

Prologue

Lynne ran into the garden, carrying in her right hand her favourite toy—a small, brightly coloured car; red, orange and blue. It had large eyes and made a sound like a car racing along a track whenever she pulled it along the ground using the string attached to it. She found her favourite part of the garden, feeling happy that her sister was at a friend's birthday party so she could be alone and play with her toys. Her sister's favourite doll, Nancy, was in her left hand.

Lynne sat on the bench at the far end of the garden under the shade of the apple tree. She smiled and began to sing: 'Ring a ring o' roses, a pocket full of posies...' Just then, she heard a sound in the next garden and hoped that her neighbour, Zac, wouldn't insist on climbing through the hole in the fence to play. At 4 years old, he was almost a year older than her, but he acted like a baby as far as she was concerned.

'Lynne, where are you?' shouted her mum from the patio doors at the back of the house.

'Here, Mummy!' she replied.

'Stay where I can see you,' said her mother, then disappearing back into the house.

It was a lovely warm day. Lynne began to run around in circles, feeling the breeze in her hair. Just then, she saw a white cat jump off the fence and realised that the sound she had heard coming from the next-door garden must have been the cat. She had never seen it before. It was completely white, with bright blue eyes. It had a collar with something hanging from it shaped like a fish.

'Hello,' said Lynne, excited. She ran towards the cat. It sat calmly watching her, seemingly unconcerned at the toddler who was now racing towards it.

Lynne stroked the cat. 'Do you want to play with my car?' she asked. 'What's your name?'

The cat began to purr, then laid down on the grass, allowing Lynne to continue stroking it.

Suddenly and without warning, the cat jumped up as if scared. Its eyes turned very dark, almost black, and it backed away.

'Wait, little kitty, don't be scared, silly,' said Lynne. Then, she turned to her right, and saw her mother standing next to her.

'You scared the cat, Mummy!' Looking back at the cat, she said, 'It's only Mummy, she won't hurt you.'

'Who are you talking to, Lynne?' asked her mother, seeing an empty grass lawn where Lynne was pointing.

'The cat, Mummy, look. Isn't he pretty? Can I keep it?'

'You and your imagination,' said her mother, sighing, unable to see the creature so clear and real in Lynne's eyes.

'Can I, Mummy? Please? He's so sweet.'

'It's time for dinner, Lynne, come on.' Her mother picked her up.

'Can I bring the cat inside?' She looked over her mother's shoulder as she was whisked into the house, and watched the cat in the distance, now further and further away from her. He continued to look at her with those hollow black eyes. Lynne began to feel a little frightened and held on tightly to her mother.

The cat never returned to the garden and Lynne was left wondering if she had imagined it after all. Like all events in a three year-old's life, it was soon forgotten. Two weeks later, her parents bought her a cat of her own, a black and white cat. The mysterious white cat from the garden became a distant memory, never to be recalled.

Chapter One

I don't love him anymore, thought Lynne to herself, as she looked at Adam lying on the bed beside her. *We're supposed to be getting married in a couple of weeks time... eighteen days time.*

She jumped out of bed, ran into the en suite and closed the door. Reaching for the tap, she

splashed her face with cold water. *Maybe I'm still asleep.* It was wishful thinking. Opening the bathroom door, water dripping from her chin, she took a deep breath and wiped her face with her pyjama sleeve. She walked into the bedroom and looked at the man lying on the bed. He was sleeping, his mouth slightly open. As she listened to the familiar sound of his breathing and the faint snore, a fear took hold of her; a realisation that she no longer felt anything for him. The sensation had crept up on her without warning. She tried to reach back into her past—even to last night—to conjure up some loving feelings. *I was still in love with him last night... at least I think I was.* They'd been laughing, as they watched a documentary on TV about a fourteen year-old girl who wanted a boob job, even though, at first, Adam had said he didn't want to watch it and they'd had a bit of a disagreement about that.

Lynne had been living with Adam for three years, and it was something she just took for granted that she still loved him, never questioning it. Okay, she knew it was no longer like in the first few months, when her heart would beat faster every time they met, but it was an unwritten rule, something that was just there. They were still together, so it had never entered her mind that she had stopped loving him. Not until today. Now, she knew for certain, that she had no feelings for him. *How can this have happened?*

Just last night, they had been talking about the plans for their upcoming wedding, and the honeymoon location, over a glass of red wine. Granted, she'd done most of the talking, but he was agreeing with her, and he seemed to be looking forward to it. Men weren't supposed to be particularly enthusiastic about planning weddings, so she didn't expect anything more from him. She'd felt happy.

Crawling back into bed next to him, she could see from the alarm clock that it was 7:21 am. The alarm was set for 7:30—the time Adam got up for work.

She thought back to his proposal, as she fingered the diamond engagement ring on her left hand. Her eyes drifted over to the wardrobe, within which her wedding dress was hanging. She'd noticed the dress a couple of months before Adam proposed to her, stopping in front of the shop window on her way to work to admire it. It was beautiful. As she'd stood in front of the shop window, she'd wished that Adam would pop the question so she could buy it. Her wish had been granted a few weeks later when Adam got down on one knee, at the top of the London Eye, in front of a group of smiling tourists, and asked her to marry him. He had tears in his eyes when she said 'Yes'. She'd felt so blessed, and sure that they were fated to be together. She tried to reach back in time and pull out those feelings, but they were gone.

As she turned to look at Adam, a strange emotion ambushed her; a feeling of deep regret. It was like the way she'd felt when she'd drunk too much at that party back in her university days, and had gone to bed with Stuart Redman, the most unattractive bloke on the campus; the one everyone said was most likely to join the Foreign Legion. It had been a feeling of instant regret, a feeling of uncleanness, when she'd woken up to find him dribbling all over his pillow next to her. She'd jumped into the shower straight away, and scrubbed herself until she had washed that night away.

The feeling was almost exactly the same now as she lay next to Adam; the gut wrenching sensation of having made the most horrendous mistake. But she couldn't jump into the shower now and wash away over three years of time. Somehow, though, that's what she wanted to do, as ridiculous as it seemed. *What's wrong with me?* she wondered

Adam began to stir in the bed. Soon he would be awake. It was 7:29 am. She turned away from him and closed her eyes, pretending to be asleep. *How could I have just fallen out of love with him overnight?* Then she remembered the dream she had the night before. In the dream she had been sitting alone in a bar and a man approached her. He looked familiar, but she had never seen him before. He seemed to have a white light around him, like an aura. He had said, '*You must not marry Adam, it will be a mistake*'. Then he disappeared, and she woke up. She was a bit shaken after the dream, especially as the man had seemed so real, and his voice remained in her head when she opened her eyes. But after a few minutes, when she had fully woken up, the dream had slipped away to the back of her mind, no longer significant. Then, Steve, her ex, had phoned her, out of the blue. She hadn't spoken to him for over four years. Could the dream, and the subsequent phone-call from Steve have caused her emotions towards Adam to freeze up now? Was that why she could no longer feel anything for him? She began to worry that perhaps she had never really fallen out of love with Steve, and his call may have awoken long dormant emotions, making her feel that her marriage to Adam would be a mistake. That would make more sense if Steve had called first and then she'd had the dream, but it had happened the other

way round.

She could hear Adam in the shower. Usually, she got out of bed when the alarm went off to prepare his breakfast before he set off for work, wanting to make the most of the time they had together, because Adam was often working abroad. Today, however, when Adam had said, 'Good morning,' she had rolled over and said, 'I'm tired, I think I'll lie in a bit today.' That had been the end of the conversation.

She lay in bed now listening to Adam singing in the shower. His voice was out of tune, but it didn't usually bother her. *I love Adam, I love Adam, I love Adam*, she tried to convince herself. Perhaps if she kept repeating that in her head, she would eventually believe it. She pretended she was asleep again as she heard him re-enter the bedroom to change into his work clothes.

Lynne had fallen in love with Adam over three years ago. It was love at first sight. She had just come out of an awful relationship with that rat, Steve, and then she'd met Adam; sweet, kind Adam. He was handsome and gentle, and had been so good to her. Soon she became besotted—almost obsessed. When he finally asked her out, after what seemed like an age, she'd been the happiest girl in the world.

People were jealous of Adam and Lynne's relationship. From the outside, they were the perfect couple. And even though their relationship was not as great as it had once been, Lynne still never doubted they would be celebrating their golden anniversary together one day. So, she could not understand how she could just wake up one morning and feel unable to even look at him.

She wondered whether it was because she had fallen for Adam on the rebound from Steve, transferring the feelings of love she'd had for Steve to Adam. Perhaps now that she had spoken to Steve again after so long, and realised she didn't love him anymore, she also no longer loved Adam; after all, he'd only ever been a substitute. Was it that simple? But she was sure that she loved Adam because he was Adam; not just because Steve had left her and she needed a replacement. Over the years, she had formed a strong bond with Adam, one she thought could never be broken.

The strange thing was, there was something at the back of her mind telling her that she had probably known all along that she didn't love Adam, but had just not faced up to it until this morning. *I mean how could I have ever been in love with him?* Her mind now seemed clearer than ever before; more focused. It was as if a messenger had been travelling for over three years, desperately trying to get to her over a treacherous journey, wishing it had reached her sooner. It had still been catching its breath, after telling her, in no uncertain terms: 'You don't love Adam anymore.'

Thinking back, she realised that after the first few months of dating him, their relationship had become more like a companionship than anything else. Adam was always away on business and she consequently ended up spending the most important days of the year on her own: birthdays, Christmas, Valentine's day—an endless list of lonely occasions. But somehow this hadn't mattered to Lynne; she'd been busy, too, working as a secretary in an accountancy firm. She hadn't had time to ponder the strengths and weaknesses of her relationship. It was only really in the last few months, since she had been made redundant, that she had faced up more to the lonely days. This created some tension between her and Adam whenever he returned home. But she kept herself busy with the wedding arrangements, thinking that the wedding would wash over any of the inadequacies in their relationship. Since the engagement, she'd had a more positive outlook, brushing aside any arguments, believing that getting married would solve their problems. Now, she wondered whether they were too far down the line of incompatibility for that to work.

She took a deep breath as she heard Adam close the front door on his way to work. *What should I do? It would be better to tell him now, instead of standing him up at the altar.* But what about her family and friends? What could she tell them?