



'A cool, clear glass of sane  
in a world of  
unbearable woo-hoo.'

**CAITLIN MORAN**

# Bridget Christie

A Book

For Her\*

\* And for him, if he can read.

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## About the Book

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Bridget Christie is a stand-up comedian, idiot and feminist. On the 30th of April 2012, a man farted in the Women's Studies section of a bookshop and it changed her life forever.

*A Book For Her* details Christie's twelve years of anonymous toil in the bowels of stand-up comedy and the sudden epiphany that made her, unbelievably, one of the most critically acclaimed British stand-up comedians this decade, drawing together the threads that link a smelly smell in the Women's Studies section to the global feminist struggle.

Find out how nice Peter Stringfellow's fish tastes, how yoghurt advertising perpetuates rape myths and how Emily Bronte used a special ladies' pen to write *Wuthering Heights*.

If you're interested in comedy and feminism, then this is definitely the book for you. If you hate books then I'd probably give it a miss.

## About the Author

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Bridget Christie is a stand-up comedian, writer and actor. She is the winner of the Fosters Edinburgh Comedy Award (2013), South Bank Sky Arts Award for Comedy (2014), Rose D'Or International Broadcasting Award (2014) and four Chortle comedy industry awards, voted for by comedy fans, from 2014 and 2015. She was also nominated for a Radio Academy Award (2014) and a British Comedy Award for Best Female Television Comic (2014). Her 2013 show *A Bic for Her* became the top-selling comedy show at the Soho Theatre ever.

Bridget can also load and fire a 17th century musket (though not while under pressure or any time constraints), scuba dive and drive a tractor. She lives in north London with her family and cat.

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# Bridget Christie

A Book  
For Her



CENTURY

For all the women in my family and ALL WOMEN.

Whether they want it or not.

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# INTRODUCTION

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*'It was the best of farts, it was the worst of farts.'*

I DIDN'T WANT to talk about farts in this book. If anything, I tried to avoid them altogether.

I said to myself, 'Bridget Christie, try to stay away from farts for your debut book. You've been doing really well since the summer of 2013. You've inadvertently become a critically acclaimed and financially viable stand-up act by talking about feminism after eleven years doing stand-up about nothing at a personal monetary loss to massive public and critical indifference. Don't throw it all away by talking about something as alienating and divisive as farts.'

But my editor at Random House (who also publish the long-standing best-seller *Mein Kampf* by A. Hitler<sup>fn1</sup>), insisted upon farts. She (my editor) does have a point. This book wouldn't even exist if it weren't for a particular fart that came out of an unhelpful man's ass at 17.20 Greenwich Mean Time on 30 April 2012.

The unhelpful man wasn't Hitler, by the way. He was long gone by then. He's got nothing to do with it. Forget about Hitler now. The only link between A. Hitler and myself is that we have the same publisher. That's it. So don't go looking up my genealogy or clips of my early stand-up, because you won't find anything incriminating there.

God, I wish I hadn't brought up Hitler now, but someone from Random House's art department mentioned in passing that they also published *Mein Kampf* by A. Hitler at the photo shoot for the book, which was the first I knew about it, so I thought I'd better mention it straight away or people would think I'd wilfully chosen to ignore it, and I didn't want a genocidal maniac to be the elephant in the room for the book.

Just to be clear, the man from the art department wasn't boasting about publishing Hitler's tome. He didn't say, 'We've got a brilliantly eclectic list here at Random House, Bridget, so you're in good company. We've got Harper Lee, Katie Price, Hitler, you. So I thought, for the front cover, we could have you sitting on planet Venus, looking over at planet Mars with a sort of confused look on your face, like on all those other books by women now. We just need to let the readers know that this book is a funny, light-hearted look at feminism, and how you approach feminism and violations of human rights in your stand-up, Bridget. We need to reassure them it's not going to be full of photographs of men being horrifically tortured and suffocated with their own cocks while loads of feminists stand around laughing, drinking yards of ale, welding metals and thermoplastics and playing darts with the donated embalmed penes of dead male feminists. Many of our readers won't want to read a book like that. We are a commercial publishing house.'

The Hitler thing was just presented as fact. Then he took some grapes from a bowl and ate them. So I conceded that yes, okay, the fart should be included somewhere in the book because it was such a pivotal one, but suggested it might be introduced somewhere after page 11, once I'd established myself properly as not being like Hitler, and gained the trust of the reader; once I'd proved to them that I could write about things other than farts. It's the same with stand-up, I told my female editor. First gain the audience's trust, then you can do whatever you like.

'Even fart?' she said.

'Yes. Even fart,' I said.

'I see,' she said.

'The reader,' I explained to my editor (who is a woman), 'doesn't know who I am yet. I haven't introduced myself properly. They don't know anything about me. I don't want them thinking, Who the hell is this fart-obsessed idiot? Oh no, this book isn't going to be all about farts, is it? I hate farts at



the best of times. I hope it's not going to be like a book version of the musical *Cats*,<sup>fn2</sup> without the cats and music but with farts and pages instead.

'I don't want them thinking I'm a one-fart pony. Or a one-trick fart. Or one pony's fart trick,' I said. 'Also, what if the Head of Women, Jimmy Somerville from Bronski Beat, hears on the feminist-practice-and-post-structuralist-theory-lecture grapevine that this book is supposed to be about feminism and becomes so infuriated and confused by all this early fart discourse that he only reads the Introduction and then writes a horrible review of it for the *Spectator* with the headline "BRIDGET CHRISTIE IS NOT A FEMINIST. SHE'S A FLATULIST IN FEMINIST CLOTHING"?'

'What if his horrible review is always the first thing that comes up if you search for my name? It happens all the time. Then your family thinks you're deluded and lying about your career, because they only see the terrible things people say about you. My auntie is a nun in California. My brother, who lives in the States, has told her I'm doing really well. What if she looks me up on the convent computer with some other nuns and they all see the Head of Women Jimmy Somerville from Bronski Beat's horrible review? I'll just have to hope and pray that my auntie's convent doesn't have internet access. I'm Irish. My Catholic priest follows my career as well. What if he sees the horrible review and thinks I just write about farts? That is a conversation I do not want to have. I've already got to try to find a way of broaching the thorny issue of abortion with him. Farts might just be a step too far. I'll be *persona non grata* on the feminist panel/talk/debate circuit *and* at the altar. This book is turning into a bit of a nightmare for me,' I told my editor.

'Don't worry about the Head of Women, Jimmy Somerville from Bronski Beat,' my editor said. 'You have to make it clear, right from the beginning of the book, that you're not going to be answering any questions in this book. Or even asking any. This book is going to be in the Humour section in bookshops, not in the Critical Thinking section. No one's going to be thinking as they read this book, let alone critically, and if they are, you've written it wrong. No one's expecting you to be the next de Beauvoir or Friedan or Hildegard of Bingen. It just needs to not be shit, and to not have loads of photos of you in school plays in it.' This made me feel slightly better but I was still worried.

I'd been burned by farts before. This was a review for my 2012 Edinburgh Fringe show, *War Donkey*:

If you think a tape of fart sound effects is the last word in quality stand-up, then you may enjoy this show. For everyone else, it's probably best avoided. And the farts are the best jokes ... in a world where female comics are treated seriously, they will still sometimes get a bad review; but it won't be because of their gender. I really wanted to like this show, but don't let Christie take your money and give you nothing but farts in return.

### *The List*

So yes, I have to talk about farts, I'm afraid, because in April 2012, one of them changed the course of my life for ever. Not a private fart. This was a very public fart. It is the reason I have been commissioned to write this book. My views on everything from yoghurts and cave paintings to the economy and terrorism to Jeremy Clarkson and patterns on toilet paper can be traced back to this one apocalyptic expulsion of intestinal gas. This effluvium is at the heart of everything I now think, do and say. I will bring my children up with the values and ideologies I hold as a result of this sphincter disturbance. This anal reflex was my gateway into the very bowels of feminism itself. I was catapulted from a position of utter uneducated ignorance of even the tiniest aspect of feminism right into the epicentre of modern British feminist discourse by this single smelly smell.



I would not have received a Chortle Award from Christopher Biggins without this fart. Ed Miliband would not have watched my 2013 show, *A Bic for Her*, at the Stand Comedy Club in Edinburgh standing up by a pillar because there weren't any available seats for him to sit down on, without this fart. Dr Helen Pankhurst, activist and great-granddaughter of pioneering suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, would not have invited me to speak on a panel with her and Radio 4's *Woman's Hour's* Jane Garvey, music's Annie Lennox, Radio 1 DJ and feminist Gemma Cairney, founder of worldwide phenomenon the Everyday Sexism Project Laura Bates and Sri Lankan equal rights campaigner Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala on International Women's Day 2015 without this fart. I would not have been invited to perform in New York, LA, Melbourne, Montreal or Russia, or at Hugh Grant's birthday party, without this fart. Naomi Wolf, former political consultant, best-selling author of *The Beauty Myth*, democracy activist and leading spokeswoman for third wave feminism, would not have mistaken me for Sandi Toksvig's wife without this singular and significant fart.

In fact, let me just tell you about that before I really get into the fart bit. At the start of the Women of the World Festival in March 2013 I was asked to take part in a photo shoot to launch the weekend, along with (amongst others) the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and activist Alice Walker, Wolf (whom I've just mentioned above, remember?), writer, presenter, comedian, actress and producer Sandi Toksvig, the human rights campaigner Shami Chakrabarti, writer, comedian, actress, interviewer, producer and campaigner Ruby Wax and the psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, writer and social critic Susie Orbach. I was out of my depth. Before we went up on to the roof, for the photos, where we were all asked to hold red umbrellas up above our heads, some of us had met up inside while we waited for everyone to arrive. I was sitting on a sofa with Naomi Wolf, Sandi Toksvig and Sandi's wife, Debbie Wolf, who was there to promote women (like us all) and her latest book, *Vagina*, asked me why I was there. Not in an accusatory way – she didn't emphasise the 'you' in the question, as in 'What the fuck are you doing here?' Rather, she just wanted to know what everyone did.

I managed to splutter out something vaguely coherent about not knowing why I was there, that I thought there had clearly been a terrible mistake, and that I didn't want to be in the photos anyway as I would look like the Where's Wally of Feminism; then I told her I wrote jokes about feminism. Then she very kindly added that I wouldn't have been asked by Jude Kelly – artistic director of the South Bank Centre and founder of the WOW Festival – if I didn't have something to bring to the table, so they must be good jokes. Little did she know that what I was bringing to the Women of the World Festival 2013 was a man's fart. And my own shame.

Shami Chakrabarti, CBE, director of Liberty, the British civil liberties advocacy organisation, overheard me telling Naomi Wolf I was a stand-up and said she thought I seemed funny and that she might come to a gig, but she had a very neutral expression on her face when she said it so I don't know if she was being sarcastic or not. Anyway, Naomi Wolf then mistook me for Sandi Toksvig's wife, probably because I was sat next to Sandi's wife, Debbie, at the time. I don't know how it happened, to be honest, but it was an easy mistake to make. Debbie – Sandi's actual wife – and Sandi – Sandi's actual self – and I didn't feel like we needed to immediately correct Naomi Wolf because it didn't really matter if she thought I was Sandi's wife, did it? Also, I was flattered and delighted that Wolf considered me smart enough to be Sandi Toksvig's wife so I thought I'd enjoy pretending to be clever for as long as I could. In the end we had to come clean and tell Naomi Wolf that not only was I not gay, but I wasn't even a feminist either. I was an imposter. I was Bridget Christie: the Borat of the Women of the World Festival.

\* \* \*

Before I tell you about my smelly Damascene moment, first I'd like to explore quickly the

complexities and nuances of farts and farting. It's important that you know this in order for you to understand how a fart came to be the key protagonist in my story. Farts can tell us as much about a person, if not more, as their voting or online purchasing habits.

By the way, if you think you've read enough about farts for one book, I haven't even scratched the surface of them yet. Need I remind you that I have to live every single day of my life in the shadow of this man's fart and there's no escape for me. Every time my cat makes a smell, I am transported back to 30 April 2012, back to the Women's Studies section, back to the unhelpful man's ass, back to sexism and the oppression of women, and I have to live through it all over again. The very least you can do is read a few pages about it. So. A 'public' fart, one that is emitted out and about amongst strangers, is a statement. The public farter (PF) has consciously made a decision to ignore the comfort and well-being of those in close proximity and is therefore establishing themselves as superior. They are saying that their comfort is more important than yours.

The PF's default position is to claim freedom of expression, to proclaim that his (*or her*) rights to make a smell are being eroded by the United Nations' overly zealous radical left-wing agenda: 'It's just methane-based banter!' 'You wouldn't accuse a Muslim of farting!' For them, forcing strangers to smell your farts is just the same as Jeremy Clarkson tweeting a picture of himself asleep, next to a sign saying 'Gay Cunt', with his *Top Gear* co-presenter James May laughing in the background. For them, farts, full English breakfasts and 'Gay Cunt' signs put the 'Great' into 'Great Britain'.

The PF is beyond complying with the generally accepted social norm that farting in public is antisocial and splits communities. The PF is saying, 'I am better than you and have higher status. I do not recognise your PC lefty liberal laws. Sniff this, losers. It came out of my ass and made a funny noise. Legislate your way out of that.'

Only the disenfranchised are exempt. They have sphincter carte blanche. You can hardly complain when a homeless person farts. They *are* home. We have not provided for them. Why should they comply with our fart bureaucracy? Society has failed them. Why should they abide by society's rules? It would be interesting to find out if Scandinavia, with its hugely superior and efficient state systems, has a problem with incongruous smells.

To many people the fart experience would have been just an unpleasant moment, but it ended up being my political awakening. A chemical composition of nitrogen, hydrogen, carbon dioxide, oxygen and methane introduced me to Simone de Beauvoir. To me, this total disregard for the well-being of others was just one more damning indictment of current Prime Minister David Cameron's failed Big Society. This man's fart, emitted in a public space, displayed a total lack of empathy for any feminisms that might be lurking there. Or for anyone else that might be lurking there, just to get out of the rain; like a homeless war veteran for example, forced out of a south London doorway by the installation of 'anti-homeless studs' by a property developer to deter him from sleeping there. Or a pigeon. Or maybe a teenager who has nowhere else to do their homework because their home is too cramped and noisy, and whose local library has been closed down and turned into a pawnbroker's. Or a dying bee.

A fart is not only a political statement; it is also a weapon. I have often commandeered farts for private use during arguments. As a retort, the fart can be more powerful than any single word in the English language. As a slight, it is more effective than a raised eyebrow, a tut or a yawn. It can have multiple interpretations, depending on the timing and circumstances in which it is expelled. A fart can be joyous, illuminating, insulting, confusing, helpful, unhelpful, disarming, liberating, puerile or the height of sophistication. If deployed with integrity and impeccable timing, a fart can be up there with the best of Wilde, Johnson, Swift, Beckett, Chaucer, Shakespeare or McGuinness (Paddy, not Martin)<sup>fn3</sup>.

All of the above only applies to men's farts, of course. If you're a woman, no context will ever exist that is suitable for you to fart into. Unless you live in Sweden, which has one of the best equal rights

records in the world. I'm sure Sweden women release gas from their *analöppning* whenever they like and good luck to them!

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So I hope that's cleared up farts for you. Perhaps now you will understand how, on 30 April 2012, one came to change my life. The epiphanic public fart that altered me for ever was not only unbelievably smelly, but was also clearly a potent critique on feminist literature and the state of modern feminism today: a powerful metaphor for how an entire ideology is viewed.

I'd gone into a bookshop to buy three feminist books: the Bible, the Quran and the Torah. But they were all sold out, so instead I thought I'd get Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and *She-Wolves* by the historian Dr Helen Castor, [fn4](#) whose brilliant TV series about England's early queens (who used to dress up as wolves so that they'd be taken more seriously) I'd just watched and loved.

Now before I go any further, I need to put this fart into context, as all good farts should be: 30 April 2012 hadn't been a good day. In the morning I'd received an email from a producer at Amnesty International telling me that the comedy film they'd commissioned me to write about infant mortality and maternal health in developing countries wasn't going to be made after all. Their reasons were completely reasonable and justified. It was just a bit disappointing. I was inspired to research the subject by my daughter's NHS health visitor, a brilliant woman from Sierra Leone called Lucy Sandi who I dubbed 'the Baby Whisperer'. Lucy could make a baby daughter instantly stop crying by talking quietly to her about how vulnerable she was, and telling her that it was in her best interests to keep on the right side of me because I was breastfeeding and the one that changed her nappy, and that a good way of doing this was not to cry all the time. [fn5](#)

Anyway, Lucy would meet me for a coffee and tell me all about the conditions women in Sierra Leone give birth under, especially women from rural communities. Sierra Leone has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. It's one of the worst places in the world to give birth in. According to the World Health Organization, as of March 2015 every day 1,500 women die due to complications in pregnancy or childbirth.

I live in Stoke Newington in north London. Stoke Newington parents take their children very seriously (Stoke Newington parents apply for nursery places so far in advance that the deposit paid for a child to attend a Stoke Newington nursery in 2015 was paid for in pre-decimal coins), but taking our children seriously is the last thing we should be doing, isn't it? They're children. Being taken seriously is the last thing they need. Children should be taken with a pinch of salt.

If you wander around Stoke Newington on a weekend you'd be forgiven for thinking that there weren't any other children left in the world, and that these Stoke Newington children were the last children on earth. The atmosphere of the playground in Clissold Park is like a smug version of P. D. James's novel *The Children of Men*, in which two decades of human infertility have left society on the brink of collapse, except for in Stoke Newington, where humans have managed to survive by being cocooned inside limited-edition Bugaboo prams.

Here's the pitch and script I sent to Amnesty TV in 2011:

## **AMNESTY TV – MATERNAL HEALTH IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

### **A NORTH LONDON ANTENATAL CLASS**

There are various expectant mums in attendance, all of whom are accompanied by at least one birthing partner. Some are husbands/boyfriends, friends, grandparents, some are hired doulas. They should all look middle class and comfortable. They are sat on yoga mats and passing around baby stuff (brochures/catalogues/nappies/babygros with stupid witty slogans on them/slings/pram accessories etc.) that they are discussing. There is even a birthing chair set up in the room that one of them is

trying out. One of the women is demonstrating how to use a sling using a baby (that keeps being dropped on the floor).

The midwife is sitting on a table, where someone has laid out leaflets/baby booklets ('Emma's diary' type things)/printed information sheets. No overacting or winks to the camera. Think *Police Squad* with Leslie Nielsen, but in an antenatal class.

## MIDWIFE

Morning, ladies, I'm Lucy. Jackie, who normally takes the class, is away so I'll be taking her place for you today. I hope I don't scare you off! It's a bit late to back out now anyway!

(laughs)

## MUM 1

Scare us? I don't think so. We're all *One Born Every Minute* and *Call the Midwife* addicts. There's not much you can tell us that we don't know already.

## MIDWIFE

I must just say how nice it is to see some dads here today. Because of course, you will be bringing up baby on your own when mum dies during childbirth. That is, of course, if the baby survives.

(the group all look horrified)

## DAD 1

What?

(whispering to his partner, MUM 6)

I thought you said it was all breathing techniques and birthing pools at these things?

## MIDWIFE

It's impossible to say at the moment which ones of you will survive, but realistically I'd say that two or three of you might make it. If you're lucky.

## MUM 2

Will yoga help? It's just that I've spent a fortune on getting the right breathing technique.

## MIDWIFE

Not if you're lying on a dirt track needing an emergency caesarean it won't, my dear. By the time you've walked to the main road, which could be miles away, waited for someone to stop and give you a lift to the hospital, you'll be long dead, I'm afraid. So you won't be breathing at all. Let alone properly.

## MUM 3

Only two or three of us?

## **MIDWIFE**

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Yes. The rest of you will just suffer serious illness or permanent disability.

### **DAD 1**

Is there anything we can do to prevent it? Because I'd really like Jenny and the baby to survive.

## **MIDWIFE**

I'm afraid not. You will all die of completely unnecessary complications. I'm sorry, but it's just the way it is. If you were born somewhere else maybe you could have the basic human rights most of us take for granted, but you weren't. So sorry, but your wife and baby will probably die. You'll just have to suck it up.

### **MUM 1**

But surely any complications will be spotted in our check-ups? When we're examined?

## **MIDWIFE**

No. There are no check-ups. You can't afford the consultant's fees. And he or she (probably a he) won't examine you until you've paid. So you'll just do without check-ups and hope for the best.

### **MUM 3**

Why didn't my mum tell me it was going to be like this?

## **MIDWIFE**

Because she died giving birth to you.

### **MUM 1**

What do you think is the best type of nappy to use? Because the *Guardian* says that terries are better than disposables because they produce less waste.

### **MUM 2**

Well, it's not as simple as that actually. Terries don't produce as much waste, but they have a bigger carbon footprint because you use up so much water and electricity washing them all the time.

## **MIDWIFE**

If your baby is born healthy and you survive, you will tear pieces of your own clothing off into squares, wrap that around your baby, and then put plastic bags over the top of that to prevent baby's mess from going everywhere.

### **MUM 2**

Can't we just buy some? It's much easier.

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**MIDWIFE**

No, you can't. Because disposable nappies cost three pounds each. And that is more than you or your husband earns in a month.

**MUM 4**

My husband will be taking two weeks' paternity leave when the baby arrives to help out. Will it be okay for him to do some of the night feeds?

**MIDWIFE**

If your husband misses two weeks' collecting plastic bottles from the tip to sell on, all the other dads will find them and you will be even poorer than you were before. So I would let him go to the tip if I were you, and do the night feeds yourself.

**MUM 2**

Do all midwives have a little case like in *Call the Midwife* with all their sterilised equipment in?

**MIDWIFE**

Not quite like that, no. They might have a razor blade to cut the cord, and some black thread and a needle to stitch you up if you tear. They only have one colour though, black.

**MUM 3**

If I'd known all this I'd have made him wear a condom!

(they all laugh, uncomfortably)

**MIDWIFE**

No, you wouldn't have. The Pope doesn't want you to. Although he has just changed his mind. But let's save that conversation for next week.

**DAD 1**

Thank you very much, Lucy. I didn't realise there was quite so much to it. I look forward to next week. Will you be here or is Jackie back next week?

**MIDWIFE**

Jackie died.

**DAD 2**

Oh! She was due, wasn't she? Did the baby make it?

## MIDWIFE

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No. Neither of them made it. The consultant wouldn't help until he had her credit card. And she forgot her wallet, what with being in labour and everything, so they both died.

## DAD 2

(to MUM 1)

You do that all the time, don't you, darling? Forget your wallet, especially when you want some new shoes. I'd better make sure I have mine with me, otherwise ...  
(makes a cut-throat gesture and stupid 'dead' faces)

## MUM 1

Shut up, Roger. You really are a prick sometimes.

## MIDWIFE

Okay, see you next week. Hopefully.

I did a read-through of the script with some mates at the Camden Head in Camden in front of an audience and it went down pretty well, so that was a relief. Although this may have been down to the skill and talent of the performers<sup>fn6</sup>, rather than the script itself. Sometimes you're not sure if you've horribly misjudged something, so it's always worth having a read-through of scripts in front of a live audience. Whether it's for radio, TV or for a live show, it's never a waste of time and it always tells you something. Most importantly, Lucy thought it was a great idea. She just wanted to raise awareness for what was happening in Sierra Leone. Anyway, it didn't happen. So that was the first thing.

Another thing that happened on 30 April was that I stumbled across a legitimate, published review of myself that included the sentence 'Anyone watching Christie would wonder who you had to fuck to get on in this business.' He didn't even asterisk the word 'fuck', which I thought was just really impolite.

Ironically, I was nowhere in my career at that point. I'd been doing stand-up for about eight years and I hadn't really made any progress. I still wasn't really being paid for gigs, my shows weren't generating any other work for me on TV or radio, and none of the scripts or ideas I'd submitted to radio or TV had gone anywhere. At this point, I didn't even have an agent. Also, the night the critic was in, he was one of about fourteen people in the audience. So I'm obviously not very good at the sex, am I, if, after all those years of having sex with people to get on in the business, I was still only playing to fourteen people?

The review made me feel depressed and angry. I thought about how upset my dad would be if he saw it. My dad's known me for literally all my life. He knows how passionate and serious I've always been about comedy, since I was four, when we used to watch *Laurel and Hardy* together and I said that I wanted to do that, and how I'd never risk sullyng my love for comedy with something as precarious as sex. He saw the comedy sketches I wrote at school, he saw the local amateur dramatics production I did, he was there when I got the letter from Gloucestershire County Council telling me I'd won the only grant in the County for Drama that year (who paid for most of the fees), and when I subsequently won a part-scholarship from the school to make up the shortfall. He knew I worked in offices from the ages of fifteen to thirty-six doing jobs I hated. He knew how many times I was rejected. He was there on the day of my graduation. And my dad watched me doing all this, without my having sex with any



of the people involved. There were no orgies at the Gloucester Operatic and Dramatic Society, Gloucestershire County Council, or at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts. None that I was invited to anyway. I couldn't stop staring at this sentence. 'Anyone watching Christie would wonder who you had to fuck to get on in this business.' I thought about all the awful gigs I'd had; all the feelings of shame and humiliation and self-loathing and failure I felt until I did my next gig and it went OK and everything reset to zero again; the years of circuit gigs; the seven Edinburgh shows I'd written and performed. I thought about all the sex I hadn't had during that time, and wasn't having. But worst of all, I felt disgusted with myself for being so angry about it. It was just a stupid twat's sexist comment, nothing I hadn't read about myself countless of times before. I checked my privilege and slapped myself across my First World-problemmed face. The information pack Amnesty gave me about maternal health and infant mortality rates was lying open next to my computer on my desk, burning my corneas like an electric arc, reminding me of all the women in Bo, who would probably give their right arm to read a stupid twat's sexist review of themselves, rather than being needlessly dead. I knew all this, I knew how weak and pathetic I was being, but I couldn't help it. He'd reduced life's worth of dreams and ambitions and work to nothing, in one sentence. The implication being that everything I'd ever achieved, up until this point (which wasn't much, admittedly), had been down to sexual favours. I thought about how the achievements of women were continually demeaned or doubted or reclassified as achievements 'for women' rather than 'for humanity'; that I'd never seen a male comedian reviewed like this; I thought about the bigger picture – that his comments didn't exist in a vacuum, that thousands of women probably had to deal with comments like this, all the time, whether they were said in published reviews, or whispered in boardrooms, or shouted into female earlobes in cockpits or in science laboratories; I thought about the cumulative effect of reading or listening to comments like this about yourself year after year, and that many women probably decide that, on balance, it's not really worth it in the end, and they give up. Not all women have the same levels of tolerance and confidence, and I thought that if he'd said it about a newer, less experienced female comic, she might have thought twice about carrying on.

So that's why I was upset, not because it was a bad review. I'm used to those. I love them! In fact, bad reviews often really cheer me up, like the fart sound-effects review I already mentioned. But I was also baffled by the idea that you could get on in comedy by having sex with people. There isn't a casting couch in stand-up comedy. There isn't even a couch. That's why we're always standing up. Most of the time there isn't even a backstage toilet. We have to use the same toilets as our audiences which can be really awkward if you've had a bad gig, or a bad stomach, or need to fuck someone in a cubicle to try and get on in this business.

How stand-up comedy works is this. You write some jokes and then get up on a stage in a room above a pub and tell them to strangers. If the audience thinks you're funny, they will laugh. If they don't think you're funny, they won't. Then you do hundreds and hundreds of gigs to improve your jokes and your delivery. If you're one of the lucky ones, you can earn a decent living from circuit gigs and might even be able to tour in your own right. You can't really 'get on in this business' by having sex with people. It just doesn't work like that.

Unless you're Dara Ó Briain. He's slept with everyone he works for and that's how he got all his work. He's slept with scientist Brian Cox and the comedian Robin Ince, to name but two. And those blokes in that boat – Griff Rhys Jones and Rory McGrath. And all the gag writers from *Mock the Week* in a simultaneous no-holes-barred orgy. God knows how many others there are. He had sex with Ed Byrne as well, so that Ed Byrne would do that travel programme with him, *Dara and Ed's Great Big Adventure*. And he had sex with that bloke who jumped off the rocks into the sea in it as well, just to keep his options open. He's even had sex with an actual television, just in case.

So that was another thing: a stupid twat's sexist review. It made me think about how female stand-

ups are written about, and how, if this is how women are talked about or written about in comedy, it is probably how women in other professions are being talked about as well, except for perhaps in the world of the high-class escort, where it is a given that you can sleep your way to the top.

Then, at about 3 p.m. that day, I saw five minutes of *The Only Way is Essex* on TV. In those short few minutes, two young girls decided to have Botox injections before they went out to a quiz night. The conversation went like this:

‘Are you going to the quiz night?’

‘Yes. Let’s go together. We can get our Botox done, then head down there after.’

I was a bit confused. Why would they have their faces filled with botulinum toxin for a quiz night? I could see their logic if they were playing poker. But a quiz night? You don’t need a poker face for a quiz night, do you? You just write the answers down on a piece of paper. Have things changed this much in twenty years? When I was eighteen, I would get ready for a quiz night by swotting up on my general knowledge.

It was the casual way in which the girls talked about having intrusive surgery, and at such a young age. It made me feel so out of touch. I felt upset, alienated and depressed. I worried about my own thirteen-year-old daughter. How will she be getting ready for a karaoke night in fifteen years’ time? By having a labia minora reduction party? (Which is also on the increase, by the way, and not in some far-off place either. NHS figures for 2010 show a five-fold rise since 2001 and one London-based surgeon has seen an 80 per cent rise in labiaplasty procedures between 2013 and 2014.)

Just in case there’s anyone reading this who doesn’t know what labia minora reduction surgery is, it’s the surgical trimming, by choice, by a cosmetic surgeon, who you’ve paid, of your ladies’ bits so that they look like porn stars’ bits, which don’t look like normal women’s bits. Porn is also why your teenage girls are shaving off all their pubic hair. Teenage boys see so much internet porn now, they’re traumatised when they see a normal vagina with all the usual vagina stuff on it.

I find it very difficult to talk about this sort of thing, by the way. It’s not something I ever thought I would talk about. Most parents say to their children, ‘Don’t look directly at the sun or you’ll go blind.’ Well, my Irish Catholic parents said that to us, but about our genitals. We weren’t even allowed to look at them during a full solar eclipse when it went dark. I had to make a pinhole camera out of a massive cardboard box and put my back to the mirror and view mine as shadows through a colander. One year I was taken to Regent’s Park in London to try and see it through enormous telescopes provided by the Royal Astronomical Society, which I found to be incredibly intimidating.

I don’t even like modern vaginas, to be honest. Or modern houses. They are both bad examples of streamlined interior design. I go into other people’s houses and the female changing areas at my local swimming pool and I think, Where’s all your stuff? Where are all your books and CDs and labia minora? You’ve decluttered your vaginas.

What’s going to happen when this trimmed, clean-lined look isn’t in any more, when they want all their original fixtures and natural character put back in? There aren’t going to be reclamation yards full of discarded labia that you can pick up for a fiver and just get a man to weld back on.

When I explained all this surgical trimming and shaving business to my fictional husband, he said, ‘Oh! So that’s why all the vaginas you see nowadays aren’t like the ones in the 1970s.’

I said, ‘What do you mean, “nowadays”? What vaginas are you looking at “nowadays”?’

He said, ‘You know, just the ones that are about.’

‘“About”?’ I said. ‘“Just the ones that are about”? Around where? You only go to the post office, the supermarket and prehistoric burial chambers. Where are all these random, modern vaginas that are about?’

Anyway, that was our son’s birthday party ruined. And the people on the table next to us at the Pirates Playhouse asked to be moved. Still, that’s pirates for you. Vagina-hating, parrot-wearing, rum-

drinking, one-eyed, wooden-legged twats. As my seven-year-old said to them.

So what with terrible maternal health and infant mortality rates in Sierra Leone, a twat's sexist review, Botoxed Essex faces and modern vaginas, I had to get out of the house. I strapped my little girl into her pram and went to collect my son from school. Then I went to buy three books about women by women, which I thought might cheer me up. I don't really know why. Perhaps recent events had conspired together to send me out to seek answers, and the day's Amnesty script turn-down and Botox TV conversation had spurred me into some kind of action. But I couldn't find any of the books so I went up to the counter and asked the man to check if they were in stock.

What followed was a drawn-out, surreal, hostile exchange with a man whose heart was clearly not in the job. It was the kind of exchange that is only made tolerable by the possibility of writing a routine about it at some point in the future. I honestly don't know how people who are not journalists or writers or comedians or artists or musicians cope without the possibility of this deferred creative revenge on the tedious admin of life.

I ended up having to spell out, many times, all the titles of the books, and all the authors' names, and the bored man typed them into his internal database system. He kept getting thrown out of the page he needed to be on and spelling the authors' names wrong, while my two children asked for every single item that was piled up high on shelves around the counter. In all this time, the man didn't make eye contact with me once, and the queue behind me got longer and longer.

The conversation, as I eventually recounted it in my 2012 show *War Donkey*, went like this:

ME: So, the first one is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, please. By Mary Wollstonecraft.

MAN: What?

ME: *A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN*.

MAN: How do you spell it?

ME: How do you spell what? A? Well, A. A for algorithm.

MAN: Nothing under A. I'll check under the author's name. Who wrote it?

ME: Wollstonecraft. Mary Wollstonecraft.

MAN: What? (*Sighs.*)

ME: Wollstonecraft. W.O.L.L.S.T.O.N.E.C.R.A.F.T. Wollstonecraft. (*Then quietly under my breath*) The inventor of modern feminism, that's all, Lord of the Sighs.

MAN: Nothing in the database for this Wollstonecraft.

ME: Oh, okay, I'll have a look online. Don't worry.

MAN: I'm not worried.

ME: Good.

MAN: What were the other books? (*Another death sigh.*)

ME: *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf.

MAN: How do you spell it?

ME: How do I spell what? *A Room of One's Own*? Or Woolf?

MAN: (*Silence.*)

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ME: Well, A, as in *A Room of One's Own*. A.

MAN: Nothing under that. What's the author again?

ME: Woolf.

MAN: How do you spell it?

ME: How do you spell what? Woolf? Are you joking?

MAN: No.

ME: Woolf. W.O.O.L.F. Woolf. As in wolf, like a wolf, that howls at the moon (*then I howled like a wolf and the kids laughed*) but with two Os. Double O.

MAN: Nothing under Woolf in the database.

ME: You have nothing in your database for Virginia Woolf? Is this a bookshop or have I walked into a fishmonger's by mistake?

MAN: I hate fish.

ME: What?

MAN: The look of it, and the smell ... awful.

ME: I don't care if you like fish or not. Are you sure you don't have anything under Woolf?

MAN: There's nothing in the database.

ME: Well, I don't believe that. Have you got *She-Wolves* by Dr Helen Castor?

MAN: What's it called?

ME: Oh, God. Kids, pack it in!!!! SHE. NEW WORD. WOLVES. SHE, AS IN FEMALE. S.H.E. WOMAN. HER. SO, SHE, YEAH? THEN WOLVES. LIKE WOLF, BUT PLURAL. THE PLURAL OF WOLF. I.E. MORE OF THEM. WOLVES. SHE – WOLVES. SHE. S.H.E. – NEW WORD – WOLVES. W.O.L.V.E.S.

MAN: Nothing under She.

But I knew that they did have *She-Wolves* because there was a huge display of them in the window.

ME: Right, well, thanks for all your help. I'll have a look myself and see what you do have. Where's the Women's Studies section, please?

MAN: The what?

ME: THE WOMEN'S STUDIES SECTION.

MAN: Upstairs. There is a lift for the pram.

ME: Thank you.

The lift was out of order so I carried the pram upstairs. There was no Women's Studies section upstairs. It was all Hitler and cookery up there. Luckily there was a fish tank upstairs in the Children section so I pushed the pram in front of that and quietly and menacingly threatened the kids to be quiet, a bit like how I imagine a murderer might.

Anyway, the kids looked at some fish and I went off for a bit to find my three books. Then a female shop assistant told me the Women's section was downstairs. 'Downstairs?!' I said to her. 'That tall, moody bloke told me it was up here. He hadn't heard of Virginia Woolf. Does he hate women writers or something? He was very blunt.'

She said, 'He's just a bit of an illiterate. I know that doesn't sound like much of an insult, but in bookshop circles, that's pretty much the worst thing you can say about someone.'

Anyway. On my way downstairs I saw the guy standing in the Women's Studies section and when he saw me he looked really sheepish, like a dog that's just lapped up a tray of congealed fat, boiled water and washing-up liquid. And enjoyed it. Then he looked at his watch and pretended to be late for something and sped off to Non-Fiction. When I got to the Women's Studies section it was heavily cloaked in the familiar yet objectionable odour of sulphur. Yes. What I mean is, it absolutely stunk of farts.

I was confused at first, but then the penny dropped. This man, who'd seemed so reluctant to sell me any feminist literature, and so keen to be rid of me, had obviously decided that the Women's Studies section was the least-populated area of the bookshop and that this was the safest place for him to expel his daily flatus.

And to be fair to him, this guy needed some personal space. For his effluvium won all the prizes. It was apocalyptic. I truly expected to leave the bookshop to find that civilisation had collapsed and crowds of zombies were roaming the streets. I could hardly breathe. The flatus had almost become a matter of life and death. With the slightest change in local air pressure, this man's gas could've become a solid.

And as I stood there, in the Women's Studies section, choking, my nostrils and lungs filled with an obstructive sexist's gas, while I tried to locate Wollstonecraft's feminist manifesto, I had an epiphany.

This is where feminism is today (or was on 30 April 2012). This is what people think of the fight for equality. It's irrelevant, redundant and pointless. Something to be farted at. No one goes to the Women's Studies section any more, not now. There's no need for it! That's all done now, isn't it? Women can vote and vajazzle and vomit at weekends now, can't they? They are free to do anything they like. I'll be safe here, the man thought, in the Women's Studies section, where I will do all my day's farts, without fear of any feminists turning up. Whatever they are.

And it was then, in that moment, that smelly moment, that everything fell into place. My life was given clarity that it hadn't had before. I felt as if I'd been given a feminist Ordnance Survey map with which I could now negotiate my way through life. I felt that all the things I'd ever been annoyed about, all the times I'd been made to feel stupid, or paranoid, or weak, or frightened, or a prude, or frigid; all the times I'd been called feisty or spunky or gobby or bossy or fierce or weird; all the times I'd thought something was my fault when it wasn't; all the stupid things everyone had ever said to me simply because I was a girl. I understood all the violence and all the oppression happening around the world to women and girls every minute of every day; all these things had been given a provenance. But most importantly, I thought that this man's fart was also funny, and it made me realise that terrible things can also be funny things. And that if I could make a terrible thing funny, I might be on my way to something.

This man's fart didn't just give me the light from which I would now see the world; it also handed me the keys to a career.

And for that I am for ever in his debt.

[fn1](#) My publisher asked me to point out that their edition of *Mein Kampf* is a critical annotated academic publication. All proceeds are donated in confidence to charities and academic institutions. None of the proceeds go towards funding Mel Brooks musicals.

[fn2](#) I hated *Cats* the musical. First of all a cat came out and sang a song, and then another cat came out and did a dance, and then two more cats came out and sang a duet. After about half an hour I thought, Oh no, it's not all about cats, is it? I suspected that one of them might even be a human in a cat costume, Bonnie Langford I think its name was, but it was only when it sang, and sprayed all over the first five rows, that I was completely convinced of it. It was, indeed, a real cat.

[fn3](#) Between October 1988 and September 1994, when voices and farts of representatives from Sinn Féin and several Irish republican and Loyalist parliamentary groups were banned by the British government from being broadcast on television and radio, in the United Kingdom, Martin McGuinness' farts were dubbed with those of an actor; they weren't his own actual farts.

[fn4](#) *She-Wolves* isn't an explicitly feminist book, but it is about four excellent women who ruled medieval England before Elizabeth I, who no one really knows about. I can't even recall any of their names now, to be honest. I remember watching it, thinking, I must remember all these brilliant women's names, so that I can list them during arguments with people who say Margaret bloody Thatcher is the only powerful woman Britain's ever had. But then instantly forgot all of their names.

[fn5](#) Not really. I don't know how she makes them stop crying. She just does.

[fn6](#) Danielle Ward, Dave Reed, John Luke Roberts, Nadia Kamil, Sara Pascoe.

# CHAPTER ONE

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*'People think feminists are all a load of butch hairy lesbians, stomping around academia using impenetrable language, calling all men rapists and drawing trousers on ladies toilet signs. But that's not all feminists. That's just me, working alone.'*

HELLO. I'M BRIDGET Christie. You've just met me in the Introduction, although you still might not know who I am. As of writing, I've been a stand-up comedian for eleven years. I used to dress up as dead kings and insects and plagues and fire and things like that. Not very many people came to see me and didn't earn any money. Then, in 2013, I did a show about how, in terms of gender equality, women are still getting the shitty end of the phallic-looking stick.

The show didn't say anything new because it's pretty impossible to say anything new about feminism. Most of it's been said before and said brilliantly by our foremothers. I only said what other women have already said and continued to say. I just put some jokes in and pulled faces. And did it in comedy clubs instead of university lecture theatres.

There is a reading list of some of these brilliant women's works at the end of this book that you can tear out, bring into a bookshop and shove into the face of an obstinate, unhelpful smelly man. So the show was popular with audiences and awards panels. It won the Foster's Edinburgh Comedy Award for Best Show, the 2014 South Bank Sky Arts Award for Best Comedy, and Best Show at the 2014 Chortle Awards. It also won a 2014 Hospital Club 100 Award for Theatre and Performance and a 2014 Chortle Award for Best Tour. I'm not saying that winning all those awards means it was the best show in any of those categories in that year. It was just the one that – finally – got me noticed.

I was described as an 'unfunnywoman' (all one word) by the *Sun* columnist Ally Ross, received an email from icon of British motorsport Sir Stirling Moss, congratulating me on all of my success, and became the top-selling comedy show ever at the Soho Theatre. (Although admittedly the room I was in has only 145 seats. I'm not competing with the stadium set and it could all be over tomorrow.)

The fact remains: I've profited from women's pain and misery as surely as the pimps that work on my road. I need to get myself a white suit, a panama hat, a solid-gold cane and a multicoloured fur coat. Making money from the oppression of women was never my objective. It was a completely unexpected by-product.

I genuinely didn't expect a show about feminism to do well. I thought it would go down badly and that I could then give up and be financially supported by my fictional husband. The whole thing's been a complete disaster. I've only had about ten nights off in a year and a half.

I mean, what's the point of being a liberated free woman if I'm too busy and knackered to enjoy it? Just because I believe in employment equality laws, doesn't mean that I personally want to work. Feminism may have improved the quality of many women's lives, but it's completely ruined mine.

We didn't think about that, did we, ladies, in the fight, that we'd have to actually do something with all of our freedom? I had hoped to spend 2014 lying on a chaise longue, eating grapes and pretending to be delicate and coquettish. But oh no, I've had to think again. I don't know how the men do it. I take my hat off to them, I really do.

Anyway, after I did my show on feminism, everyone then started calling me 'Bridget Christie the feminist comedian'. I was asked to write a book about feminism, which was a very good idea of my publishers, especially after Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Susan B. Anthony, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer, Naomi Wolf, Kat Banyard, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Natasha Walter, Caroline Criado-Perez, Laura Bates, Susan Faludi, Ariel Levy, bell hooks, Alice Walker, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Kate Austin, Dora Montefiore, Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Adrienne Rich, Susie Orbach, Eve Ensler and Millie Tant all made such a mess of it.



I thought I'd better look up feminism in case I was interviewed on *Newsnight* about it by the Head of Women, Jimmy Somerville from Bronski Beat. So I'll just quickly explain to you what I found out feminism means, and then I'll get on with all the more interesting stuff about cheese and ants.

I'm a feminist. All this means is that I am extremely hairy and hate all men, both as individuals and collectively, with no exceptions. Nope. Not even Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen/Paul Hollywood/Ronnie Corbett/Trevor McDonald/David Attenborough or John Nettles circa *Bergerac* are good enough for me.

Oh ... it could've been you, John. Oh, John. Those blue eyes, those blue jeans, that burgundy car ... Oh, John. You could've been the thinking feminist's crumpet, John. But Jersey has no gender equality laws, John. Oh, John, what a wasted opportunity.

I even hate Ban Ki-moon. It's one thing to try to eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, but Mrs Ban Ki-moon told me she can't remember the last time her husband put the Hoover round. Or sprayed his own soiled pants with pre-wash Vanish. Feminism begins at home, Mr Ban, not at the UN. Huh! Ban Ki-hypocrite, more like.

I also learnt that us feminists hate being complimented, praised or having our lives improved or enhanced in any way by a man. A feminist would rather be dead than have her life saved by a man.

Feminists don't like humour, except slapstick. Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy and *Bottom* are all very popular at feminist comedy nights. Anything that involves men being physically harmed always goes down very well with feminists. They also enjoy watching *Tom and Jerry*, Road Runner cartoons and war documentaries.

Feminists never have sex and hate men opening doors for them, even into other dimensions.

Christmas is banned in the 'feminist community', along with birthdays, wallpaper, nuance, giving people the benefit of the doubt and all music. Feminists only ever listen to one song, on a loop: k.d. lang's 'Constant Craving'.

Feminists hate all visual and conceptual art except for Jamie McCartney's *Great Wall of Vagina*, a nine-metre long polyptych consisting of 400 plaster casts of vulvas. Apparently you can see it from space.

All feminists are lesbians. There is not a single heterosexual woman in the world who believes that women should have equal rights. Not one. If a feminist says she is heterosexual or bisexual or asexual she is lying. They are all lesbians.

Every feminist became a feminist because they were so fat and ugly that they couldn't get a man, even the most repulsive man in the world. We've all tried to get him, and he just doesn't want to know. I personally tried everything. I sent him boxes of pork scratchings, I dressed up like a sexy pork scratching and poured salt all over myself, and I even polished his tool kit. And that's not a metaphor.

I did everything. I was a cook in the kitchen, a cook in the bedroom and a cook in the living room. I think that's what annoyed him, actually – all the cooking. And peelings everywhere.

I'm not going to reveal the identity of the most repulsive man in the world. But here's a drawing I did of him:



Feminism is the sole cause of the recession, global warming, terrorism, pandemics, cancelled flights, volcanos, delayed trains and overly pedantic health and safety regulations. You can't have hot drinks at work now because of feminism, or climb up small stepladders in libraries. You can't eat a lobster without safety goggles now because of feminists. You can't even open a door now because of all the feminists. You have to hurl yourself through plate-glass windows to get in and out of buildings now because of the feminists. All doors have been bricked up now because of feminists. It's like the window tax of 1696 all over again, but with doors.

All feminists are from the 1960s. There are no feminists from any other decade.

All feminists wear glasses and look like Velma from *Scooby-Doo* circa 1969, Olive from *On the Buses* or Elton John from the gay community. And Princess Di's funeral.

All feminists do all day is burn bras. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, without eating, sleeping or taking toilet breaks. A feminist would rather wet herself than leave a bra unburned. If you read the CV of a feminist, under 'Occupation' it would say: 'Bra-burner'. And under 'Skills' it would say: 'Very good at burning bras'. And under 'Hobbies and interests' it would say: 'Finding bras and burning them'. And under 'My five-year plan' it would say: 'To have burned loads of bras'. And under 'My ten-year plan' it would say: 'To have eliminated all the bras, by burning'.

Feminists steal bras from wherever they can. From lingerie departments, barns and hay bales, the wardrobe department for *The Benny Hill Show*, the stage floor at a Tom Jones concert, milkmen's pockets, James Bond's glove compartment and *Carry On Camping* star Kenneth Williams's face.

Then they burn the brassieres in braziers, singing their politically correct nursery rhyme, which goes:

Bra, bra, black sheep,  
Have you any bras?  
Yes, sir, yes, sir,  
Three bras full.  
One for the master,  
And one for the dame,  
And a tiny double-A one for the  
little girl who lives down the lane,  
who doesn't need one yet,  
and won't do for years to come,  
but who wants one because she  
saw an American Apparel advert,  
before it was banned by the  
Advertising Standards Authority,

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sample content of A Book for Her

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