

A black and white portrait of Lucy Pussett. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. Her right hand is raised, with her index finger pressed against her lips in a 'shh' gesture. She has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a dark, off-the-shoulder top. The background is dark and out of focus.

ANGELIQUE

Diary of a Contemporary Woman
Continues..

LUCY PUSSETT

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LUCY PUSSETT

Diary of a Contemporary Woman Trilogy
Part two: Angelique by Lucy Pussett

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This book is dedicated to anyone who has suffered discrimination,
bullying and abuse solely due to their sexual orientation.
The power, the love of Angelique Santoro is here to lift you all.
Hold this book close to your heart and know you are loved.

Also by Lucy Pussett

Diary of a Contemporary Woman

(Part one, of Diary of a Contemporary Woman trilogy)

Angelique

(Part two, of Diary of a Contemporary Woman trilogy)

In addition a Spotify playlist to be enjoyed as you read Angelique on my
website

www.lucypussett.com

CHAPTER ONE

JOSHUA

‘Hi Joshua.’

“Hey Angelique, wasn’t sure if you were going to pick up.”

“I gave serious consideration to letting it go to voicemail, then I decided to give you a chance at entertaining me.”

“It is truly an honor to be granted such an opportunity.”

“It is, no question. Had you been my mother, well...”

“Voicemail city.”

“Yup. So how are you JoshUA?”

“Can’t complain. All pretty much drama free, albeit a little dull and predictable.”

“So, you thought you’d call me, see if I can rev up your life?”

“I thought you might be up for that bike ride I promised you as the weather is looking more settled.”

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“Oh yes, that bike ride and pub lunch,” I say casually, taking another long sip of my gin & tonic. “I’d totally forgotten about that.”

“That’s so not true, Angelique. I think you’ve been waiting on my call.”

“Is that so? I’ve been spectacularly busy, not had much time for daydreaming about pretty surfer boys and the like.”

Joshua laughs. “I see you’ve lost none of your tomboy charm.”

“Fucking hope not.”

“You ok, though?”

“Honestly, it’s been a total shit show but I think perhaps the worst has passed.”

“Happy to lend an ear if that’s helpful.”

“Appreciate you Joshua but it’s all in hand I believe. Just time and a bit of good fortune required here on in.”

“I’ll fire over some dates, see if any suit your schedule and we will ride out.”

“I don’t have any protective gear for your Ducati.”

“If you don’t mind using my ex-girlfriend’s jacket, lid and gloves...”

“Of course not. It’s every girl’s dream to use some other girl’s kit. You do know how to make me feel special.”

Silence on the other line.

“It’s fine, JoshUA, I’m playing with you. If I have fun perhaps it’ll inspire me get a bike of my own.”

“And melt the hearts of men in biker cafes around the southeast.”

“Well, if that’s the price, they will just have to pay it,” I say giggling, ending the call.

Back to drinking then. Starting to feel lightheaded, got a little buzz on now. Sean’s announcement upset me, rattled me, then hearing Joshua’s

voice lifted me, so I'm in a bizarre place right now. I'm neither upset nor happy just half cut and floaty. It could be worse, no question.

I feel an overwhelming desire to be held. Thinking of giving my lil' sister a loving hug, smelling her familiar apple shampoo whilst daydreaming away to Wolf Alice's "Don't delete the kisses" playing in the background of this run-down bar.

It's past visiting hours at the addiction clinic and me showing up smelling of spirits is unlikely to get me many admiring looks of appreciation, right?

Text it is then. "Sup lil' sis. Hope you're doing ok. It's probably awful right about now. Just know it is going to get better. You're not in this alone. You have Martin. You have me. Don't go tiring yourself out worrying over mother. I'm all over it. Look in the mirror and smile. You got this yeah. Big love always. A XX"

Addiction divides people, doesn't it? Some are filled with empathy, kindness towards that person, seeing drug addiction like a disease, no different to Cancer. Others see addicts as scum, untrustworthy junkies. Losers, lacking self-discipline, weak people taking an easy path rather than facing their problems causing the addiction. I think the latter is how people view a person coming from a privileged, white middle class background. A loving family, spoilt with money, with security, never knowing abuse, poverty. A self-indulgent snowflake.

I have no idea what anyone thinks or feels about my sister. Moreover, I don't give a toss. She's my sister and I love her. I'm over feeling guilty about not being a perfect sibling growing up – Who the fuck is? My actions at school were not done with the goal of making her life more troublesome, that's rather an unfortunate side effect. I was a teenager, struggling at times and that's all there is to say on the subject.

Three double gin & tonics down the hatch in less than an hour? Full buzz on secured, it's time to stand up – "Whoa Angelique!!" I think, gazing

down at my unsteady legs. "Right Mother dearest," I mutter under my breath, let's go see about you.

Selecting Kate Bush "Running Up That Hill" for company on my walk to the old family home, I quicken my pace. I feel like I'm gliding. Not sure if I'm walking faster than I usually do or just the perception alteration as the alcohol guides me. Twenty minutes later and I find myself staring blankly at the gorgeous castle-like front door when it suddenly opens and Mrs. Worth-Higgins appears. My heart sinks whilst a broad smile takes over my face, beautifully disguising the total loathing I have for this false bitch.

"Angelique Santoro as I live and breathe! Gosh, how long has it been!? How are you dear?"

"I'm great, thank you. And you?"

"Well, I was doing so well and then I heard about what has happened to Catherine, to you all really and I just HAD to come and offer my support."

Translation my friends? I heard there was trouble afoot in the land of Santoro, real gold leaf gossip and got myself around here as swiftly as my short, chubby legs would carry me.

"Well, that's so kind of you, Mrs. Worth-Higgins. Don't let me keep you, I'm on a bit of a tight deadline for work today so just popping by" I say, helping her off the steps and on her way.

Mother closes the door after I've passed through somewhat aggressively. "Here we go then Angelique," I say to myself, turning around, offering an awkward embrace.

"The vultures haven't stopped circling since the news broke."

"She hasn't been your first visitor then?"

"My first visitor? No such luck. Although her expressions of concern for my well-being have been the least convincing."

"She always has been the unchallenged heavyweight queen of gossip

in the neighbourhood.”

“Her delight in my suffering is nothing but cruel Angelique! Backstroking her way across my pool of misery!”

You’d never know my mother was head of classics at my old school, would you? All that was missing was an exaggerated hand to forehead and a wistful gaze to the heavens.

“She always has been a bitch.”

“Language Angelique! It’s like you never went to a decent school. You always have had a potty mouth.”

For fuck’s sake.

“Sorry Mother, I’m just angry like you that you’re experiencing this on top of the upset with Dad. It’s a lot.”

“Thank you, dear. I appreciate your support if not your language.”

“Have you heard from Aveline in the States?”

“She left me a rather lovely, sweet message late last night. Bless that child, at least I have her love.”

Clever Aveline, calling late enough to know Mother’s sleeping medication would have done its job and her mobile would go to voicemail.

“You have my love too, Mother.”

“Why yes, of course dear. I appreciate you being here.”

Jesus, the irony! That sounded about as sincere as words from Mrs. Worth-Higgins, the queen of bile who just left our family home.

“Coffee?”

“Yes, please.” I answer, casting an easy eye around the place. Everything looks immaculate. Mother looks immaculate. So, some things are back to normal even if the deep emotional scarring is only just starting to form.

I sit at the kitchen table, moving the large vase full of freshly cut

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flowers to one side maintaining eye contact with her.

“I imagine you’ve been in regular contact with your father.”

Just couldn’t help yourself could you Mother dearest? What is a passable response? No point lying because she knows I would have been and, in her eyes, there is no possible reason for one of her daughters to support him in his infidelity.

“A couple of brief conversations.”

Mother’s snort of derision expressed plenty. “Of course, you have.”

I close my eyes for a moment to better compose myself. “It’s not about taking sides. I love you both and I’m not saying it’s ok, his affair. My communication with him does not mean I approve, Mother.”

“Well, you’ll do as you see fit. You always have.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Angelique Santoro. Rebel child, international sporting star, successful businesswoman. You make up your mind to do something, you just do it. To hell with the consequences.”

“I’m lost. Are you suggesting me achieving things in life is a negative somehow?”

“Is it achieving something supporting the man who has ripped your poor mother’s heart out!?”

Fuck my life. I can’t win. I never can with her.

“That’s not fair, Mother. If the shoe was on the other foot, I wouldn’t turn my back on you.”

If the look she gave me was anything to go by, I’d best shut my mouth...

“Do you know when Aveline returns from the states dear?”

“Not sure. Depends on how well the media and public swallow whatever golden threaded bullshit she’s spinning.”

Another cold stare.

Wow, honesty and just saying how things are, is not going down well today, huh. Implying my sister is like Rumpelstiltskin is hardly a new suggestion.

“I’m certain she will be back with you as swiftly as possible. I know she feels bad she can’t be here just now.”

“It’s unfortunate timing that’s all.”

I muttered in agreement and focused on finishing my coffee.

“Right, well lovely to have this unscheduled visit Angelique but I really must do some prep work for class tomorrow.”

“Of course, Mother. I’ll see you soon.”

Another awkward embrace and I’m out the door feeling about as appreciated as Mrs. Worth-Higgins.

I select Tonight Alive, “The Edge” for the brisk walk back to my flat. Has Gareth returned? Still angry or calmed down? I know it’s his unbreakable love for me which made him react so aggressively to the news of my sexual assault and this makes me smile. He’s my universe and everything held within it.

A cyclist with no lights on, running a red light nearly takes me out as I’m crossing the road.

“Arsehole!” I yell at him, whilst skipping out of his path.

To which he replies, “Stupid cunt!!”

Seldom I’m taken aback by anything life throws at me, but this literally makes me stand still and take a breath. Did he just yell that word at me for crossing on a pedestrian green light?! Did I just imagine this? Wow. Had I had Ralph with me, it’s entirely plausible he would have been struck as he sometimes walks a couple of feet behind me playing follow my leader.

Opening the front door, I’m relieved to see Gareth cuddling Ralph on

the sofa, bottle of beer in hand, a gentle energy in the living room.

“Hey, girl.”

“Hey, boy.”

“Everything ok?” I ask, taking my jacket off, placing myself in between my boys.

“Yeah. Sorry about storming off like that earlier, just so mad.”

“Nothing to be sorry about Gareth. I was wronged, you responded accordingly.”

“Still want to tear him another asshole.”

“Of course.” I reply, “Got any more cold ones’ in the fridge?”

“Stay sat, pet. I’ll get you one.”

Gareth returns, sighing as he sits down and hands me the beer.

“Czech Republic Pilsner boy? You’re spoiling me.”

“Award winning Czech Pilsner, to be precise.”

“Ohh, look at you Mr. fancy pants.” I tease, raising my bottle to meet his.

“Oh, I have news you might find interesting.”

“Really? Go on.”

“So, about an hour ago, I received a phone call from a headhunter.”

“About what?”

“Well, apparently the Hilton is seeking a new general manager and they were wondering if I might be up for it.”

“Thought you hated all things global corporate n’ stuff.”

“Well, I do and probably will dislike parts of the company immensely if I get the job but it’s mega bucks and I was just thinking...” Gareth looks boyishly at his feet then at me.

"I was just thinking if I can earn more, perhaps I can save like you do then we can buy a proper house together."

I throw my arms around Gareth's neck and kiss his face all over.

"Yes, Yes and thrice yes, Gareth!" I squeal excitedly.

"Alright luv, was just a suggestion. Give a man some breathing space now, eh."

I jump to my feet and yell out, "Alexa, play Shut Up and Dance with Me" by Walk the Moon."

Moving to turn the volume right up to ten, I grab Gareth by the arm and yank him to his feet.

"Dance with me boy!!"

Gareth takes my hands in his and we start a silly dance grinning at one another. He spins me around and around until I'm dizzy and releases me whereby I stumble and fall into the oversized beanbag by the bay windows.

Ralph joins me, licking my face, my arms, his tail smacking into my thighs.

"It's a spaniel attack, help me!" I cry out.

Instead of offering me any kind of assistance, Gareth throws himself onto the beanbag and smothers us, planting kisses on us.

All the recent drama in my life. All the worry over family just melts away like it's nothing.

I manage to sit upright and push my hair away from my face.

"So...when's the interview?"

"Next Thursday, after my shift ends."

"Face to face or Teams?"

"All the interviews will be face to face Angelique, especially a senior leadership role for the Hilton group."

“Well, I suppose you’ll be wanting some interview tips and pointers from a well-respected recruitment advisor?”

“That would be amazing. Who do you recommend?”

I roll my eyes slowly whilst shaking my head at Gareth.

“Nice. I see what you did there.”

Gareth laughs. “Of course, I want your help darling. You prep me. Be a tough interviewer and fire all kinds of tricky questions at me so the real interview might feel easy.”

“Yup, we shall prepare together. I feel sorry for the other candidates now.” I say, picking up my phone and ordering a pizza from our favourite Italian restaurant. I crack open another beer, passing it to Gareth.

“Choose a film boy, make it a good one!!”

CHAPTER TWO

That was then, this is now.

That was then, this is now. Two years have passed since that special evening cuddled up with Gareth and Ralph. Two years gone in the blink of an eye. Time flies when you're having fun, right? I would suggest time flies whether life is fun and carefree or a total cluster fuck of crazy.

With my coaching, Gareth sailed through the four-stage interview process. It was not a very original process at the Hilton hotel group. Generic, often obvious questions flowed one after the other. Gareth said it was as if we knew what questions they would ask, what their reservations would be. Perhaps it was my eighteen years in recruitment bearing fruit, perhaps it was a spot of good fortune or perhaps it was as simple as Gareth was the best candidate for the job.

Certain cynical types were suggesting, "Oh, an openly gay man in Brighton gets the job over far more experienced candidates! Nice spot of positive discrimination there!" Perhaps the Hilton group were seeking to engage with a manager which understood people, understood Brighton

and what people really wanted from a high-end hotel. If this was the main criteria, then Gareth would have killed it.

Following his success, the local media reported with pride that it was local lad, Gareth Newman which fought off stiff international competition to become the new general manager of the Hilton hotel, on Brighton's infamous Kingsway.

The night we found out Gareth was successful, we all went out eating, dancing, and drinking until the early hours of Saturday morning. Sat on the beach with Olivia, Caitlin and all of Gareth's friends passing a joint around, huddled together for warmth, watching the sun come up, whilst listening to the sound of the waves breaking on this stony, less than perfect Brighton beach.

I'll never forget the exact moment I got the call.

It's engraved upon my memory, like burnt plastic on a cooker. Driving back from teaching my class in Brixton, thinking about how I miss seeing Kelly but how proud I was knowing she was doing so well in the Team GB squad, according to Sean.

Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia" was playing. I was 20 miles from London, so around 35 miles left on my journey home to Brighton.

"Angelique Santoro?" asked a woman whose voice I did not recognise.

"Yes, speaking." I replied.

"This is Detective Sergeant, Kirsty Jackson. I'm with Sussex police, calling from the Royal Sussex hospital."

"What's going on?"

"We have you down as ICE (in case of emergency) for Gareth Newman. Is this correct?"

"Yes. Absolutely. He's my flat mate, my best friend."

"I'm sorry to advise you Miss Santoro but it appears Gareth has been

the victim of a violent assault.”

“What?!! Oh my God. What’s his condition?” I asked, feeling a cold shudder over my neck, down my spine.

“I’m not at liberty to discuss details Miss Santoro but would ask you make your way safely to the hospital’s A&E department and ask for me at reception when you arrive. Can you do this?” Her voice remained calm throughout, never showing any emotion. A seasoned emergency responder, a professional. This wasn’t a new experience for her.

“Yes. Of course. I’ll be there as fast as I can.” I confirmed, trying to keep my voice steady but failing.

“Safely, Miss Santoro, is what I need from you, not fast. Safely please.”

“Yes, of course officer.”

I hung up the call and automatically dropped my speed, pulling into the slow lane whilst I took on board all this information.

My Gareth assaulted. Why? By whom? For what possible reason?

I gritted my teeth, dropped Nelly down two gears and booted her. I was doing over 100 mph before I changed gear again and moved into the outside lane.

“Why Gareth? What could be the reason?”

I must have asked myself this fifty times yet there was nothing obvious coming to mind.

Gareth is funny, warm, bright, and engaging. There’s no way he started a fight or deserved a bloody kicking! The only person he’s ever antagonistic towards is me and that’s usually deliberate to amuse himself.

I couldn’t find a parking space near the hospital, so I did something I never do. I just shoved Nelly up on the pavement, well half on the pavement and half on the road so someone in a wheelchair could still get past my car. Double yellow lines near the biggest hospital in Sussex? “I’m so getting a

ticket, oh just fuck it!" I said out loud, locking her up and moving swiftly towards A&E.

Upon reaching reception I buzzed twice. No one appeared.

"Fuck's sake! Hello! Hello! Anyone here in accident and emergency this evening?" I yelled out with zero patience and even less charm.

A short, slightly built woman, mixed race, perhaps European Thai or Filipino appeared from a side door, smiled at me with an insincere look that suggested, go fuck yourself but said "Yes, miss. How can I assist you?"

"Angelique Santoro here, requesting you find police officer, Kirsty Jackson."

"In regard to what?"

"Sorry. Ermm. Gareth Newman. I'm his ICE contact. Kirsty Jackson said to ask for her here."

I may have been mistaken but I swear I saw a sadness in her face, in her eyes. The name meant something to her. She knew Gareth's condition or perhaps had seen him arrive in the ambulance.

Before I could ask her anything she said, "I'll take you to Detective Jackson now, she is waiting for you."

"Can I not see Gareth first?"

"No. That's not how this works Ms. Santoro." She finished abruptly, pointing at the door leading away to ITU (Intensive Care Unit.)

"Follow me."

I did as I was instructed, feeling utterly lost and helpless. Even I know ITU is bad news. You end up there if your life is in very real danger.

We passed through the double doors into a brightly lit corridor which seemed to go on forever. Those overhead lighting strips, the off-white walls, the yellow arrows on the floor seeming to hypnotize you, to lull you into a more passive state.

Outside ITU there was a small seating area, with cheap red plastic chairs where I was greeted by two police officers.

“Angelique Santoro?”

“Yes, that’s me.” I replied, presenting my hand to meet hers.

She shook it firmly, announcing, “This is Detective Gerald Shaw” nodding to the heavy-set man to her right. “I’m Detective Sergeant, Kirsty Jackson. I’ll be taking the lead on this investigation.”

“Look, I’m sorry, can someone please tell me just what the heck is going on? Why won’t you let me see Gareth?”

“He’s unconscious, under the closest observation Ms. Santoro.”

My heart skipped a beat, my mouth suddenly dry as I repeated her words.

“He’s suffered an intense assault. I can’t give you more details. We all need to wait on the doctors for more information. I’m sorry.”

For those of you struggling, as I was to comprehend why on earth Angelique was not being met immediately by a senior medical professional, I shall explain. In the UK and I imagine likewise across Europe and to the USA, when an emergency call is made for an ambulance due to a stabbing, a gunshot wound or severe beating, the police are notified immediately and indeed may turn up on the crime scene before the ambulance. There are two reasons for this: First, to secure the crime scene and second, to ensure it is safe for the paramedics to do their job.

Incredulous, as it will seem to you reading this, in the UK there are increasing assaults, violent abusive behavior toward ambulance staff trying to save people from further harm. Who are these people? Who the fuck attacks emergency staff whose sole purpose is to save lives, to preserve life?

So, here I was at the hospital talking with detectives, not a doctor. Left in the dark as much as they were. He’s in a bad way, he’s unconscious was all any of us knew at this point.

Gerald Shaw was an ex professional boxer, complete with flattened nose, his dark brown eyes sunken back in his skull. He looked like he had been hit once too often. He was an old school copper. Happy to go with the obvious choice and the easiest route to conviction.

Kirsty Jackson by sharp contrast was not. She stood average height and build, plain looking other than hair so blonde, her eyebrows and eye lashes would have appeared almost invisible if not for mascara and tinting. Jackson was exceptionally bright. She had worked her way up the hard way, from beat officer at just 18 years old having left college. Not some privileged, fast-tracked graduate but an officer which grafted harder than any of her peers and had made it to detective after eight years loyal service to the force.

Having reached the rank of detective, Jackson was promoted faster than any detective in the history of the force. Just 18 months to detective sergeant. With the promotion came relocation away from her beloved Met Police and East London roots and upheaval to Brighton. Not even 28 years old and just one more promotion, she'd be leading all detectives in homicide and violent assault cases across the entire county of Sussex. Not bad for the daughter of a betting shop manager and café waitress.

I recognised the tomboy characteristics in her from myself right away. The easy, somewhat manly stance, feet wider apart than many women would stand. The confident, streetwise attitude. Here was a detective that would have been fist bumping her colleagues well before Covid-19 became the reason for a new, alternative handshake.

Detective Sergeant Jackson indicated for me to take my jacket off and take the seat beside her colleague. I did so as she found a seat opposite from me to start the mild interrogation.

"Who do you know who has it in for your friend, for Gareth?" Shaw asked.

"No-one at all detective," I replied, shrugging my shoulders.

“You sure about that? Think upon it for a moment longer...perhaps you do know someone or some people.”

I twisted my body around, so I was facing him.

“I just said very clearly detective that I did not know. IF I knew anything, do you think I would withhold such information?”

Jackson leant forward, her elbows resting on her knees and looked up, staring into my eyes.

“No one is suggesting that Ms. Santoro. Don’t get defensive at this stage. We have a lot of questions to ask and the sooner we understand the background surrounding Gareth, the more likely we can progress this case, which is what we all want. Right?”

Her removing her jacket earlier and now sitting open palmed allowed me to see the tattoo on the inside of her right forearm.

Never give up.

“That a promise to me Detective Sergeant Jackson?”

Jackson glanced down at the tattoo, then looked into my eyes as her raspy, East London accent took hold. “It’s not specifically to you, Ms. Santoro. It’s to any victim of violent crime which ends up in my lap.”

“Regardless, I’m going to hold you to that!” I said, turning my head toward the ITU ward.

I ran my hands through my hair, looking blankly at Shaw then Jackson. “I just can’t believe this is happening. Gareth is so lovely, so funny and kind. It makes no sense.”

Shaw responded, “Sadly, that doesn’t prevent extreme violence from occurring. It’s seldom we see this level of violence whereby the victim does not know their attacker, but it does happen.”

“If not a robbery, it’s possibly a hate crime.”

“Expand for me on that Detective Sergeant.”

“Is Gareth a practicing Muslim, Jewish or perhaps belongs to a group who believe certain things which is strongly opposed by others?”

“Why would that matter?”

Shaw interjects, “Hate crimes sometimes have religious connections. We have seen a recent spike in attacks on people of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.”

“That’s awful but no, Gareth is agnostic,” I said before adding, “But Gareth is gay.”

Jackson gave Shaw a passing glance. Jackpot.

“You think this could be a homophobic motivated attack?”

“Too early to say Ms. Santoro but we won’t rule it out.”

“In Brighton? Like the gay capital of Europe!?”

“So what?” Shaw suggested.

“Are you seriously telling us that everyone living in Brighton is pro-gay relationships? That everyone is tolerant and happy to live and let live?”

“Well, I’ve lived here all my life and gay bashing is a rare occurrence from what I know.”

Jackson looked upwards to the ceiling and cracked her neck left then right.

“Yeah, you may be right Ms. Santoro but as my colleague suggests that doesn’t mean everyone is on board with their way of life. Hatred builds in people, sometimes silently over many years then it comes to the surface and the bile of hatred pours out like a volcano erupting. They smile and talk pleasantly, whilst angry emotions simmer underneath.”

“If people have attacked my Gareth solely because of his sexuality, I’ll fucking kill them.”

Jackson sat back and stared at me. “I’ll pretend Detective Shaw and I did not hear that Ms. Santoro.”

Silence followed.

If they were waiting for an apology for my aggressive outburst, they'd be waiting a very long time.

"You mentioned if people have hurt Gareth? Why are you so sure it wasn't a single attacker?"

I laughed as I stood up.

"I'm going to get a coffee. Why don't you google me and work out between yourselves why that did not happen."