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# *Backwards in High Heels*

THE IMPOSSIBLE ART  
*of* BEING FEMALE

TANIA KINDERSLEY & SARAH VINE

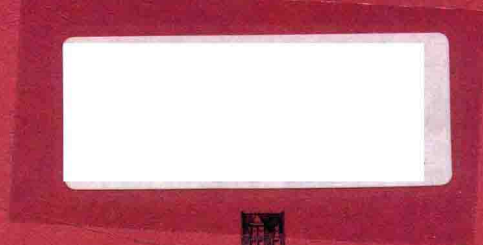




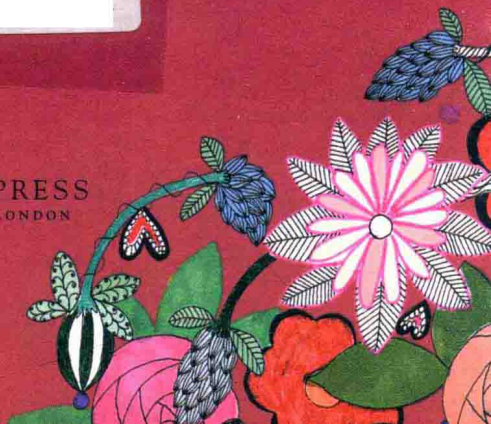
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## THE IMPOSSIBLE ART *of* BEING FEMALE

BY TANIA KINDERSLEY & SARAH VINE



RUNNING PRESS  
PHILADELPHIA • LONDON



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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: **LOVE ...10**

CHAPTER 2: **FOOD ...44**

CHAPTER 3: **CAREER ...62**

CHAPTER 4: **MEN ...84**

CHAPTER 5: **HEALTH ...108**

CHAPTER 6: **POLITICS AND  
THE NEW ORTHODOXY ...134**

CHAPTER 7: **PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, SELF-ESTEEM,  
AND THE WHOLE DAMN THING ...164**

CHAPTER 8: **DRESSING AND SHOPPING ...184**

CHAPTER 9: **MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY ...204**

CHAPTER 10: **MONEY ...248**



CHAPTER 11: **GRIEF** ...268

CHAPTER 12: **AGE** ...288

CHAPTER 13: **BEAUTY** ...302

CHAPTER 14: **SEX** ...326

CHAPTER 15: **THE PRACTICAL CHAPTER** ...350

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ...390



## Praise for *Backwards in High Heels*

"Infused with wit, warmth, and wisdom and a refreshing dose of common sense. . . Irreverent and clear-eyed, they do their best to remind us that growing up with dignity doesn't mean you have to give up being spontaneous. . ."

—*The Observer*

"...bold, unpatronising guide to 'the art of being female.'"

—*The Sunday Times*

"*Backwards* is self-help for the thinking woman."

—*Telegraph Review*

"Manuals for women tend to be reductive, either geared towards man-pleasing or cheesy self-empowerment that ignores the complicated realities of life. This beautifully produced book offers a refreshing new approach, illuminating the lot of contemporary women without claiming to have the answers. . . ."

A much-needed antidote to dumb women's magazines that hold the meaning of life can be found in a flat stomach."

—*The London Paper*

"Above all, it is female-friendly. Not in that pretend way of glossy magazines that devote pages to the saggy knees of celebrities, but in the sense of cheering you on as you try to make sense of being a woman in this peculiar world."

—*The Mail on Sunday*

"I love this book. It's one of those rare beasts that you want to earmark, scribble in and rush out and buy for all your girlfriends. . . . This is a brilliant feat of realism that hasn't been managed convincingly in print before: with this kind of how-to guide, the choice until now was either froufrou delight or slash-your-wrists gloomfest."

—India Knight, *The Sunday Times Magazine*





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To all the great women  
(and a few great men)





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# INTRODUCTION

There was a great indie pop tune not so very long ago which went: It's not a love, it's not a love, it's not a love song.

This is not a self-help book. It is not a how-to manual. There will be no easy ten-step life plans. If you want one of those, go immediately to another section of the bookstore. You'll find no admonitory instructions about how to keep your man happy or make your hair glossy or lose weight. We may occasionally pass on something about life which we have learnt, or offer an illustrative anecdote, because we love an anecdote. Quite frankly, we are in absolutely no position to set down diamond-hard advice, because half the time we don't know what the hell we are doing. If this book is about anything, it is about figuring out as you go along, about making up your own mind and trusting that mind, whatever the zeitgeist might be telling you.

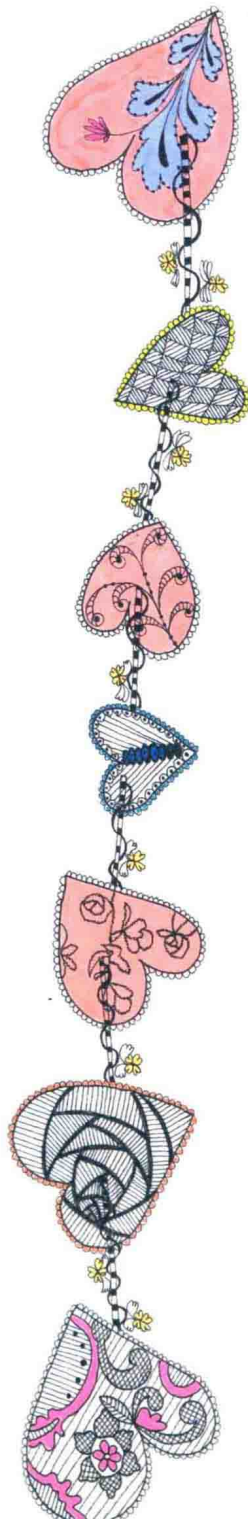
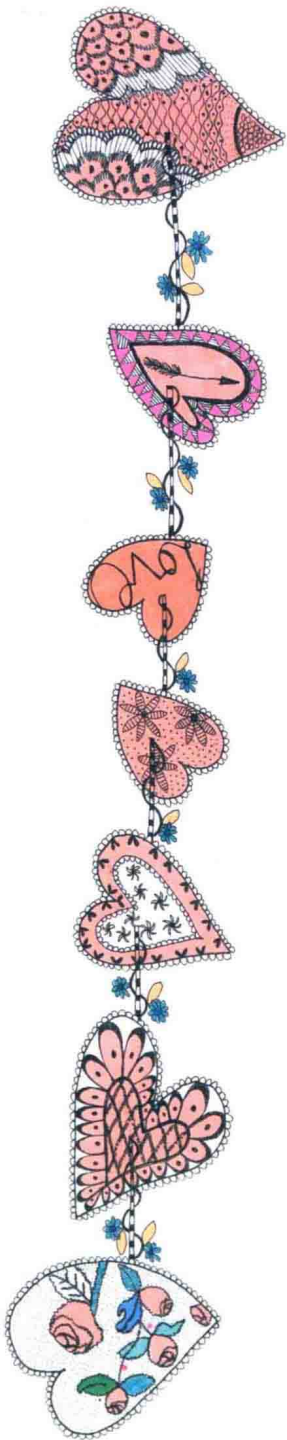
It is the literary equivalent of the conversations that women have every day of the week. There might be a few more flights of fancy and movements of abstract thought: there will be more going off on tangents, because one of us is addicted to tangents. But the spirit of it is exactly the same as when you carefully put your friend back together after she has taken an existential bashing: you do the empathy, you make the jokes, you remind her that everyone gets a little bit crazy sometimes and there is no law against that.

We don't necessarily want to be correct; we want to make you feel that you are all right, in all your complexity, because there are entire industries out there devoted to insisting that you, as women, are somehow all wrong, and we've had enough of it. We say: the

received wisdom is not set in stone; there is another way. We are mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore.

TANIA KINDERSLEY and SARAH VINE

*Chapter One:*  
LOVE







## Romantic love

There are twenty-one dictionary definitions for the word love. Every woman (or Everywoman, the heroine of this book) may come to a point in her middle life when she suspects she doesn't understand the first thing about any of these. Poets, philosophers, playwrights and pop singers from Socrates to Stevie Wonder have had a great deal to say about love. It is the sweetest thing; it is a red, red rose; it is a battlefield; it is a drug, a delusion, a lunacy. It is the answer, and the question. It is a balm, and a piercing arrow. H. L. Mencken compared it to perceptual anesthesia; Keats wrote that it was his religion; Shakespeare called it a familiar, a devil, an ever-fixed mark, a smoke, a fire, a sea, a madness, a fever, a choking gall; it is like sunshine after rain, and does not bend.

Of the various loves, romantic love is the most complicated and inexplicable. It can come on when you least expect it (and with the most unsuitable person), it can cast you from the heights of ecstasy to the abyss of despair, it can roar in you one moment, then dissipate as quickly as breath on glass. It is what drives you to offer yourself to another human for the rest of your natural life, but only a few years later you may look back and have no memory at all of that initial ecstasy. Romantic love can be so confusing that sometimes you just want to give up on the whole thing and concentrate on the nature of dark matter, or macro-economics, or something else less tiring.

