

Book Proposal

LUNA

A novel by Nic Penrake

Genre:

Literary fiction with cross-over to thriller and romance genres

Logline

A painter's worries over money lead her to take extreme measures to revamp her career and see her become dangerously entangled with a French swinging couple.

Word count

Approx 95,000 words

Compatible titles:

The Post Birthday World & Double Fault – Lionel Shriver

Prozac Nation – Elizabeth Wurtzel

On Chesil Beach – Ian McEwan

Taming the Beast – Emily Maguire

3 – Julie Hilden

The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl – Brooke Magnanti

Submission – Marthe Blau

Market

Written like a memoir or confessional, "Luna" describes an artist's experience with sexually addictive behaviour that is partly explained by her abusive childhood.

Luna relates with searing honesty her own character failings and how her ambition to create a new and more commercial series of paintings leads to a period of excessive sexual experimentation and, ultimately, a **fateful love triangle situation** with one of her models and his partner.

Unlike a memoir, the story is not episodic or anecdotal. Literary fiction it may be, but the language and pace of 'Luna' will appeal to many thriller readers, while the sexual content will appeal to readers who have picked up bestsellers like "Belle de Jour" and erotic literary fiction like Marthe Blau's "Submission".

This is a **domestic drama** with the **pace of a thriller**, delivering **compelling twists and a powerful double climax**. “Luna” originated out of a TV treatment for a series about a sex addicts group. Luna was developed as a 50 minute script which **received high praise from Phillip Shelley, the well known TV screenwriter and industry reader**. He not only rated “Luna” highly, he also thought the series idea had huge potential. When this book is published, the TV series idea will stand a better chance of being commissioned by e.g. Channel 5 under its remit of edgier UK drama.

The novel, now with a fuller plot than the TV episode, has even more to recommend it as a piece of writing that is readily adaptable to the **big screen**. Several readers have said it would work as the kind of movie the French excel in. The fact that the two of the leading characters are French may well appeal to a French Production company and Canal Plus.

The Narrator

Readers have commented on Luna as a ‘**sympathetic MC**’, her plight one that many readers will relate to, especially women.

Luna is an unusual narrator. To begin with she is a woman of mixed race who was brought up in London until her mum threw out her Iraqi/Persian father when she was 9. Luna and her mum then moved to Frankfurt where Luna did the rest of her schooling. At the age of twenty-one, she escaped the Frankfurt drug scene to study Art in London.

Luna has come through child abuse, drugs and alcoholism to become a relatively grounded woman, albeit an artist who remains drawn to the worlds of extremes.

Because of her past we are perhaps more ready to forgive Luna the risky choices she makes. What starts as an art project becomes a sexual adventure, a sort of **cathartic journey** that enables her to destroy some of the demons of her past even as she inadvertently draws more chaos into her life.

Luna’s journey is hardly typical of a woman in her late thirties, and yet the feelings she is made to experience during her story are particularly poignant to any woman of that age and a little older. In this story, sex, murder, miscarriage and birth all mash together to produce **a new and hopeful ending which is also a new and hopeful beginning.**

Themes

- Sexual addiction

Sexual addiction is more and more talked about – but usually only insofar as it relates to the proclivities of celebrities, who anyway have licence to indulge in most kinds of wayward behaviour and still remain hot property. What is less known is that many ordinary women, women we wouldn’t perhaps normally expect to bump into at a Sex & Love Addicts Anonymous group, are also looking for some kind of help with their (usually) destructive sexual behaviour.

Many of us, men and women, have had our promiscuous phases, even if they only lasted a few weeks. So we can relate to Luna’s plight, her issues, her ambition. And most of us will be able to sympathise with her choices because of what she was put through as a child.

- **The creative drive**

It is Luna's creative drive that works as the catalyst that turns Luna into a sex addict. The fascination here is that Luna literally throws her body and spirit into her art and physically puts herself on the canvas. Interestingly it is the paintings she makes of her grief of losing Bertrand and Mari that fetch the biggest prices at her Exhibition.

- **The lesbian/bi-sexual relationship**

Post Bridget Jones, not so much who and where is Mr. Right? but, rather, Do I need a man at all, why not a woman? And if a man isn't to be in the picture, can I make it work as a mum with a girlfriend?

Style

Even when there are just two people in the room, there is a highly dramatised sense of conflict and a central question that needs resolving.

The way the sex is described is untypical for a female narrator – and owes it legitimacy to accounts and 'confessions' by four real women the writer knows well. For some, the sex may belong in the erotica genre, but the writing is more sophisticated than that and seeks to stimulate the mind as much as the senses. It's the writer's opinion – and experience – that many women these days are not afraid of expressing themselves exactly as men do – so let's hear them speak.

Readers' feedback

Script consultant Phillip Shelley wrote: "There's an icy, Germanic quality to Luna's dialogue and actions. You've created a strong sense of her trying (but failing) to remove herself emotionally from the situation she's created."

Everyone who has read the opening 6 chapters has asked for more. No exceptions. One reader, an actress, when asked to write notes and feedback apologised saying, "I'm sorry, I got so absorbed in it I forgot to write any."

Blurb

At 38, Luna's career as a painter takes a sudden dive. The credit crunch is still grinding on and her regular buyers are too busy guarding their mortgages to invest in modern art. As her financial anxieties escalate, and she digs deeper for new, more 'commercial' ideas, she returns to the Pandora's Box of the past, the sexual and physical abuse she experienced as a child. And then, one day, she chances upon an idea for a new series of paintings that seems to offer her not just a way out of her financial mess, but a way in to a darker side of her sexuality that she believes will provide her with answers – answers she feels she must have before she hits menopause.

But at what cost? Her idea is radical and upsets her boyfriend. She goes for it nonetheless. And in pursuing her ambition, she throws herself into a sexual odyssey with a French swinging couple that oscillates dangerously between happiness and death. And yet, maybe her instincts have been right all along and she is slowly making her way to a kind of catharsis or rebirth too.

Synopsis

At 38, Luna's career as a painter takes a sudden dive in 2009. People simply aren't buying – or not her work, anyway. Her clients are too busy ploughing reduced bonuses back into more essential things than paint. As her anxiety escalates she finds herself digging deeper for ideas and returns to the Pandora's Box of her childhood sexual abuse and the physical abuse she endured from her Iraqi/Persian father.

She starts a photography project using clay models and doll's houses which she uses to explore her past – the child and the other man. Her agent, though impressed by her new series, tells her the material is too controversial, too dark, for any of her clients, but suggests she try to make the material more abstract using paint.

So Luna has a go at this. She lays a large canvas on the floor of her Old Street apartment and gets to work. But she can't make it work and, in her frustration, hurls paint at her canvas. When her actor boyfriend, Liam, tries to stop her they tussle and she falls into the paint. When he offers her a hand up, she pulls him onto the canvas and, out of some sort of pique, demands that he make love to her in the paint.

Returning from a shower to view the canvas they were on, Luna wonders if she hasn't chanced upon an idea for a series of paintings that captures her and a lover's sexual energy in paint. So she reworks the 'painting' till she has created an expression of what the experience with Liam meant for her.

She shows the work to her agent, who, through blushes, says she's impressed and would be interested in seeing a series. The question is, now that Liam is going up to Manchester on a six week TV job, who will she do her series with?

Luna's choice to explore her idea to its logical conclusion sees her become tragically entangled in a complex love triangle with French swinging couple, Bertrand and Mari.

Nine years younger than Luna, Bertrand is something of a mystery, not least for being a magician. He has travelled extensively, been a drug runner in Thailand, returned home to Europe to enter the wine trade in London as a broker, given that up to learn how to build violins, while pursuing his love of magic. Somehow his relationship with the far more sensitive Mari has endured all kinds of ups and downs, but as Luna arrives in their lives, it is already on the wane.

While out with Mari, Bertrand approaches Luna while she is wandering around The White Cube Gallery one day. Mari watches them talk from the other side of the gallery and doesn't interfere when Bertrand invites Luna to join him for a coffee. The two get acquainted and hit it off. Luna calls him as a life model and while drawing him considers whether she might go one step farther and have sex with him in paint. Not surprisingly, the cool Bertrand agrees to be of service. Luna wishes him to know the experience was purely for her project, but Bertrand contrives a way to see her again.

Luna then begins to venture further into the unknown having sex with various men who model for her. Before long she is 'auditioning' them with little intention of using them for her project. The thrill of pretence and control prove addictive. It is only when she actually begins to think of charging the men for her services instead of paying them, that she realises she needs help.

And so she goes to her first SLAA meeting. There she befriends Simon, an intellectual underachiever whose sexual addiction owes much to his life on the road and picking up prostitutes. He introduces her to an alternative SLAA group and the two become friends in spite of the sexual tension that seems to define the time they spend together.

Luna is just on the point of telling Bertrand she no longer wishes to see him any more when he invites her to join him and his girlfriend at an 'adult party'.

Luna is immediately smitten by the half French half Japanese Mari – her beauty, her glacial self-possession, her mysterious vulnerability speak to her in ways no man has ever done. And the feeling appears to be mutual, because Mari falls for her too. And suddenly Bertrand's sleight of hand to keep Luna interested in him appears to be working against him.

And yet the triangle remains, trembling under the weight of compounded desire. Until one day Mari announces she's pregnant. More shockingly, the father-to-be may not be Bertrand. She's been having an affair with a married man, a Dr. Michael Grove, a gynaecologist whom she met briefly at the 'sex party'. Grove doesn't want the child – if, in fact, it is his – and although Bertrand is far from happy at the prospect of being a father – or a step-father – reluctantly he agrees to be some kind of a father regardless of the outcome of a paternity test.

After much heartache, the day she goes for her first appointment to an abortion clinic, Mari decides she not to go ahead with termination – she's keeping the baby. But only a few days later, as all three are gathered round at Luna's, a phone call comes through from Mari's sister that shocks Mari's confidence in herself and Bertrand. Hanging up, she gets into a bitter argument with Bertrand and storms off, to disappear for days on end.

Around midnight, the day before Mari is due to have her abortion, Bertrand arrives outside of Luna's flat, drunk. She lets him in and they talk. He agrees to sleep on the sofa, but later joins Luna in bed and they have sex. They talk into the early hours. Luna is adamant they should stop seeing each other as lovers. She begins to wish she had Liam back. Then, as she goes to the bathroom for a pee, something terrible happens. She hears a crash in the living room and enters to find Bertrand grappling with a masked intruder. Before she can intervene, the intruder has stabbed Bertrand fatally in the neck with one of her own scalpels. Bertrand bleeds out and dies.

Luna becomes prime suspect in what the police first believe to be a domestic that got out of hand. At the police station, she is continually offered a self defence plea as an end to endless grilling. The next day, not being allowed back to her apartment, she goes to stay with Liam. His kindness moves her. But she must hasten on to Mari. The news of Bertrand's death may well impact on her decision whether she keeps her baby or not.

Luna visits Mari in her ground floor flat in Brixton, which she shares with a Sudanese refugee. In grim surroundings, Luna breaks the news to Mari. Mari reveals she has decided to keep her baby and the news won't change her mind. They cocoon themselves in her flat for a long weekend, during which time they console one another and become lovers again.

Luna promises to help care for Mari. She can move in to her apartment. They will be like a couple and get past the horror of Bertrand's murder.

But only days after Mari moves in, she suffers a miscarriage. Again their relationship takes a beating. In dealing with her grief, Mari withdraws from Luna. And then one day Mari returns home with a cup of foul smelling tea, which she says her former lover, Grove, gave to her. She now suspects him of having poisoned her with something that caused her to miscarry.

Luna calls the police. The tea is found to contain a miscarriage-inducing drug and Grove is arrested. But the case against him is flimsy. Not least because, being a Chemist's assistant, Mari might also have had access to the drug. Finally the fact that Mari was doing a house move just before her miscarriage persuades the police their case is simply not strong enough and Mari is left without a remedy.

Mari escapes to Paris for a few days and fails to return in time for Luna's opening night of her exhibition. Luna is sick with anxiety. But when Mari returns she seems to have found some new courage to bring to their relationship. Luna can be hopeful again. But only hours later she discovers she is pregnant. From the night she last had sex with Bertrand. She had meant to take the morning after pill but in the wake of the murder, she had completely forgotten to do so.

The news breaks something in Mari and she can't carry on being with Luna. Finally she moves out and little by little Liam returns to Luna's now calmer life.

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