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Opening Extract from...

Never Google Heartbreak

Written by Emma Garcia

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Never Google Heartbreak

EMMA GARCIA

HODDER

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For my trio of Leos with love and gratitude.

‘Look, there’s a patch of blue sky over there.’
Maureen Tucker

‘*Illegitimi non carborundum*.’
‘Don’t let the bastards grind you down.’
John Tucker

PROLOGUE: PART I

Rob Waters proposed to me three months after I slept with him. I thought it was one of those whirlwind romances you read about in magazines at the hairdresser's. Five years and two postponed weddings later, I've accepted it's more of a slow burner.

In two months' time, however, we will finally, actually be saying, 'I do.' This time everything's booked: the Blue Room at Burnby Castle near his parents', the reportage photographer and the Rolls-Royce. Rob has been very hands-on, which is great; it was his decision to go with the strawberry brandy snap baskets.

We're keeping it informal. He'll be in a navy blue Hugo Boss suit and pale pink shirt, the same pink as the bouquet roses. My dress is very simply cut with just the right amount of Chantilly lace. I sold the last two meringues on eBay.

We still have to pick out our wedding bands. They'll be platinum to match the engagement ring. It's funny but since he gave me this rock I've never taken it off, not even when he wanted to postpone the wedding the first time (he's scared of churches) or the second (he felt funny about being thirty-five). I suppose I just love Rob Waters. I love him and not for all the obvious reasons like the fact he's incredibly easy on the eye and absolutely loaded. I love the neat way he's put together, his pouty lips and blond curls. I love the way he walks and how he sleeps curled up. I love the way he wrinkles his nose and sniffs when he's concentrating. I've grown to love how he calls me 'Bunny'. I don't even mind

when he screams, 'Who's a filthy little bunny?' when we make love. I just say, 'I am.'

He'll be back from the gym soon so I'm making salmon with wild rice and chicory salad for supper, his favourite. I move around the kitchen and find I'm humming to myself. I'm certainly a very lucky girl to live in this fabulous apartment right in the centre of London, the greatest city in the world. I'm young(ish), in love and about to be married. I have everything I ever wanted.

The door slams. He's back early. I go to the top of the stairs. He looks up, ringing bells in my soul with his handsomeness.

'Hi.' I smile. 'Supper's nearly ready.'

'Hey, Viv,' he says, and I know by his voice something is wrong. I go into the living room and wait. He must have had a bad day at work. He steps into the room and just stands there and the look in his blue eyes chills my blood. It's a look I've seen before, twice before. His eyes search my face as he slowly, sadly, shakes his head.

'Oh no,' I whisper, and sink onto the Graham and Green sofa.

'I can't do it, Viv,' he says, and I feel my heart snap like stepped-on ice.

PROLOGUE: PART II

Nevergoogleheartbreak.com – Self-help for Lovers

Rob Waters and I are 'on a break', taking time apart to discover what we want. Well, so he can discover he's lost without me.

Moving out was my decision, a cruel-to-be-kind thing, like cutting back a lovely but straggly rosebush. You only do it to let something more beautiful bloom, and something beautiful will bloom for us when he realises what he's lost and comes to get me back.

So yeah, no, just to be clear . . . We haven't split up; we're on a break – it's different.

Obviously I was devastated when he cancelled our wedding . . . again (he doesn't feel fully grown, spiritually speaking) and I didn't want to leave, but I couldn't stay, waiting like a spider with my wedding-dress web, could I?

I went upstairs that very evening and quietly started to pack. He asked me not to go, but this time something between us felt broken. I just left the dress and the veil hanging on the wardrobe door.

Now I have my own place, a little rented flat in north London. It's fine. It's what you'd call bijou. I was relieved when they finally got the sofa in (by taking the legs off and shoving for an hour). It's funny, that sofa looked tiny at Rob's.

Every day I wake up and remind myself he'll be swinging by any minute, telling me he's made a terrible mistake, he does want to marry me and it's all back on.

Anyway, since I left, he hasn't really been in touch (except to text me to ask if I knew where his hockey pads were) and I've developed a strange fascination. I'm finding myself researching heartbroken people. I'm obsessed with them. I've been collecting the details of other people's break-ups and Googling words like 'heartbreak', 'spinster' and 'dumped', to see what's out there. I haven't been dumped, obviously, but I'm just interested. I can tell you there's a whole lot of misery online. I've also begun to collect self-help books. I spend whole evenings in bookshops browsing through the personal growth section. There are many strategies you can use to help yourself. If only those broken-hearted people online knew!

Then I started thinking about putting all this together on a website. I'm thinking it'll be something hopeful and upbeat, funny even, like an online magazine about relationships. The kind of place where self-help meets heartache, if that makes any sense. I'm thinking there'll be case studies, top tips, an agony aunt forum – even a dating page. I know someone at work who might build it for me.

Yes, so that's what I've mostly been thinking about these past few weeks since I left Rob. It's kind of a project to throw myself into so I don't spend every spare moment pining for him.

I do spend every spare moment pining for him, though. I wonder what he's doing all the time, every second. But I'm not broken-hearted – as I said, we're just on a break. And that's what I think to myself every night as I take his T-shirt from under my pillow, hold it to my face and breathe in the last musky traces of his smell.

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Case Studies

'*That morning I remember he was very keen to have sex. Afterwards I went to work as normal. At about half nine he sent a text: "I'm moving out." That's all it said. When I got home, he'd gone. It was the secrecy that really got me, how he'd arranged everything behind my back.*

He took all the cutlery. After two years of living together, he left me without so much as a spoon to stir my tea.'

Debbie, 28, Glamorgan

It's Monday evening at Posh Lucy's, Battersea. We've been scouring the internet for more break-up stories for the website.

'There was a girl I used to work with,' I say.

'Hmm?' replies Lucy, without looking up.

'And she caught her fiancé in bed with their eighteen-year-old neighbour.'

'Nasty.'

'She used to go round to his place after that and hang about outside. Like, every night.'

'Why?'

'So she could see him.'

'Isn't that stalking?'

'And she left little anonymous notes . . . loads of them, Sellotaped to his door.'

'Poor, sad woman.'

'That must take dedication. Imagine that – every night.' I consider going to Rob's and doing something similar, but he

lives on a very busy street and I know all the neighbours because I lived there myself for five years.

I pick up the phone just to check a text hasn't come in.

'Ring him,' says Lucy.

'I can't ring him. As I've already explained to you, I'm waiting for him to ring me.'

'So you were about to marry him and now you can't even talk to him?'

'I can't ring him after I moved out, can I? What would I say? "Hi there. Have you missed me yet? Shall I come back? Want to get married?"'

'What if he doesn't ring you?'

'He will. It's about time now. He's had the first week for it to sink in, the second week to enjoy his freedom, go to the gym, watch the rugby and all that, and another week to realise he's lost without me. He'll be calling anytime now. It's text-book stuff.' I glare at her. Making her accept this theory is extremely important.

'Okay.' Lucy shrugs and drains her glass. I finished mine ten minutes ago. I suddenly wish I had a cigarette; it's been quite an intense evening with all these dumped stories. It makes me so glad I haven't been dumped.

Lucy collects up the glasses. 'Want another?' She walks with perfect posture to the kitchen. I consider the gleaming surfaces and unblemished white carpet of Lucy's flat. I read somewhere that the state of a woman's house is linked to her state of mind. If that's true, then Lucy must be mentally extremely healthy. Lucy's always been sorted, though. At university she interior-designed her dorm room. She had a colour scheme, a new colour television, taffeta curtains and scented candles. In my room next door I had a new washbag and thought myself swish. I nearly died when she knocked and introduced herself, with her perfect

accent and her 'Fancy a G and T?' I was amazed at how nothing ever fazed her. I called her 'Posh Lucy' and she started introducing herself like that at the Freshers' Ball, as though it were some sort of title: 'Hi, I'm Posh Lucy and this is my little friend Vivienne.'

Anyway, she's done well for herself and she deserves it. She works very hard, so she says. I think of my own place. I haven't actually finished unpacking yet, but I know, even when I have, it's going to be depressing. You know why? Because it's a *single girl's* flat. Nothing against single girls, mind; it's just that I'm not one of them. I might have moved out, but I'm still a fiancée. I'm 'in a relationship'. I rub the skin of my wedding ring finger. It feels naked without the engagement ring.

God, I feel miserable.

A whole month without Rob. I mean, I know we're on a break, but I didn't realise it would be like this. This is a complete cut-off . . . like death.

I put my feet up on the coffee table next to a neatly stacked pile of glossy magazines. My eye falls on the cover girl with her hair blowing back and her caramel lips. 'Women who have it all,' it says across her chest. I flick through to the article. The woman with it all has high heels and an expensive-looking hairdo; there she is in her office, holding up a pen with authority. Next she's lounging with a tray of croissants in satin pyjamas, and she probably hasn't eaten a croissant since the early eighties. There she is crouching on her private beach cuddling three gorgeous kids (although, hold on, is one of them cross-eyed?).

She really actually has it all. Beautiful home, CEO of a blue-chip company, happily married and she still finds time to bake. She's not the kind who sits around waiting for ex-fiancés to call. I start to fill in the little quiz at the bottom.

Are You a 'Have It All' Girl?

Age: Thirty-two – and, as we know, age, like dress size, is just a number.

Relationship: On a break.

How would you describe your relationship on a scale of one to five, five being totally perfect? N/A.

How would you describe your career on a scale of one to five, five being completely fulfilling? Also N/A – what I do for a living isn't really my 'career'.

How would you rate your friendships with the key people in your life? Hmm, key people . . . Lucy and Max, I suppose. My oldest friends. I tick 'good', then change it to 'excellent' in case Lucy sees it.

What you have to do is add up your scores and find the description to fit yourself. The upshot of mine is that I should work out my priorities and set 'life goals'. Of course! Life goals are what I need.

Well, obviously I don't define myself according to whether I'm in a relationship or not, but I have to be honest here and say it's Rob: getting married to Rob, having Rob's children . . . but I suppose I should have 'Get a career' as a life goal too. I'm not a total loser and I've always thought it would be good to become a buyer for Barnes and Worth, the department store chain where I work, before going off on maternity leave.

I'm a product manager in ladies' gifting, and as such I spend my daylight hours putting together 'gift options' so people can buy conveniently for their maiden aunts and mother-in-laws.

Summer rain bubble bath with body lotion set (you get a free toiletries bag covered with raindrops), pop-up brollies, nailcare sets, massage mitts, soft leather gloves, quilted make-up bags, animal-shaped key rings with built-in torches,

seasonal headgear, grow-your-own herb kits, mini luxury jam-taster collections. You know the sort of thing.

I glance at the silent phone. It's Rob's birthday this month. Should I call and wish him happy birthday? When do you stop remembering your boyfriend's birthday? I must research this; it's exactly the kind of thing the website should tell you.

Last year I organised a surprise trip to Rome for his birthday. It was very romantic, except he said to not do a surprise trip again because he felt 'hoodwinked'. But I mustn't reminisce about the good times – gritty reality is what I need. Get things into perspective. I pick up one of Lucy's broadsheets.

'Leading doctor says women putting off motherhood are risking infertility.'

I examine the picture of a woman in a suit sadly holding some knitted booties up to her face, with the caption 'Fertility falls off a cliff in mid-thirties.' Oh, now I feel very bad. I stare at the booties woman who's left it too late. She looks like me. Why do they print stuff like this? Why, when women aged thirty-something might be reading? What are we meant to do – run out into the street, find any man who can stand up unaided and get up the duff before the pretty fertility balloon floats away, pulling up its ladder for ever? I throw the newspaper on the floor.

Anyway, I'm not mid-thirties yet. I have years before the cliff thing happens and by then I'll be back with Rob.

Lucy returns with champagne – real champagne, mind, not sparkling wine. She can afford it: she has some big swanky job in a big swanky office in Berkeley Square. It's funny, really – I know the details of her sex life but not so much about how she earns a living. She once sat me down to explain. It was, 'Stocks, shares, market, bull, bear, risk-assessment trading, blah.' She's quite important, I think. I slurp up the winking bubbles.

'I was thinking,' I say, 'we could have a kind of dating page on the site where people are reviewed by their exes – you know, like on Amazon where books get reviewed? You can see what other people think before you buy. It might be fun.'

'Except all your exes think you're devil spawn.'

'Not all . . . do they?'

'You turned Ginger Rog gay, remember?'

'You can't turn someone gay, Lucy. It's not like a cult.'

'That guy from the RAC, then. The one you slept with after he fixed your Mini. He said you ruined his life.'

I stare at her. 'You know, you should be an agony aunt with that knack for straight talking.'

'Hmm, yeah . . . "Ask Lucy". I like it,' she says dreamily.

I pick up the phone and turn it off and on again in case there's a fault.

'Why don't you just call Rob? I don't know what you're scared of.'

'I'm not scared of anything.'

'Just do it, then. Put yourself, and me, out of your misery.'

'Okay, I will.' What I really do not want to do is call Rob. I haven't spoken to him since I moved out. I'm sure the rules of 'on a break' state that I'm the one who left and so he should be the one to ring. I mean, you can't leave someone and then be ringing them up morning, noon and night. Lucy is glaring. Maybe I could just pretend to call him . . .

'And don't do that pretend phone conversation thing where you just say, "Uh-huh," a lot,' she says.

I scroll down to his number and press 'call'. I show her the terrifying display – 'Dialling Rob' – and put the phone to my ear, staring her straight in the eye. Scared indeed – ha! It rings. My heart's jumping like a gerbil in a box.

'Rob Waters speaking.'

I hang up and throw the phone like it's hot.

'Nice one,' says Lucy.

The phone rings. We both look over to where it landed. I scrabble to get it.

'It's him,' I say.

'No shit,' she says, making her eyes unattractively wide.

I jab the button.

'Vivienne Summers speaking.'

'Hi, it's Rob . . . Did you just call?' The sound of his lovely voice makes me ache.

'No, I don't think so,' I say airily.

'Your number came up.'

'All right, all right . . . I did call, but it was a mistake.'

'Oh. So. How are you, Viv? Are you okay?'

'Fine. Very, um, healthy and busy, you know . . . How are you?'

'Great.' There's a pause and I hear plates being cleared.

'Are you eating?' I say.

'Are you going on Saturday?' he says at the same time.

'Saturday? Saturday, er . . .' Yes, good! Pretend not to know it's Jane and Hugo's wedding. Pretend not to care that this Saturday was one of the dates we'd considered for our big day.

'Hugo's wedding?' he says.

'Oh yeah. I'll be there.'

'Me too. Should be a good do.' He's pretending not to care either, but I can tell by his voice he's looking forward to seeing me. We'll be in the same room. I'll make sure I look completely gorgeous. I think seeing me is what he's needed; he'll beg me to take him back. A month apart will have been nothing. We'll sit by a crackling fire and laugh about it one day.

'Actually, I was going to call you about Saturday,' he says.

'Really?' He's going to ask me to go with him. I'll say no, of course; I don't want to seem keen.

'Yeah, I just wanted to let you know I'll be with someone . . . erm, a guest.'

I feel something snag in my throat. 'A guest? Oh. Who?' I say in a strangely high voice.

'A friend of mine.'

'A girl . . . friend?'

'Yeah.' The apology in his voice stabs me through the heart.

It takes a second for me to breathe again.

'What kind of girlfriend?'

'What do you mean, what kind?'

'Is she a friend who's a girl, or is she your girlfriend, like, you know . . . a girl who's sleeping with you?' Lucy is making cutting movements at her throat with her hand. I turn away.

'Uh . . . what does it matter?'

'Well, I don't know, does *she* matter? Where did you meet her? *When* did you meet her? Jesus, Rob, I've only been gone a month!'

'Look, Viv, don't get upset—'

'Upset? Who's upset? Not me!'

'I can't really talk now. I just wanted to let you know I'll be there with someone.'

'Me too. I'm bringing someone – not a girlfriend, obviously. No, no. So . . . I'm glad you mentioned it. I was just about to say, you know, to be prepared. Don't know how you'll feel, seeing me with someone else . . .'

'Good. Well, that's great, then – see you Saturday.'

'See you then!' I must hang up before he does. I jab 'end call'.

'Bye, Viv,' I hear him say as I collapse.