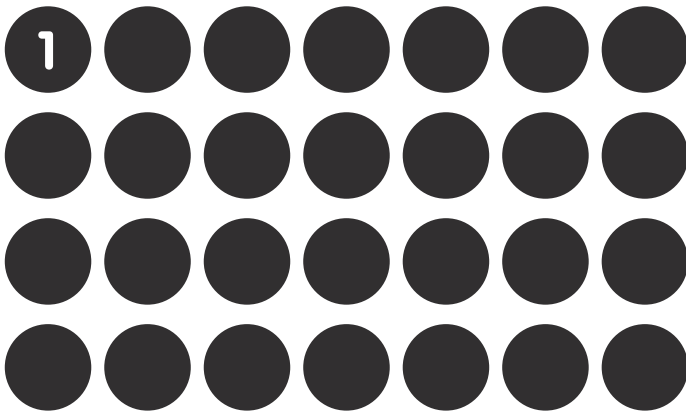


*Gravitation is not responsible  
for people falling in love.*

— Isaac Newton



### **‘You’re leaving?’**

Chloe dropped my hand.

‘I know, it sucks,’ I lied. ‘My parents think I’ll get better marks at a new school.’ Another lie.

‘The fascists,’ said Chloe, which was kind of hilarious given that my parents met at the Feminist-Socialist-Anarchist Collective at university.

‘It’ll be okay,’ I said. ‘Billy Hughes is a really good school.’

‘What’s wrong with *our* school? They’re all the same, anyway. All institutionalised learning designed to turn you into a robot.’

I shook my head. ‘Billy Hughes is really progressive,’ I told her. ‘The school motto is *Independence of Learning*.’

Chloe narrowed her eyes. ‘You don’t want to go there, do you?’

Of course I did. 'I don't want to leave you.'

'They'll *break* you, Ava!' said Chloe, her eyebrows drawing together in concern. 'It'll be all *rules* and *homework* and *standardised testing*. No creative freedom. There'll probably be *cadets*.'

I shrugged. How could I explain to Chloe that I *wanted* rules and homework and standardised testing? I wanted to be challenged. I wanted to be around people who cared about maths and structure and results. Not so much the cadets, though. The truth was, I'd begged my parents to let me change to a private school. I wrote letters and sat a scholarship exam and when I got the letter half-way through first term, I danced around my room like a lunatic.

'It's not like I'm going to another country,' I said. 'We can still hang out after school and on weekends.'

Chloe lit up a cigarette and took a long drag. 'Whatever,' she sighed, exhaling.

Chloe was the coolest person I'd ever met. She was tall and thin and had elegant long fingers and pointy elbows like those pictures on women's dress patterns. Today she was wearing a black pencil skirt with fishnet stockings and hot-librarian shoes, which she'd kicked off beside my bed. She had a black shirt on under a dark tweedy fitted jacket. Her dyed black hair was short and spiky and elfin. Two silver studs glittered in her nose, and four in each ear. Her fingernails were painted a very dark plum.

The only lightness about her was her porcelain skin, and her white cigarette.

Chloe read battered Penguin Classics she found in op shops and at garage sales. They were all by people like Anaïs Nin and Simone de Beauvoir and made her look totally intellectual, particularly when she was wearing her elegant horn-rimmed glasses.

Chloe didn't really care about school. She said most of the teachers were fascists, and sometimes even crypto-fascists, whatever that meant. She said that our education system made us docile and stupid, and that true education could only come from art, philosophy, and life itself. Chloe would rather sit on the low stone wall just outside our school and smoke cigarettes and talk about Existentialism and Life and make out with me.

She was wonderful, and I was pretty sure I was in love with her.

So how come I wanted to leave so badly?

When I first told my parents I was a lesbian, they threw me a coming-out party. Seriously. We had champagne and everything. It was the most embarrassing thing that'd ever happened to me.

They loved Chloe – possibly even more than I did. When Chloe came over, she usually ended up poring over some Ann Sexton book with Pat, or listening to Bob Dylan on vinyl with David. Ostensibly, I was there too. But I didn't really care for washed-out poetry about wombs, and

I thought Bob Dylan was kind of overrated. So I just sat there politely like I was at someone else's house, until the phone rang or something, and I could finally drag Chloe away to my room. Then there would be less talk about feminism, and Chloe would read to me from my favourite book of Jorge Luis Borges short stories, and I would make her laugh by doing impressions of Mrs Moss, our septuagenarian English teacher. Making Chloe's lips curve upwards in a smile, or her eyes crinkle with laughter, made me happier than just about anything else in the world.

When it was finally time for Chloe to go home, she'd smooth her hair and rearrange her clothes, and we'd troop back out to the kitchen. Pat and David would always look so crestfallen that she was leaving. 'So soon?' Pat would say. 'But we've hardly had a chance to chat!'

Sometimes I thought my parents wished Chloe was their daughter.

I got home and said hi to Pat and David and then went into my room and shut the door. I wished I had a lock, but there's no way that my parents would approve of that. It would imply that I had something to hide, and they're the most liberal and accepting parents in the world – so what would I possibly want to hide from them?

If only they knew.

I went to my wardrobe and dug through my old jelly-sandals and mouldy runners until I was practically in

Narnia. And I pulled out a bag. It was one of those pale-blue shiny shopping bags with a ribbon handle. It was the kind of bag that people on TV have fifty of when they're on a shopping spree that could fund a starving African nation.

In the bag there was a bundle wrapped in thin lemon-yellow tissue paper, sealed with a pale-blue oval sticker with gold lettering on it. Holding my breath, I gently prised the sticker away from the tissue paper, and unwrapped the bundle, listening carefully for the sound of Pat or David busting in to offer me an espresso or a lecture on post-structuralism.

At the centre of the bundle, there was a jumper. A pink argyle cashmere jumper, to be exact. It was pretty much the softest thing ever, the pink and cream diamonds snuggling up against each other like soul mates.

I rubbed the soft wool against my cheek, and then got up and stood in front of the mirror, holding the jumper against my body. I didn't need to put it on – I knew it fit perfectly. I knew because I'd tried it on at the shop. And it was so beautiful, so soft, so ... pink. I just had to buy it. Even though I knew I couldn't wear it, because Chloe would laugh herself silly.

I *never* wore pink. Pink wasn't cool. Pink wasn't existential. Pink was for princesses and ballet shoes and glittery fairies.

When I was five, I only wore pink. Pink everything, from my undies to my socks to my little frilly dresses to

my Flik Flak watch. I refused to wear any other colour – much to the dismay of my parents, who were itching to dress me in miniature Che Guevara T-shirts and black berets.

All my toys were pink. I only used pink pencils. I insisted on having my bedroom painted pink.

Not now. Now my bedroom was painted a sombre pale grey, with charcoal skirting boards and architraves. Now, there was no trace of pink in my room. No more unicorn posters on the walls – instead there were black-and-white art prints. My parents must have been so proud. There wasn't even so much as a rainbow flag; as Chloe said, we weren't *that* sort of lesbian.

As I'd grown older, Pat and David had worn me down. They explained to me that pink was an empty signifier of femininity, and pointed out that none of the other little girls at my Steiner school wore pink dresses under their art smocks. They showed me magazine articles about Britney Spears before she went off the rails, and shook their heads sadly.

By the end of primary school, they were victorious. The pendulum had swung all the way over to black. Now, you'd be lucky to find me in a skirt, and at the end of Year Ten I'd thrown out my last pair of non-black undies. My hair was dyed black, and usually caught up in a messy bun. I wore a reasonably unchanging wardrobe of black jeans and black tops – black singlets in summer, and a grandpa cardigan in winter. Sometimes I wished I could

dress crazy and eclectic and feminine like Chloe, but I knew she would always outshine me, so I stuck to what I knew.

So now the pink jumper was practically glowing in my grey bedroom. It was like a tiny bit of Dorothy's Oz in boring old black-and-white Kansas.

I carefully folded it up, and rewrapped it in the yellow tissue paper.

Pink was for girls.

Girly girls who wore flavoured lip gloss and read magazines and talked on the phone lying on their perfect, lacy bedspreads with their feet in the air. Girls who spent six months looking for the perfect dress to wear to the school formal.

Girls who liked boys.