

EASTERN PROMISE



JACQUELINE
POULIOT



EASTERN PROMISE

Lesbian Romance by
CARMENICA DIAZ

writing as

JACQUELINE POULIOT

Carmenica Diaz writes erotic fiction under various pseudonyms. The stories are either hard and nasty or soft and tender, depending on her moods.

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EASTERN PROMISE

JACQUELINE POULIOT



*Come what may, I will love you forever
And forever my heart belongs to you
Come what may, for as long as I'm livin'
I'll be living only for you*

Come What May (Après toi)
(Mario Panas, Klaus Munro, Yves Dessca)

Lesbian romance by Carmenica Diaz, writing as Jacqueline Pouliot

The Wedding (2012)

Dancing Barefoot (2013)

Dominique (2013)

Click! (2014)

The Artist (2014)

The Weakness in Me (2015)

Lighthouse Beach (2015)

MY BROTHER'S GUEST (2015)

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Changes (2016)

The Mountain (2018)

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[MY BROTHER'S GUEST](#).

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PREVIEW

A Frosted Mirror.

London 1964

The tiniest moments triggered sudden memories. The faint scent of an Eastern spice, an unexpected hot breeze tickling a leafy fern. Perhaps, soft shuffling steps on a parquet floor, or a soft voice with the hint of an oriental accent: anything at all, could send her mind swirling back to 1953 in an instant. *Was it that long ago? Has over ten years really vanished?*

The restaurant was subdued. Conversations murmured around her, grey rain slid down the glass windows and unsmiling waiters dropped silver cutlery on snow-white tablecloths. A red double-decker bus bruised through the busy streets. Black umbrellas everywhere. London going about its daily business in grey rain.

London. I've returned after so long. Now, I'm feeling cold to my bones, And so afraid, intuitively afraid. I wonder if I can be brave enough for this, this life. Hold on, hold on to yourself because no one else will.

A newspaper discarded by a previous occupant lay on the table, black ink and dirty white paper. The headlines were restrained for a change, but still leapt

to the eye. *At least Profumo and Christine¹ are off the front page.*

An old military man was enjoying a meal at the next table. The wavering scent brought a hint of coriander with other spices to her nostrils. More memories again, images of sweet faces, hot nights and ceiling fans. *So long ago, another lifetime and, I was another person. Just a young, naive stranger in an even stranger land.*

To Poppy, the past appeared to be a distorted reflection of herself. Sometimes, a view of a different person. It was like looking at her reflection in a frosted mirror – half there, the rest blurred and indistinct. Flickering memories through frosted glass.

A telephone call had brought Poppy to the restaurant. It had been a sudden reminder, a sudden jolt, as if someone had reached out from the past and suddenly touched her on the shoulder. In fact, it had been an unwelcome and sharp reminder of what she had lost. Those telephonic chiming bells had brought the past.

‘Hello?’

‘I was hoping to speak to Poppy Haines.’

Poppy had known that voice instantly. The slight accent sent Poppy spiralling back through the years immediately, back to those naïve, rigid days of the 1950s. ‘This is she.’ She managed the few necessary words after a pause.

Another pause from the caller. ‘Is it *really* you?’

¹ The Profumo Affair, a British political scandal in 1963, was named after the then Secretary of state for war, John Profumo, a Conservative Cabinet Minister, married to the film actress, Valerie Hobson. He had an affair with Christine Keeler, he lied to parliament, the Russians were involved and he and the Prime Minister inevitably resigned.

‘Yes.’ Poppy knew it was a valid question. Was it *really* her now after changing so much? It was a question that wasn't easy to answer honestly.

Now, waiting in the restaurant, Poppy still didn't have the answer. She waited in the tiresome restaurant to face the past, to feel it all once again.

Poppy glanced at her watch. The other woman was late but then again, Poppy remembered wryly, she was always fashionably late.

A young couple thrust into the restaurant, arrogant in their sudden pride in a rising culture. Dressed in the latest clothes, his hair was long and unkempt, her skirt short and risqué, their smiles confident and insolent. Oblivious to the disapproving stares of the matrons and their cowering husbands, the young couple slipped into a vacant table, laughing and smoking, confident their culture would win in the end. The Beatles and Bob Dylan warned of changes coming. No one in the restaurant, apart from the young couple and Poppy, heard the call.

Change *was* coming. Poppy knew that. Perhaps, change had already arrived. The old was slipping out the back door while the new was insolently forcing its way through the front door.

The life we knew, the life we grew up with is vanishing, if not gone. We should silently thank our Gods for that small, wondrous mercy.

Poppy thought she was quite adept at hiding her memories. She locked them away in secure corners of her mind. Expert in keeping unwanted reminders separate from her usual life.

She had successfully done this with remnants of her childhood, locked them away to reduce the pain.

However, memories of *that* time in 1953 stayed with her every day; those memories had *never* left her.

Especially that face. Her face has remained with me all this time. So long ago, but I remember it all so clearly, like it was a dream, languid, softly enfolding like a sensuous fog.

PREVIEW

The Dragon's Tail.

Vietnam 1953

Most people thought Poppy had impetuously chased marriage. However, her sisters knew Poppy had calculated well. Her marriage had been the last hope for her ageing mother and her younger sisters, at least until her sisters found husbands.

Marriage was all that was possible for a young woman in the bland and comfortable days of the 1950s. Some said marriage was a woman's destiny after all. *What was a woman without a husband? Why wait passively for a man to make the first move? Shouldn't a woman take her own destiny into her hands and find one?*

It was said by her family, and, especially, by her sisters, Poppy was *extremely* self-confident. It was not a compliment. They also added Poppy was, perhaps, *more* confident than a young woman *should* be. They loved to point out Poppy's confidence certainly *frightened* potential suitors. Poppy, of course, said nothing when she overheard their resentful remarks. Her sisters and Poppy's mother thought they knew Poppy so well. They were seemingly proud that they knew her as well as they claimed. Poppy knew the truth. They knew *nothing* about her! Stifling a smile,

she thought if her sisters knew Poppy's *real* thoughts, they would run screaming into the *night!*

The truth was, internally, Poppy was a constant sea of self-doubt. Full of relentless fears and strange desires. Particularly strange desires. Coupled with her paralysing shyness, Poppy would mutely listen to whatever conversation was swirling around her. Her unusually bright blue eyes watching the participants in a manner that gave her the reputation of being aloof and somewhat arrogant. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In her diary, like many young women of her time, Poppy recorded her most private thoughts. She wrote, *I am cursed with intelligence. I see the answers and the realities far too quickly. In a man, this ability would be a gift; for a girl, it's a curse. It is not helpful I see people as they really are, while they only see my skin, the outer me'.*

Poppy also sketched small drawings of people in her diary. None of those skilful depictions were flattering in any way. Those hurried drawings already displayed the cruel edge of the artist's truth. And, of course, she had to keep her talent a secret. No one could know what she really thought of people.

Her marriage had been rushed like so many others after the war. Lives in a holding pattern could begin again at last. Perhaps, the thought of a new era spurred them on. It didn't matter. To Poppy, Andrew seemed so solid, so dependable. With her keen intelligence, Poppy had seen Andrew as an escape, a path to an exotic world. A world so different from Poppy's life as a shop assistant. A life Poppy *needed* to run to. She knew she would not fit within the grey life of English society. Poppy also knew she had to find an answer to herself. An escape was needed, and Andrew had been the solution.

Her last days in London had been a strange mixture of fear and excitement generated by the prospect of her forthcoming journey. The young Queen Elizabeth was embarking on the second year of her reign and Poppy sometimes wondered if everything was changing. She hoped it was. Perhaps, change would be fast. Sadly though, to her, it seemed life went on as it always did.

The flight from London had taken several days. Flying by day and landing at night in exotic countries. Places that had once only been vague names in her battered schoolgirl's atlas.

Wherever she landed, an official from the British Embassy met Poppy at the airport to escort her to whatever hotel she was staying in for the night. The ingratiating small talk was always the same. However, the further east Poppy travelled, the seedier the hotel and embassy officials became. And, the coarser the comments.

One official had been particularly suggestive. He had openly leered at her breasts, his eyes raking over her like he was examining a plucked chicken hanging in a shop. He almost licked his lips as he suggested meeting for a drink. 'Just a drink, Mrs Haines, that's all. Has anyone told you that you look like Marilyn Monroe, that new actress?' He was so drunk, he stumbled at the hotel room door while inviting her. Poppy had politely refused, firmly shutting the door in his unshaven face.

In the shabby bathroom, Poppy examined herself in the cracked mirror and wondered if she could dye her hair. She guessed the further east she travelled, the more unique her blonde hair became. Poppy was, above all, a survivor.

Her journey was surreal, tinged with a strange brew of excitement and bitterness. At last, Poppy arrived. When she stepped off the plane, Andrew met her. He seemed nervous and was accompanied by a group of men in rumpled suits from the Embassy. A photographer took several photographs. Later, the photographs appeared in a small newspaper for the diplomatic community under the headline *'British Ambassador's Wife Joins Husband'*.

The Ambassador's compound was large and fortified with sullen soldier. The residence was quiet and leafy, with teak-shuttered windows, darkly polished floors, and slow, constantly-circling ceiling fans. The furniture was dark and heavy. Ornate carved lamps in polished teak cast small pools of light against the thick, brocaded drapes. The portrait of the new Queen seemed incongruous within the almost mystical surrounds.

Poppy could not count the number of servants. There did seem to be many. Poppy also struggled to pronounce their names. It was impossible to remember their faces. She felt vaguely uncomfortable with their quiet insistence they do everything. Accordingly, she locked the bathroom door in fear a calm Asian face would suddenly appear, ready to assist Poppy in her most private functions.

The reality of her situation hit home and in the darkness of her first night, Poppy wrestled again with self-doubts and fears. However, she wore her automatic, serene smile. That mask hid her secret doubts while, inwardly, she trembled with fear and doubt.

Poppy discovered the life of an ambassador's wife was full of small rituals. Every second Friday evening, the French Ambassador hosted a cocktail

party. On the other Friday, the French embassy hosted a dinner for the diplomatic community, selected government officials and well-connected business people.

The cocktail party was Poppy's debut as Andrew's wife into the tight diplomatic world. Smiling grimly, perspiration running down her back, around her bra and in her girdle, Poppy allowed Andrew to steer her from smiling face to smiling face. She felt everyone's eyes keenly assessing her.

The wife of the French Ambassador stared at her coldly when Andrew almost timidly introduced them. Overwhelmed, Poppy managed to stutter a greeting.

Thankfully, Andrew whisked her away from those cold judgemental eyes. Still, Poppy heard the French Ambassador's wife say, as if from a distance, 'How old do you think she is? She looks like a *child*'

What am I doing here, Poppy asked herself again and again. *What am I trying to prove?* On the surface, Poppy offered a young beautiful face to the world. Fair skin, blue eyes and naturally blonde hair combined to make her stand out from any crowd. Poppy seemed so controlled and calm, but inside she was still a sea of swirling doubts and worry. She needed this marriage and her life as an ambassador's wife to succeed. It was, after all, her escape from grey England. In her melancholy moments, Poppy was desperate to seek a meaning to it all, to truly understand *herself*!

Life had been strange enough in London but the Far East was like another planet. Poppy watched the Asian world swirl around her with numb incomprehension. There were moments when she felt as if it were a dream. She was a passenger, an observer. Poppy was sailing over the surface, trying

desperately to be what she thought Andrew wanted her to be. She was also trying to understand it all, to make some sense of the world and herself. *I must find a way to control life. I can't let it control me!*

Each moment of her daily life was stressful. *It's not just the relentless heat*, Poppy silently told her reflection in the mirror when she was preparing for the function. *It's the constant humidity. British cosmetics aren't designed for this.* Pouting to apply her melting lipstick. Already, a small sheen of perspiration could be detected bubbling through her foundation. For a moment she wondered if she should clean her face and begin again, but what was the use? It was a battle that could *not* be won.

Poppy jealously wondered how the native women always appeared so cool and collected. To add to her frustration, the French Ambassador's wife appeared serenely comfortable and, even, elegant.

For all official functions, Poppy's tentative plan was simple. Smile, nod, make small talk and survive the night. Be the ornament on her husband's arm Andrew required and never let her true self be revealed. It was a simple plan but it soon became *very* complicated.

Andrew was in deep conversation with the American Ambassador. Poppy stood obediently by and smiling faintly and nervously. It was at that moment, on her first night at the French Embassy, Poppy first saw Chan Juan.

Chan Juan appeared on the arm of a bear-like man in a crumpled linen suit. She wore a calm smile like armour, masking an inscrutable but deeply beautiful face. Her dark eyes slowly swept the room. Her body lithe and lush in a red and gold cheongsam.

So full of envy of the other woman's poise and serenity, Poppy could not take her eyes from her. She had never seen such grace and beauty in a woman before. Her heart quivered slightly as if beginning to wake from a long slumber. Poppy tried to ignore it. Young and somewhat inexperienced, Poppy did not recognise the tremor for what it was.

Yet, there was an impression the Chinese woman was unhappy and deeply so. Poppy thought she could see the pain in her wonderful almond eyes from across the room. She felt sympathy and empathy.

She was so engrossed, Poppy failed to notice a dark buxom woman moving to stand beside her. 'She's the Soviet Ambassador's wife,' the woman confided softly. She smiled when Poppy whirled, startled. 'I'm Billie-Jo,' she had said with a brittle smile and a thick southern American accent. 'We met a few days ago, but I don't think you would remember.' Billie-Jo sipped her drink, her eyes watching the woman. 'She's Chinese, I think. Those damned chink dresses are sexy as hell and they cover everything. Go figure.' Billie-Jo drank from her glass again, her brow speckled with beads of perspiration. 'He met her in Hong Kong or somewhere. That's the story, and the rumour is she's from a wealthy family but I'm guessing she was a lady of the night.' She winked awkwardly, the alcohol already confusing her reactions. 'She keeps to herself. How long do you think you'll have to stay in this hellhole?' A sharp, almost brutal question, another sip, and the crystal glass was suddenly empty.

'I think the posting is two years,' Poppy murmured. She tore her eyes from the red and gold figure in the centre of the room. *Two years, how will I manage it?*

‘That’s what they say, pray they don’t forget you. Stanley and I have been here almost three years.’ Both women watched as the French Ambassador’s wife sailed calmly across the floor to greet her guests. ‘She spends most of the day in her bath,’ Billie-Jo, whispered in Poppy’s ear, her breath rich with American whisky. ‘That’s why she always seems so God damn *fresh!*’ Reaching for another drink, Billie-Jo sniggered slightly as she said it.

What a good idea, Poppy thought, and immediately planned to spend the next morning reading in her cool bath.

Andrew appeared and smiled fleetingly at both women while he gently took Poppy’s elbow. ‘More people to meet I’m afraid, darling.’

‘Have fun,’ Billie-Jo said icily. Andrew smiled thinly at her without humour before leading Poppy away.

Suddenly, Poppy was standing before the Soviet Ambassador and his wife. Andrew’s introductions faded into the noise of the cocktail party under the careful eyes of Chan Juan. ‘How very nice to meet you,’ Poppy said formally, clutching her small purse, her fingers damp against the shot silk.

The Soviet ambassador half bowed, his big head bobbing once in a stiff motion, his eyes bored and disinterested. His wife openly examined Poppy, a half smile, and a warm flicker of interest that vanished as rapidly as it came. Poppy found herself wanting to smile more but held back under Andrew’s watchful eyes. He began speaking to the other man. The two women stood an arm’s length away from each other, a small distance across a tumultuous invisible ocean.

‘You have just arrived?’ Chan Juan inquired softly, her head tilting slightly as she spoke. She glanced quickly at her husband, who was looking over Andrew’s shoulder at someone as Andrew talked quickly.

Poppy found herself nodding frantically in answer. *Stop it, she demanded, don’t reveal yourself as a complete fool! ‘Yes, yesterday.’ Why do I feel I know her? This is absurd.*

‘It is a long passage, I think? You must be tired?’ Her voice was musical and warm. A soft timbre caressed Poppy’s senses and her hands trembled against her purse, Chan Juan’s eyes rested on Poppy’s hair.

‘A little, it was an exhausting journey,’ Poppy managed to say.

‘So different from England, you must find it strange?’

‘It is certainly hot,’ Poppy smiled apologetically, fanning herself with her hand. ‘I never expected it to be so hot.’

‘Yes, the heat can be draining. There are other differences, of course,’ Chan Juan said softly, glancing at her husband again who was now talking to Andrew, their heads close. ‘The food, the water, the people and, of course, there is a different morality here.’ She raised her eyebrow again in conjunction with her sad, almost secret, smile. The Russian ambassador turned to her, took her arm and said goodbye to Andrew and Poppy before moving off into the crowd.

‘That wasn’t so difficult, was it?’ Andrew asked as the car returned to the Embassy residence.

‘No, I suppose it wasn’t.’ *It was terrifying, absolutely terrifying!*

They returned to the residence in silence. The Embassy was silent with lamps burning in the foyer. Poppy’s high heels tapped loudly on the hard timber floors. The servants had left the ceiling fans on and they sluggishly stirred the thick air.

‘Can I come to your room tonight?’ Andrew asked, eyes averted as Poppy stood by her door, hand resting on the heavy doorknob.

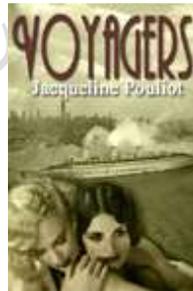
‘It’s not possible, it’s that time,’ she lied, using the age old excuse men accepted unquestioningly. Poppy had discovered men were both mystified and threatened by female functions.

‘It’s been so long,’ Andrew persisted, watching the fan turn. ‘Perhaps something else?’ He looked directly at her and Poppy saw a cold gleam. ‘It is my right, of course.’

‘Of course, darling,’ she said brightly, blinking quickly, and followed him to his room. *Please, just my hand, let that be enough.*

Enjoyed *EASTERN PROMISE*?

You may enjoy other historical romances written by Carmenica Diaz as Jacqueline Pouliot.



PREVIEW