BOOK TWO OF THE GALLOWAY GIRLS SERIES

GILL STEWART

Gemma's not sure



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Galloway Girls: Gemma's Not Sure

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To Pia Fenton (aka Christina Courtenay),
great writer and fantastic friend.

Gemma

'I'm not sure I can do this.' I mean to say it inside my head.

'Of course you can!' Lily turns her gaze from my computer screen. 'You're the best singer in the school, and you're amazing at piano. You're bound to get–'

I wave my hand to shut her up, which works, surprisingly. Maybe she's noticed I'm on the verge of tears.

I mean, everyone seems to think I *should* do this. Go to uni, study Music, make a career out of it … They'd said it couldn't hurt to apply, could it? As it happens, yes, actually. Because now the Conservatoire has sent me details of the audition and just reading them makes me feel so sick I think I might need to run to the toilets. (This is saying something given the state of the ones at Galloway Academy.)

I take a deep breath and close the window.

'No need to think about it now,' I say, as brightly as I can.

‘Of course not. Take your time. Although, the audition is in November, so you do need to decide fairly soon …’

I pretend to rummage in my bag. Lily accepted her audition to study Drama straight away. No nerves at all. Me, I love singing at home, or in a choir – but on my own in public? My stomach lurches. And why did I even choose voice as a secondary instrument when I could have done just piano? Although, I’m not comfortable playing that in public, either.

Basically I’m pathetic.

Lily is being very patient, for her. She doesn’t mention the audition again for at least two hours. Then, as we walk back to her house after school, she says, ‘You know, they do a music-teaching course at the Conservatoire. Maybe you could consider that? It isn’t so much about performing in front of people.’

‘No, it’s about performing in front of a class of kids every day of the year.’

‘Only in term time.’

‘Lily, I’m never going to be a teacher.’

She doesn’t give up. ‘You were really good when you led the choir in the pantomime last year. That was basically teaching. And you’re a prefect. That shows you know how to use your authority.’

Lily’s all about those ‘transferable skills’. But, again, ‘No, it shows I organise the prefect rota so I’m always on with you, and you can be the one to “use your authority”.’

'Oh.' She looks surprised. Then she frowns. 'I thought it was because you enjoyed my company.'

'And that,' I add, in the unlikely event that I've hurt her feelings.

And I do enjoy Lily's company. She's been my friend for forever. And I'm usually good at tuning out her overenthusiasm.

As we turn to go up the steps to her front door I say, 'Anyway, why isn't Tom with us?'

'Tom and I don't spend our lives in each other's pockets, you know. We're both independent human beings.'

'But where is he?'

'Taking Sarah to her hospital appointment.'

'Ah.' That should put my worries about the Conservatoire into perspective. Tom's younger sister doesn't even get to go to school, so who knows if she'll ever be well enough for university? And yet …

What am I going to do about the audition?

Mrs Guthrie, my singing teacher, and Mrs Marshall, my piano teacher, will probably have something to say about it. I know Mum and Dad will just tell me to do what makes me happy, but that's the problem: I'm not sure what that is.

Jamie

Uni life is amazing! Freedom. No one looking over my shoulder all the time. No one planning what I should do every second. This is what I've been waiting for!

I'm not exactly smashing the academic side of things, but we're only a few weeks in. The social side will probably calm down soon – not that I want it to.

Innis, one of the guys in my flat, is on the same course as me and just as keen on making the most of student life.

'You coming over to the Union?' he says, as I drop my gym bag and reach for some juice from the fridge.

'Aye, why not?' I was going to look at my Accounting notes, but I've just put in a good training session. I deserve a break. 'Give me ten minutes for a shower.'

My phone rings as I head into my room. Mum, of course. I could just ignore it, but then she'll try again and again until she gets through.

'I'm in a bit of a hurry,' I answer.

'I won't keep you,' she lies cheerily. 'Just a couple of things. Your dad is in Glasgow tomorrow so he can take you out for dinner. That'd be nice, wouldn't it? And I wondered if you've got your marks back yet from your latest assignment? Are you refereeing this weekend? It'd be lovely if you could come home sometime soon but I know how busy you are–'

'Mum, that's already more than two things.'

'–and what I'm really phoning about is that Mrs Marshall has said she'll fit you in a for a long piano lesson before you take your exam. That's good of her, isn't it? If you let me know when you're coming home, I'll arrange it with her. Then we can discuss whether you want to go on and do the diploma.'

Shit. I'd forgotten I let Mum enter me for the Grade Eight piano exam. Grade Eight! Why she even thinks it's a good idea I have no clue. I've told her I have absolutely no desire to take my music further.

'Actually, Mum, I haven't been practising much – lack of access to a piano, you know – so maybe we should delay–'

'You can't do that! I've paid the entrance fee. Anyway, you need to pass this to count towards your Gold Duke of Edinburgh.'

Ah yes, that's why I'm still learning piano.

'I've got a lot on just now …'

'I know you have, darling. So I won't keep you. Just message me a couple of dates and I'll arrange it all for you. Love you. Bye.'

That's another thing Mum's good at: ending conversations just when I'm about to get a word in.

Oh well. No point worrying about that now. I've got an evening's drinking to look forward to. Tomorrow is another day and all that.

The Finance lecture first thing the next morning turns out to be a group presentation. Which I knew about. Probably. At least before the evening in the Student Union, which turned out to be pretty good. Cheap beer, lots of laughs – what's not to like?

Aside from the headache as we saunter into the lecture room.

This guy Kris says, 'You okay to do the speaking, Jamie? You said you would if we put the slides together.'

'Yeah, fine.' I might have agreed to that. I'm too hungover to remember.

'You have looked over them, haven't you?'

'Of course.' I flash my most confident grin. 'Just having a final look now.'

I flick my laptop open and pull up the slides. I see someone was working on them at midnight last night, so I'm not sure when I was supposed to have had a chance to go over them. I was way too drunk by then anyway.

When it's our turn I straighten my shirt, check my reflection in a side window, and head to the front of the room. I've got this. If there's one thing I'm good at, it's standing in front of an audience and acting like

I know what I'm talking about. Dad says I get it from him. Lily, my ex, said it was an unfair advantage.

Whatever. We smash it. Looking confident really is half the battle. The lecturer nods throughout, and preens when I use some of his own phrases back at him. We even get a smattering of applause from the rest of the class, who pretty much slept through the other presentations.

Sometimes I have my doubts about this course. I mean, who actually enjoys Accounting and Business Studies? But right now, I'm on a high. The guys slap me on the back as we sit down.

I repeat: life is good.



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