



I Love This Part by Tillie Walden

[Contemporary Fiction]



It's my favourite part.

"Can we ever tell anybody?"

"Probably not."

Simple, subtle, sublime: two girls share experiences, confide and reassure each other gently.

They explore landscapes together, looking over, out or nestling within them. This is the sweet languor of youth when you still have time to rest supine and stare at the sky up above you. There's an intimacy in the way they inhabit those landscapes, absorbing a song, one ear-bud each, or crouched under a duvet in front of a laptop with a nocturnal cityscape rising behind them, its tiny skyscraper windows lit while their monumental silhouettes, crisp and bold, stand out against purple-tinged clouds.

"I got an ipod Shuffle once for Hanukkah and it really stressed me out that I never knew what song was next." That made me smile. It's true, isn't it, that we enjoy the segue from one song to another on an album we love, subconsciously anticipating what we know will come next as the final chords on the current one fade or when it concludes in a blistering crescendo? Same with mix-tapes you've made.



The story is told in single-panel pages and if the landscapes are so often majestic – mountains, canyons, valleys – then the two girls are equally epic and so completely at one with them. Their positioning is perfect and the sense of scale is breathtaking. Here Tillie Walden takes her early Winsor McCay influence and makes of it something uniquely her own. Winsor thought like this, but he never *did* this. There's also that dreamlike comfort to it. Or at least there is to begin with.

Initially each full-page panel features both girls in synch, either side by side or opposite each other, but then there's a brief falling-out over a photo uploaded onto social media without the expressed consent of the other. It's still gentle, and the kindness – the reassurance – remains. But there follows a telling page in which they're no longer completely as one but staring in different directions and, oh, the art is exquisite as one girl's swimsuit hugs tight while the other's dress billows in a breeze.

Gradually there encroach pages in which only one or neither girl features, silence falls and texting begins instead. Never forever, I promise you, for this is far from linear. But it's in marked contrast to what went before when their relationship morphs as they tentatively explore new territories, not necessarily successfully. Aaaaaand we're still only a fraction of a way in.



The comic's not long but it's substantial, begging you to linger and rewarding you if you do. It's fiercely well observed with incredible understanding and empathy, but without demanding you recognise that, for so much is left to be said by the silences.



Note: I LOVE THIS PART can now be found within Tillie Walden's ALONE IS SPACE collection along with THE END OF SUMMER and A CITY INSIDE, the last of which contains the single most romantic line ever written:

"You gave up the sky for her."

Also recommended by Tillie Walden::

SPINNING, an autobiography created at the age of just 21 which boasts an astonishing sense of perspective and, most unexpectedly, includes both a coda to the above and, sadly, a resolution.

