamily towards the seafront.

'Finished,' I said.

She looked up at me.

'*Fuckin' hell!*' she exploded. 'You got him to tattoo your face!' She squeezed her eyes tight to get a closer look. 'What the fuck have you done, Lily?'

'I changed my mind,' I replied. 'Wanted something different.'

Nick grinned his approval and let out a low whistle.

'I knew you were a dark horse,' he added.

'Jeezussss . . .' Liana hissed. 'I thought we'd agreed we'd have the same.' She put her leg forward and pointed at the small, brightly coloured butterfly she now sported on the side of her ankle, visible but distorted through the clear protective bandage.

I smiled.

Maybe tomorrow I would have my hair cut. Become the new 'me' in earnest. It was already jet black by nature, so at least I wouldn't need to dye it.

'You sure are a crazy gal, you know.'

I haven't always been crazy. In fact, if you asked anyone who knew me before I went to university at Sussex, they might well have described me as dull. Middle-class, professional parents, house with garden and pets, room of my own and all that. It was a happy environment to grow up in, despite the cloistered nature of my existence, and somehow

it wasn't until I actually left home that I began to question things. Small things at first, then bigger ones. And once the seeds of doubt had been sown in my mind, it all just festered.

When I thought of my mother's life – the long-suffering parent who packed in her career to bring me into the world and then filled her time with nappies, school runs and pulling weeds from our walled garden – a part of me shriveled in fear. Was this all that life was about? I had a few boyfriends, gave away my cherry at seventeen to a nice boy who meant nothing to me but happened to be around to do the deed and so I played along. The sex was OK, though not great, but I had no doubts that one day it would become better. All along I was aware something was missing. Something important. I just didn't know what.

You couldn't even say I was a rebel, because I had no cause. My rebellion had been limited to plastering the walls of my room with posters of classic heavy-metal bands and musicians. Somehow, the fierce images of Alice Cooper and Kiss felt inspiring, though I was aware that even my musical rebellion was a couple of decades out of date, and these days my rock heroes had become ageing and respectable. But mostly I just drifted.

I met Liana on my first day at university. We were sitting at the same table in the student cafeteria, both away from home for the first time and getting our bearings and knowing we didn't fit in yet. We were two outsiders, cut from the same cloth, though her hair was mousy brown where mine was black, and she was taller and thinner than me. Where my parents had both trained as doctors, her father was a

patent engineer and her mother had once been an air stewardess.

It wasn't so much the fact that we had the same sort of background that attracted me to her company, but that I saw a wildness in her, a recklessness I aspired to. As if she had broken those unseen chains that were holding us back. We were both studying English Lit and shared several of the same classes, and quickly became inseparable, eventually moving in together a year later into a large flat near Hove that we shared with four others.

Neil was one of them. He was only in his first year and so he came under our wing. We treated him like a younger brother, inoffensive and always present, although Liana once confessed to me that he reminded her of her father, always silently disapproving of her excesses.

It was a Friday afternoon and, together with Liana, Neil and a dozen or so others, our drinking had begun early at the student union bar and quickly moved on to a variety of pubs in town. Liana and I were pacing ourselves – we had a plan to make a whole night of it once we'd lost the others. Neither of us wanted to visit our parents during term time, so, as Liana had put it, we would have the whole weekend to get rid of the hangovers before tutorials and lectures resumed on Monday.

By the time we'd hit the seafront and the Lanes, there were only seven of us left and we wandered in high spirits from bar to bar at a leisurely pace. Liana and I were still relatively sober and amused by the antics of our friends who would be written off in a matter of hours while we still had the whole evening ahead of us.

A few more dropped out after we took a mid-afternoon

pause for fish and chips by the main pier. Further casualties faded from the scene by the time we reached the bar of the Komedia on Gardner Street – Neil was friendly with the staff there and they didn't mind a bunch of rowdy students sitting in a quiet corner and trying to make each round last as long as possible.

Liana was digging around in her ridiculously oversized tote bag in search of money, swearing under her breath as if the act of doing so would conjure new banknotes out of nowhere.

'Damn, damn, damn,' she said. 'I was sure I had some more cash in here somewhere.'

'You always do,' I remarked.

Neil, sitting opposite us, pale and sickly, his tolerance for alcohol still untrained in comparison to ours. His eyes looked glazed and unfocused.

'I don't think I can manage another drink,' he said feebly.

'Spoilsport,' Liana muttered while I just smiled.

'I think I have to go back to the flat,' Neil said, rising hesitantly from his seat, steadying himself with a hand on the table where our empty glasses lay like a deserted landscape after a battle.

Liana now ignored him and looked around.

'Where are the other two?' she asked. 'What's their names? Wally and Dasha?' She'd only just noticed that the science students who'd tagged along with us earlier had now left our midst, and we were the only three left standing. And three was becoming two as Neil prepared to throw in the towel.

'Finally. Just you and me, honey.' Liana winked at me as Neil's silhouette retreated through the door that led onto

Gardner Street. 'We're still in good shape and the night is still young, my darling Lily.'

'Actually, I don't think I can manage a whole night out, even if we could afford it,' I said, watching Liana rummaging through her bag again. The day's activities and the glass of lager that I'd been sipping had begun to take their toll.

A beam lit her face as she extracted two fifty-pound notes.

'I knew it was there. I was sure. My rainy-day money!'

She handed one of the notes to me. 'Pay me back whenever,' she said. 'It's not really my money and, besides, I'm sure I owe you for last time.'

'Fifties!' I exclaimed. 'Since when do you have that sort of cash?'

'Dad sent it to me mid-term. He's obviously feeling guilty about something.'

'Well, don't brandish it around like that.'

'We should put it to a good cause. If not boozing, then at least something worthwhile. What do you think?'

'Haven't got a clue,' I answered. 'Pity Neil left. I'm sure he'd come up with some idea.'

'Oh, yes, I'm sure he would,' Liana said, smiling at me broadly.

'What do you mean?' I asked her.

'Don't act innocent . . . Like you hadn't noticed the way he stares at you all the time?'

I had. But I hadn't given it much thought until now. Neil was nice, decent-looking but . . . unexciting.

'He's just not my type.'

'What is your type? Come on,' Liana quizzed me. 'You'll be single all your life at this rate.'

All those now-distant faces from the bedroom posters came rushing back to me. Men with dark make-up, men in black leather and metal studs, wild men. I had left the heavy-metal posters back home and would have attracted ridicule at the flat had I decorated my room here with them all. I opted for discretion. Noting my closed expression, Lily didn't pursue the subject.

'Damn,' she said, brushing her hair back from her forehead. 'It's hot in here. Even I'm falling asleep. Wanna go for a walk? We're bound to stumble across something to do sooner or later.'

'Suits me,' I agreed.

Night was falling and there was a nip in the air. Most of the jewellery and antique shops in the Lanes were beginning to close and the crowds were thinning.

We were walking aimlessly along, the stark realisation that there was still a whole evening and night ahead dawning on us and we still had nothing to do when we slowed down across from the tattoo parlour.

'Hey!' I said.

'What?'

'Remember how we used to talk about getting matching tattoos?'

It had been shortly after we'd met, and we'd been much drunker than today on that occasion, almost a year ago now, and still high on the exhilaration of being away from home and family and the knowledge we'd found we had so much in common. I only vaguely remembered the conversation but, all of a sudden, the idea appealed to me immensely. There was a touch of the perverse about it; it was just

the sort of thing good girls would never do in a month of Sundays.

'Perfect. Let's do it,' Liana said. 'Do you think we've got enough?' She indicated the crumpled note she had stuck into her skirt pocket.

I had no idea what a tattoo cost.

'Well, they'll only be small,' I shrugged, and stepped towards the shop door.

'Oh, Lily, this is going to be so exciting,' Liana giggled.

And now, we'd actually done it.

'So, ladies, what are you two up to next?'

'Another celebratory drink, I suppose?' Liana replied, in good spirits although I knew her ankle must still be burning if the aching on the left side of my face was anything to go by.

'I hate to be the voice of reason,' Nick said, leaning forward and brushing a lock of hair back from Liana's face as though he'd known her for ages. I was beginning to feel like the odd one out, the third wheel all over again, and was tempted to leave the two of them to it and go home to nurse both my jealousy and my new tattoo alone. I worried about Liana though, and what sort of fix she might get herself into next, so I knew that I would be stuck with Nick for as long as Liana let him hang around. 'But it's a bad idea to go out drinking when you've just had an inking,' he continued. 'You need to get it home and wash it. Didn't you listen to the aftercare instructions?'

'Course we did,' Liana replied, taking another drag on her cigarette. 'We're not idiots. But surely one little tipple

won't hurt? It's Friday night and we're practically stone-cold sober.'

I remained silent, though I felt like I might well up with tears. I'd been a fool to think that a tattoo would change anything. Different face, but still the same girl with the same life.

'I live just around the corner. I'm done for the day now and Jonah's shutting up shop. You could both come home with me and I'll pour you a glass of something nice. Get some warm water on those tattoos. Make you a coffee. Call you a cab when you need to show your faces to Mummy and Daddy. I don't envy you that,' he added, eyeing the now permanent tear below my eye.

'We don't live at home,' I said abruptly.

'Well then, you are both welcome to stay all night, just to be on the safe side. Wouldn't want you to risk getting an infection in your eye, after all.'

He was laughing at the obviousness of his own pick-up lines, and I resisted an urge to hit him, though I had to admit that the guy was a looker, especially when he smiled and his full lips pulled open to display a row of even white teeth. He was attractive in a dishevelled, uncaring sort of way, the sort of person who would scoff at Neil's daily and seemingly futile trips to the gym, but who still managed to maintain a lean body and bulge in his biceps without any effort at all. He looked as though he hadn't brushed his hair for a week.

'Come on then.' Liana held out an arm to each of us, and we linked together and walked the few streets to Nick's flat on King's Road.

I stood outside the off-licence on the corner and stared at

the sea lapping against the pier as the two of them bought wine and yet more cigarettes. My phone buzzed in my bag.

Are you OK? Want me to come get You?

Neil had managed to sober up enough to check on us and even offer to pick us up and walk us home. He'd probably been fretting since he got in. He was sweet but smothering, just like my parents.

We're fine. Staying with friend. Don't wait up, I replied, in case we didn't end up going home at all and Neil freaked out and called the police.

My tattoo still throbbed, and I had a sudden urge to run down to the pier and throw myself off the side, letting the icy-cold water soothe the sting along with the strange funk that had settled over me and permeated my existence, as if one dunk in the sea could wash away all of my eighteen years to date and leave me refreshed and renewed, like a baptism. I had a sudden premonition that tonight would be the first night of the rest of my life.

Little did I know how true that would prove to be.

'You all right, honey?' Liana's voice interrupted my daydreaming. 'Don't look so sad. I'm sure your parents will get over it. You don't see them very often, so it's not like they're going to have to look at you every day.'

She burst into peals of laughter and took me by the hand, pulling me along behind Nick around the corner and up to the door of his flat.

'Christ,' Liana said when we got inside, walking around the bright expanse of his living room with its large bay window and far-reaching view over the seafront. 'Not such a struggling artist, after all, eh?'

'You can thank my parents for this place. You two aren't the only middle-class rebels in town, believe it or not.'

I warmed to him more after that. His mother was a QC, he told us, and his father a banker. He'd dropped out of his law degree and begun training as an apprentice tattooist with his uncle, Jonah, as a way to get out from under the weight of his parents' expectations.

Liana made herself right at home immediately, nestling into his couch and resting her tattooed ankle on top of an ottoman. I perched uncomfortably alongside her.

Nick handed us each a glass of wine and returned shortly after with a bowl of warm water and a clean cloth. He pulled up a chair in front of Liana and lifted up her skirt, exposing the length of her calf, her bare knee and half of her thigh, although he only needed to gain access to her ankle, which was already uncovered.

I took a gulp of my wine. It was cheap and red and tasted pretty nasty, but I needed the distraction. Anything to ease the discomfort of witnessing Liana and her new man fondling each other.

He ran the pads of his fingers around her ankle bone, circumnavigating each bump as if it were a mini universe until he knocked the protective film that covered her tattoo and she gasped.

'Careful there, buddy,' she said, through gritted teeth.

Her response only seemed to heighten his desire. A flush had spread over his cheeks and though it didn't seem possible for his mouth to become any fuller, his lower lip hung very slightly open as if he'd already begun kissing her, at least in his imagination.

I glanced down at his trousers and immediately turned

away, startled by the size of the obvious bulge at his crotch. Nick seemed to be turned on by Liana's discomfort and I was torn. We should have made a run for it, right then, and I knew that I was the responsible one of the two of us and that, as headstrong as Liana was, she would have come with me if I'd got up and left. She was reckless, but loyal to a fault.

But it didn't seem like my business who Liana flirted with. She wasn't drunk and clearly liked the guy.

'Do you girls smoke?' he asked.

I could tell that he wasn't talking about cigarettes by the way that he rolled the 'o' in his mouth.

Liana grinned at him. 'Why not? More fun than taking an aspirin.'

Nick gave her leg one last stroke and then stood up and rummaged in a nearby cabinet.

'Just enough left for the three of us, I reckon,' he said, tossing a small foil packet and a square of cigarette papers over to Liana. 'You know how to roll?'

She nodded, and carefully dog-eared the sides of the foil open, exposing the flakes of dry green bud within. The smell was sweet, cloying and unmistakable. I had never actually smoked pot before, but I'd often caught a whiff of it on campus.

'Another first time, my sweet, innocent Lily?' she said to me, taking a liberal pinch of green in her fingers and sprinkling it over the paper. I nodded. 'Don't worry, I'll show you how it's done.'

'No need to be smug about it,' I answered. The wine was beginning to go to my head and I was feeling feistier than usual. Liana just laughed.

She lit the smoke and took a long drag, then gestured frantically for me to bring my face closer to hers.

'Not as harsh if you take it from me,' she mouthed, still holding the smoke in. She took hold of my shoulders gently and leaned forward, resting her lips against mine. I realised that she was blowing the smoke into my mouth rather than snogging me just in time to catch her exhalation.

'Hold it,' she gasped, quickly catching a breath as our mouths parted. Her lips were impossibly soft and tasted like wine, and I was surprised to find myself disappointed when she pulled away.

'Ooh, I like that,' said Nick, who had gone in search of more booze and returned just in time to watch our exchange. 'My turn.'

He took the joint from Liana between his thumb and forefinger and sucked the end liberally, then bent down and clasped her chin, raising her face to his. His hand strayed down to her exposed throat and for a moment I panicked and prepared to lunge forward and push his arm away. Her neck seemed so alarmingly fragile clutched in his palm.

But instead of an expression of fright or fear, I watched in shock as she arched her back and lifted her mouth eagerly to meet his. He squeezed her neck tighter, holding her in place firmly as the smoke passed from his mouth to hers. He released her abruptly and as she sank back into the sofa, a look of blissful calm spread across her face.

The image of his hand around her neck and the way that she had responded to it replayed again and again in my mind and I bizarrely began to giggle.

'I think I need the bathroom,' I whispered, when I finally found my voice.