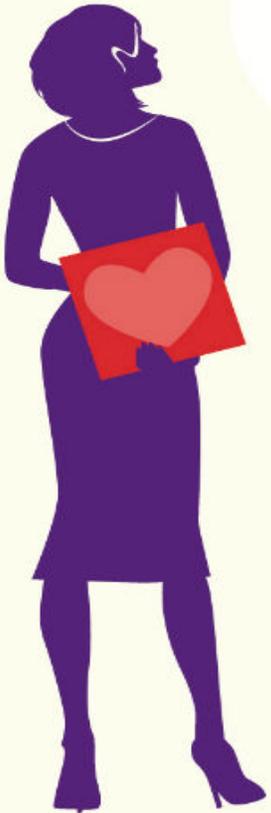


'Hilarious and beautiful... Funny, insightful, wonderful'

EASY LIVING

*I
Think
Love
You*



**ALLISON
PEARSON**

HER NEW BESTSELLER

VINTAGE

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About the Book

1974. Thirteen-year-old Petra and her best friend Sharon are desperate to win a competition to meet their teen idol.

Meanwhile Bill is unhappy in his job, ghostwriting the fanzine of the man so adored by the girls - and slightly unnerved by the extreme emotions of some of the fans.

Fast forward to 1998. Petra is pushing forty and on the brink of divorce. While cleaning out her mother's wardrobe she finds a letter declaring her the winner of the competition she and Sharon had agonised over decades ago.

So, twenty-four years after entering the competition the girls claim their prize and are flown out for an all-expenses-paid trip to Las Vegas to meet their hero at last. Bill, now the magazine's publisher, flies out with them . . .

Poignant, hilarious, joyful, profoundly moving and uplifting, *I Think I Love You* captures what we learn about love, life and friendship through the universal experience of worshipping a teen dream. It will resonate with readers everywhere.

About the Author

Allison Pearson was born in South Wales. An award-winning journalist, she was named Newcomer of the Year at the British Book Awards for her first novel, *I Don't Know How She Does It*. Allison has written for many magazines and newspapers including the *Independent on Sunday*, *Observer* and the *London Evening Standard*. She is a contributing editor to Harper's Bazaar and, for four years, she was the popular Wednesday columnist of the *Daily Mail*. Allison is now a staff writer at the *Daily Telegraph*. She lives with her family in Cambridge.

ALSO BY ALLISON PEARSON

I Don't Know How She Does It

For my son, Thomas Daniel

And in memory of my beloved grandfather,
Daniel Elfed Williams

I Think I Love You

Allison Pearson

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

It panics him. He always keeps the curtains drawn. 'They are out there, Mother, they're out there.'

*Evelyn Cassidy, on her son
David's reaction to his fans*

PROLOGUE

1998

The wardrobe was double-fronted, with a full-length mirror. Inside was her mother's tweed suit with the mink collar. There were tailored skirts, and blouses on hangers. There were sweaters in soft colours, carefully folded, with layers of tissue paper in between. At the bottom were the racks of shoes.

It was there that she found it, behind the racks. She wasn't looking for it. She wasn't looking for anything. She was reaching for a pair of black patent heels, the shine still on them after thirty years, when her fingers brushed against something colder than leather. She took it out. A tin with a lake and mountains on the lid. A Christmas gift from Austria. Inside, she found cards and photographs, and a sheaf of letters, tied together with a red ribbon.

The pink envelope was out of place. It had smiley faces and a rainbow on the front. It was addressed to her, but there was something strange about the handwriting. It took her a moment to recognise it as her own. Not her own now, but the way she used to write, a long time ago, with flowery loops. The envelope had been opened and it was easy to slide out the letter inside. She read it for the first time in her life. Then she read it again to make sure.

She got up and walked across the landing and pushed the door into her old bedroom. The brown coverlet was still on the bed, soft and slightly damp to the touch. She knelt

down, reached under the bed and pulled out a grey transistor radio. She flicked the switch.

PART ONE

1974

How To Kiss - Part Two

You have kissed him, the one important boy, for the first time. Was it a successful kiss? Was it a kiss he'll always remember? Was it a kiss that made him kiss you again? Or was it a kiss that he'll remember for all the wrong reasons? That is the last thing in the world you would want to happen. So, when the time comes to kiss again, it's important to bear a few things in mind.

Don't make these mistakes:

1. Don't be nervous.
2. Don't spend too much time practising, so that's all you can think about when the time comes.
3. Don't look flustered or nervous, don't look as though you're afraid.
4. Don't close your eyes all the way until you're sure your lips are going to meet his and his lips are going to meet yours. He may be just as nervous as you and might close his eyes and wind up kissing your nose or the side of your mouth, unless you see what's happening and move your head so your lips will meet.
5. Don't put your tongue into his mouth. Not this time.

You are going to think this - these exact words - then think it again and again.

'He wouldn't want to kiss me unless I looked pretty to him. I look pretty to him. I look pretty to him. That is why he wants to kiss me. That is why he is kissing me now.'

'Loving Fashions', 16 magazine

1

HIS FAVOURITE COLOUR was brown. Brown was such a sophisticated colour, a quiet and modest sort of colour. Not like purple, which was Donny's favourite. I wouldn't be seen dead in purple. Or in a Donny cap. How much would you have to like a boy before you went out wearing a stupid purple peaked cap?

Honest, it's amazing the things you can know about someone you don't know. I knew the date of his birth - 12 April 1950. He was a typical Aries, but without the Arian's stubbornness. I knew his height and his weight and his favourite drink, 7-Up. I knew the names of his parents and his stepmother, the Broadway musical star. I knew all about his love of horses, which made perfect sense to me because when you're that famous it must be comforting to be around someone who doesn't know or care what famous is. I knew the instrument he learned to play when he was lonely. Drums. I knew the name of the dog he left behind when he had to move away from New Jersey. I knew that when he was a boy he was small for his age and he had a squint and had to wear an eyepatch and corrective glasses, which must have been hard. Harder than for a girl even. I didn't wear my glasses if I could help it. Only in class for the blackboard, though I couldn't see well without them and it got me into trouble a few times when I smiled in the street at total strangers who I mistook for members of my family. A few years later, when I got contact lenses, I was stunned by the trees. They had leaves, millions of leaves, with edges so sharp and defined they looked like God had made each one with a pastry cutter. Basically, before I was sixteen, the

world was one big Impressionist painting, unless I screwed up my eyes really tight to bring it into focus. Some things, as I would discover, were best left a blur.

Back then, I wasn't interested in the real world. Not really. I answered my parents' questions, I gave the appearance of doing homework, I lugged my cello into school on my back, I went down the town on Saturday afternoons with girls who sometimes felt like friends and sometimes didn't, but I was living for Him. Each night, I spread my long dark hair out on the pillow and made sure to sleep on my back so my face was ready to receive a kiss in case he came in the night. It wasn't that likely, obviously, because I lived in South Wales and he lived in California, which was five thousand miles away, and he didn't even have my address, although I had once sent a poem for him to a magazine. Choosing the right colour paper took longer than writing the actual poem. I settled on yellow because it seemed more mature than pink. I thought all the other girls would choose pink and part of loving him was finding better ways to please him so he would know how much more I cared. They didn't sell brown writing paper or I would have used brown because that was his favourite colour. Some time later - three weeks and four days if you're counting, and I definitely was - a reply came in the post. It was seventeen words long including my name. It didn't matter that the letter said they were sorry they couldn't publish my poem. In some crucial way, I felt as though I had made contact with him at long last. Someone important in London, someone who had been in the same room as him, had touched the yellow paper I had touched and then typed my name on an envelope and licked the stamp. No rejection slip has ever been more treasured. It took pride of place in my scrapbook.

I knew exactly where he lived in California. In a canyon. A canyon was like one of our valleys, only much bigger. We said much bigger. David said way. Way bigger. Way was American for much. America was so big that Americans

would drive one hundred miles just to have dinner with someone and they didn't think that was a long way to go. In America, way to go means you've done something well. Way to go, baby! And they have gas instead of petrol.

Other words I had learned were cool, mad and bathroom. You have to be careful because a bathroom is not a bathroom in America, it's a toilet.

'The Americans are a most polite people who are not standing for vulgarity,' said my mother, who was German and beautiful and disapproved of many things. You might say that my mother's whole life was a battle to keep the vulgar and the ugly at bay. In our town, she had found the perfect enemy. I just liked knowing American words because they brought me closer to Him. When we met, it would be important to retain my individuality, which was one of the top things David looked for in a girl.

In every interview I had read, David said that he preferred a girl to just be herself. But to be honest I was unsure of who myself was, or even if I had one, although I still maintained a touching faith that this unknown and as yet undiscovered me would be deeply appealing to David when we eventually met. How could I be sure? The understanding in his eyes told me so. (Oh, those eyes. They were deep green pools you could pour all your longing into.) Still, I reckoned that meeting David would be awkward enough without any unnecessary confusion, so I did my best to pick up American. It would be tricky to go to a bathroom in his house in Los Angeles, for example, and find there was no bath, wouldn't it? Or imagine saying someone was mad. David would think that I meant they were angry. Crazy means mad in America. Back then, I couldn't imagine David ever being angry, he was so gentle and sensitive. Sorry, do I sound mad?

'Donny Osmond's a moron,' Sharon said firmly. She was kneeling on the floor, picking at the staples in a centrefold with her thumbnail trying to free a male torso. The slender,

headless body was naked to the waist and practically hairless, except for a fine golden down just above the belt, which boasted a heavy bronze buckle. It looked like the door knocker to an Aztec temple. Sharon eased the poster off the frail metal pins until it rested on her hands, trembling a little in the hot air blowing from the small heater beside her. Sharon's bedroom was small, painted in a sickly shade of ointment pink and reeked of burnt hair, a bad candyfloss smell that got in your nostrils and stayed there. Sharon had dried her hair in front of the heater and a few strands got sucked into the back, but we didn't really notice the smell, so absorbed were we in our work.

'I don't think Donny's a moron, to be honest with you,' I said carefully.

'All the Osmonds are morons. I read it in a mag,' she insisted without looking up from the poster. Sharon was an expert restorer. The best artist in our class. When she grew up she could probably get a job in a museum or an art gallery. I loved to watch her work. The way she rolled her tongue into a little tunnel when she was concentrating and applied her attention to the tiny puncture holes in David's stomach, soothing the torn paper with her fingertips until the flesh appeared to seal up.

'There you go, lovely boy,' she said, and placed a noisy smacking kiss on his belly button before adding the poster to the pile.

There was a prickle in my throat like a piece of trapped wool. I badly wanted to correct Sharon about the Osmonds being morons, but our friendship was still too new to risk disagreement. We liked each other because we agreed. We agreed because we both thought David Cassidy was the most wonderful boy currently alive and maybe in all of human history. At thirteen years of age, I couldn't imagine the luxury of having a friend you could disagree with. If you disagreed with her you could fall out. Then, before you knew it, you'd be back out there in the playground by yourself,

sighing and checking your watch every couple of seconds to indicate that you did have an arrangement to meet someone and were not, in fact, the kind of sad, friendless person who had to pretend they were waiting for friends who did not exist.

Even worse, you could find yourself entering into anxious negotiations with some other borderline outcast to be your partner in PE so you didn't have to be in a pair with Susan Davies. Susan Smell, who had a disease of the skin no one could spell. Her face, her arms and her legs were all cratered like the surface of the moon, only some days the holes were filled in with the chalky dust of calamine lotion. We knew exactly what it was because our mothers dabbed the lotion on us when we got chickenpox. The angry, itchy spots were like tiny volcanoes around which the soothing pink liquid hardened into a tempting lava crust. Mustn't pick it, mind, or it would leave a scar. The worst thing about Susan Davies, apart from the way you felt really sorry for her but still didn't do anything to help her, was the pong. Honest to God, Susan smelt so bad it made you retch in the corridor when she went past, even though she always walked on the side with the windows.

'Donny's a *Mormon*. I think it's a religion they founded in Utah,' I said cautiously, trying the sounds in my mouth.

Ooh. Ta.

I knew exactly what Mormons were. Donny Studies were part of my deep background research on David. I knew everything about the other Osmonds too, just in case, even Wayne. At a pinch, I could have given you the star sign of every member of the Jackson Five, and details of their difficult upbringing, which was in such contrast to their carefree, joyful music. Twiddly diddly dee, twiddly diddly dee. Twiddly diddly dee. Dee dee!

You know, I can never hear the opening chorus of 'Rockin' Robin' without a spasm of regret for what became of that remarkable little boy and all his sweetness.

Even as a child, I had this overdeveloped taste for tragic biographical information, a sort of twitching inner radar for distress. I may have been the only one not to be in the least bit surprised when Michael Jackson began to take leave of his adorable black face in painful cosmetic stages. You see, I understood all about hating the way you looked and wanting to magic away the child who made a parent feel angry or disappointed. When you grow up, they call this empathy. When you're thirteen it just makes you feel like you're not so horribly alone.

'D'you reckon Mormons all have to wear purple because it's Donny's favourite colour?' I asked.

Sharon giggled. 'Get away with you, Petra, you're a case, you are!'

We thought we were hysterically funny. We laughed at anything, but lately boys had become a particular target for our witticisms. We laughed at them before they could laugh at us, or ignore us, which curiously felt even more wounding than being teased or insulted. You know, I always liked Sharon's laugh better than mine. My laugh sounded like a nervous cough that only starts to let itself go too late, when the joke has passed. Sharon made that happy, hiccupy sound you hear when you pull a cord in a doll's back. She looked a bit like a doll, did my new maybe friend. She was round and dimpled and her eyes were an astonishing bluebell blue beneath the palest barely there lashes. Her hair was that bone-dry flaxen kind that bursts out of a person's head like a dandelion clock. When we sat next to each other in Chemistry, her hair would float sideways on an invisible current of hot air from the Bunsen burner and stick to my jumper. If I tried to sweep it off the static gave me a shock that made my arm swarm.

Sharon was pretty in a way everyone in our group could agree was pretty without feeling bad about it. It was a mystery. Her weight seemed to act as a sort of protective jacket against jealousy. When she lost her puppy fat I think

we all sensed it might be a different story. In the meantime, Sharon posed no threat to Gillian, who had got the two of us together in the first place and who was the star of our group. No, that's not right. Gillian was our Sun. We all revolved around her and you would do anything, anything at all really, really humiliating and shameful things, just in the hope she might shine on you for a few minutes because the warmth of Gillian's attention made you instantly prettier and more fascinating.

As for me, the jury was still out on my looks. I was so skinny that next to Sharon I looked like a Victorian matchgirl. And don't go thinking, 'Oh, get her, she's proud of her figure.' Skinny is not the same as slim, no way. Skinny is the last-girl-but-one-to-get-a-training-bra because you've got nothing up top. God, I hate that expression. Up top. 'Hasn't got much up top, has she?'

Where we lived, girls had Up Top and Down There. You don't want to let a boy go Down There, but sometimes he was allowed Up Top, if you'd got anything there, like.

Skinny is always being late for hockey and being made to run five times round the games field because you keep your blouse on until the others have left the changing room so they don't see your sad little girl's vest. A vest with a single shaming rosebud on the front.

The magazines told us to identify our good points. Mine was eyes. Large and grey-blue, but sometimes green-blue flecked with amber, like a rock pool when the sun is shining on it. But my eyes also had these liver-coloured smudges under them which no cucumber slices or beauty sleep could ever cure. I never stopped trying though.

'Petra's dark circles are so bad she could go to a masked ball and she wouldn't need a mask,' Gillian said and everyone laughed, even me. Especially me. Be careful not to show her what really hurts or she'll know exactly where to put the knife in next time.

My worst feature was everything else really. I hated my knees, my nose and my ears, basically anything that stuck out. And I had pale skin that seemed even paler because of my dark hair. On a good day, I looked like Snow White in her glass coffin.

Expertly, my mother took my face in one hand, chin pinched between thumb and forefinger and tilted it sharply towards the bathroom light. She squeezed so tight my jaw ached. 'You are not unattractive, Petra,' my mother said coolly. 'Bones really quite good. If you pluck the brows when you are older, here and here, like szo, revealing the eyes more. You know, you are really not szo bad.'

'It's *too* bad, Mum, not so bad. I don't look *too* bad.'

'That is exactly what I am saying to you, Petra. Relax, please. You are not szo bad for a girl at her age.'

My mother believed she spoke perfect English and my dad always said now was not the time to tell her. Did I mention my mother was beautiful? She had a perfect heart-shaped face and eyes that were wide open yet sleepy at the same time. I'd never seen anyone who looked like my mother until one Saturday night I was round Sharon's house and there was a show on TV. This woman was sitting on a high stool in a dress made of something that shone like foil with a white fur cape draped around the shoulders. She looked glamorous and hard, but her voice was like a soft purr.

'That's all woman, that is,' Sharon's dad said, which made me wonder what the rest of women were. Were they halves or quarters? Marlene Dietrich didn't look like she had kids, but then neither did my mum. Put my blonde mother in a gathering of my father's dark, stocky Welsh relatives and she looked like a palomino among a herd of pit ponies. Guess which side of the family I took after.

'Got it! Knew it was here somewhere.' Sharon was grinning in triumph. She had found the legs to match the torso.

Jackie was giving away a free life-size David poster, but it came in parts over three weeks. Last week was jeans and cowboy boots, this time it was the body. They always saved the head till last.

‘So you got to keep buying the mag, isn’t it? Do they think we’re blimmin’ stupid or something?’

I couldn’t see Sharon’s face, but I knew she was frowning and funnelling her tongue as she lined up David’s belly with his jeans. This was the hard part. Once she’d got them in position she flipped the shiny pages over and I handed her the strip of Sellotape, ever the dutiful nurse to her surgeon. We both stood up to get a better view of our handiwork. It wasn’t a typical David pose. Among the thirty or so posters on Sha’s walls there wasn’t another quite like it. His thumbs were tucked into his waistband, the top button of his flies was undone and the jeans wrenched apart so you glimpsed that inverted V of hair that the zip normally hid. I tried to think of something funny to say, but my mouth felt dry and oatmealy. The absence of his head was definitely a problem. We urgently needed David’s smiling face to reassure us about what was going on down below. I felt a flicker as a tiny pilot light ignited in my insides and a warmth like liquid spread across my stomach and trickled down into my thighs.

Sharon had seen a penis, but it was her brother’s so it didn’t count. Carol was the only girl in our group who had touched a real one. Chris Morgan’s in the tree house down the Rec where the boys went to look at dirty mags. Carol said the penis felt like eyelid skin. Could that be right? For weeks after she told us, I would brush a finger over the skin above my eye and I would marvel that something which was made of boy could be so silky and fine like tissue paper.

When we went through the mags, Sharon and I always flicked past the bad boys. Mick Jagger and that David Bowie, he was a strange one. We sensed instinctively that those stars were not for us. They might want to come down off the

posters on the wall and do something. Exactly what they would do we didn't know, but our mothers would not have it.

'It's really weird,' Sharon said contemplating the headless, semi-naked David.

'Weird,' I agreed.

It was our new favourite word, and we used it as often as we could, but it really bothered me that we weren't saying it right. When David said it on *The Partridge Family* it had one syllable. Whirred. Our accent put the stress in the wrong place somehow. However hard I tried it still came out as 'whee yad'. On the cello, I could play any note I liked. I knew if it was wrong the same way I knew if I was cold or hungry, but controlling the sound that came from my own mouth was different. Funny thing is I didn't even realise I had a Welsh accent. Not until our year went on a school trip to Bristol Zoo and some English girls in the motorway services mimicked the way I asked for food.

'Veg-e-tab-ils.'

I pronounced the 'e' in the middle, but English people didn't.

They said 'vedge-tibuls'.

Why did they bother putting an 'e' in there, then, if you weren't supposed to say it? So people like me could sound *twp* and they could have a laugh.

Sharon and me were doing our top rainy Sunday-afternoon thing to do, listening to David's *Cherish* album and flicking through magazines for any mention of him. After Sunday school, which lasted for two long hours, there wasn't much else to do in our town on the Sabbath, to be honest with you. Everyone abided by some unwritten law that people should stay indoors and keep quiet. Even if you didn't go to chapel, which we always did because my father was the organist, it felt as though chapel had come to you. My Auntie Mair never used scissors on a Sunday, because God could see everything, even the wax in your ears and the dirt

under your nails. You could grow potatoes under there. *Achafi!* Disgusting. And you didn't hang your washing out on the line because of what the neighbours would think. The judgement of the neighbours might not be as bad as that of the Lord Thy God, Dad said, but you knew about it sooner.

Sundays lowered the temperature in the rows of grey-stone terraced houses clinging to the mountain which rose steeply above our bay, and even the sea became a bit subdued. It always made me think it was a good day for Jesus to walk on the water. People shivered on the Sabbath and went upstairs to put a cardigan on and came down to watch the wrestling on TV, but always with the sound down, out of respect. It was really 'whee yad' looking in through the windows as you ran down the hill towards the seafront, using your back shoe as a brake till you smelt the rubber, and seeing the big men in their leotards throwing each other about, silently bellowing and stamping their boots on the floor of the ring.

Going round Sharon's house was like a holiday for me. She had an older brother called Michael who teased us, but in a funny way, you know, and a younger sister, called Bethan, who had a crush on little Jimmy Osmond, if you can believe it. (We called him Jimmy Spacehopper because he had these little bunny features stuck in the middle of a round face like a balloon.) She also had a baby brother called Jonathan who sucked Farley's Rusks in his highchair till he got a crusty orange moustache which you could peel off in one piece when it got hard and there were visitors who dropped in for a chat and stayed because they were too busy talking to notice the time. As for Sharon's mum, well, she was lovely, you couldn't ask for a nicer person. She knocked on the bedroom door, really respectful, and came in and offered us squash and Club biscuits. Always remembered that I preferred the currant ones in the purple wrapper, not the orange. Mrs Lewis said she liked our David posters and she told us she still had a book of matches and a cocktail stick

from the night Paul McCartney dropped into a club in Cardiff. 1964 it was. Sharon's mum was absolutely crazy about Paul. Said she had hated Linda for marrying him.

'He was mine, you see.'

Yes, we saw.

My favourite thing was the David shrine on the back of Sharon's door. She got it in a *Tiger Beat* her Auntie Doreen brought back all the way from Cincinnati, America. Four pictures fixed at mouth height so Sha could snog him on the way out to school in the morning. Like she was saying goodbye to a real lover boy. In the first picture, David had that shaggy haircut and a naughty smile. The second was this look - you know. In the third, his lips were puckered up, and in the fourth, well, he just looked really happy and pleased with himself, didn't he?

Over time, the four Davids became smeared and blurry with the Vaseline that Sharon used to soften her lips, a trick we copied from Gillian. Sometimes, Sharon let me have a go at kissing David Number 3. I wasn't allowed posters on my wall at home because my mother believed that popular music could make you deaf and was really common and therefore appealing only to people like my dad, who worked down the steelworks and was a big Dean Martin man on the quiet, though that's another story and I'm meant to be telling you this one.

Well, at the start of that year, several things happened. Gillian - she was never just Gill - lent Sharon to me as my special friend. I was really happy, you know, but I sensed the loan could be called in any minute if Gillian's infatuation with Angela, the new girl from England, ever cooled. The uncertainty gave me this feeling in my stomach like I was on a ferry or something and couldn't get my balance. Most nights, I woke with a fright because my legs were kicking out under the sheets as if I had to save myself from falling, falling. Another thing was the headmaster told me after

assembly one morning that I was going to play the cello for Princess Margaret when she came to open our new school hall. She was the Queen's sister and the Lord Mayor and some people called dignitrees were coming. But the really big news was that David Cassidy had postponed his tour of Britain after having his gall bladder removed. Two girls in Manchester were so upset they set themselves on fire, according to the mag.

On fire! My God, the thought of the passion and the sacrifice of those girls, it burned in our heads for weeks. We hadn't done anything that big for him. Not yet anyway.

Another couple of fans wrote to David asking if they could have a gallstone each as a souvenir. Sharon and I pretended to be shocked and disgusted by the gallstones story. *Achafi!* Secretly, we could not have been more delighted. The blimmin' cheek of it! Honest to God, where were their manners? It was in bad taste and unladylike. David, as any true fan knew, liked girls to act really feminine. We shook our heads and crossed our arms indignantly, as we had seen our mothers do, resting them on the invisible shelf where soon our breasts would be. Asking for David's gallstones!

Feeling superior to your rivals was one of the sweetest pleasures of being a fan, and maybe of being female in general.

We found out all about the tour cancellation and the gallstones from *The Essential David Cassidy Magazine*. It was brilliant, our Bible really. God's own truth. At 18p, it was way more expensive than any other mag.

'Dead classy, mind,' Sharon said, and so it was with its thick, glossy paper, gorgeous recent pix and a monthly personal letter written by David himself actually from the set of *The Partridge Family* in Hollywood, America. You couldn't put a price on something like that, could you?

From David's letters, we collected facts like eager squirrels, putting them by for some vital future use. If you'd asked us what that use was we couldn't have told you. All

we knew was that one day it would become magically clear and we would be ready.

‘David writes lovely, mun,’ Sharon sighed.

‘David writes *well*.’ I heard my mother’s voice correcting Sharon’s speech inside my head. She looked down on people with bad grammar, which was everybody except the lady who did the tickets at the library and the announcers on the BBC.

‘Don’t talk tidy, please talking the Queen’s English, Petra,’ rebuked my mother whenever she caught me speaking the way everyone else in town spoke.

But there in Sharon’s room, with the little heater filling the place with sleepy warmth and David on the turntable singing ‘Daydreamer’ I could tune out the voice of my mother and start learning how to be a woman all by myself.

‘Nothing in the world could bother me
Cos I was living in a world of make believe . . .’

The cancellation of the Cassidy tour at the start of 1974 was a bitter blow, but it also came as a relief. It gave me more time to perfect my plan for meeting David when he came later in the year. Maybe autumn. He would call it ‘the fall’, which seemed perfect to me. I knew that somehow I would have to travel to London or Manchester because Wales was so small it had no concert venue big enough to hold all the fans. I wasn’t sure how I would get there – no money, no transport, a mother who thought any singer who wasn’t Dietrich Fisher Dishcloth shouldn’t be allowed – but once I got there and was safely outside the concert hall I knew that everything would be fine.

I would be hit by a car. Not a serious injury, obviously, just bad enough to be taken to hospital by ambulance. David would be told about my accident and he would rush to my bedside. Things would be awkward at first, but we would soon get talking and he would be amazed by my in-depth

knowledge of his records, particularly the B-sides. I would ask him how he was enjoying the fall and if he needed to use the bathroom. It would not be at all weird, it would be cool. David would be impressed by my command of American. Jeez. He would smile and invite me to his house in Hawaii where I would meet his seven horses and there would be garlands round our necks and we would kiss and get married on the beach. I was already worried about my flip-flops. Yes, it was a kind of madness. It didn't last all that long, not in the great scheme of a life, but while I loved Him he was the world entire.

The next day was school. I hated Sunday nights, hated the melancholy hour after getting home from Sharon's warm funny house, hated having to revise for the Monday morning French test.

I love, I will love, I was loving, I have loved, I will have loved. *J'aurai aimé*. Future perfect.

The only thing that made it bearable was reading the David mags I kept under a floorboard by my bed and listening to the Top 40 in a cave beneath the sheets.

My mother's voice drifted up the stairs: 'Petra, finishing your homework, at once, and then cello practice.'

'I'm *doing* my homework.'

And so I was. Lying on the brown candlewick bedspread, reading by the light of the bedside lamp, I studied that week's words and committed them to heart.

Dear Luvs,

I guess I'm like everyone else. I just dig getting letters! I like to know who you guys are. That's why I'm totally thrilled when I get a letter and YOU tell me something about yourself - your favourite colour or where you live. Pretty soon, I feel like we're old friends. That's so nice.

I reckon I should return the favour. Well, you probably all know what I look like by now . . . But the thing is I'm sitting in my trailer in between takes of *The Partridge Family*. It's a real home from home, with family photographs and all my favourite sodas.

Hey! I've just caught sight of the amount I've written - and this was supposed to be just a short letter! I guess I must have had so much to say to YOU that I got carried away.

See the effect this has had on me? I never used to like writing letters and I used to have to stretch my literary efforts to get them to seven or eight lines. Now I can't wait to make contact again next month. Till then.

Luv,
David

2

Hey! I've just caught sight of the amount I've written - and this was supposed to be just a short letter! I guess I must have had so much to say to YOU that I got carried away.

See the effect this has had on me? I never used to like writing letters and I used to have to stretch my literary efforts to get them to seven or eight lines. Now I can't wait to make contact again next month. Till then.

Love you loads,
Loads of love,
Loadsaluv,
Lvu-

'GOD'S *BOLLOCKS*.' BILL pulled the paper out of the typewriter as hard as he could. It made that sound he always thought of as Writer's Hiss, halfway between a rip and a zip. He balled the paper up and hurled it at the waste-paper basket, or, rather, at the cardboard box that was all the office could afford. 'Wagon Wheels 184 pkts' it said on the side. Bill's aim was untrue, like many things about him, and the missile struck Zelda amidships. She turned very slowly, and her paisley kaftan billowed like a sail.

'Now now, William. Don't despair. Man has to suffer for his art,' Zelda said. Bill had never understood the word *chortle* until he heard the noise that his editor made when she was amused, preferably by the misery of others.

'What's art got to do with it? I am making up absolute rubbish to put into the mouth of some cretinous pretty boy who can't sing, probably doesn't shave yet and certainly couldn't write a letter to save his own grandma.'

'It's a perfectly respectable branch of fiction,' Zelda replied, unperturbed.