

Based on a shocking true story...

THE **SEX**
TOURIST

*Exclusive
Preview*



OLIVIA WILD

THE SEX TOURIST
EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

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Author's Note

What follows is a work of fiction inspired by true events. The resemblance of some characters to real life persons is intentional. Other similarities are by coincidence only. The names of all characters in this book are either made up or changed in order to protect identities.

Foreword

This book is in memory of my beloved sororal twin, Lilian. The last time I saw her alive she talked about her ambition to become a writer one day. That way, she would have escaped her death-trap: prostitution. I inherited both her handwritten diary and, on her laptop, her very first book in the making. Time and time again I read and re-read many parts of these writings and often asked in vain, “Lily, why didn’t you tell me about this?” I still feel strongly that I could have saved her, if only I knew...

Whether outlawed or legalized, the vast majority of prostituted girls, and to a certain extent the dancers in strip clubs, are abused. This form of abuse shall prevail as long as there is fear of poverty or evil pimps. Irrespective of the causes of their entrapment, these girls are indiscriminately stigmatized by most people. This is unfair. To most of her “customers” Lilian meant nothing more than a juicy steak in a restaurant, either well done or medium rare depending on the customer’s taste, which they could order, consume, pay for, and excrete the following day.

Anne Brontë’s most famous novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, gave my sister the first inspiration to become a writer. Lilian started writing her book about three months before she died. She wanted it to be a testimony about her journey through drugs and prostitution, and an inspiration to other *working girls*.

Book One, with the exception of the Prologue and the very last chapter, is Lilian’s work. It’s based on her own diary. I changed the Hungarian currency references to euros (Hungary’s currency is the forint, but tourists sometimes pay in euros anyway), but otherwise kept the editorial modifications to a bare minimum.

I spent a long time debating whether or not to cut the explicit and sometimes disturbing sex scenes. Did she mean to publish all those? Eventually, in order to reflect better the true nature of her *business*, I decided not to leave out anything, so Book One doesn’t make easy reading for the faint-hearted. I think some parts of it, like the chapter *Wuthering Heights*, are tributes to her talent.

Book Two is my own writing. I tried to follow Lilian’s style, and chronologically it starts where hers comes to an abrupt end.

The settings are: Hungary, Switzerland, England, the USA, and South Africa. Our namesake was the inventor of the ballpoint pen. It is less known that *biro* means *judge* in Hungarian. I sincerely hope that one day there would be a chance of proper justice for girls who suffered similar fates as Lilian.

Vivian Biro

Prologue

Budapest, Hungary, April 2015

“Sorry, I don’t talk to unknown callers.” I always tell this to a new punter when his phone number is withheld. It is a tiny bit of protection against a stranger, whom I can’t even look at. My sister says anybody can get a SIM card with a new number stating a false name and address these days, so this isn’t much protection, but it’s better than nothing.

“Just give me a sec...” His voice sounds reassuring. He rings off, but in a few seconds my phone lights up again. This time I can see his number on the screen. “Hi again. I saw your profile on the website, and was wondering if I could come around – could be there in half an hour.” His speech is a bit slurred. How many times has he made this kind of call before?

“No problem. I’m available now.”

“What’s your hourly rate?”

“Fifty. That’s in euros. Anything extra costs more.” I don’t tell him I have high hopes that he comes within ten minutes and disappears soon after that.

“Smashing,” he says. “How do I find you?”

“I’ll text you my address. Call me when you are at the gate, so I can tell you the entry code,” I say and ring off.

He’s my second punter this week. Four days have gone by, but I’m still getting nauseous whenever I think about the first one. Not that he was anything out of the ordinary. It’s more to do with me. After a long time, I’m a working girl again. I got my room back on Tuesday.

Three of us are renting this apartment. The other two girls, Jasmine and Laura, live here, but I only use it for work. Each of us has our own bedroom. Mine is en-suite and this is where I am applying the lubricant right now. Jasmine and Laura share the main bathroom.

The punter arrives promptly after half an hour. At the gate he calls. I tell him the code, and ask him to come up to the second floor. In the hall he takes off his shoes and hands me the cash. It occurs to me that I still owe this week’s rent. He is a middle-aged, average guy. They look the same to me, like cabbages. A pungent odor of sweat and booze makes washing compulsory for him.

“Would you mind having a shower first?” I ask.

“Not at all,” he says, and starts undressing as I usher him into the bathroom.

A little later both of us are lying naked on the bed. I’m on my back. He’s on top of me and has been screwing me for the last few minutes. His breathing is getting heavier. Like a good actor, I don’t have to concentrate too much on my role. I’m adjusting to his movements, and after every thrust of his I issue a lustful groaning sound, as it makes him more excited. The more excited he gets, the sooner he comes, the less I have to suffer. He paid for one round only. After his shower, the only bad smell I have to put up with is the stench of liquor coming from his mouth. Right now not even that, as he’s nuzzling my neck and folding me in his arms. I’m watching the ceiling. A teardrop is rolling slowly down from my left eye on my temple to be soaked up by my hair. He convulses and roars as he comes and squeezes me hard. I squeeze him back, though not so hard, longing for the shower. At least there’s a condom.

“Thanks, gorgeous, I really needed this tonight,” he says, almost apologetically, in a hoarse voice.

“Any time, honey, just give me a call if you need it again. Another shower?”

“No need for that, gorgeous.” He’s all sweaty again, but that’s not my problem anymore.

I put on my bathrobe while he’s getting dressed. After a goodbye kiss, he’s gone. These quick ones are preferable, so I store his number with the nickname *Fast Punter2*. Under the shower I’m trying to convince myself that I only rented out my body – my soul should be intact. But why can’t I stop crying? Why can’t I control my erupting emotions? Under a gush of water, I’m trying to scrub away the past half an hour. It takes another half an hour to calm my nerves before I dry myself.

Wrapped in a towel, my hair covering my face, I come out of the bathroom and sit on the bed. When I smooth away my curls, to my shock and surprise, I find my sister staring at me with her big brown eyes. Mum used to say we had the same eyes. She is sitting on the bed too. Legs crossed, like a yogi. This is the first time she’s come to see me at work, but what surprises me the most is her hairstyle. She must’ve spent a long time at the hairdressers to change her straight brown hair into something which looks like my auburn curls. My phone starts flashing and making noises on the bed, so I only have time to gesture *bold on* with my hand.

“Are you up for anal tonight, love?” says a husky voice which I’ve never heard before. I wonder how easy it would be for him to ask this question face to face.

"It depends on the size."

"So what's the maximum size you accept?" There is a slight mockery in his tone. Why do so many of them get a kick out of asking questions like this?

"Well, definitely smaller than a Coke bottle," I say, and I might sound a bit irritated, but it's likely that this caller is wasting my time.

Grooves appear on my sister's forehead. She must've guessed what this conversation is about. It's difficult to talk like this.

"Sorry, no deal then, love," he says and hangs up. I look at my phone, exasperated, as if it should take a share of responsibility in subjecting me to such calls. My housemates and I have a name for these callers. They're the bored little squirrels.

"You shouldn't allow people to destroy your bum," admonishes my big sister. The age difference between us is only about three and a half minutes, but she has always been the one with more authority.

"It's not like that. You know, most of the time punters get so excited, they don't even realize which hole they enter from behind."

But of course she is right. If it happens, the pain could be excruciating, so I have "No" for this option in my profile.

My phone is buzzing again. I don't recognize the number.

"What can I do for you?" I try to sound welcoming.

"Leila," he says. That's my alias on the sex advertising website. "I saw your profile. Could you help me and my mate out tonight around 1 a.m. please?"

"So there are two of you. Where do you guys want to be *helped out*?"

"At my place..." He mentions the name of a suburb, Gyál, in the outskirts of Budapest and I don't like the sound of it.

"Okay, please listen. This is how it works. I happen to know that neighborhood pretty well. My driver is going to drop me in front of your house. When I arrive, I'm going to text you. You and your friend come out, and pay cash in hand to him. You and I go into your house together. My driver and your friend are going to wait in the car. Then you swap with your friend. Is this acceptable?"

The line goes dead.

"Who's your driver?" asks my twin, raising her brows.

"Jasmine's boyfriend. He gets his cut."

I want to keep to myself my latest visit to a punter two days ago. The marks on my wrist, caused by his violent grip, have all but disappeared. It could've been much worse if Dave didn't intervene in time. I still owe him twenty euros for the driving. My sister lets out a deep sigh. Her resentment is palpable. The glowing light in the corner, the cupboard with a floor-to-ceiling mirror door and the king-size bed as the only pieces of furniture, the maroon counterpane with matching drapes, the red carpet flooring, and the subtle scent of burning incense...the purpose of this room is too obvious.

My phone is buzzing again. It's my ex-madam this time. Her call should mean good money. My twin has chosen the wrong time for her first visit to this place. Sometimes hours go by without a single call.

"I know this is short notice, but are you available now?" Despite the background noise, I recognize Liz's voice. "Two members of a stag party are asking for escorts. They already ordered their cab to take them back to their hotel at midnight. Can you make it down to the club in half an hour?"

"You want me to handle both of them?" I'm a bit surprised. This is not normal practice. Liz would ask me to go straight to the hotel. I've never been to that strip club before.

"No, I'm calling someone else too," says Liz.

It's a ten-minute walk to the club so I can make it if I get dressed quickly. Before that I have to discuss urgent family stuff, but I can't miss this one.

"What's in it for me?" I pretend to examine the crimson nail polish on my big toe. This is not the time to play who-will-blink-first with my twin.

"It's the usual deal. These guys look loaded. Can you make it?" I can sense the pressure in Liz's tone. She still has to call another girl, and if I say no she's ready to make more calls.

The usual deal for outcalls is a hundred euros an hour. Liz pockets half of it. If the punter pays for any extra, Liz gets half of that as a kickback. If he is a good catch, she would get a lot more, but I find that unfair so I just wouldn't tell her.

"Where did they come from?"

"England, of course."

"I'll be there." I ring off and dash for the en-suite. My sister follows me like a shadow.

"I need to talk to you now," she says. "It can't wait. It's about Mum. Tomorrow morning I'm seeing the surgeon who carried out the procedure last night. He's expecting money and I'm broke."

"This latest call might help. Come with me. You might be able to negotiate a better price for some extras." I

propose this while I hurriedly put on my gear, and try to do my makeup in record time: eyeliner, mascara, a little blush on my pale face, and harlot-red lipstick.

“You know how I feel about you doing this. Now you want me to act like your madam again? I’m your sister for goodness sake.” She sounds more agitated than normal. I see her frown in the bathroom mirror.

“We’ve been through this before. I can’t think of anything better. Without this money we can’t pay the doctor tomorrow. Mum would get crap treatment again and they might even throw her out of the hospital. Let’s go,” I say as I put on my stilettos. The next minute we’re out of the apartment.

“There has to be another way.” Her eerie voice echoes in the desolate staircase. The elevator is broken, so we walk down the stairs.

We’ve had this conversation before. It has almost become a ritual, so I carry on with it.

“Well, the pocket money from Dad doesn’t even cover the groceries, does it?”

“No, and my minuscule college scholarship can’t even pay for the utility bills. It’s been tough since Mum has fallen ill again,” she admits.

“You see, that’s exactly why I can’t quit now.” This is of course just part of the truth. The other reason must be buried deep in my subconscious. I wouldn’t dare to go there. Now that I’ve started again, it’s going to be difficult to give up hooking any time soon. I’m twenty-two now, and I want out of this long before I get my degree next year.

“I’ve never even been in a strip club before.” A hint of concern is in her tone.

“You don’t have to come in. All I’m asking you to do is to chat to my punter either on the street or in the cab. You can gauge him better and make me feel safer. Make sure you tell him the usual details.”

Outside there is a steady flow of cars on Nagymező Street. A group of revelers cross the road randomly, causing the brakes of a cab to squeak and its driver to bellow some swearwords. The yellowish bright streetlights deceitfully suggest that it isn’t too late at night. We pass a group of inebriated, cackling people, who have just left a typical Budapest ruin pub. They must be from Britain. One of them is yelling: “Let’s go to the tee-tee bar.” Another one responds in a similar fashion: “I want to feel the boobies.” Massive blocks of four or five story apartments tower above the road on both sides. I wonder how people can sleep there, if they attempt at all...

“Where do you want me to wait?” My sister’s voice is faltering.

“I’ll leave you with the bouncer outside. I’m going to be in and out in five minutes. The cab might be waiting already.”

I’ve asked her a few times before to help with some phone calls from English speaking punters if she happened to be around. Otherwise I managed to keep her out of all my stripping and hooking business. Today she showed up in my room for the first time ever and I don’t want her to be exposed to the inside of a strip club as well.

“What do you want me to find out?” I hear her anxious voice from behind. I want to calm her nerves.

“The more the better. These stag doers come in all shape and form. Half a dozen bottles of beer mixed with who knows what could turn them into animals. So I need to know what I’m getting myself into in his hotel room. Wait here.”

I smile at the sturdy bouncer in front of the strip club. He gives me a friendly smile back. My sister is going to be safe with him for the next few minutes, even if he doesn’t seem to notice her. I totter through the door. The music is loud and the place is crowded, but I instantly recognize Liz: I saw several photos of her on Facebook. She is a short, slender, dark-haired woman in her mid-thirties. She looks at me hesitantly.

“Leila, is that you?” Liz wouldn’t use my real name in public.

“Do I look so different?”

“I haven’t seen you for ages and you’ve changed a bit,” she shouts in my ear.

“It’s a long story,” I shout back.

“I couldn’t get anyone for the other guy. Do you think you can go with both of them for double pay?” She sounds agitated. We’re right next to one of the speakers.

“Okay, but I hope they don’t want a threesome.” The music is so loud that I don’t think Liz hears my last words. She quickly hands me over a hundred euros which I sink in my purse.

The topless girl at the pole in the middle is Jasmine. I’m renting my room from her. She’s a beautiful curvy brunette. Her new breasts look phenomenal, but I would never allow anyone to implant anything in me. She makes an inverted move. Some spectators are applauding. I’m proud I introduced her to pole dancing a couple of years ago.

As we get to the stag party table, two of the guys get up. One of them is appraising me with an unmistakable look in his eyes. He is a bulky guy in his mid-to-late thirties. The other one is lean and looks about ten years younger. He’s gaping like a fish, giving me a penetrating, bewildered stare. I don’t understand why. Someone must be tweaking the volume. The music isn’t that loud anymore.

“This is Leila.” I hear Liz saying.

“Hello, love, I’m Mark, and this is my cousin, Paul,” says the bulky guy, and this is followed by a “fuck” as he

drops something on the floor.

The next second he's on all fours under the table and I see him pocketing a small glittering gold ring. I wonder why so many of these guys are trying to hide their wedding rings. At the table, the groom-to-be is wearing pink bunny ears and looks totally wasted. He's chatting to a hostess girl I don't know. She pretends to listen with a blank smile on her face. My older punter gets up, and I give a quick kiss on the cheek to both of them. We head for the exit. A cab is waiting outside.

"I've got the cash for the doctor." I murmur this under my nose in Hungarian to my twin, so she can relax.

I am the slender riding bitch between the two punters in the back of the cab. My sister is the riding shotgun in the front, and I let her do all the talking.

I read and write a lot in English – next year I was supposed to get my degree at university and become a qualified high school English teacher – but sometimes I still feel embarrassed about my Hungarian accent. On the other hand my twin speaks fluently with a British accent. She spent five years in England with Dad and his new family. I've been staying with Mum here in Budapest. My dad wanted me to join them in England for a few years, but I couldn't bear the thought of leaving my mother on her own. After chatting to the punters, my big sister gives me a quick summary in Hungarian.

"They want to do it one after the other. They're sharing a room. I explained that together is a no-no anyway and also told them that anything more than one basic round within an hour costs extra," she says, all in one breath.

We stop in front of the hotel and the older punter hands over some cash to the cabby.

"Be careful, and get back as soon as you can." I hear my sister's voice as she calls after me when the three of us get out of the cab.

We leave the younger punter in the hotel's tiny bar for the time being. The bulky guy and I head for the lifts.

"You're so fit, love, I can't believe my luck." He leers at me in the elevator. He looks like he's got a perpetual blush on his face and he keeps snuffling. These are two sure signs, which explain the protrusion in his jeans. Viagra in any form is bad news for me. I give him a lopsided smile, and think about his marriage. Sometimes it is down to girls like me to hold these marriages together. We enter the room and he doesn't waste much time. He doesn't even want to take a shower. I slip out of my dress, unclip my bra and my suspenders, and roll down my lace-top stockings. Lastly, I get rid of my G-string. Stark naked, I take a foil packet out of my purse, and rip it apart with my teeth.

"Do you want to put this on, or do you want me to do it?" I ask, showing him the rubber.

"You do it, love. After that can we try the doggy-style?"

"Of course," I say as I slide on the condom, smirking at him. It only takes a few seconds for me, but he is already groping my breasts. "I just have to nip to the bathroom for a second, if you don't mind."

"Go for it, sweetheart," he says, and his lecherous eyes are on me as I walk across the room. I take my bag, close the bathroom door behind me and quickly do the lube. His erection is not that big, so it wouldn't hurt that much, but this way there'll be no pain at all. I'm out in less than a minute. As soon as I'm on all fours on the bed, he rams himself inside me like a reindeer. I moan the usual way.

"May I spank you a few times, love? I won't be too heavy handed."

At least he asks me this question. Others wouldn't.

"That's an extra fifty," I improvise between my groans.

"Fine, sweetheart," he says and smacks my bum straight away. In fact, he is a bit heavy handed, and my cheeks are on fire in no time, but I utter a whining sound after every spank of his, which turns him on more and more. He comes at last, and when he does, he grabs my breasts from behind, and I shriek, faking climax. The doggy-style has the advantage of not having to smell the bitter stench of booze on his breath.

"That was the best shag I had for many years," he mutters and rolls to my left side on the bed. We lie next to each other for a few seconds.

"We can't let your cousin wait for too long, honey," I say, swallowing back my tears. He gets up immediately, and pulls the rubber off his wilting cock. He gets dressed quickly, and hands me a fifty euro note.

"Thanks love, that was really special. Would it be too much to ask for a blowjob after Paul's turn?"

"Not at all, but it would cost you another fifty."

He hands it to me straight away.

"I'm really looking forward to it. I haven't had one for years." His eyes are fixed on my breasts. "I'll send Paul up right now. I'm sure the lad cannot wait."

When he leaves, I go straight to the bathroom for a brief shower and wrap myself in a clean white towel. As I get out, the younger punter enters the room.

"Leila – is that your real name?" His eyes pierce through me like darts, and there is no trace of the usual lecherous look in them. I roll my eyes at him. His inquisitive gaze annoys me. He makes it difficult to play my role. Why is the punter staring at me like this? Why can't he, like his cousin, just fuck me without asking trivial questions?

“Of course it’s not,” I say.

“I knew a girl with the same alias. Her real name was Lilian. Lilian Biro,” he says, and I recoil like I’ve been dealt a massive sledgehammer blow. I feel giddy. Somehow I manage to stagger to the bed before my body crumples. There’s no time to open the floodgates. A dam bursts in my mind as Vivian makes a sudden appearance. I’m flabbergasted.

“But...but...but...I...am...Lilian—” I hear my own pathetic mumble.

“No, you’re not. She died...About six months ago.” His tone is doleful, and he’s stating this as a matter of fact. I quiver, and tears start oozing down my face. He kneels in front of me. “You look a bit like her, especially your eyes and your hair. When you walked into the strip club, for a few seconds I thought I was seeing a ghost. The scent of the very same perfume on you in the cab was driving me...Who *are* you?” He’s holding my hands now, but they don’t stop shaking.

“I’m Vivian...her twin...” These are the only intelligible words I’m able to utter. He keeps holding my hands. “You must be Paul Taylor,” I say eventually, after a few deep breaths.

Through my tears I can see his expression changing. His eyes are sparkling with excitement now.

“So you know about me. Lilian talked to me about you too, but I always thought that you weren’t a...” He hesitates.

“...a hooker?” I ask. “I’m not. Well, I wasn’t until about five days ago. It’s complicated.”

“We have a lot to talk about, but this is not the right place or time. I’ll call a cab for you now. Our plane leaves tomorrow afternoon,” he says, glancing at his watch. It’s half past one already. “Actually, it leaves today. Could we meet in the morning?”

My sobs are subsiding.

“I have to go to hospital in the morning, but will be done by eleven.”

“Can you be at the Gerbeaud coffee shop at half past eleven? I’ll buy you a coffee.”

“I don’t drink coffee, but I’ll be there,” I say, and suddenly remember the here and now. “I promised a blowjob to your cousin, and he gave me fifty euros already.” I can’t do it anymore. Not in this state; not ever. I don’t even care about the money. He can have it back.

“Don’t bother about that, I’ll pay him back. Please put your clothes on.” He turns his head away from me, walks to the room phone and asks reception to call a cab.

I go to the bathroom, wash off all my smeared makeup and get dressed. We’re in the lobby within ten minutes. The jaw of his red-faced cousin drops open as he sees me going.

“Something came up and Leila has to leave.” I hear Paul saying as he hands over a fifty euro note to his cousin, who is furrowing his brows.

I wave goodbye to both of them and dive into the waiting cab outside. I have to get home, clamber into bed, and think. I’ve been through so much today, but in the cab I sigh with relief. Now I know who Paul Taylor is. Lily didn’t tell me, but I’ve been desperately trying to find him ever since I read her book and her diary. My futile attempts to track him down on social media, among the thousands of other Paul Taylors, led nowhere. If only Lily had written his proper email address anywhere, it would have saved me all the frustration.

By the time I get home, I’ve made up my mind. Paul doesn’t know it, but he’s planted a new seed of hope in me. I have to stop punishing myself for not preventing Lily’s death. Hooking would be the last thing she would want me to do. She, herself, was desperate to quit. I fumble my phone out of my bag and text Jasmine:

“Jas, thanks so much for letting me use Lily’s room this week. I’ve left the rent money and another twenty euros for Dave on the bed. Something came up, and I have to quit. I’ll get my stuff out tomorrow afternoon. Viv xxx”

This has been my first and last week as a hooker. I’m going to wipe Leila’s profile off the website permanently and change back my SIM card first thing in the morning. In the bathroom I take a look at myself in the mirror and tears start rolling slowly down my face again. In the past six months I’ve been acting like a robot, executing self-assigned tasks one after the other. I’ve kept telling myself: “Don’t go there,” whenever my mind wandered dangerously close to the point of no return and looked down into the abyss of grief. At last the time has come. I can start mourning my sister.

“I love you, Lily. Goodbye,” I say to my mirror image. Tears flood my eyes and blur my vision. I let my sobs run their course and turn off the light.

Book One

Lilian

1 – Sweet Little (Almost) Sixteens

Budapest, February 2009

A big crowd gathers in Wigwam, a popular rock concert hall in Budapest. My favorite rock band, Dragonflies, is on stage already. They're about to start. Vivian's name lights up on my phone.

"I tried to call you twice, why don't you pick up?"

"I can hardly hear a thing." I'm pressing the phone to one ear while sticking my index finger into the other.

"Guess what, Lily. It's a done deed. I'm coming home on Friday; for good. From Monday we're going to the same school."

"So what's happening to your exams you're supposed to take in June?"

"I'm not taking them anymore." Vivian sounds woeful and I want to cheer her up. Just yesterday she sounded even more depressed for missing her favorite band.

"Then you're coming with me to the big concert on Saturday. You don't have to miss Wizards of Wires, Viv!"

"I hated the idea to miss them. They're the coolest band in US history."

"And CL69. Look out for them at the airport. They might take the same flight as you do."

"No chance. It would be too soon for them."

"We're going to have so much fun!"

"And I'm going to get so drunk," says Vivian. "Can you ask Tom to get us a few bottles of wine?"

"I broke up with him last night... Thinking about it, he can still do that much." I'm shouting now, as people begin to cheer around me. "Guess what, I began to fancy Chris, the drummer of Dragonflies. I've to ring off now."

Poor Vivian was offered a full bursary by some posh girls' school in London, but Dad must've cancelled her placement. His haulage firm fired him and he's going to drive a bus in Leeds. His British wife is starting a new nursing job there. The whole family is moving up to the north of England. It sounds like they couldn't think of a way for Vivian to stay behind in London. Her dream about Cambridge is down the drain, but I can't wait to share my bedroom with her again – just like in the good old primary school days.

She's not the only one to be depressed. Tom turned out to be a jerk. I saw through some gimmicks of his to get me to sleep with him. Why couldn't he wait for my birthday?

The band is on stage again, and I don't want to miss any of it. I'm cheering and singing along not far from the front row. Chris, the drummer, winks in my direction, but I can't be sure...

* * *

At the airport I keep checking the arrival boards. Vivian's plane is twenty minutes late. I can't wait. Two other girls saunter close to me. The blonde one keeps folding and unfolding a nametag. They must be at least twenty and I can't help but eavesdrop.

"I wish it was Monday already," says the blonde.

"I'm not sure I want to be here either. Can we run and hide somewhere?" asks the brunette with a sigh, but it's obviously a rhetorical question.

"I guess it's too late to bail out now. How's your English?"

"Not too bad, I think. Definitely good enough to be a tour guide for a stag party. Yours?"

People start trickling through from the gate.

"Mine sucks. There was this guy two weeks ago. He spoke with such an accent. I couldn't get a word," says Blondie.

"I guess that's the least of our problems. Besides, consider yourself lucky. Sometimes it's better to ignore all the disgusting stuff they're saying."

"You'll do all the talking then. Just think about the money."

The gate opens, and a bunch of noisy guys come out. All of them are wearing purple t-shirts with "Eric's Stag Do" printed on their back. They go straight to the girls.

"That's my name on that tag," bellows the bulkiest one. "Are you our hosts?"

"Yes. Helen sent us to..."

Vivian appears at the gate. I push through the throngs of people and we give each other a quick hug.

“Wow, Lily, these guys were making so much noise on the plane,” says Vivian. “Lucky I had my window seat and my iPod.”

“Are you geared up for the concert tomorrow?”

“Of course,” says Vivian. “Did you ask Tom for the wine?”

Vivian sometimes buys from him – he sells it cheap. On her last visit she even smuggled a couple of bottles to England.

“Yes, but he’s an asshole. There was only one thing on his mind in the past two weeks: to go all the way. I refused of course.”

“I didn’t like him from the start. Only his dad’s homemade wine is worth something.”

Vivian is right. These days Tom’s favorite pastime is to wash down Xanax with a couple of glasses of vodka as if they were vitamin C and water. The last time he wanted me to do the same. I was like...Why should I get stoned for this jerk?

“You wouldn’t believe how pissed he got with me. I had enough.”

“Don’t bother. He’s not worth it. As long as we can get seriously boozed up tomorrow, nothing else counts.”

“You bet! Do you still fancy Rob?”

“I have a crush on him,” admits Vivian. “Tell me about Chris.”

While I’m carrying her hand luggage, Vivian is dragging the suitcase we call *gray carcass*.

“I think he noticed me at the concert,” I say. “It’s so funny that we’re falling for guys from the same band.”

Vivian chuckles. “Is it by freak chance, or what? I just hope one day they’ll notice.”

An hour later we arrive at our apartment block in the midst of several similar tall concrete monsters. The lift is working for a change – climbing seven floors with a big suitcase is not our favorite sport – so we think it’s our lucky day. That thought evaporates when we get into the elevator.

“Shit, this’s not my luggage.” Vivian is looking at the bags. “Shit, shit, shit. Our outfits for the concert are all in my suitcase. Who would’ve thought there’s another gray carcass on that carousel?”

This kind of spoils our evening – after all those preparations. Mom’s even taken the day off. I guess Tesco can survive a day with one cashier less. The smell of our favorite dish, roast chicken and mash, would excite us much more if we knew what to wear for Saturday’s concert. Mom’s looking at our long faces and knows already that dark clouds are casting shadows over our tiny family dinner.

We step in the living room, which also serves as the dining room and my mom’s bedroom. From there another door leads to my bedroom – well, our bedroom from tonight. Vivian’s single bed is next to mine already. Mom and I struggled enough this morning to carry it upstairs from the basement. It wouldn’t fit into the elevator. From now three of us are going to share this small apartment again.

I don’t remember my father staying with us here – he was gone just before Vivian and I turned three – but space must’ve been scarce with all of us around. Mom says that didn’t happen too often, as most of the time Dad slept in his truck. Despite their divorce, my folks have been on good terms. Otherwise Vivian couldn’t have spent five years in England.

* * *

When people look at us on the street, it doesn’t even occur to them that we’re sisters, let alone twins. Vivian’s straight brown hair is nothing like my natural auburn curls.

“I want my hair look like yours, Lily,” she says as we step into the hairdresser’s.

She is going to spend a fair portion of her savings here today. We both want highlights – she chooses caramel and I go for orange-y ones. We ask the stylist for some rebellious pitch-black lowlights too. I’m almost ready under the dryer when the stylist begins the elaborated process of curling Vivian’s hair. Sadly, her curls are only going to last for a day or so.

Thanks to *my* curly hair, I’m assigned the errand to swap her suitcase to the one I’m dragging, which belongs to a certain Mr. Eric Smith. After spending several hours on the phone, Mom tracked him down. He’s staying in a hotel in the seventh district. When I get into the lobby, to my surprise, I see Blondie, the girl from the airport, waiting with the gray carcass.

“You both were careless,” she says to me. “At least he has an excuse of being drunk and getting married, but what’s yours?”

“Long story,” is my short reply. I don’t want to explain that it wasn’t me but my sister.

Vivian’s curls are all done when I get back to the hair salon, and we look a bit more like sisters.

“What time will you come home tonight?” asks Mom with the usual concerned and irritating undertone

which we both know so well. She's normally strict when I go out on my own, and quite often we end up quarreling if I'm not back before midnight.

"Three in the morning, I guess," says Vivian. When she's around she tends to be the one negotiating these deals.

"So late? You two are only fifteen, you know."

"We'll be sixteen next month, Mum. We know how to look after ourselves," says Vivian and as far as she is concerned, the case is closed.

We both head for the bedroom to get dressed. First I help Vivian with the nail polish. She chooses light red. I go for the maroon one. The suitcase has got all the missing clothes we need for tonight. I put on my new mini dress and shimmering fishnet tights – Vivian's latest acquisitions from Primark in London. When I catch up with her in the bathroom, she's applying mascara and putting some extra gloss on her lips. It takes more than an hour and a half for us to get out of the bathroom, but we enjoy every second of this preparation.

"Have a good time and look after each other," says Mom and we give her a hug, conscious not to smear our makeup, and head for the night.

In the park at the end of our street we meet Tom, who is holding the two bottles of wine. The small bottle of vodka from the shop is already in my bag. Vivian hands him the cash.

"That's not enough," he says. "The price doubled since we last met."

What a jerk! For that much we could buy wine in the shop. Vivian carries on arguing for a while, but pays up eventually. It's too late to find a store.

"This is the last time I've dealt with that asshole," she fumes.

"Look what I've got." I show Vivian the Xanax pills which Tom gave me last week. "I'll take them with vodka."

"Lilian," starts Vivian and frowns. She only uses my full name if she wants to tell me off for something. She's just a few minutes older than me, but in her eyes I'm her little sister. "You are going to be knocked out proper and wouldn't be able to enjoy the concert."

That's a good point. I'll stick to the vodka for now. The pills can wait.

"You're right." I take a swig of vodka from the bottle. Vivian's furrows smooth out on her forehead.

"I might need some other kind of pills after tonight," she says and takes a swig of wine.

"What pills?" A glance at her, and I know what she's talking about. I quickly rephrase my question. "Do you want to lose it?"

"I'll see how close we can get to those bands after their gigs. Are you in?"

For the first time in my life I feel like she's racing ahead of me on my own turf. I've been proud to be the bad girl in our family. Vivian hasn't been going out with boys yet. She always prepares her homework. Her school reports, whether in England or here, have been outstanding, particularly in sciences. To me homework has never been a priority, and my reports, save for languages and literature, have been average at best. *I've* been the one going out with boys. If she loses it tonight, then I'm going to lose it too.

"I'll follow you anywhere, Viv."

We take several more swigs, until Vivian downs more than half her bottle. Meanwhile I've drunk most of my vodka. I feel so light and the trees in the park seem to become elastic around me. I've to make an effort to avoid bumping into them. I'm wondering why it's so hot when there're still some patches of snow on the grass.

When we get to the hall, the concert is about to start. It takes all our beguiling skills to squeeze ourselves to the front row, and as much as our state allows us, we're thoroughly enjoying the deafeningly loud music. I feel groggy, but luckily the big crowd wouldn't let me fall.

Wizards of Wires are on stage. Vivian is flailing her arms and jumping up and down as we cheer for them. She's forgotten about all her troubles. She knows by heart most of the lyrics and sings along with Jamie, the vocalist, who seems to shoot generous glances towards her once in a while. I keep yelling and cheering too, but want to spare some of my vocal cords for the next gig.

Then the long wait is over for me. It's nothing short of an ecstasy, what I feel during the CL69 performance. I scream at the top of my voice and make eye contact several times with the bass guitarist. He fancies me by the looks of it. When all is finished, Vivian and I don't feel like going home just yet.

"I have an idea." Vivian's voice sounds a bit hoarse. "Follow me."

She leads the way through the dispersing crowd, first to a door next to the exit, then up the stairs onto a corridor which leads to the front again. I come here more often than her, but I wouldn't be able to muster up the courage to do this. Two guys are standing at the backstage entrance.

"I can't let you through, girls," says one of them in an American accent. He's holding an amp.

"I'm WoW's biggest fan. Could I ask them for autographs," says Vivian.

"Sorry, there were dozens of fans here before you, and we turned all of them away. Both bands had a hectic day and they need to relax."

"Could you please tell Jamie that I'm the girl from the front row who sang along with him?" pleads Vivian. I

envy her British accent. English literature is my favorite subject and I'm in the top set at school, but still miles away from speaking the language fluently.

"And who's she?" The guy with an amp points to me.

"She's my sister and the CL69 boys kept winking at her. Pleeese..."

A short chat follows between the two guys and the other one disappears. A few seconds later Jamie himself shows up at the door. His unbuttoned shirt partly reveals his hairless chest. On the stage he looked taller, but he's just about the same height as us. His light brown disheveled hair is covering his left eye. He shakes it away.

"Come in," he says. The amp holder steps aside.

Vivian's plan works. We're mingling with the rock bands. The CL69 bass guitarist recognizes me in an instant and fills some plastic cups with Jack Daniels. His name turns out to be Clarke. We sit on a sofa, and Vivian starts chatting to Jamie about tourist attractions in Budapest. I keep interrupting their chat, as I often get stuck mid-sentence with Clarke.

"This might improve your English," he says as he lights up a cigarette. "Do you wanna try?"

I'm not a smoker and I never light up myself, but occasionally, when it's party-time and I get very drunk, I take a drag or two of someone else's fag.

"Sure." I take the pull and the world starts spinning around me. I haven't felt like this before. "What's this?"

"It's a joint." He laughs. "I guess it's your first time. How old are you?"

"Seventeen," I say, this time without hesitation.

Clarke pours all of us more whiskey and I no longer need to hassle my sister for English. Vivian downs her drink quickly and asks for a refill, but refuses the joint. Other band members are coming to sit with us too, and we keep gabbling for a while. I see two Vivians bending down towards a doubled up Jamie's crotch. I'm supposed to be the bad girl.

Clarke, who sits next to me, unzips his fly and pulls out his dick. Unlike Vivian, I kneel in front of him. As I take it into my mouth, I wonder how to do this right. I'm such an amateur. It's like a Vienna sausage, so maybe I should ask for some mustard and bite into it. Ha-ha-ha. No, that would hurt him, wouldn't it? I start to carefully swirl my tongue around his growing Vienna. It soon morphs into a Pepperoni. I can feel it filling my mouth, and all of a sudden it is more difficult not to bite. Instinctively I sheath my teeth with my lips. His dick is pointing upwards now, so I straighten up on my knees. I suddenly remember seeing a porn movie last year, and I move the skin on his shaft forward and back, my tongue swirling all the time. Compared to the porn his dick is small, which makes me wonder about real life sizes. He groans, grabs my head, and as he comes into my mouth, he is trying to push himself deep. I'm too drunk to taste or feel anything, but I don't want to swallow and need the bathroom. I spit in a sink, which I don't know how I've managed to find, rinse my mouth, and swallow a couple of Xanax pills.

Back on the sofa Vivian has just finished with a second WoW member already, and is teetering to the bathroom too with a tissue paper covering her mouth. The CL69 drummer is the next one for me. His dick is certainly bigger. By the time I get to the fourth, the whole thing becomes routine. The guy who was holding the amp is the last one coming in my mouth.

Vivian shows more resilience, as I'm in a kind of semi-conscious state. She leads me to the bathroom. We spend some time to wash our mouth and wipe off our smeared lip gloss.

Vivian fumbles some mints out of her bag and says, "Dessert time after the main course."

I can't stop giggling as I pop them into my mouth.

Clarke and Jamie are waiting for us when we emerge from the bathroom.

"Come with us to our hotel. It'll be fun," says Clarke. Jamie is holding Vivian's hand already.

"We'd love that," says Vivian as she winks at me.

I'm too drunk to think it over. But if Vivian lets Jamie screw her, I'll let Clarke screw me. He's the hottest of them. Tom has become the jerk of the century. I just can't stop chuckling, imagining how furious he would be if he knew that his Xanax pills are helping strangers.

In half an hour we're getting out of their bus in front of the hotel. Four of them usher us to their room. Vivian asks for a glass of wine and I ask for a shot of whiskey. When I'm halfway through my drink, I'm trying to focus on the English words, to answer a question I don't quite get. I look up and the bass guitarist and three others are the only ones hanging around. What's his name again? Oh, yes. It's Clarke. He says, "I think your sister and Jamie have gone to his bedroom."

"I feel like passing out any moment," I mumble. How can I look for Vivian in my state? "I want to find her."

"Follow me then," he says. "We'll knock on Jamie's door."

We head outside. On the strip lit corridor I let him fondle me to his satisfaction. He tries to kiss me. His breath smells of smoke and booze, so I turn my head away. The drummer and another one follow us. I feel giddy and lean with my back to the wall. Clarke's hand is under my top. I'm too drunk to resist and don't even want to. All my willpower is draining out of me. After a while his hand starts sliding down.

His fingers get into my G-string, but I can't even feel them. He kneels down in front of me, grabs my fishnet tights and G-string on both sides, and pulls them off. I kick off my heels, and step out of my underwear. From a

distance I hear the chortles of the other guys. They must be enjoying the show. Clarke unzips his fly, and slides a condom onto his erect dick. I'm still backing the wall when he separates my thighs and lifts me up. Based on the blowjob before, I think his dick is less than the average size, but it still hurts a bit when he enters me, as it's the first time and I'm very dry. Luckily he comes fast, takes off the rubber, and flutters it to the others triumphantly. He doesn't see the traces of blood on it. They are all cheering. Did I actually get fucked or what? After several unsuccessful attempts I pull on my underwear and step into my high heels.

Vivian and Jamie are emerging from one of the rooms. She must have had a similar experience to mine.

"Let's go home," she says. I collect my bag.

"Girls, why don't you stay for the night?" asks Jamie.

Vivian gives him a "no chance" look and presses the button for the elevator.

Downstairs we stagger into a cab. We're on the road for less than five minutes when I start to feel sick as a dog.

"I'm going to throw up again very soon," I say.

"Me too," says Vivian, and I'm wondering if she should ask the cab driver to stop.

"Are you girls okay?" he asks. Of course we're not okay. He must be scared that we'll puke in his cab.

"We're fine," says Vivian and turns to me. "Can you hold on for a few minutes?"

I just give her a nod. The first lights of dawn are creeping onto the sky when we get home, and I go straight to the bathroom. Mom's still awake.

"I wish you girls had more brains." I hear her saying. "At least I can get some sleep now that you're home."

Budapest, March 2009

Dragonflies are on stage again. Rob and Chris, both nineteen, look really hot. I can't keep my eyes off Chris, and listen in ecstasy to the rhythm of his drumming. Rob's guitar solo is next. Vivian is over the moon. The stage is lit up and thick smoke is billowing down from it. Tears come into my eyes. We can't stop the shrieks and shouts. This is the best show I've ever been to. Before the last and our favorite tune, Chris winks at me and announces to the audience:

"We wish Lilian and Vivian a very happy sixteenth birthday! Girls, please join us here, on the stage."

Rob holds our hands, and we're on both sides of him singing in the mike. The crowd cheers for long even after we leave the stage for the last time. We head for the backstage.

"Birthday girls, do you want some vodka with lemonade? I think it's just the perfect drink to celebrate with," says Rob, dexterously carrying four glasses and placing them on the table.

"That's one of my favorites," says Vivian.

Rob and Chris clink their glasses to ours. Vivian takes a swig, and I follow her lead.

After the third round my head feels light, and I keep staring into Chris's eyes, and while chatting to him I catch myself making silly wide grins. Why can't I stop? Chris takes my hand and gently pulls me and I snuggle close to him. Something carnal churns deep down in the base of my belly, and I have a feeling, tonight is going to be the night.

"Lilian, you are so fit. Can we go to my place after the show?" he whispers lusciously in my ear.

"I have to talk to my sister first." I look around, and see Vivian folded in Rob's arms. I call to her. "Are you coming to the ladies' room?"

"Sure." She plants a kiss on Rob's mouth and we set off.

In the ladies Vivian and I are standing in front of the mirrors. Staring at myself, it feels like I'm looking at someone else. It's like a weird out of body experience. I guess I had too many of those vodka lemonades.

"Chris wants me to go to his place later," I say as I'm trying to wipe off a tiny bit of smeared mascara under my eyebrows. "Do you think it's a good idea?"

"I guess there is always a first time for everything," says Vivian looking at me in the mirror. Her speech is a bit slurred.

"Should I take the plunge?"

"What are you waiting for?"

"I'm not sure. Chris is so sweet. I don't think I can resist him any longer."

"I'll let Rob go all the way tonight. I made up my mind already."

The tissue I'm using stops in my hand, I look at Vivian in the mirror. Her tone is determined.

"Wow, you don't waste much time," I mutter, and another question springs into my mind. "We have to use protection, don't we?"

"I'll make sure that tonight Rob's wearing the rubber. Let's do it," proposes Vivian. I wish I could have her confidence sometimes.

We find Rob and Chris waiting for our verdict at the table.

"Let's go," I say to Chris. His eyes are sparkling.

Chris is fondling me and Rob is holding Vivian's hand as we set off into the night.

2 – Stripping

Budapest, March 2010

About thirty people are invited to our seventeenth birthday party. Mom is staying at our granny's. Chris and Rob are here with the rest of the band. In our bedroom I'm hiding behind the curtain, as I want to play a trick on Chris. Two of the band members come in, but they don't notice my shoes which aren't covered. They're talking about their German tour, and they can't be more than three feet away from me, still not aware that I'm there holding my breath. One of them is starting to play a video on his camera.

"Look what you missed, Jack. Chris and Rob screwed this German chick before I had my turn. She was the best fuck this year."

I peep over Jack's shoulder and catch a glimpse of a blonde girl giving my boyfriend a blowjob while Rob is pumping away behind her. I feel giddy, but manage to keep quiet. My legs are shaking and I begin to feel sick. Chris and Rob are making lustful sounds on the video. Jack and his buddy are cackling.

"There you are," says Chris, opening the door. He draws the curtain. The other two are looking at me, jaws dropped. Jack's buddy is desperately trying to shove his camera in his pocket.

"Leave me alone," I hiss as I push him and storm out of the room.

"You're so pale, Lily," says Vivian with a frown. Without a word I hold her hand and lead her to the bathroom.

"Viv, the... They're cheating on us." I'm stammering.

I'm telling her what I've seen on that video. She leaves me in the bathroom to wash my face. When I come out, the party is over. Vivian shuts the door behind the last guest. She kicked everyone out in five minutes.

"I've dumped Rob," she announces. "Let's go to bed."

We don't talk to each other more. It's too painful for both of us. I'm tossing and turning in my bed and sometimes I hear Vivian's sobs. How could they do this to us? I had been waiting for Chris, as if he was the messiah himself, counting the days, every time he left for those tours. We exchanged hundreds of text messages on those occasions, and he kept re-assuring me that I'm the only girl in his life. It's like the world collapsed on me. Is there any point to go on like this? Are all men the same? I don't want to end up hating all of them just because of this one pervert abhorrent asshole. I get up and go to the bathroom. My sobs shouldn't set off my sister again.

Budapest, April 2010

I'm at my cousin's party chatting to the sexiest guy I've ever met. He must be the one for me. He's handsome and tall with broad shoulders and blond hair which covers his ears. I'm staring into his eyes which are blue like the sky on a clear summer day, while he's slowly handing me another glass of vodka and tonic.

"This is the fourth drink I'm giving you, and I don't even know your name," he says.

"It's Lilian. And what's yours?"

"I'm Tibi. You look so young. Are you still at school?"

"Yes, but I'm going to be eighteen soon."

"How soon is that?"

"Well, in eleven months. And you?"

"I'm twenty-two. Finished school some time ago. I'm a manager in one of the largest Spar supermarkets in town."

He's twenty-two and a manager already! I carry on dancing with him. The old, slow moving "Close to You" tune is playing, and I cuddle up to him. When it ends I nip to the bathroom. In the mirror I can see the physical signs of me falling in love: dilated pupils, red cheeks, and a perpetual stupid grin on my face. I need fresh air. Tibi is waiting for me at the door.

"Let's go for a walk," I suggest to him.

"Good idea. I'm dying for a fag," he says. "Do you want one?"

"Please."

He lights up two Benson & Hedges cigarettes. I've never smoked a whole cigarette on my own before. Despite taking only shallow drags I begin to cough uncontrollably.

"This's too strong for me."

"Just throw it away then," he says, and I adore him for that.

We carry on chatting for a while, but suddenly he stops mid-sentence and kisses me. I kiss him back. In fact, I'm melting in his arms.

"Lilian, you're the most beautiful girl I've ever met," he murmurs in my ear. Nobody has said this to me before.

The way he holds me makes me feel that I want to live the rest of my life with him.

Budapest, January 2011

At home the heating was cut off last night. My mom hasn't paid the gas bill for months. She has been parsimonious as long as I remember, collecting every available coupon for groceries and clothing in order to get them as cheap as possible, and only if absolutely necessary. It looks like this attitude of hers recently expanded to most of the household bills too, save one. Every single month she's been sending me or Vivian to the post office with the cash and that yellow pay-in slip, if she couldn't do it herself. Money can run out to buy lunch at school, but that deposit has to be paid in.

Mom has fallen ill with some undiagnosed disease which makes her faint every now and then. This has been going on for the last six months. That's why she is out of work now. She's spent more time in hospital, undergoing all sorts of examinations, than ever before. The doctors are sending her from one department to the other, but she's not getting better. She has to wait hours and hours for her turn, just to learn that the doctors drew a blank again.

If it carries on like this, electricity is going to go next. The cash started to run out last month. I don't know what will happen if she doesn't get better soon. Dad sends us a little pocket money every month, but he has his own family to look after.

Vivian and I have spent the night freezing under the blankets. Now I have to get up, boil water in the kettle and use that to wash before school. We're turning eighteen in two months' time and finishing high school in June. Different universities are on our radars. If I get my grades, I'm going to study English. Vivian is doing brilliantly at school and she still wants to be a vet. I'm sure her prospects are much better than mine.

* * *

I can drink whatever I want here. The barman is Tibi's buddy. I'm downing my small lager and complaining about my hot-water-from-the-kettle experience in the morning. Tibi and I love each other to bits, but sometimes he comes up with quirky ideas.

"You know, Lilian, it would be so easy for you to make money as a dancer."

"You mean as a stripper, don't you," I hiss. "We've been through this, Tibi. Don't start again."

He says he loves me, but I'm wondering why he wouldn't be bothered if strangers saw me naked.

"I'm trying to help here," he says. "I'm just making the point that you'd never have to freeze again at home. A little overnight dance is worth it if you ask me. I don't want you to catch pneumonia."

"Do you think one night would be enough to pay all those bills?"

"Sure. The other day I had a chat with one of my friend's girlfriend, Erika. She's been dancing at a club for a year and could talk to the manager any time. She said, you can get tips straight away."

"But can they take me in for one night only?"

"Why not? Once you make the money you want, you could just quit. Simply don't show up the next day."

"And you wouldn't mind strangers leering at me while I'm naked on stage?" This is what disturbs me the most.

"You would be doing it as a job. You would still be my sweet little Lilian." His tone is flattering. "I wouldn't even be jealous if you have to let them touch you."

"You mean they could even do that?" I've always thought touching is a taboo in strip clubs. Where does Tibi's knowledge come from?

"It's no big deal," he says. "And they are not allowed to touch you down there. Erika told me that on a good night a girl can make 150 euros."

My eyes go wide. That would be more than enough to get the gas back on. But how can I get naked in front of a drunken crowd? Tibi lights up two cigarettes and hands one to me. I take a deep pull. I'm very nervous about this whole thing, but smoking seems to calm me. I'm getting hooked on his Benson & Hedges too. A few more drinks might also help...

"Can you buy me another shot of vodka please?"

Tibi orders us another round, but he doesn't drink. Once I finish mine, he offers me his shot and I down that one too. Can I do this? I don't know why, but this afternoon I put on my sexiest black lingerie and my high heels, so all I would need is a simple costume, I think. I muster up all my courage.

"Okay, show me the way to the club."

Tibi's eyes are sparkling.

"Let me give Erika a ring first." He goes to a fairly quiet corner, spends some time chatting on the phone,

and returns like a victorious conqueror after he rings off. "Look, here is this girl's ID card. Her name is Veronica, and she looks a bit like you. You can use it to start working. Just don't tell anyone your real name. Not even Erika. Let's go." He hands me the card. The girl on the picture has long hair too, but it isn't as curly as mine. That can be explained.

"Where did you get this?" I know I sound inquisitive, but I don't want to get in trouble using a fake ID.

"You shouldn't bother. She's staying abroad."

As I get on the bus I feel a bit groggy. I stagger to a seat and slump down on it. When we get off, Tibi ushers me into a convenience store and buys two cans of Red Bull. He opens one, and I take a few swigs. Twenty minutes later we're few steps away from the strip club and I think I've managed to sober up a little. It's 10 p.m.

"Are you coming in with me?" I ask.

"I can't. Erika said they don't like boyfriends. Go and ask for her." I hear Tibi's reassuring voice. "I'll hang around for a while. If you're not out in half an hour, I'll leave."

Two sturdy looking guys, both wearing suits and similar gray shirt with black ties are standing at the door. It looks like these strip clubs have their own uniforms.

"Can I help you?" asks the taller one.

"I'm looking for Erika. She said I could come and work here tonight." I'm trying to sound confident, and thanks to the booze and the Red Bull I think I'm succeeding.

"What kind of work are you looking for?" he asks.

"Dancing, I guess."

"Hold on for a second," he says, and soon he returns with a blonde girl and a guy in a posh suit wearing a pink tie. He's almost bald and a bit overweight. He asks for my ID card straight away.

"Hello, Veronica. It's good to see you again," says the blonde and gives me a hug. I've never seen her before.

"Hello, Erika."

After a quick glance at the ID card, Mr. Pink Tie says, "Normally you would have to fill in an application form and send it to us with your portfolio, but Erika says she knows you pretty well. Did you do dancing at all before?"

"Mm, I did belly dancing on the school stage a couple of times when I was thirteen."

"Well, you're a good looking girl, so this once I'm willing to make an exception and give you an opportunity. Don't make me regret it. Erika will show you around here."

We go down a few stairs. The first thing I notice is the voluptuous girl with a long dark hair sliding down the pole on the small stage. She doesn't look at anybody, but seems to enjoy the music. The dim multicolored lighting is just enough for me to appreciate her conical boobs as she takes off her top. I'm wondering how much practice I would need to put up an act like that. A couple of customers are standing at the bar counter. They're not even looking at the stage. A few others are sitting at the tables, either on their own or with girls. Mr. Pink Tie disappears, leaving me at the bar counter with Erika. She looks a few years older than me and is about as tall as I am, maybe a bit taller. She gives me a friendly, reassuring look. She has a slender figure, long legs and blue eyes.

"Come this way to the changing rooms," she says and holds my hand.

"What am I supposed to wear?"

"You mean you don't have a dress?"

"I've never thought I'll end up in this club tonight. To be honest I'm surprised that I've got this far."

"You're lucky, as we're really short of dancers tonight. Just take off everything except your lingerie and stilettos. I'll lend you my spare costume." She pulls out a simple white top and a matching miniskirt from her drawer. "Let's see if these fit you."

Erika sounds very helpful. I'm not scared anymore. The miniskirt fits perfectly. I take off my bra. The top is a little bit tight, but I guess I can survive tonight in it.

"So when am I supposed to take off the costume? Erika, I'm clueless."

"Don't be so uptight. I'll explain everything. Tonight there supposed to be twelve of us, but we're three short. We're taking turns at the pole, two songs at a time. Between those songs we take off our tops, so for the duration of the second song we're topless. The girl at the pole is Alice. Right now she's swapping with Kate. These are all stage names of course."

"Oh, so I never have to take off the bottom part?" I'm trying not to sound relieved, but I'm hopeful again. Taking the top off is not that big a deal. People do that on the beach.

"Not at the pole. But if they buy private dances from you..."

My hope is dead in the water. There is always a catch. Erika chuckles.

"You look like you bit into a lemon seed. It's no big deal. Let me show you the private dance rooms first." She leads me to a small room. It is on the left side behind the stage where the pole is erected. The room is carpeted and furnished with a table and a larger maroon sofa, which is facing a large mirror. The light is just a bit brighter than in the bar. Lady Gaga is singing from some hidden speakers.

"So you lead the customer here, but only after he paid. If he bought ten minutes, you only take off your top."

Twenty minutes buys him a full striptease. They can touch you almost everywhere except your pussy. But no licking or mouth stuff either. If someone breaks any of these rules, you just press this button here under the table, and the bouncers will throw him out,” explains Erika. I’m already imagining the dreadful scene of drunken strangers groping my breasts.

“How close do you have to get, when you’re dancing in here?” I just can’t imagine how this whole private dance business works.

“Okay, let me show you, Veronica. Just sit here,” Erika takes off her top and begins to dance to the Lady Gaga tune. She’s very close, her perfume smells delicious. It must be a posh one. Her movements are luscious and after some moves her boobs are just a few centimeters away from my face and as she turns, her firm, curvaceous bum is brushing my lap. She stops abruptly. “Do you get the picture? Do you think you can do it?”

“Yes, I can, but what about the full striptease?” I say, but I can hear my voice faltering.

“I’m not going to strip naked now, but these are the basic moves they’d expect from you.” She spreads her thighs apart on the table in front of me and circles her hip, caressing her crotch with her fingers. She turns around, so her bum is facing me, thighs still wide apart.

“So I must show them everything?” I’m miserably failing to sound casual.

“Pretty much, but don’t sweat it, honey,” says Erika as she deftly puts her top back on. “Most customers think we’re hookers, but that’s nonsense. We strip for cash, but we don’t screw for cash. That *is* an enormous difference. Meanwhile some of us really enjoy the way our body moves.”

“And where can I put all the cash they give me?” It occurs to me, that I haven’t seen any of these girls carrying their purses around the strip club.

“They don’t give you cash. They pay the waitress, and you get a chunk of all the cash you made with drinks and private dances in hand at the end of your shift from the manager.”

“Can I make money with drinks?” I ask, raising my eyebrows.

“If a customer buys you a drink, you ask for one of the expensive ones,” says Erika. Now she sounds like a good private tutor, and I’m grateful for her patience. She makes this whole thing seem like an ordinary on-the-job training session. “The drinks are expensive, so you get some money. I’ll show you the ones you should ask for.”

“Erika, I’ve never done pole dancing before. Is it difficult?”

“Just stick to the basic moves first. In a few minutes it is going to be my turn. I’ll show you some simple ones.”

Back at the bar we see a bunch of people enter the club. The place is starting to get busy. Erika turns to me.

“Do you speak English?”

“A little.”

“That should be enough here,” says Erika, and she picks up a wine and spirit list. “If they want to get you a drink, this is the champagne and the brandy you should ask for.”

The price of the small bottle of champagne is 65 euros. The shot of brandy costs 50 euros.

“You shouldn’t use your real name. Can you think of a stage name quickly?”

I’m trying to think of a name similar to Lilian.

“Leila, maybe,” I say hesitantly.

“Okay, Leila. Come, let’s find the others,” says Erika, and ushers me back into the changing room. Two other girls, Alice and Kate, say hi when we enter. Kate is wheezing. She just finished her dance at the pole. They are both fixing their makeup in front of a large mirror.

“Five of them have just come in. Are you okay to come with us and join them?” asks Alice. Her hair is dark brown and she’s dressed in an all purple costume. She is shorter than me. I’ve a feeling that her makeup, like a mask, is hiding some of the true features of her face, but her slightly snub nose and sensual lips must be a definite advantage in this line of work.

“I guess so.”

Kate’s taller than me, but no makeup can disguise her long nose which makes her look a bit like a horse. “Let’s go,” she says.

As we approach, some of the guys stand up to greet us. They are sitting around a larger table and we occupy the seats between them.

“Hi, I’m Craig. You look so gorgeous,” says the guy sitting next to me. He looks scrawny and must be in his late twenties.

“I’m Leila, nice to meet you.” I know I have a Hungarian accent, but can’t do much about it.

“My friend dressed in that yellow overall is getting married next weekend,” says Craig. “We’re here to celebrate.”

The groom-to-be actually looks like a giant penis in a condom. He’s a middle aged fat guy. Right now he’s ordering drinks for us, and turns to me:

“What can I get you?”

I show him the champagne which Erika showed me earlier, and he gives the waitress our orders while I’m

watching Erika, who just started her dance at the pole. Beyoncé's voice fills the hall right now. The moves Erika is making at the pole are pretty simple, but I'm not sure if I would be able to remember any of them once it's my turn. She gives me a wink and takes her top off salaciously. I don't recognize the second tune, but I like it. The waitress shows up now with our drinks and Craig pours some champagne in my glass. It tastes sweet. I take a few sips.

Craig turns to me again. "Are you going to dance at the pole too?"

"Later." I don't tell him that it is going to be my first time.

"I saw many pretty girls in Budapest, but none of them comes close to you."

"Thank you."

"How do you say 'pretty girl' in Hungarian?"

"Seep lain." The actual spelling is *szeép lány*, but that would be too much information.

"You're a *seep lain*, Leila."

"Thanks. Your accent is very good." Of course it's not, but I'm putting on my sweetest smile for him. I need those euros desperately. "You must be good in languages."

"My German teacher didn't think so. And when can you dance for me?"

Wow, my flattering tactic actually worked.

"If you want, I can do it now."

"Can you?"

"You have to call the waitress to pay first."

To my relief he pays for ten minutes. Only topless, thank heavens. I take Craig's hand and lead him to the private dance room. In there I tell Craig to sit in the middle of the couch and relax. I start dancing in front of him. When exactly do I have to take my top off? Let me get it out of the way. Unclipping and throwing it on the sofa only takes a moment. I keep blushing, but he can't see that. Showing off my breasts to a stranger feels awkward, but he is just sitting there relaxed, leaning back on the couch, and not moving his hands at all. Suddenly I remember what Erika said earlier. I have to inform the guest about the rules.

"You can touch everywhere, except down here," I say pointing to my lap.

"Are you serious?" he says and touches me at waist level. As I lean close to him, he begins with caressing my back. Maybe I would even enjoy it, if he was my boyfriend and not a complete stranger. Pretty soon I feel his hands cupping my breasts and his fingers squeezing my nipples. I smile at him, but I'm biting my lips at the same time and blush again. This is no fun at all, and I don't even like the smell of his aftershave. I turn. My bum is brushing against his lap to the rhythm of the music. His dick is protruding now.

"You are drop-dead gorgeous, Leila," he murmurs.

"Thanks," I say and check the small clock in the corner – five more minutes. He gropes my bare bum.

"Are you going to lose the bottom part too?" he asks as he carries on stroking my backside ever closer to the forbidden zone.

"That only happens if you pay for twenty minutes."

"Why didn't they tell me? I guess that's for next time then."

Only two minutes left now. The tune changes to Rihanna, I change my position, and he's groping my breasts enthusiastically from behind as my bum keeps brushing his lap again. I'm counting down the seconds in my head.

"Time is up now. I hope you enjoyed it," I lie, relieved, as I stand up and fumble with Erika's white top. Eventually it clips on. We walk back to the table and I take a swig of my champagne. Another girl is dancing at the pole now. Erika gestures me. It's my turn next.

The Rihanna tune comes to an end and I swap with the girl at the pole. I start dancing to something I don't recognize. First I do some simple moves which I've seen Erika and the others doing. I'm holding the pole with both hands and swirling around it. All the booze I had earlier makes me feel a bit giddy and I'm not too bothered about the audience. The tune changes and some customers are turning their heads staring at me. It's Adele now. Oh, I'm supposed to take off my top! I'm still not used to Erika's white costume, so I fumble with the clip on my back again for a few seconds which seems an eternity. It's off at last.

Now I just have to repeat the same movements topless. Jesus, this is embarrassing. I should just focus on my moves. Suddenly I remember Vivian showing me some forward bends with straight legs, and I try them out holding the pole with both hands, my bum facing the audience. I'm bending deeper and deeper in a small straddle until my hair is almost brushing the floor. When that's done I think of another move and carry on dancing. Just when I begin to feel okay, I trip myself and almost fall, but manage to catch the pole on time. I pull myself up as if it was on purpose. The Adele tune is ending, and Alice is coming to swap with me. I quickly put on my top.

"That was awesome," says the penis lookalike groom-to-be. Kate is sitting on his lap now.

"Thank you," I respond. It's over for now. Kate and Mr. Penis go for a twenty-minute private dance. Alice is still dancing, so I'm left there on my own to entertain the whole stag party with my broken English. At this point I don't even care. Taking a sip of my champagne they ask me to teach them some more words in Hungarian, like *hello* and *thank you*. I also ask them some trivial questions about how they like their stay in Budapest so far.

Alice comes back again and I excuse myself for a minute. Back in the dressing room I light up a cigarette and check my phone. I have several texts and five missed calls; four from Tibi and one from Vivian. First I call Tibi and tell him not to wait for me. I call Vivian next.

“Mum can’t leave me alone,” she says. “She asked me to call you. Where the heck are you, Lilian?”

“At Tibi’s place,” I lie. “I’ll come home around 4 a.m.”

“You’re going to fall asleep at school I guess.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time.”

The rest of the night goes quickly. Another private dance and one more round at the pole is all I have to perform. At 3 a.m. in his office Mr. Pink Tie hands me about 100 euros together with his business card. I’m ecstatic, but don’t want to show it. He makes me promise to come again tomorrow.

At home the heating is still cut off, but I don’t care. This is about to change. Tomorrow after school I’ll go and pay the gas bill. I don’t want to turn on the light, so I change into my pajamas in the dark and try to sneak into bed under the cold duvet quietly, but Vivian wakes up.

“You made it home at last,” she says, still half asleep.

“I solemnly declare, that this is the last night we’re sleeping in a freezer,” I tell her.

“What do you mean? Is there a heatwave heading for Budapest?” She still sounds sleepy, but puzzled.

“Not that I know of, but I’ve got the cash to pay the gas bill.” I’ve never made this much money in just one night. This makes Vivian sit up in bed, I can only see her silhouette in the dark.

“Lilian, how did you get it?” Oops, I should have kept my mouth shut.

“I’ll tell you tomorrow.” This is my lame attempt to dodge the question, but it’s too late. My big sister switches to interrogation mode.

“No, you’re going to tell me now,” she hisses, and I know I can’t get out of this.

“I was dancing in a strip club.”

“Lilian, are you mad? You can’t be this stupid. Once you start, you’ll never be able to get out of it. How did you get in anyway? You’re not even eighteen yet,” she berates.

“Viv, please, let me sleep,” I plead. “We have to wake up in a couple of hours to go to school, and I’ve drunk too much. And please don’t tell Mom.”

“Okay, but I’ll have a word with you tomorrow about this.”

3 – More Stripping

Budapest, July 2011

Two sturdy guys are beating Tibi. He's falling down on the pavement right in front of his apartment block. They kick his head and his body a few times. A black Audi is parking in a disabled spot right in front of the building. I'm standing in front of the gate, petrified. We were about to go and get some breakfast, before Tibi goes to work. Some bystanders are gaping at the scene, but nobody intervenes.

"This was just a gentle reminder. On Friday we're breaking your leg," says one of the attackers. He's wearing sunglasses and a white shirt. After a final kick to Tibi's stomach with his polished black shoes they both get in the car and drive away.

I rush and kneel next to Tibi, still lying on the pavement. Blood is oozing from his nose and mouth, but he's moving. He's on all fours now. Two bystanders come across the street and help him to his feet.

"Do you want me to call the police?" asks one of them. "I've got the number plate."

"No need, but thanks," replies Tibi. He's trying to wipe the blood off his face with little success.

"Who were these guys?" I scream. "Do you know them? Are you hurt?"

He's ignoring my questions, but leans on my shoulder. I figured this couldn't be a random attack. He thanks the two bystanders and tells them he's fine. Then he turns to me. "Let's go back upstairs."

* * *

"This is Veronica. I wonder if you remember me." I'm holding Mr. Pink Tie's business card. The silence on the line lasts for couple of seconds only.

"Oh, yes, you're the girl who vanished. Can I help you?"

"I would like to start dancing again tonight if possible."

"Well, come to my office at 4 p.m. We'll take it from there." He rings off without a see you or a bye.

Tibi is sitting next to me on a bench in a park under the shade. He's on his lunch break. My feelings have never been so mixed up before. His mouth is bruised and swollen on the left side. If I didn't care about him so much, I would find it kind of funny, because it looks like he has a constant lopsided smile. As if this new facial feature needed a kind of asymmetrical balance, his right eye is bloodshot and swollen. He is frequently touching his side on the right. His ribs might be broken. I can't really enjoy the scent of the flowers or the humming of the old oak trees caused by the gentle summer breeze.

"You see, Lilian, it wasn't that difficult. Why did I have to beg you for ages to make this phone call?"

He should have stayed quiet. I'm fuming.

"Tibi, you know why. I promised Vivian that I'll never go back there. I'm only doing this for you." I glower at him. "You know how I feel about this whole thing."

"If you save me, I'll be indebted to you forever."

"So tell me now. Why were they beating you?"

"The problem is that I owe a drug dealer some money. I should've paid him last Friday, but I didn't have the cash – started my new job last week, but I only get paid about a hundred euros today. That's not enough. If I don't pay him back the entire debt by Friday, he's going to send his guys back to break my leg. I recorded the whole conversation on my phone. Do you want to hear it?"

"Not now." I'm seething with anger. "How could you get yourself in such a mess?"

"In the park these assholes asked me to sell some of their new synthetic drugs. I did that last month just to make a fast buck, but I entered an online poker competition and lost all the cash –"

I can't believe what I'm hearing.

"Are you a pusher now?"

"Not anymore. I worked out this method in poker –"

"Stop right there," I hiss. "I'm not interested. Promise me that if I get you this money, you'll never sell drugs or gamble like this again."

His gaze reminds me of Thumb, Vivian's dog in England.

"I promise, Lilian." He sounds so solemn and looks so miserable, that I can't help but carefully plant a kiss on the right side of his mouth.

* * *

I'm sitting in Mr. Pink Tie's small office in the back of the strip club. A laptop, a phone, and a mug are the only items on his desk. A slightly oversized safe is in the right corner. He's sitting in his comfy office chair, while I'm squirming in one of the smaller chairs in the front. He is wearing a red tie today. I'm eighteen now, but I want to keep my false identity. The less they know about me here the better.

"Veronica, we don't like vanishing girls," he begins in a husky voice.

"I would like to apologize. I freaked out the morning after my first time here. Now I made up my mind, and want to give this another go." I hope he believes me.

"You could have phoned that time. Instead you took the money and disappeared." Despite his rebuke he smirks, and I know that the odds of dancing here tonight are in my favor.

"You're right. But now I would like to start properly. I've been going to a pole dancing club so I learnt some moves too." I say this with a bit more confidence. Vivian developed an interest in pole fitness after my one-night experiment. We've been attending classes since March. She said I wouldn't need the strip club anymore if I could satisfy all my primal dancing needs elsewhere.

"I have no shortage of dancers right now," says Mr. Pink-or-Red Tie. "But you were doing so well that I'm going to give you another chance. What was your stage name then?"

"Leila."

"Okay, Leila. Here is the deal again. You're on minimum wage. You get two days off a week, but not Friday or Saturday night. You get paid in cash once a week. For this you dance at the pole when it's your turn. However, if you manage to sell private dances, you'll get half of that at the end of your shift."

"Can I start tonight?" I squirm in my seat. Mr. Pink-or-Red Tie is giving me lewd looks, so I want to get out sooner rather than later.

"You can. You still have some time to prepare. Be here at half past eight this evening. We open at 9 p.m. Bring a costume." he says on my way out.

I should've stayed with Vivian in England. My visit to The Brontë Parsonage Museum is still fresh in my mind. I want to carry on reading *Wuthering Heights*, but instead I have to strip in front of strangers, who can't wait to grope my breasts with drooping saliva.

Mom is home. Her health has improved a lot lately. She's found a new job at a grocery store and she is very busy these days. That didn't stop us to celebrate our exam results. Vivian and I both succeeded with our university applications. Mom, normally so stingy in spending money, took me to a spa and a celebratory shopping spree yesterday. She couldn't wait for Vivian to come back from England. I've got a brand new yellow top with matching miniskirt which I can use as a costume tonight. My finger- and toenails are also superbly polished – the ladies in the spa did a great job. I quickly pack all the stuff I need into my gym bag.

"Mom, I'm sleeping over at Tibi's tonight, so don't worry." I don't want to lie to her, but she would freak out if I told her...

"Okay, darling, be careful." She gives me a kiss and a hug.

"I love you, Mom."

I still have some time left so I go and see Tibi in his flat.

"Look, I rolled a joint for you. Let's relax," he says and shows me his creation. I'm not impressed. He sees my frown and is quick to explain. "Lilian, weed is recreational. It's nothing like the synthetic drugs."

He lights it up on the right side of his mouth, as the left side is double the size. He takes a drag and hands the joint to me. Two years have passed by since the last time I smoked it. After a little hesitation I take a drag too and almost instantly feel the world swirling around me.

"Christ, this is strong." I am immersed into an eerie sensation of daze.

"I know, babes. It's top quality pot. I could use one as well. It beats all the pain killers."

I take a few more pulls, and after a while I'm not worried about stripping at all. Maybe Tibi's right – this stuff can help me through the night. He looks at me with a shining left eye.

"I'm going to roll for you one more joint. That should keep you going for the night," he says.

"Do that, honey. This stuff makes me feel good. After the club I'll come and sleep with you here," I murmur in his ear. We kiss carefully and I have to dash. I don't want to be late.

* * *

Entering the club, I bump into Erika.

“Do you still remember some moves?” she asks, pointing to the pole.

“I’ve been practicing in a pole-fitness club,” I say gleefully.

We go to the changing room. I prepare my makeup, and put on my new yellow costume. Alice is there too. She comforts me a bit by making kind and flattering comments about my looks. Some customers start trickling in. It’s my turn at the pole. My first dance goes really well. Taking off my top still makes me blush, but my makeup should hide all that.

At the end of my dance one of the customers, sitting on his own at a table near the stage, is applauding, and when I finish he buys me the champagne and asks for a twenty-minute private dance. He must be in his fifties.

“Don’t worry,” Erika murmurs. “He’s a regular and never broke any rules. He buys dances from all new girls.”

We go into the room on the right side, a mirror image of the other one I used in January, and I start dancing. I take off my top first, and he gropes my breasts, but he isn’t rough at all. My miniskirt goes next and I turn around. My bum brushes his lap a few times. All this comes easy tonight. I roll down my G-string, and I’m dancing there naked, save my stilettos. He strokes my back.

“Could you take off your high heels too, darling?” he pleads, and I do as I’m told.

My bum facing him as I go on all fours on the couch and open up my thighs wide – now he has a full view. He’s gently groping my bum. He is heavy breathing, swallowing, and when I turn I see him sweating too. He seems to be enjoying himself a lot and I don’t really mind. Time flies by.

“Time is up, dear,” I say with a sheepish smile.

“You’re an amazing girl, and this was worth every cent of it. I’ve never seen anybody dance like this. You’ve made my whole night.”

“It’s my pleasure.” I say politely as I put on my costume.

“If you are here tomorrow, I’m going to buy another twenty.”

After this the night goes on, I smoke the joint at my break and do two more private dances. Someone buys me another small bottle of champagne. After the strip bar closes, Mr. Pink Tie hands over to me 160 euros. That’s almost half the money I need. Just two more nights like this to save Tibi and end up with some spare cash.

I crawl into Tibi’s bed at 4 a.m. and turn on the reading lamp. He is sitting up and rubbing his left eye. The right one is patched.

“Look what I’ve got for you,” I whisper in his ear and show him the cash.

“Lilian, you are a life saver.” He is not his usual rough self, he fondles and cuddles and kisses me gently and carefully. His injuries make him wince as he moves so I make him turn and lie on his back. It’s not my favorite position, and it hurts a bit, but I know he hurts even more. The cash gets dispersed all over the bed. I’m very tired, but even in his roughed up state, or maybe because of it, he turns me on. It could also be the stripping itself, or the effect of the joints I smoked, but a primal feeling of lust deep down my belly is taking over my body and my soul. I’m wet, he is hard, and, despite the horse riding pose, making love to him never felt so good before. Tibi is attentive, he’s caressing my nipples, and he is holding back till my build up completes. I curl up and kiss his neck and shoulder. This way it feels like pure pleasure. We reach our climax together. He’s still deep inside me and he keeps hugging me tactfully and whispers in my ear: “I love you, Lilian!”

* * *

I wake up with a ravenous appetite. Tibi is not there, and he must have collected the cash from all over the bed. I send him a “where r u” text and he calls back instantly.

“I paid 200 and told him that he’ll get the rest on Friday. Lilian, you saved me, and early this morning you made me the happiest man in the world. Babes, you’re the best.”

“You’re the best for me too.” I say and I blush. Doesn’t matter, nobody can see me anyway.

“You blushed,” says Tibi. “I’ll get us some more weed for tonight.”

“I don’t want to be addicted.”

“These few days shouldn’t matter.”

“True. Smoking that stuff really helped last night. Now I’m hungry, but I have to go home and change.”

“Let’s meet up at our pizza place on your way home. I’ll see you there in half an hour.”

During lunch Tibi rolls another couple of joints, just in case I need it. I tell him I’ll see him early Friday morning with the rest of the cash.

* * *

I smoke my joint before my shift and make more money on Wednesday. Thursday is much the same. The fairly decent guy in his fifties shows up on both days and that helps a lot. Friday early morning I visit Tibi, give him 300 euros and we make love again.

4 – Paul’s Stag Do

Budapest, July 2011

Tibi wakes me up with a kiss and a full English breakfast on a tray. It’s afternoon already, so it’s a brunch actually. I love the smell of the toast, the fried eggs, and the coffee. He even put a dollop of my favorite strawberry yoghurt in a bowl too.

“I’ve settled my debt thanks to you,” he says. “I profoundly apologize, but I learnt my lesson, Lilian. I’ll never sell drugs again. Are you dancing tonight?”

“Saturday is the busiest,” I say with a muffled voice, half an egg in mouth. “If I don’t show up, I can’t ever dance there again.”

“I don’t mind you going back there at all. I feel bad about borrowing most of your money.” Tibi’s sitting next to me on the bed caressing and massaging my feet. I love having my brunch this way. He’s not wearing his eye patch anymore, and his mouth looks much better.

“I’ve done it because I love you.”

“I love you too,” says Tibi. He leans over me and kisses some latte off my lips. “Didn’t you say the other day that you started saving up for a car?”

“That’s what I was thinking. Then I could drive Mom and Viv around sometimes.”

“If you keep this up till end of August, you might be able to get a decent second hand car.”

“It would be great to start university like that.”

“Do you want me to roll a couple of joints for tonight?”

“No, if I go tonight, I want to see if I can cope without it,” I say. “I don’t even want to drink before I go.”

After finishing brunch, I wash and decide to go shopping.

* * *

I enjoy dancing at the pole in my new outfit. Taking off my top on stage is no big deal either. However, I’ve managed to bruise myself on my left arm and the back of my thigh. The bruises don’t show that much, but they hurt if I make careless moves. People don’t realize how much pain one has to go through in order to master certain tricks. Like in gymnastics, more practice improves the show.

When I finish, I’m invited to a table, where this effeminate and slightly overweight guy is sitting. He’s in his mid-thirties. His thick wedding ring clinks to the champagne glass as we say “cheers” to each other. After I take a few sneaky sips he pays for 20 minutes in the private dance room.

Coping without smoking hemp proves to be tough. I don’t even know what’s playing, but after a while I have to strip stark naked and open up my thighs. My cheeks are burning under my makeup and I feel like running out of the room, screaming “I don’t want to do this!” Instead I’m smiling at him as he gropes my breasts, drooling in anticipation of having a proper look into my pussy. When I turn with my bum facing him, he sniffs, he blows, and his hands and face are too close. He’s pulling apart the cheeks off my bum so aggressively that it even hurts. I’ve been checking the time every ten seconds, but it doesn’t want to move. All of a sudden I feel his tongue on me, slobbering around my anus and I press the panic button.

“Don’t do that!” I growl at him fuming as I turn around.

“Sorry...,” he apologizes. I can see a wet patch spreading on his light summer trousers. He would still have three minutes, but the bouncer is already there.

“What’s wrong?” The bouncer politely turns his head away from me as I’m still stark naked.

“He broke some rules. I think he needs to clean himself up too,” I say as I try to cover my private parts with my hands. The customer doesn’t object at all. He’s gazing at the floor and I begin to dress.

“Time to go home, bro,” says the bouncer as he grabs the customer by his lapel and escorts him out of the room. I put on my sleek outfit and try to fix my disheveled hair. A few minutes later, dressed in my costume again, I get out of the room.

I’ve never seen the club so busy before. Kate is at the pole. All the other girls are occupied with customers. Two groups, from different stag parties, are sitting around the tables. I see Alice come out from the other private dance room holding hands with a bulky guy. He’s wearing a green t-shirt with “Paul’s Stag Do” printed on the back. They sit down at table number four. Five others are wearing similar shirts. Erika is there too chatting to one

of them, but calls me with a hand gesture, and they offer me a seat next to the groom-to-be. He's wearing a zombie skeleton pirate costume. Alice is sitting on the lap of the bulky guy.

"This is Leila," says Erika, and I'm getting a mixture of lustful and appreciative looks.

"Can I get you something to drink?" The groom-to-be gives me a polite look with his right eye only. His left eye is patched. The glasses on the table are almost empty.

Save a couple of sips, I haven't had anything to drink yet, but I need something strong now.

"Can I have a double shot of this brandy please?" I point to the expensive one on the wine and spirit list. He gives the order for the whole table to the waitress. She returns with all the drinks. The groom-to-be hands over his credit card, and I take a swig of my brandy straight away. The bulky guy with Alice on his lap is chatting to the groom-to-be.

"Paul, I'm getting you a dance with Leila. This is your last chance, mate, before you tie the knot. Alice has just treated me to a really good time." He kisses the nape of Alice's neck and calls back the waitress to pay. Alice is playing along and kisses him back on the cheek.

"Thanks, mate, I really appreciate it," says the groom-to-be.

The last thing I want to do is to go back to that room and strip, but I have no choice. I leave half of my drink, take his hand, and lead him to the room on the left. A girl with a customer from another table just finished a dance in there. As we enter, I make the groom-to-be sit in the middle of the couch.

"Please keep your dress on," he says in a tender tone, and I gape at him. What does he mean by this?

"Do you want me to dance with my dress on?"

"You don't have to dance at all. Please, just sit down and let's have a chat."

I do as I'm told. I sit down to his right and pull my left leg up on the couch. The bulky guy called him Paul. He takes off his pirate patch.

"Don't you like me?" I ask, looking into his warm brown eyes. My cheeks are on fire.

"You are by far the most beautiful girl I've seen in this club, Leila, but I'm getting married next weekend." He's speaking slow and articulating nicely. "I don't want to cheat on my fiancée, but that's how I would feel if I touched you or even watched you naked, when you're this close."

"That's really nice of you." I don't know what else to say, but he carries on.

"My colleagues and my cousin were pressing me hard to organize this stag party." He makes a real effort to explain to me why he wouldn't let me dance. He doesn't know how relieved I am. "You see, Leila, what would be the point of my marriage, if I enjoyed fooling around with another girl so close to my wedding day..."

Even his slow speech is too fast for me. I'm lost, but I think I get the gist of what he is saying.

"You're going to be a good husband. Your fiancée is lucky." I have a good look at him. He's lean and tall, and he's looking at me guilelessly.

"Let's stop talking about me," he says. "Tell me, how does a stunning girl like you end up in a strip club?"

"My boyfriend needed money," I shrug. "From September I'm going to study English literature at university, so I'm going to quit next month."

"I love books." His eyes are glistening with excitement now. "Others watch sports or go to the pub. I read. What was the last book you've read?"

"I've just finished reading *Wuthering Heights*." I'm thrilled I can talk to someone who is interested in literature. "Have you read it?"

"I started reading it a long time ago, but stopped halfway. It's not my cup of tea. Did you like it?"

I'm not sure if he wants a cup of tea or not, but I can make an effort to answer his last question.

"I couldn't put it down...I read it to the end. I was in England last month...I was with my sister. We were visiting my father in Leeds. I asked him to drive us to the Brontës' house. They lived in Haworth. Today that house is a museum. I saw the desk where Emily wrote that book. All she needed was a pen and paper. No computer...I wish I could do that."

"Do you think about writing a book yourself?" This simple question makes me blush more than anything else. I've never dared to think about it.

"I'm writing my diary in English, but I use the computer first...I check the spelling and grammar. For me, it's hard to get it right. Once there are no red lines...under the words, I copy them into my diary by hand. Then I delete it from the computer...Then I hide my diary. I don't want my mom or my sister to read it."

"I'm sure you're not alone..." says Paul with a snicker. He's right of course. There must be many girls out there with secrets. "Tell me more about the place where the Brontë sisters lived."

"Have you ever been in Haworth?" I ask, just to steal a little time to think about the proper words. I know I speak slow broken English, probably making lots of mistakes, but I can't help it. This is my longest ever real life conversation in English and the concentration makes me feel hot. Paul is looking at me attentively. His eyes are sparkling like precious stones.

"I've never been there, but would like to see it one day. It's so strange that I have to learn about this in Hungary. Is there anything else to see there?" he asks, smiling.

“Yes, you should walk up to the Top Withins too. It’s three miles...There and back. People thought the ruins up there used to be the farmhouse in *Wuthering Heights*. An old...mmm, plaque on the wall says that it’s not, but Emily was thinking about that place when she wrote the book.” I’m talking too much. I want to find out so much more about Paul. Just by looking into his bright eyes, my admiration of him keeps growing and growing every single second. “And what books do you read?”

“Oh, I read all sorts of books. I like some other nineteenth century classics, like Austen or Dickens, but I read many contemporary novels too. Like Stephen King, William Boyd and —”

Erika pokes her head in. Oops, I forgot to check the time. I jump.

“Others are waiting for this room. I thought this pirate kidnapped you,” she jokes, but also sighs with relief to see me dressed. “Is everything okay?”

“Yes.” My mind goes blank and I can’t think of anything else to say. Paul comes to the rescue.

“Sorry, it’s my fault,” says Paul. “I’ve never seen anybody dance like Leila and didn’t want her to stop.” I don’t think Erika believes him, but it doesn’t matter. He puts on his pirate eye-patch as we go back to the table. The bulky guy winks at him.

“Did you have a good time, mate?”

“Thanks for the treat, mate. I owe you one. Leila is amazing.” When we sit down, Paul scribbles something on a serviette and gives it to me. I have to leave it on the table, as it’s my turn at the pole. “This is my email address,” he mutters as I stand up. “Please just send me an email with your name on it, and I’ll respond.”

“Okay, but I have to dance now.”

I swap with the girl at the pole and I start dancing, still dressed up, to Beyoncé’s new tune *Best Thing I Never Had*. Paul is watching, and I’m doing some inverted poses. My auburn curls are wafting in the air. He turns the other way when I take off my top. I don’t know why, but I feel alarmed when I see his stag party members standing up. They’re about to leave when my tune finishes. I quickly put on my top and go back to him.

“My real name is Lilian,” I murmur in Paul’s ear when I kiss him on the cheek. “I wish you a very happy marriage.”

“Don’t forget to email,” he says. “I want to continue our conversation.”

As they head for the exit I hear the bulky guy saying to him:

“You’re so lucky, mate. Leila’s got the hottest boobies in this joint.”

I’m still standing there looking at the exit sign, thinking about Paul. His fiancée is very lucky. Suddenly I remember the serviette with the email address, but it isn’t on the table anymore. I grab the waitress.

“Suzy, there was a serviette on the table. One of the customers wrote something on it for me.”

“I just poured all the rubbish from that table in there,” she says, and she points to the bin at the back of the bar.

I rush to the bin and pick out a few serviettes from the top. None of them is Paul’s. I dig deeper, but still can’t find it. The bartender’s eyebrows are up to her hairline, wondering what I’m up to. I dig even deeper to no avail. After a while I give up the search and put all the rubbish around me back in the bin.

* * *

Vivian and I keep on arguing in our bedroom in a muffled voice.

“Lilian, you promised me,” hisses Vivian with searing eyes. “You promised me that you’d never ever go back to that strip club. A headless chicken has more brains than you. How could you be this stupid?” Her rebuke is harsh as expected. Ever since we met in the arrivals hall at the airport, she hasn’t stopped berating me. At last I get fed up with her.

“Vivian, I can’t take it anymore. That’s enough.” She’s not used to this tone of mine, so she sighs.

“Tibor got you ensnared in this again. Why can’t you just dump him?”

“I love him. I can’t help it.”

Is this true? I’m certainly in love right now. But I’m confused. Who am I in love with? I’m just not sure. Paul changed everything. I would do anything to see him again and I know it’s insane. He’s in an entirely different world and he’s getting married. Vivian is explaining something, but I’m too absorbed in my own thoughts. Where does this overwhelming feeling come from? At the same time, I can hardly control myself when Tibi and I smoke pot together. Those times I think he’s the hottest man on the planet. Sometimes I can’t stop grinning at him like an idiot. That’s why I refused the joint he offered yesterday.

“...And now that you’ve settled his debt, why don’t you stop stripping?” I catch this last question of Vivian’s and I know she has a point.

“I enjoy parts of it. Yesterday I had a chat with a very nice guy.” I don’t mention my loathsome experience

with the other one. “Besides, I might earn enough cash to buy a second hand car next month. I’ll stop next month before the university starts.”

“What does Mum know about this?”

“Nothing, she thinks I’ve been sleeping over at Tibi’s place these last few days.”

“She would be so distressed if she found out what you’re doing,” says Vivian thoughtfully.

“Viv, can I ask you for a favor?”

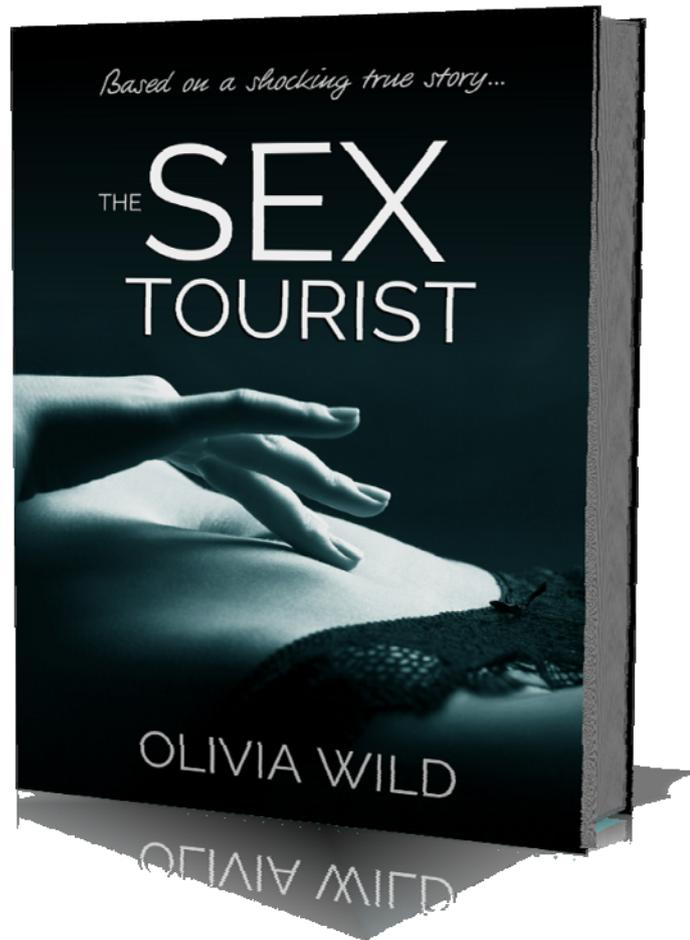
“What?”

“I’ll tell Mom that Dad sent me cash to buy the car. You know they don’t talk much these days. Would you support me?”

“Okay,” she says with a deep sigh.

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About the Author



Olivia Wild is an exciting new British-Hungarian author to enter the Erotic-Thriller genre. Her writing is inspired by true events in her own life and that of very close friends who kindly share their innermost secrets enabling Olivia to expose a darker side to the world we live in. Her first book, “The Sex Tourist” took two years to write and allows closure on a tumultuous chapter in Olivia’s life. Whilst it is an honest and heart-wrenching story about a sex worker who falls in love, it is also a story of the unwritten bonds between two sisters.

When she’s not working Olivia is studying veterinary medicine and enjoys pole fitness and yoga.

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