



Praise for *Ellie Pillai Is Brown:*



WINNER – Branford Boase Award

SHORTLISTED – Waterstones Book Prize

SHORTLISTED – Jhalak Prize

LONGLISTED – UKLA Book Awards



‘Hilarious and heart-warming.’

Aisha Bushby, author of *A Pocketful of Stars*



‘Frank, funny, warm-hearted and wise.’

Simon James Green, author of *Gay Club!*



‘Warm, funny and hopeful!’

A. M. Dassu, author of *Boy, Everywhere*

‘A fresh, funny, feel-good story.’

Rashmi Sirdeshpande

‘Heart-breaking and hilarious.’

Brown Girl Magazine



‘I loved the fresh and original voice.’

Bookseller, Highlights of the Season

‘Hugely enjoyable.’

The Scotsman

**‘Funny, heartfelt, true-to-life,
coming-of-age page-turner.’**

LoveReading

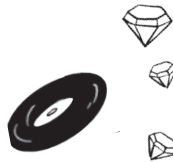




ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Pillainayagam is a writer and retail strategist, who lives in Kent with her young family and a collection of records, CDs and minidiscs. A mild obsession with the Beatles and the desire to write a story that reflected her own experiences growing up as a first-generation immigrant led her to put that love of music and words into a book. *Ellie Pillai is Not Done Yet* is her third novel.

A singer-songwriter, Christine also writes a blog: thelittlebrownbook.co.uk




ELLIE PILLAI
IS NOT DONE YET




CHRISTINE
PILLAINAYAGAM

Illustrated by Trisha Srivastava



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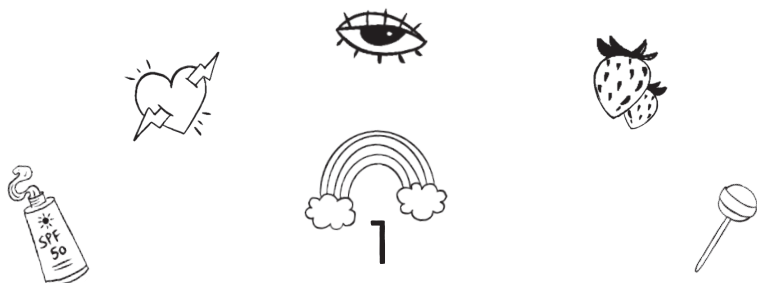


You can listen to the *Ellie Pillai Is Not Done Yet* album by scanning in the link below – hear Ellie’s songs come to life!

There are song chapters throughout the story that reference specific songs on the album.



For Mum, Dad, Michele and Terence – the family that made
me. For Ian, Theo and Miles – who made me a family.



A Girl Called Ellie

My name is Ellie. Ellie Pillai.

And I choose me.

Which, I appreciate, doesn't make sense to a lot of people.

It's just, I sort of fell in love, and then I fell out of it, and I feel like falling, when you're not sure where you're going to land, is how you end up with the words SPLAT and WAH WAH WAH above your head in a speech bubble, like you're a cartoon character instead of a real human girl.

So, when it's a choice between your ex-boyfriend, your current bandmate, or yourself—you choose you. Because real human girls don't bounce as well as cartoon ones. They tend to crumple. Or split into pieces. And I've found pieces don't really suit me. Like the one-shoulder top my cousin made me buy, which makes me look like an octopus that's missing a tentacle.

My name is Ellie. Ellie Pillai.

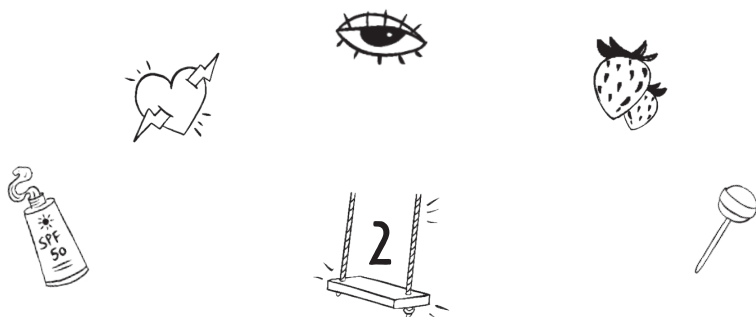
And I choose me.

Which means no falling, no crying, no kissing and definitely – no drama.

Or at least, that's the plan.

Although.

I've never been that good at sticking to plans.



Pride & Prejudice or Prejudice & Pride

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

WHAT IS HAPPENING??

Ellie:

nothing

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

who do u love??

Ellie:

no 1

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

ELEANOR. Y R U TORTURING ME?

I can only guess my cousin's reference to torture is the quasi-love-triangle I appear to have found myself in with my ex-boyfriend Ash – aka the boy in the yellow rain mac – and my bandmate Shawn – aka Dirty Blond – and the fact they've both asked me out, but I refuse

to go out with either. And before you ask: I have no idea what a quasi-triangle looks like. I can only assume, a smaller triangle.

Ellie:

i choose me ❤️

Which, I'm not going to lie, isn't exactly easy when you like both of them, but you're not entirely sure how much you like yourself.

But here's the thing about falling out of love/getting your heart broken: at some point, you have to get unbroken. You have to get back up and think about yourself. Work out who you are on your own. What you want on your own. You have to learn to like you. Love you.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

what does that mean??

And what that means is . . .

Ellie:

💀 no romance 💀

So, I am now officially entering my No-Romance Era, a strictly Self-Improvement Zone. Because therein lies my problem. Romance. Distracting myself with yellow rain macs and dirty blonds and missing the bigger picture. The future. Real stuff.



Ellie:

i need to focus on me

I check my reflection in the mirror and imagine myself metamorphosing into a mature, better version of me. A butterfly Ellie. An Ellie 2.0 who focuses on exams and family and friends. An Ellie who doesn't have chin hair like her thousand-year-old granny.

Note to self: find tweezers. Also, find out how hairy caterpillars are when they become butterflies.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

 it's not a *terrible* idea 

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

I give it 2 weeks

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

3 tops 

I ignore her tone in the manner of a mature, better version of oneself, and throw my phone down on the bed, jumping spreadeagled behind it. Then I smash my head against the headboard – because unfortunately, butterfly Ellie does not have new and improved spatial awareness.

I rub my head for a minute then I turn over on my back and press play on my new favourite podcast, my pyjama-clad legs and white socks neatly crossed beneath me.

I will no longer be drawn into pointless childish romantic entanglements. I am Ellie 2.0. Fearless, formidable warrior of a new world.

Ooh, that sounds good. Must write it down.

I type the words into my Journal app and listen as the sound of Dr Jada's American accent fills my room. It may be the twelfth time I've listened to this particular episode but it's the sound of the words being said, sort of staccato and firm and unapologetic. *Heartbreak is a pointless exercise.* Just like that. Heartbreak. Is. A. Pointless. Exercise. It's sort of rhythmic. And soothing. I listen to it like it's a song. As though it's lyrics I can memorise. Wisdom I can absorb.

Heartbreak.

Is.

A.

Pointless.

Exercise.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

ru listening 2 that Jada person again??

How does she know? I sit up and eye the corner of my wardrobe suspiciously. Maybe there's a hidden camera in there. I wouldn't put it past my parents; a hangover from their Ellie Is In Need of Watching at All Times phase – or maybe Ellie's Actual Hangover phase, which, I will admit, was not my finest hour. But all I can see in the vicinity of my wardrobe is clothes. And records. And books. And a bowl with some leftover ramen noodles from when Mum 'cooked' last night. Which makes it slightly tricky to spot a camera, or in fact anything I need, at any time I might actually need it.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

u need 2 clean ur room

I slide my eyes from side to side.

Ellie:

where ru??? 🐼🐼

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

i. am. everywhere ... 🐼🐼

Ellie:

this feels like the start of a horror movie

Ellie:

where the brown girl dies 1st

Soon, a masked clown will come and kill me.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

ur mum may kill u if u don't clean ur room

Mum, dressed as a masked clown may kill me.

Ellie:

...

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

hrd her telling my mum u haven't left ur room in a week ...

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

it's not the quasi-love-triangle is it?? ⚠️

But if she means the fact I was once in love with Ash Anderson, and now I am not in love with Ash Anderson, because he broke up with me on my birthday and had a weird inappropriate relationship with his best friend that he also used to date (ugh, Rebecca) then didn't bother to visit me in the hospital when I almost died – then the answer is no. Or if she means the fact that after Ash and I broke up I kissed Shawn, and it may have felt like one of those fairy-tale kisses where space and time cease to exist and you are the only two people alive in the universe – then also, no.

These are just Things I Can't Think About Right Now, because I'm focusing on becoming Ellie 2.0. Someone who thinks about things other than kissing, and what songs are playing in your head when you're kissing, and has a firm grip of quadratic equations and the French perfect and pluperfect tense.

Ellie:

hav been revising!

Which Mum knows, because I've told her this, like, multiple, multiple times. It's not my fault that every time I use the word 'algebra' she just switches off and goes on about how I need to have a shower and leave my room.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

ru sure? because that kiss w dirty blond ... 🤪

Exactly. Head-blown emoji. This is why my love life carries a triangular hazard warning sign.

Note to self: heartbreak is a pointless exercise. Heartbreak is like doing circuits around a running track, just, you know, *because*. So, it's weird. In a bad way.

So, even if Ash did secretly drive my mum and granny back and forth to the hospital when my dad had a heart attack and he says he's sorry, and he still loves me, and he'll wait for me, It Doesn't Matter. And even if Shawn says he likes me, and he'll wait for me too, That Doesn't Matter Either. Because as Dr Jada, Spotify's number-one emotional well-being podcaster keeps reminding me, I need to focus on Me.

Ellie:

as previously discussed. i choose me.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

i'd choose u 2 ❤️

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

altho dirty blond would come a close 2nd

So, I've been trying to focus on finding my own path. Which in my case is paved with algebra and trying to understand whether Elizabeth had the pride and Mr Darcy had the prejudice, or Elizabeth had the prejudice and Mr Darcy had the pride – one of life's most important and eternal questions.

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

time 2 think abt U snack 🤔

London Cousin – Not Annoying:

also me . . . can i borrow ur yellow top??

Stuff is happening in the world. Real stuff. Important stuff. Things that need my attention. Like my GCSEs and my dad recovering from heart surgery, my mum having a baby and my lovely but brutal granny (aka a brown, old-woman version of Jon Snow, *Game of Thrones*) currently living with us and obsessing over what we should all wear on Saturday to meet my aunt's soon-to-be husband's parents, at possibly the world's most awkward lunch. My fear is she's erring towards sari, which I never feel like myself in. I have a tendency to fall over in them, and if I'm going to fall over, I'd at least like to look like myself when I'm doing it. Or maybe I wouldn't. Maybe I can pair my sari with sunglasses and a fake beard.

Ellie:



London Cousin – Not Annoying:

c u on sat 🗨️

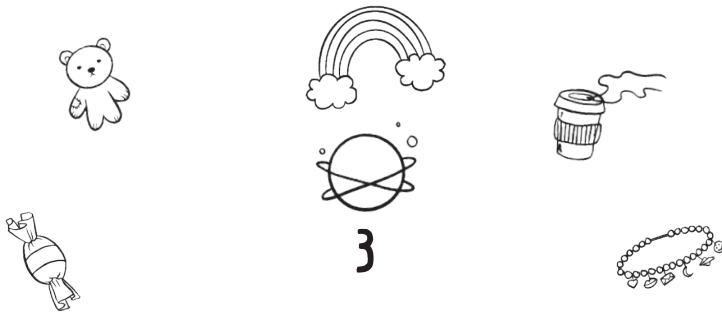
Ellie:

stop being creepy

London Cousin – Not Annoying:



I stroke the hair on my chin, the feeling annoyingly soothing.
At this rate, I won't be needing the fake beard.



Ellie 2.0

My brain is now thinking in French.

J'ai le menton d'une femme cinq fois mon âge.

Which I'm taking as both a win, and urgent reminder to find my tweezers.

I take a break from revision and decide to alphabetise my records while Dr Jada plays in the background, telling me to release the need to criticise myself.

'Ellie?' Mum says, poking her head through the doorway.

'Uh-huh?' I reply, sat on the floor trying to work around the mountain of washed clothes in need of a home.

I mean, /release the need to criticise myself, now Mum's here, that's an entirely different story.

'Are you listening to that woman again?' she asks, side-eyeing the pile of clothes I was planning to put away as soon as I worked out whether to organise my records by band, album, genre, era or experience. It's a lot. I'm having a lot of thoughts about it.

'It might be easier to do that first,' she says, pointing at the clothes.

'Her name's *Dr Jada*, Mum.' I roll my eyes as I press pause on my phone, which takes several minutes due to having to find it beneath the aforementioned washing.

'She's not a *real* doctor, Ellie.'

Mum. Six months pregnant. Wants me to leave my room. Doesn't rate *Dr Jada* and more often than not, me either.

'She is,' I insist in a high-pitched voice. 'She has a PhD in Resilience.'

'Resilience?' Mum scoffs, and I know, as soon as she's alone, she will immediately google whether or not that's a real qualification.

'Do you need something?'

She's stood at the door looking gloriously, beautifully round, in a long denim skirt and black vest top. Because only my mother could look this beautiful whilst appearing to smuggle a beach ball.

'I was going to ask you the same thing.' She rubs her stomach in smooth circular motions. 'When was the last time you changed your clothes, *en anbe*,' she asks, trying not to look like she's been keeping track of my daily outfit choices in a diary entitled **WHAT ELLIE IS NOT DOING WELL**.

I sit up and brush the crumbs of toast Granny brought up for me off my favourite Strokes T-shirt.

'I've changed my underwear,' I mumble, 'and this is a new T-shirt.'

Yesterday I was wearing a Queens of the Stone Age T-shirt. I remember because I kept hearing 'Fortress' and wondering what wilderness behind your eyes looks like and if I had it when trying to understand quadratic equations.

'Granny says I need to revise,' I state. 'In fact, I was just trying to work out . . .' I pick up a mock paper I've stuffed into a shoe and start reading out an algebra problem that involves x 's and y 's and whole

numbers, and watch her eyes lose focus. Mum is annoyingly good at everything, but even she can barely feign interest in the completely irrelevant, unrelatable, useless questions of a GCSE maths paper (her words, not mine). I hope the problem will be enough to dissuade her from further conversation re the state of my room/life in general, but she clearly has an axe to grind.

‘It’s thirteen,’ she says, staring at me.

‘What?’

‘The answer. X is three and y is four.’

‘How did you do that?’

‘Do you really need me to tell you?’ she asks suspiciously. ‘Because you’re pretty good at maths, Ellie – and that wasn’t a hard question. Or are you just hoping my dislike of algebra will make me go away so you can carry on doing whatever it is you’re doing in here?’

Mind reader. Witch!

She watches me carefully, her face contorted with a mix of wariness and concern.

‘And since when did you listen to your grandmother?’ she continues. ‘Or anyone, for that matter? You need to take a break, *en anbe*. See some friends.’

She looks exhausted. She looks like she’s got enough on her plate with the pregnancy and working and looking after Dad and Granny. Because Granny alone would be enough to make anyone’s plate feel more than full. I feel suddenly guilty for making her worry. For making her think there’s something wrong with me. That she needs to watch me, the way she used to watch me.

‘I’m fine, Mum,’ I reply, trying to look Alive and Vital and Powerful, as Dr Jada tells me I am daily, so it must be true. ‘But I was going to

invite Jess and Hayley over later, so you can stop worrying that I'm some kind of crab hermit.'

Note to self: invite Jess and Hayley over later.

'A what?' she smiles.

'A crab hermit,' I offer imperiously, not enjoying the look she's giving me.

'I think you mean a hermit crab,' she says, trying to hold back a laugh, which seems to me to be the exact same thing.

'That's what I said.'

'OK,' she says, trying to keep a straight face.

'Look. Can I help you with anything, Mum?' I ask, sitting up on my knees.

She shakes her head.

'I came in here to help you,' she says, rubbing her belly for the hundredth time. I'm starting to think there's a genie in there.

'Is everything OK?' I ask, nodding towards her stomach.

'Fine,' she says. 'Just itchy.'

Gross. Remind me never to get pregnant.

'Seriously,' I say, looking at her. 'Can I do anything to help, Mum? You look tired.'

'I'm fine,' she repeats, sounding like me. 'I don't need anything. I just wanted to make sure you know I'm here. If you need me.'

'I don't need you.'

'Oh,' she says, sounding hurt.

Ugh, well done, Ellie.

'I mean, I should be helping you. Let me take something off your hands. Something you don't have time for,' I insist. Because this is how you become a better person. An Ellie 2.0.

She walks in, arching her back slightly as she lowers herself down on to the bed.

‘Well,’ she breathes, ‘you *could* help your grandmother organise her table setting. For the lunch.’ The lunch being the meeting on Saturday between the Sòng family and the Pillai family before my aunty Kitty and her fiancé, Charles, get married next month. The reason I’ll see Hope this weekend – and probably never see my yellow top again. A marriage Granny took her time coming round to, because Charles is British Chinese and not Sri Lankan Anything. Mum rolls her eyes, clearly exhausted by the idea of the lunch, let alone the lunch itself.

‘Like helping her buy stuff and organise, that kind of thing?’ I ask.

‘Yes,’ she says, fixing me with a piercing look. ‘That would be great.’

‘Anything else?’

‘You could get Dad’s records out of the cupboard? He wants them in the lounge so he can listen to them while he works.’ Since Dad’s heart surgery he’s been listening to a lot of Tim Buckley. Which says a lot about how he’s feeling. He’s usually more of an AC/DC man.

‘No problem,’ I respond cooperatively. I love Tim Buckley.

‘So, how are you getting on with all this?’ she asks, gesturing to the chaos around me.

‘Fine. Yeah. Good.’

‘Great,’ she says slowly.

‘Then why are you looking at me like that?’ I demand.

‘I’m worried about you, *en anbe*.’

‘You should worry about you, not me,’ I say calmly.

‘Me?’ she asks, surprised.

‘You’ve got work and the baby, and Dad, and Granny. You’ve got

a lot going on. You don't have to worry about me too, Mum.'

Ellie 2.0 notices when her mum looks worn out. Ellie 2.0 is helpful and mature, with a soon to be excellently organised record collection.

'Yes, but you're going through all that with me,' she says gently. 'Don't think I don't know that.'

But I'm not going through anything other than a hairy caterpillar (must find tweezers) to powerful butterfly glow up.

She stands up and leans down to kiss me on the forehead.

'I'll talk to Granny about the table stuff,' I reply officiously. 'Get it all sorted.'

'OK,' she says heavily.

As she leaves, I close my eyes and un-pause Dr Jada.

You are Alive and Vital and Powerful, Dr Jada intones.

You are a Woman, tapping into your Power, she continues.

Yes. Yes, I am.

I just need to work out what my Power is, and where I can find it.

I am Ellie 2.0.

Watch out, world. I'm coming.