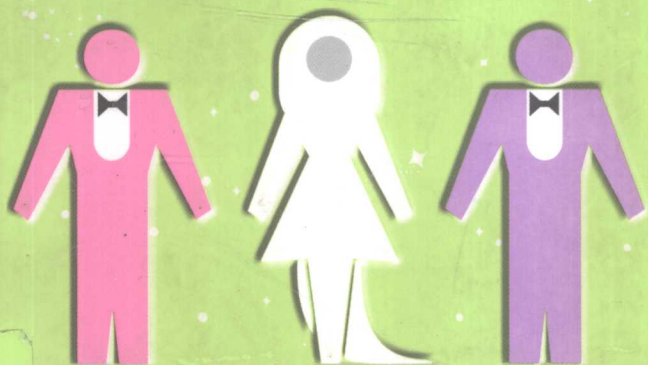


'A very enjoyable, fast, fun book' Daily Mail

Honey Moon

Who is the love of your life?



Amy Jenkins

Honeymoon

Amy Jenkins



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FLAME

Hodder & Stoughton

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Amy Jenkins was born and brought up in London. She created the BBC 2 television series *This Life* and wrote and co-produced the feature film *Elephant Juice*. She has also written and directed two short films. *Honeymoon* is her first novel.

Praise for *Honeymoon*:

'The hottest property in town. You can feel success rising off her like steam'

Evening Standard

'You'll love HONEYMOON – an addictively funny read by the writer of *This Life*'

Cosmopolitan

'A very enjoyable fast, fun book'

Daily Mail

'Definitely one to make you miss your bus stop'

Later

'Jenkins has redefined the notion of a page-turner'

Guardian

'Bridget Jones with more spunk'

Sky Magazine

'A surefire summer hit'

Venue

'Filmic, sexy and fast-moving it will go straight into the best-seller lists. Who are her fans? Just about every twenty and thirtysomething of either sex currently residing in Great Britain'

Marie Claire

'HONEYMOON is a superior read for the beach. Jenkins' prose is conversational: breezy and full of good jokes'

Daily Telegraph

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We're in this white limo purring through crowded Saturday-night streets. Like in Hollywood. Although it's not Hollywood. This great big fuck-off ridiculous stretch limo is in London's West End – although it's hardly the West and nowhere near the end. This limo is so stretched you can't understand why it doesn't sink in the middle and drag its belly on the ground. This limo is so long you think it can't turn those tight Soho corners without sweeping café society into the gutter.

But imagine this. Imagine it does have to stop at one of those corners. To avoid killing someone. And when it stops, there's this young man – looks like he might be from out of town, all fresh-faced. And he is drawn to one of the limo's open windows, leans down to the window, becomes involved in conversation with the limo occupants, leans into the window, further and further, until finally he is sucked through the window into the limo, head first. The last you see of him being his tattered red trainers as they disappear from sight.

Because the thing is – you see – this limo does not

contain one lonely pop-star riding along in state. This limo contains more girls than you could shake a stick at. Wall to wall feminine flesh, crammed in we are. Girl sardines. I'm in a great white tin of girl sardines. Or that's what it feels like.

And this witless piece of fresh-faced masculinity is wedged into the seat opposite me, squeezed between thighs. And all the girls in the limo – they want me to get off with him. That's what you do on your hen-night.

Hen-night.

Oh my God. Or, Oh! My! God!, as my sister Ven would say – she's twenty-one. Left to my own devices, I would never have had a hen-night. 'Honey,' Della had said, 'sweetheart, left to your own devices you would never be getting married. And now look.'

And now look. Well, quite.

Honey, by the way, is my name. Della is given to terms of endearment but not that given. Not two-in-one-sentence given.

So Della went ahead and arranged a surprise hen-night. And, actually, I'm quite enjoying it. I mean, I never like the *idea* of just being girls together – like I never like the idea of a salad for lunch – but when it comes to it, it can be quite pleasant. At least they didn't hire a male stripper or truss me up and put me on a plane to Amsterdam. Del rented the stretch limo and invited everyone and we've been driving round London drinking champagne. Or, rather, they have. Champagne gives me a headache.

After a bottle or five, they'd got all girl-powerish, which is how they came to be hanging out of the windows trying to pick up blokes. I wasn't that interested. West End pickings on a Saturday night are notoriously slim. Besides, I'm not really interested in anybody at the moment. Not a foreign body at any rate. They'd been telling me you have to be unfaithful on your hen-night, snog unfaithful at the very least. Della said the French have a word for it – she'd just spent six months in Paris on attachment, she works for M&S. She couldn't remember what the French word was exactly, but roughly translated it means 'last gasp before dying'.

'Charming,' I said. 'Believe it or not,' I said, 'I don't want to be unfaithful.'

Della looked kind of disappointed at that, but not too disappointed. Because she likes Ed. My intended. Thinks he's a *good thing*. Actually, I think Della's finding it a bit hard to adjust. They all are. It's a tradition, you see, amongst my friends. That I can always be relied upon to fuck things up. By things, I mean life.

We'd all got into Ecstasy but I was the one who was out three nights a week and weeping into my trainers if I wasn't on the guest list. We'd all had trouble getting into work on time, but I was the one whose favourite *must-go* club was on a Sunday night and ended up losing my job. We'd all had ridiculously loud parties ridiculously late, but I was the one who'd had Paul Trouble Anderson playing a 5K sound system in my basement flat and I was the one who got

evicted two months later. We'd all had dodgy boyfriends, but mine was the one who cleared three grand out of my Abbey National account and was last heard of behind bars in the Scrubs. And we'd all had credit-card debts, but I was the one who got declared bankrupt – well, virtually. I had to do one of those voluntary-arrangement things.

But all that was pre-Ed and now I'm post-Ed and not only born again but – gobsmackingly – on the brink of matrimony. I felt a bit like a weary boxer. I'd been up there in the ring, year after year, doing the rounds and now at last someone had thrown in the towel. Someone in the form of a nice, suitable young man called Ed. And all I wanted to do was to bounce on the ropes for a blissful moment and catch my breath while I dreamed of retirement. I did not want manager Della shouting in my ear that I was good for another round. Presenting me with some leery lanky Scottish lad they'd pulled, trying to get me off with him. No thanks, I'm headed for the dressing rooms, me. Not that he was that bad or anything. I think Jennie had him in the end.

When the girls finally realised they weren't going to get any live action, they became resigned. But they started saying, 'Okay, who would you be unfaithful with if you could have anyone? Tonight. Right now. If the man you most fancy in the world were to walk out of that restaurant and get into this car. There must be someone.' They made suggestions. You know, the usual suspects, the movie stars. They didn't get very far because I'm over fancying men on

celluloid. Although I did waver a bit when they got to Ewan McGregor – I once saw him in a kilt at a party.

Then Della shrieked, 'I know! The Love of Your Life!' The Love of My Life is what we call this guy I had a wild night with years ago. The story's so old and hoary now it's sort of gone into Legend Land. But with Della and me it's still one of the old favourites.

Jennie, who we only met about a year ago, when we took up Ashtanga yoga for, like, one day, said, 'Who's the Love of Your Life?'

So I said, 'Does this mean I get to tell the The Love of My Life story?' I like doing that because it gives me this nice glowing feeling when I'm telling it. It's like rewriting my life as a movie, with me as the leading lady, and all of sudden I get a sense of myself as someone who things actually happen to, like in a movie, and when I'm telling the story I sort of believe that I am that character for a few moments. That my life is a bit like a movie, or could be seen that way.

'Yes,' they all said, 'tell the story.' Like they really wanted to hear. Bless them. So I did.

At the time, this is like seven years ago when I was about twenty-one, I was seeing this guy called Paulo. He was Italian and I was just *seeing* him, if you know what I mean. Seeing every bit of him, mind you, but it didn't even cross my mind to have a relationship with this man. He was young and fuckable and vain and kind of middle-aged before his time, though he'd kill me if he

heard me say that – with his cheekbones, his Armani suits and his cocaine habit. Anyway, he just wasn't suitable relationship material. Not that relationships were much on the agenda at that point in my life – but I mean we could barely have a conversation. It wasn't a language problem, he spoke perfect English, we just weren't that interested in anything the other had to say. Those were the days when I filled my evenings and weekends having non-relationships with Mr Unsuitable and wondering why I never met Mr Suitable. And that was pretty much the story of my twenties.

You know, I wish someone had told me that it was probably a good idea to apply some time and effort to looking for a nice man with an interesting life and prospects and all that while I was still at an age when there were lots of them around and on the market. But no one tells you. It's a bit like when the new season's shoes come into the shops and you go in and ask for a size five and a half in the second week of September and the assistant looks at you like you're nuts and says they've sold out of all sizes except those fitting giants and midgets and you say, 'Why have you already sold out in the second week of September?' And they look at you like you're even more nuts to think that they might wish to supply you with this shoe and they explain gently but firmly, 'It's a very popular shoe.' Or even, 'It's a very comfortable shoe.'

You see, if you don't learn these natural laws hard and

fast you're looking at a very unfashionably shod life. Or a very uncomfortably shod life. One or the other.

Maybe I should have worked out this suitable-man thing for myself. Others did. I think what put me off was the idea that this Mr Suitable wasn't going to look like Johnny Depp. I couldn't face the non-Johnny-Depp look. But I do wish someone had told me that the distracted man with a dream and a drug habit – the one who keeps looking over my shoulder for something better – is not a sensible route to that warm, fuzzy, thirty-something place where you gambol with children and dogs.

Anyway, I digress. The night I met the Love of My Life, Paulo picked me up in his sports car – I have to admit, I found the sports-car thing quite dazzling. I was like a rabbit in the headlights. Paulo took me to a chic Italian restaurant, all minimal even then, no outsize peppermills. He liked it because they made the vodka martinis like they do back home. Paulo, of course, kept disappearing off to the loo. I declined to join him, partly because I was really quite interested in the food and partly because drugs just don't agree with me. Afterwards, I'm all raw and messy for days. I cry at the drop of a hat. I cry over *Pet Rescue* on TV. I cry when someone wins the Birthday Bonanza on the radio. Oh God.

So, I saw this delicious risotto being delivered to the next table. I've got a thing about risotto. It's like grown-up baby food or something. I can get compulsive around risotto. Luckily, risottos take a long time to cook and a lot of

stirring so I don't often attempt them at home. Before I'd thought about it – this is not the sort of thing I usually do actually, I kind of surprised myself – I leant over to the next table and said, 'How's the risotto?'

This guy had just taken this great big forkful; I hadn't even looked at him until he turned to me, and he had these horribly blue eyes in this dark face, and he fastened his eyes on mine and we recognised each other. I don't mean that I knew him, I'd never met him before in my life, but we *knew* each other, if you know what I mean. It was like being punched in the stomach, it was like – I'm trying to avoid mentioning electricity here because it's such a cliché, but I guess people talk about electricity for a reason. That's what it feels like.

And he said, 'Game.'

How's the risotto? Game. That's how it started. I didn't get 'game', so I just kept staring at him. In any case, looking away wasn't an option he had me wired straight into his soul.

'Game risotto,' he said. 'It's the game risotto.'

'My God. What kind of game?'

'I don't know – whatever you guys have been shooting lately, I guess.' At this point it registered that he was American.

Paulo, who, I should have mentioned, was present at the table during all of this and not in the loo, coughed politely. He was always polite, Paulo, he was always one great big stuffed-up ball of Armani-suited politeness – except when

he whispered unusual requests into my ear during sex – in Italian. It turned out, thank God, that he didn't want to *do* them, he just wanted to whisper them in my ear. So Paulo coughed and I came back to the land of the living, although I was all red, and flushed and hot under the collar. And we both went back to our respective dinners and our respective dates.

Mr Blue Eyes at the next table was with a blonde. Of course, he would be. She was very at ease, she exuded at ease – I put out my antenna for the vibe. Were they an item? I tried to gauge sexual tension. She was all ease. I ordered the risotto.

So the risotto came and I was munching away although, to be honest, I'd lost my appetite, but it was bringing us together this risotto – it was a love risotto, my love letter to him. And he suddenly leant over and said, 'Good game?'

'Very good,' I said.

And we were back with the eyeballs thing. And this was really getting embarrassing so I glanced at the blonde. And he knew I was saying, 'Who is she?'

And he looked at her too and said, 'But I'm just a Yankee tourist.' Like – what do I know? And she smiled.

So now I knew that he lived in the States and she was the woman he stayed with or saw in London and maybe they had sex and maybe they didn't but there was no 'we', which was the most important thing. You may ask, how did I know this for sure, but I did. We were communicating with jungle drums.

Next thing I knew I was leaning over and saying, 'Congratulations.' And they all three looked at me. And I went, 'Did you know that only eight per cent of American citizens hold passports? Congratulations for being one of them.'

So then Paulo was doing his coughing thing again and Blue Eyes excused himself and got up and headed for the gents. And I sat there a moment and then it occurred to me that maybe I was meant to get up and follow him. I mean 'meant' in a kind of fatalistic, universal sense – I don't mean I thought he was expecting me to follow him. And I couldn't believe I'd even had this thought because – really, I mean it – following people is not the kind of thing I do. So I sat on the idea and then – all this took about a nanosecond – the thought came to me, Well, I *could* just follow him anyway, there's no law against it. It might change my life. Getting up now and going to the loo might change my life. This might be it. The turning point. And if I don't do it, I will never know.

So I got up and went to the loo too. When I got there I hung around in the corridor for a bit waiting for him to come out. But I only managed about a minute of that before doubt struck and the possible awful consequences of what I was doing came crashing down on me. What if I'd read the situation all wrong? And how awful would it be if he came out and found me standing there and just sort of looked embarrassed and walked past? The truly awful thing would be that he would *know*. At this point, you see, we were in the same boat: both of us suspected but