



Quick Reads

ONLY £1.99

Pick up a book today

Vinyl Demand

Hayley Long

Vinyl Demand

Hayley Long



ACCENT PRESS LTD

Published by Accent Press Ltd – 2008

ISBN 9781906125967

Copyright © Hayley Long 2008

The right of Hayley Long to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

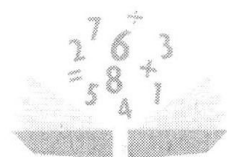
The story contained within this book is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publishers: Accent Press Ltd, The Old School, Upper High St, Bedlinog, Mid-Glamorgan, CF46 6SA.

The Quick Reads project in Wales is a joint venture between Basic Skills Cymru and the Welsh Books Council. Titles are funded through Basic Skills Cymru as part of the National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Printed and bound in the UK

Cover design by The Design House



Words Talk-Numbers Count
Geiriau'n Galw-Rhifau'n Cyfri

Quick Reads™ used under licence

Side One

1

Beth Roberts picked her post up from the floor. Flicking through the morning's delivery, she counted three pieces of junk mail, one skinny brown envelope which could only contain a demand for money, and a postcard from her parents in Spain. She pulled out the three pieces of junk mail and threw them on to a large and yellowing heap of similar envelopes in the corner of the hall, then made her way back upstairs to the flat.

In the rent book, 52c Queens Road, Cardiff, was described as a fully-furnished flat but really it was more of a poorly-equipped bedsit. It consisted of one large room which housed a single bed on each of the long walls and a small kitchen area in a corner at the far end. The only other objects which could count as furniture were an enormous old TV which looked as if it might be older than Beth and an even more massive music centre which was *definitely* a whole lot older than her and cased in polished wood. The music centre was only ever used as a coffee table because it was too old and useless

to know what a CD was, let alone *play* one. Unframed posters of Justin Timberlake and Orlando Bloom clung to the walls and tried to cheer them up. Clothes lay scattered all over a scruffy dark-green carpet. The whole place was nothing more than a very shabby teen bedroom. Through a door across the hallway was a bathroom which was shared with the occupants of flats 52a and 52b. Beth Roberts didn't live in the best flat in Cardiff.

Beth flopped on her single bed and held the postcard up in front of her. It was the usual picture of a beach and sunshine. On the back her mum had written, '*Weather is here. Wish you were lovely!*'

Beth sighed. Her parents had been living in Spain for almost three years now. They had moved there the week after she had taken her final GCSE exam and they had never really understood why she hadn't wanted to go with them. Looking around the bedsit, Beth couldn't really understand it either. But this was where her friends were and Cardiff was her city.

Beth fixed the postcard to the wall with some glue and then turned her attention to the envelope. Opening it, she saw that she was right. It was a bill. A gas bill. Printed in red ink

was a demand for £76. A final demand. At the top of the bill in bold letters it said,

Failure to pay this bill within six weeks will result in your gas supply being cut.

Beth sat up. This was bad. No more gas would mean no more meals of heated baked beans. No more noodles. No more boil-in-the-bag fish. No more bananas in custard. No more anything. No more gas would mean that Beth and her flatmate Rula would starve. And then what would she do? Write to her parents in Spain and ask them to rescue her? Tell them that she couldn't cope in Cardiff on her own?

Beth glued one corner of the red phone bill to the wall to stop it getting lost and got up from her bed. She crossed the room, pulled her mobile phone out of the pocket of a jacket which was hanging from a hook behind the door, and flipped it open. She pressed the speed-dial button and waited. Seconds later, a voice as young as Beth's but marked apart by a soft Polish accent answered.

'Hello?'

'Rula,' barked Beth into her phone. 'You haven't paid the gas bill. I paid it last time,

remember? You need to go to the post office and pay it.'

'Yes, I know.' There was a pause. 'I forgot.'

Beth gripped the phone a little tighter and rolled her eyes up to the ceiling. She and Rula had been best friends since they'd met in high school, way back at the beginning of Year 10. Back then, Rula had been painfully shy, homesick for Poland and hardly able to speak a word of English. But she'd had a fun twinkle in her eye and Beth had spotted that and decided that she was going to look after her. Sometimes, Beth felt as if she was still looking after Rula even now. Keeping her voice as calm as she could, Beth said, 'Well, you need to pay it *now*. It's seventy-six pounds, and unless you pay it quickly, we're going to get cut off.'

Rula's reply was cheerful and instant. 'I'll get it, Beth. I'll get it today and I'll get the bill and I'll pay it. Stop worrying. There are more important things in life to think about. See you later.'

And with that the call was over.

2

Rula Popek snapped her phone shut and slid it into the pocket of her jeans. She could tell that Beth was cross with her. It wasn't the first time and it surely wouldn't be the last but it still needed to be sorted out. Life was tough enough as it was.

Rula and Beth were always falling out. Sleeping in child-sized beds in a cramped bedsit wasn't easy. Not even when you were sharing with your very best friend. There just wasn't enough space and the only way to get any privacy was to go across the hall to the shared bathroom and lock the door. Rula had spent a lot of time sitting quietly on the edge of the bath just thinking about things and enjoying the fact that she was alone. And sometimes, when it all got too much, she would disappear for a few hours and walk through central Cardiff looking into the shop windows at things she could never afford.

But they never fell out for long. Just as the lack of space and money pulled them apart, it

also pushed them together. There was no room to sulk in 52c Queens Road. Sooner or later, one of them would open a couple of cans of beer and within minutes they'd be watching the ancient TV and laughing again. Even the lack of a sex life didn't really cause too much of a problem. 'I'm saving myself,' was Rula's promise, the day she hung her Catholic cross on the wall by her bed. Beth, with no cross above her bed, had smiled and said, 'As soon as I find a rich man with a nice flat, I'm out of here so fast you won't believe it.' But Beth hadn't found him yet and she didn't really seem all that fussed.

So for now, they were in it together. Two nineteen-year-old girls with crap jobs, no money, family in foreign places and no rich boyfriends with nice flats. They needed to stick together to survive.

Rula hurried down Cowbridge Road. She liked this street. It reminded her of the busy city streets back home in Poland. It was busy and noisy and full of interesting things to see and buy. To her left, a man shouted cheerfully at her, asking her to buy bananas from his fruit stall. She shook her head, smiled and walked on, almost bashing straight into another man who was pasting a large poster on to the side of

a bus shelter. 'Easy love,' he said. 'Watch where you're going.'

Rula mouthed a 'sorry' and stepped to the side. As she walked on, she turned and glanced at the poster. It was a huge picture of a woman who looked barely any older than her or Beth. She had chocolate brown hair and a ring through her lower lip. Beneath her picture, in big capitals, were the words LISA LASHES AT LIQUID. ONE NIGHT ONLY!

Rula read the words and frowned. It made no sense to her at all. Half of the stuff she read in English made no sense.

'Rula!' A shout made her turn. There, on a bike, was Skunk. Everybody knew Skunk and Skunk knew everybody. Six foot four, black, dreadlocked and almost always on his mountain bike, Skunk was not an easy man to miss. Nobody knew what he did exactly but it seemed to involve knowing everyone's name and selling things. Rula smiled. 'OK, Skunk?'

'Have one of these.' Skunk pushed a piece of paper into Rula's hand.

Rula looked down at the flyer which was already a little tatty from being pressed between Skunk's palm and his handlebars.

LISA LASHES

IS COMING AT YOU

LARGE IN LIQUID!

COOL BEATS, BIG

BREAKS AND EVEN

LONGER LASHES...

NEXT THURSDAY

Rulá frowned down at the flyer silently for a moment and then she read the words out loud to see if they would make any more sense. They didn't. Looking up at Skunk, she shrugged her shoulders and said, 'I've just read about this Lisa Lashes woman on a poster in the bus shelter. Who is she? And what does all this coming at you large stuff mean?'

Skunk sat back on his saddle and put his hands behind his head. 'Lisa Lashes is the best girl DJ ruling the decks in the world today. She's coming to Cardiff next Thursday. I can get you tickets if you want. Only twenty quid with that flyer.'

Rula crumpled the paper and pushed it into her pocket. 'No thanks. Right now, I've got to find seventy-six quid or our gas supply will be cut off and my flatmate will cut my head off. I can't afford twenty pounds to watch some girl play some boring old records.'

Skunk shook his head. 'You sure? I'm not offering again.'

Rula continued walking up Cowbridge Road and shouted, 'I'm sure,' over her shoulder.

After a few minutes she came to a stop outside a window front which was almost entirely covered by the words POLSKA

INTERNET. This was the internet café where Rula worked. It was owned by her Uncle Lado who had brought her with him from Poland four years earlier. She'd had other jobs since leaving school but all of them had involved working for people who had treated her a lot less softly than Uncle Lado did.

She pushed the door and went inside. The café was empty apart from Uncle Lado who was sitting behind a computer screen watching highlights from a Polish football match. He was a chubby little man with twinkly grey eyes and a grey beard to match. Without taking his eyes off the game, he said, 'Rula, what are you doing here? It's your day off.'

'Uncle Lado, I need to borrow some money.'

Lado looked up from the computer and sighed. 'Rula, Rula, Rula. I've got two children of my own. I can't keep putting my hand in my pocket every time you want to buy a new pair of trainers or a new CD. If you can't manage on what I pay you, get another job. Or live somewhere cheaper.'

Rula pulled a face. 'I can't live anywhere cheaper. I already live in the cheapest flat in the whole of Wales.'

Uncle Lado sighed again. 'What is it for this time?'

'The gas bill. If I don't have seventy-six pounds to pay the gas bill, they're going to cut off our supply and Beth is going to cut off my head.'

Uncle Lado laughed. 'It might do you some good. Teach you to be responsible.' He stood up from his chair and disappeared into the back room, calling out to her to wait. Rula sat down at one of the vacant computer screens and, having nothing better to do, typed 'Lisa Lashes' into the search engine. Seven hundred and twelve thousand hits came up on the screen. 'Wow!' said Rula to herself. 'She's popular.'

Uncle Lado reappeared holding an envelope. Rula forgot the computer screen and stood up. 'Seventy-six pounds,' said Uncle Lado, pushing the envelope into her hand. 'But it's not a gift, it's a loan, and I will take that money back from your wages whenever I want. You understand?'

'Yes. Thanks, Uncle Lado, you're the best.' Rula gave her uncle a delighted hug, pushed the envelope into her pocket and left.

Back on Cowbridge Road, Rula breathed a huge sigh of relief and began walking home. Uncle Lado was right. She *did* need to manage her money better but it was hard to save anything

when there was so little to save from. But then again, Beth managed to pay her share of the bills and it was hardly any easier for her. Beth worked at the other end of Cowbridge Road in an upmarket deli which sold Spanish sausage and green olives and tomato bread. Which all sounded very nice and lovely, except that the people in this part of Cardiff didn't actually *want* green olives and Spanish sausage. They wanted Clarke's pies and chips. The threat of being booted out of a job was always hanging over Beth's head.

Rula walked on, enjoying the sunshine and the noise and the life around her. In a window to her right, a woman appeared placing a new item on display. Rula spotted the movement from the corner of her eye and turned. A white Adidas tracksuit top with three red stripes running down the arms was being fitted over a plastic dummy. White and red. Like the Polish football team wore. Rula stopped to take a longer look. There was nothing else nice in the window. A yellowing wedding dress. A scruffy teddy bear. Some old books. The usual charity shop stuff.

Rula pushed open the door and went inside. The shop was busy. The charity shops on Cowbridge Road were always busy. Rula