



★ **To Throw Away Unopened: A Memoir**

Viv Albertine

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Once a punk, always a punk. Viv Albertine is a force. The legendary guitarist of post-punk cult band the Slits writes about maturity, femininity, and facing the end of life without fear in her incredible new memoir *To Throw Away Unopened*.

Albertine's narrative voice is immediate, authentic, and vivid, by turns salty and sensitive. *To Throw Away Unopened* is structured like a series of photographs or a gallery of memories. Each snapshot captures a moment that reveals deeper truths. Sitting on a bus, Albertine eavesdrops on two drug users, reflecting, "They were my Ghosts of Christmas Past, especially the woman in her leopard-print coat and motorbike boots ... spending all day with a person she didn't like, trying to score." Any decision, Albertine says, sends you down one path or another. Her stories describe a woman who is aware that her own life, and her abiding role as a voice of the counterculture in Britain, is largely a matter of chance. In the rock-and-roll memoir genre, her self-effacing, humorous tone is a welcome balm.

Albertine effortlessly leaps from feminist theory to grief to social commentary. *To Throw Away Unopened*, ironically, leaves nothing unexamined. One particularly strong passage describes Albertine's recurring dreams about her hair: unruly hair on her legs, her head, her chin, growing uncontrollably. The descriptions of the different spaces Albertine inhabits, from the public bus to the house she grew up in to her mother's living room, are excellent, and the memoir's characters are sharply, but kindly, drawn.

Throughout, Albertine's memoir contrasts social expectations for women in the 1960s with today's standards and uses quotations from other writers to illustrate her points. In some ways, we are more free, Albertine says. In others? We've simply chosen a different form of subjugation.

From her wild punk days to her wilder life as an older woman, Albertine's wonderful memoir is illuminating and brave. For all its swagger, *To Throw Away Unopened* has a sweet center and a perspective that makes it a real standout.

CLAIRE FOSTER (May/June 2018)

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