



'Warm, poignant...
I laughed and cried.'
Holly Ringland

'Big-hearted, super
sexy and inclusive.'
Michelle Law

WEST SIDE HONEY



CLAIRE CHRISTIAN

‘What just happened to you?’ Farida whispers.

‘I don’t know.’ I turn to her with a Munchian scream-face.

‘It was like a total shut-down,’ she says. ‘Like I could actually see a spinning wheel of death appear on your face.’

‘You. Shut up.’

‘How does your dad know him?’

‘My dad knows everyone.’

‘But he’s so hot.’

‘He’s not that hot,’ I lie, pretending to busy myself with the organisation of ribbon.

‘I love that you have a crush on a hot carpenter.’

‘I do not. Also, we very clearly just made his partner a bunch of flowers, Farida.’

‘Maybe they’re non-monogamous.’

‘As if.’

‘More people are than you think, Cleo,’ she says, leaning

in the back-room doorway. She's wearing another homemade T-shirt with the word Gucci painted messily in thick red letters across her chest.

'Married people?'

'Yes.'

'Really?'

'The patriarchal structure of relationships as possessive and propertied doesn't work, Cleo. Exhibit A,' she waves at me, up and down, and I give her the finger, which makes her laugh. 'Meet your Prince Charming and wash his clothes for the rest of your life, yes?' I look at her, disgusted, as she goes on: 'Exactly. There's more than one success model. The sooner the mainstream recognises that we are all pleasure-seeking beings with many needs that are incapable of being met by just one person, then the better and more satisfied we'll be.' Her eyes sparkle as brightly as her sequinned bomber jacket.

'I thought you were just scared of commitment,' I joke, but also that's genuinely why I thought she was always dating a lot.

'Quite the opposite. I am deeply committed to loving as many people as possible,' she says, and gives me a lavish curtsy.

I lean my elbows on the workbench and stare at her seriously. 'I don't think I could do it. I think I'm too jealous.'

'Well, think about it as needs. The idea that one person can meet *all* your needs is really limiting. What you get from Jude is different to what you get from me, and what you'd get from a partner—or *partners*—is going to fill other parts of your intimacy cup,' Farida smiles. 'This best friend, soulmate, lover, companion, confidante all rolled into one is a big fat lie.'

It's about *all* your cups being filled, Cleo. Which they need to be because some of your cups are dry bitches.'

I scoff standing up, 'My cups are—'

'Positively parched.'

'They are not. I slid into the DMs of a hot barista, thank you very much. And, I've been on a couple of...' I nearly say dates, but I am slapped with a flashback of Drew. 'I've met up with a couple of guys.'

Farida chuckles wide-eyed, 'Met up? Is your dad arranging all these *meetings* for you now, too? Because if he is then you should have him arrange one with old mate hot hammer.'

'Jesus, Farida!'

She grins, 'And who is this barista? What is happening?'

'Nothing. Flirty banter. Occasionally we'll send each other amusing memes. That's it.' I start to process what she's saying. 'Do you think if more people were non-monogamous, they wouldn't cheat?'

'Oofft. Don't know...' She pauses. 'If Doug had said to you that he wanted to shag somebody else, how would you have handled that?'

I feel a tense tweak in my stomach. 'Oh god, I don't know. He probably was. We were both so unhappy.'

'Everything I've read about cheating says it has nothing to do with sex, really, and it's more about other needs that aren't being met. Feeling something new. Plus, secrets are powerful,' she says sincerely.

'Part of me wishes we had talked more, earlier. But when you're in it you think...it's easier to just not talk about anything until—'

‘See now, this is the thing. You can’t be non-monogamous and not be an expert communicator cause that’s what it all is, *vulnerability, conversation, boundaries*. So much talking. I mean, I date smart, heady people already, so add an extra layer of something to talk about and that’s all we do,’ Farida looks tired at the thought of all the talking.

I say, ‘Ultimately what I’m looking for is a man—’
‘...or men...’

‘*Or men* who make me feel like you and Jude do,’ I say, realising I mean it.

‘What? Deeply frustrated and super horny?’

I poke her arm. ‘I think my problem is my type. I go out with the same kind of guys, and it always turns out to be a complete bin fire.’

‘So don’t.’

‘What?’

‘Stop dating your type and just go on dates, Cleo. As many as you damn well please.’

‘I think I’m bad at—’ I start.

She cuts me off again. ‘So practise.’

‘I just don’t have the small-talk energy in me. The filtering is exhausting. I’m operating on reserves as it is, Farida, and I think I’m terrible at it. Can I even be bothered?’

‘So, why don’t I do it?’ Farida doesn’t even look up from her phone.

‘What?’

‘The first bit. I do the initial conversation bit and see if they’re worth you chatting to and then you can tap in if I think they’re a goer,’ she looks up casually. As though she’d just

offered to get milk from the petrol station, not be the steward of my dating life.

‘Farida, you wouldn’t—’

‘Are you kidding? I’d love it. I’ve been training to judge straight men my whole life.’

Oh god, between Jude writing my profile and now Farida choosing my matches I feel completely useless. Maybe this is a terrible idea. ‘But how?’

‘I’d match, start the chat, if I think it’s worth pursuing, I hand over the reins and then you organise deets to meet,’ she nods enthusiastically. ‘You’d be able to read everything I’ve written, and I’ll just pretend I’m you, so it’ll be basic-bitch shit until you come in.’

I scoff, shaking my head. ‘I can’t decide if this is genius or crazy.’

‘Don’t they usually think people are crazy until they actually realise they’re a genius?’ She smiles. ‘Hey...are you actually considering it?’

‘I am,’ I tell her, genuinely.

‘Oh my god. Well, let’s at least try then, yeah?’

I literally have nothing to lose giving Farida control of this, and I quite like the notion of outsourcing it, really. It feels like working smarter, not harder. ‘Okay.’

‘You should put a number on it, though,’ she says pointing at me.

‘A number of dates?’

‘Yeah. Twenty dates in like three months or something.’

‘That’s a lot.’

‘It’s like one or two a week—you can do one a week. Get

out there and learn what you like, Cleo.'

'Good god. Can I count the two I've already been on?'

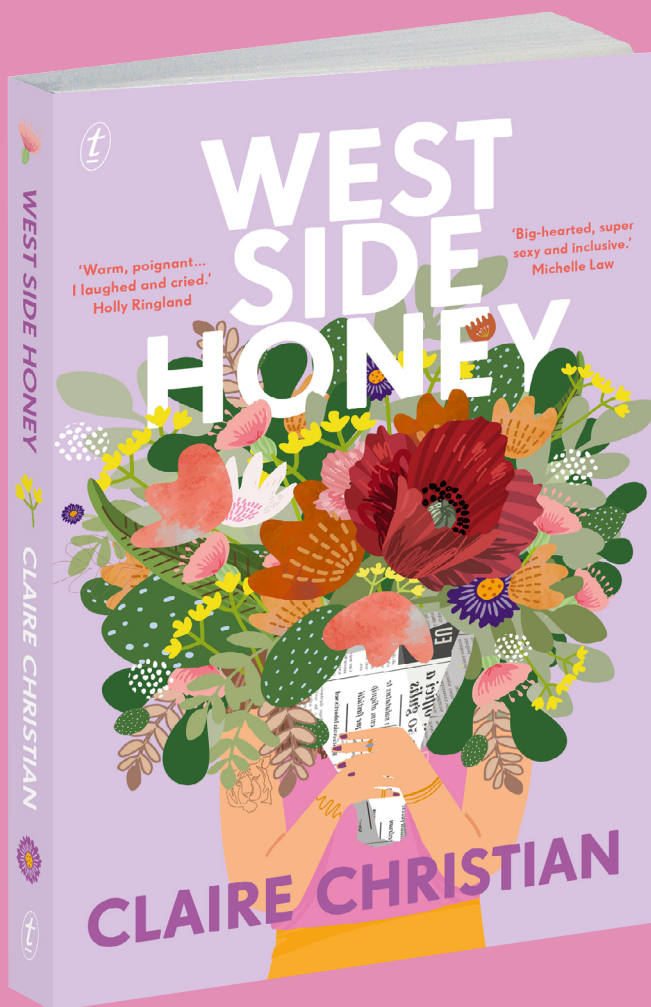
Farida rolls her eyes. 'Sure.'

'And can they be with the same person? Like, does it have to be eighteen people to date, or can it just be eighteen more dates?'

'It's your plan, Cleo. Do what you want. That's the point.'

'Okay,' I nod. 'Eighteen more dates to go.'

Farida holds up her hand for a high-five. I oblige, feeling both terrified and thrilled at the same time.



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