

A red brick wall with green ivy and pink flowers. The ivy is climbing the wall, and the pink flowers are scattered throughout the greenery.

It's time they took  
the plunge ...

# LOVE LIVES

Josie Lloyd & Emlyn Rees



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## About the Book

**Two men. Two women. And every emotion you've ever felt...**

In 1871 Appleforth House was burned to the ground. Now, over a hundred years later, the house is being rebuilt – and so the lives of four very different people converge.

Ned, a successful architect, is obsessed with restoring the house to its former glory. Focussed and determined – and bruised by a past relationship – he's not looking for distractions. But then Ellen, a documentary-maker, arrives to make a film about one of the local landmarks, leaving her boyfriend and some tough decisions temporarily behind her.

But as pieces of the past start to fall into place, the restoration also brings together Jimmy and Verity, two local teenagers: one falling in love for the first time, the other an incurable romantic, determined to find her fairy-tale hero.

And as their hopes and fears come together they all learn some surprising lessons about finding love in the most unlikely places...

## **About the Authors**

Josie Lloyd and Emlyn Rees each had novels of their own published before teaming up to write bestsellers together. Their work has been translated into twenty-six languages. They are married and live in London with their three daughters.

*Also by Josie Lloyd & Emlyn Rees*

The Boy Next Door

Come Again

Come Together

The Seven Year Itch

The Three Day Rule

We Are Family

# *Love Lives*

Josie Lloyd & Emlyn Rees



arrow books

For Tallulah – may you always love life



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# Chapter I

JIMMY OPENED RACHEL'S bedroom door as quietly as he could and peered inside. There his dad's girlfriend was, half hidden under the double duvet, alone on the double bed. In the half-light of the new day her thick black hair lay tousled across the pale-yellow pillowcases, reminding Jimmy of the clumps of seaweed that got tossed up on to the beaches during the winter storms.

Rachel had redecorated in here six months ago. Gran's old rose-patterned wallpaper had been too sickly sweet for her taste. It had been like sleeping in a box of chocolates, she'd complained. So now the walls were a neutral cream and Gran's crinoline dolls had been relocated from the dressing table to a cardboard box at the back of the white laminated wardrobe.

It made Jimmy sad, the way his gran's past had been so easily wiped out, but at the same time he was glad that Rachel had fixed things up the way she liked. This was her home as much as his now, and he knew his gran was never coming back.

Calm, Jimmy thought, that's what this room felt like now. It had a clean, sweet smell to it, a combination of fresh laundry and aromatherapy candles, which the rest of the flat lacked. Plastered with posters, Jimmy's room smelt of deodorant and cigarettes. A jumble of toys and clothes, his stepbrother Kieran's room smelt of nappy sacks, Calpol and milk. Both had a busyness to them, which made relaxation outside of sleep almost impossible. But this room, neutral as doctor's waiting room, exuded nothing but calm.

And calm was what Jimmy needed right now, which is why he lingered in the doorway, vainly hoping that the room's essence might somehow filter through him and unravel the octopus of nerves that had writhed inside him from the very instant he'd woken up.

The source of these nerves was simple: Jimmy was in love. Jimmy was in love with Verity Driver. Jimmy was in love with Verity Driver, even though Verity Driver barely knew who Jimmy was. Jimmy was in love with Verity Driver, even though Verity Driver barely knew who Jimmy was, but Jimmy didn't care. Jimmy was in love with Verity Driver, even though Verity Driver barely knew who Jimmy was, but Jimmy didn't care, because Jimmy was going to make his move.

And what's more, he was going to do it today. He really was.

Only, in the same breath, he worried that he wouldn't. Because sometimes Jimmy only *thought* he was in love with Verity Driver. Sometimes Jimmy only thought he was in love with Verity Driver because he wanted *someone to fall in love with*. Sometimes Jimmy thought that if he *only thought* he was in love with Verity Driver, then he shouldn't say anything to her until he knew for sure.

It was a complicated situation, he was aware.

Only sometimes it got more complicated still. Sometimes Jimmy wondered whether he actually knew what love was. He didn't mean the kind of love he felt for Kieran, or the kind of love he felt for Rachel, or even the kind of love he sometimes – rarely – felt for his dad. He knew all about that. That kind of love was just there, background, like bricks in a wall. It wasn't something Jimmy ever gave much thought to. It wasn't something that could soar like a bird or plummet like a stone. It wasn't an emotion that could be stretched one way or the other and yet remain the same. It wasn't, in other words, the kind of emotion that overwhelmed Jimmy whenever he thought about Verity

Driver – the kind of emotion he'd never experienced before, the kind that left him confused and ecstatic and terrified all at once.

Was that love? Jimmy hadn't a clue, but that's what he was going to find out. Was it real? He'd soon discover that, too. And if it was, would Verity care? Well, that's what today was all about for Jimmy: certainty. By tonight, all would be revealed.

But not just yet. For now, he'd stick to his routine. He'd act like nothing out of the ordinary was going on. He'd put Verity Driver and all thoughts of love to the back of his mind. He'd keep it fresh for when it really mattered.

Jimmy crossed the room and set down the steaming mug he'd been holding on Rachel's bedside table. Weak white instant coffee slopped over the mug's edge and down its side. He watched it spread outwards across the table's embroidered cotton cover, like a mud splash on snow. And although the thought did enter his head that this might be a bad omen, he dismissed it immediately.

Over on the windowsill the arc of red lights on the baby monitor flared, picking up the sound of baby Kieran coughing in his sleep in the room next door.

Rachel responded with a deep sigh and her brow pinched into a frown that she'd wear for the rest of the day. Her 'Mummy' frown, she called it, whenever she saw it captured in photos, swearing blind that it hadn't existed before she'd discovered she was pregnant with Kieran. 'All right, love?' she asked Jimmy, noticing him there and rolling over on to her side so that the duvet bunched up around her. Her accent had an easygoing Welsh lilt to it, even though she hadn't been back to her home town of Fishguard for more than a decade. Jimmy had always thought that little Kieran was a lucky kid, having a woman like this to lullaby him to sleep at night. Jimmy's own mum hadn't been around to do the same for him. That had been down to his gran, who'd brought Jimmy up – what with his

dad being out and about, neither here nor there, for most of Jimmy's life.

'I brought you some coffee,' Jimmy said, nodding at the mug, noticing that the glowing turquoise display of the prehistoric Sony Digicube next to it read 8.05 a.m.

Rachel rubbed the sleep from her tortoiseshell-brown eyes and looked him up and down. She tugged the sleeves of her white cotton pyjama top down over her exposed upper arms. 'What's the big occasion?' she asked. 'The T-shirt,' she prompted, as he stared blankly back at her.

Jimmy looked down at the old Iggy Pop tour T-shirt he'd borrowed off his dad. ('Neat family heirloom,' his friend Tara had grumbled at the time. 'All my parents have in the way of rock and pop memorabilia is a photo of Michael Jackson with some chimp.') 'What about it?' Jimmy asked.

Rachel smiled. 'Just that you've ironed it so hard that poor old Iggy looks like he's had a facelift.' Her eyes flicked down a notch, taking in Jimmy's shop-fresh, blue-black combats. 'New trousers, too, aren't they?' she observed.

Her question was a loaded one. Jimmy hardly ever bought himself new clothes. What little money he allowed himself went on social necessities like hanging out with Tara and co. down at the Sapphire, or paying off the talk and text time on his phone. The rest of the cash that came his way he stuck straight into his deposit account, safe for the future. That's how his gran had brought him up, to take responsibility for himself, and Rachel knew it.

'New-ish,' Jimmy responded noncommittally, deciding against getting into the whole story about how Tara had given them to him cheap after she'd shoplifted the wrong size from Denny Shapland's shop over on Tudor Square the day before.

'What's her name, then?' Rachel asked, reaching for her coffee.

'Eh?'

'The girl you're out to impress.'

The accuracy of Rachel's guess took Jimmy by surprise and, before he could prevent it, a blush had crept up on him and prickled across his cheeks. 'I'd best get going,' he excused himself, ducking forward and kissing her on the forehead, catching a hint of the sweet perfume he'd bought down the market last Tuesday for her thirty-sixth birthday.

Outside in the hallway, a memory surfaced in Jimmy's mind of his dad pitching up on the doorstep the year before, deep-tanned, crew-cut and beaming. He'd had a half-empty bottle of tequila cradled in one arm and an eight-months-pregnant Rachel in the other. 'Meet the new love of my life, kiddo,' he'd announced, blue eyes shining. 'And get yourself used to her, because she's going to be staying for a while.'

Jimmy wished his dad would treat her better. The old man had split a couple of months after Kieran had been born, off to Portugal on the promise of regular bar and building work. He'd been full of promises of his own to move Rachel and Kieran over just as soon as he could, but – a weekend trip to Lisbon aside – he hadn't come good on any of them yet.

Out in the corridor Jimmy paused and checked out his reflection in the full-length mirror. The stolen combats hung baggy on his slim waist and, too long for his legs as they were, swamped his ankles, so that only half a white Nike tick showed on each trainer beneath.

He toyed momentarily with the idea of beefing himself up with the grey woollen crew-neck he wore whenever he went out fishing on Arnie's boat, but decided against it. If he wore the jumper, then the retro black leather jacket that Ryan's sister had given him after the funeral would have to go.

He shuffled his shoulders inside the heavy black garment, which he wore most days like a second skin. Anachronistic, Tara called it. Made him stick out like an



operatic aria on a hip hop compilation, she reckoned, next to all the other kids' Hilfiger, Reebok and Nike gear.

But Jimmy liked it that way, looking different, letting everyone else know that he wasn't the same as them. That's what had always drawn him to Ryan: the fact that he'd dressed different and thought different.

Lifting the veil of his dark shaggy fringe, Jimmy tried out a smile on himself, but then he wiped it off again. It had made him look apprehensive, like one of those Jehovah's Witnesses who turned up on the doorstep from time to time. And, today of all days, he could do without that kind of negativity.

He ran his hand across his jaw. Not bad, he thought, for a week's growth. The stubble – adolescent and fluffy as he knew it was – still managed to make him look older and wiser, like he'd lived a little more than he really had. Maybe he should keep it going for a few more weeks, he considered, grow himself a mini-goatee, or maybe even go for the full Che Guevara.

Sadness crossed Jimmy's face as he remembered Ryan sticking up that massive red-and-black poster of Cuba's finest on the Wreck's wall early last year. Ryan had been stoned and it had taken him six or seven attempts to get it straight, but eventually he'd managed it. 'There,' he'd said, flopping back down on to the old mattress and staring up at his handiwork. 'The Unholy Trinity.'

At seventeen, Ryan had been a little old for posters, but posters there'd been, plastered all over the Wreck – the name they'd given to the disused and boarded-up cliff-side chapel they'd been hanging out in for years. 'A practical necessity,' Ryan had called them, 'an invaluable aid in covering up the continents of damp which have made it their business to colonise our den of iniquity.'

Next to Che Guevara had been one of Ryan's hero, Howard Marks, the renowned Welsh dope smuggler. And beneath him there'd been a butter-wouldn't-melt grinning

head shot of Britney, culled from some teen magazine, upon whose forehead Ryan had painstakingly drawn a series of crude, rude cartoons.

‘No one’s really worth following, Jimmo,’ Ryan had pronounced with a sigh, staring up at Che, ‘because nothing’s really worth fighting for – not in the long run, anyway.’ He’d turned to Jimmy, who’d been sprawled on the torn maroon leather armchair they’d liberated from a skip down in the town. ‘The most charismatic revolutionary of his era and look where he’s ended up,’ Ryan had concluded, ‘stuck between a convicted Welsh felon and an American pop princess.’

Ryan had then winked at Jimmy, the same way he’d always been winking at people. Ryan had never acted anything other than smarter than the people he’d mixed with. His near-black eyes – almost impossible to outstare – had always let others know he saw right through them. He’d been able to silence people twice his age – teachers, shopkeepers, you name it – without having to speak.

Jimmy had respected Ryan so much that he’d got into the habit of never questioning his pronouncements. His friend’s confidence had been like a fire against which Jimmy had warmed himself over the years and the last thing Jimmy had wanted had been to douse it with doubt. So instead, this time as every time before, Jimmy’s response had been to nod his head and to smile.

Which had been good enough for Ryan, who’d started to skin up a joint. He’d been coming out of his Jim Morrison stage at the time. His hair, naturally dark like Jimmy’s, but thin and needle straight, had hung low across the same jacket that Jimmy was wearing now. Jimmy smiled, remembering how, two weeks later, Ryan would have lopped off his locks, buzzing his hair down to grade two all over and ditching his gypsy earring in favour of a stud through the centre of his lower lip.

Reinvention, that's what life had always been about for Ryan, living as many lives as possible in the little time you had. Jimmy had loved him for this back then, for teaching him that you didn't have to be a passenger all your life, and for showing him that you could take the wheel whenever you wanted and choose your own road. Even though Ryan had only been a year older than him, he'd been a mentor to him, bigger than anyone else in his life, and certainly bigger than his dad.

Turning his back on his reflection, Jimmy continued down the hallway into the kitchen. He swigged down the rest of his tea and swilled the mug out under the hot tap, leaving it to dry on the stainless-steel draining board next to last night's plates and cutlery, and the ever-present row of plastic bottles and bibs and other baby paraphernalia.

Something hooked his attention, and he glanced out of the window and saw a gull hovering there in the wind, barely five feet away. But then, no sooner had he seen it than it was gone, sheering upwards, leaving nothing but swirling clouds in its wake. Jimmy was seriously into his photography and he wished he'd had a camera to capture the sight, but now it was too late.

The living room's threadbare brown carpet was patterned with the stubborn stains of twelve months' worth of tipped bottles and thrown bowls, all courtesy of baby Kieran and his growing appetite for destruction. Jimmy navigated his way through the minefield of second-hand Fisher Price and Tomy toys and other baby clutter, and on into his bedroom.

On the upturned tea chest next to Jimmy's box bed was a lava lamp in the shape of a space rocket, a cracked Jack Daniels promotional mirror and a framed photo of Tara, Ryan and Jimmy, the day Ryan had jacked an Alfa Romeo from the Royal Inn's car park and had Schumachered it all the way along the coast as far as Lyme Regis.

A nihilist. A bright kid, but a waster nonetheless. A dirtbag, a loser and a bloody shame. A kid who'd lost himself through taking too many drugs. That's how everyone in the town thought of Ryan now. A young man whose life had ended in tragedy, driven to suicide by the lifestyle that had taken him over. That's what the coroner had concluded. But Jimmy knew different. Ryan had been his best friend and Jimmy knew the truth about him better than any of them.

T-shirts and socks overflowed from the wicker basket by Jimmy's bed. Pringles tubes, chocolate wrappers and crushed Tango and Coke cans were scattered across the floor, next to copies of *NME*, *Uncut*, *The Face* and a variety of school textbooks and second-hand, mostly American, mostly modern paperbacks. Jimmy liked to read and liked to learn, the same as he liked to listen at school. But these were things that he wouldn't admit to anyone except his closest friends, in case people thought him soft.

The shelves on the wall above his bed gave the room a sense of order, stacked as they were with Jimmy's precious film magazines, all of them lined up in chronological order.

Alongside them, every bit as neat, were the boxed video diaries which Jimmy had shot using the camcorder he'd borrowed from Clive down at the Youth Centre. Their labels faced outwards, some of them dumb, liked *Ain't Life a Beach?* and *Stoned* and *2 Stoned: The Sequel*; but some of them were serious, like *An On-Off Season* and *Fisherman Blue*, the latter of which – 'A short film about the end of a traditional way of life' – Jimmy had sent off along with his film college application forms the month before. He was ambitious. He wanted to make something of himself. He wanted to come back here in ten years' time and for all the people who wrote him off now to see him and stop and point and whisper and stare.

He took the three small paces needed to cross the room and grabbed his Marlboro Reds and Zippo lighter from

where he'd left them on the windowsill, behind the curtain out of the disapproving Rachel's sight. He reached across the square wooden desk that housed his cranky typewriter. The machine whirred in protest as he pulled the final page of his English *Macbeth* essay off it. It was a sound Jimmy liked, because it was a sound that meant something was finished and something else would soon begin.

It was icebox-cold on the cast-iron balcony outside Jimmy's flat. Last night's storm had been a bad one and the wind was still up. It howled in from the great grey slab of sea to the east and hissed in Jimmy's ears, slapping like something solid against his face as he knelt down to unchain his scratched-up BMX from the rust-freckled railings. He pulled his baseball cap from his pocket and tugged it down tight on his head.

From up here on the ninth floor of Carlton Court - the hulk of crumbling Sixties concrete Jimmy had called home for all but one of his seventeen years - he could see clear across North Beach's half-mile curve of platinum-blond sand to the harbour and the town of Shoresby itself.

Aside from the gulls and the waves, and a lone walker visible down on North Beach, little stirred in the town. The windows of the pastel-shaded seafront town houses, hotels and B&Bs were grey and unlit, as if someone had forgotten to colour them in. It would all change soon, of course, once everyone was awake. But for now, only the shops on the High Street - whose striped awnings rippled in the wind above their brightly illuminated doorways - signalled that the town was inhabited at all.

Jimmy took his bike down in the lift and out through the shoddily decorated reception. And then he was out of there, off along the Croft, the road that followed the curve of North Beach, running fifty feet above it, before terminating in the High Street.

Fast as he could pedal, with the wind in his face, he forced his way past the swinging hanging baskets and 'Vacancy' signs of the guest houses, and on past the shutdown burger bars and Mr Whippy Head ice cream parlour, before cutting through the empty Pay & Display car park where he'd spent most of this summer's evenings practising skateboarding, before he'd got yawned-out by the whole damned thing and had flogged his board to Tristan for a bunch of CDs and the bronze Zippo lighter that now jiggled in his pocket.

It wasn't till he reached the High Street that he stopped and dismounted. He leant his bike up against a Victorian lamp-post, ducked into Wilson's the newsagent and picked up the November issue of *Total Film* from the rack and a bottle of Diet Coke from the fridge.

'How's your gran?' Bob Wilson enquired as he ran Jimmy's stuff through the cash register. 'You still visiting her?'

'Every Wednesday and Friday,' Jimmy confirmed.

Bob nodded his head in empathy. It was cancer that had taken his Elaine from him five years ago, the same as it was cancer that had got Jimmy's mum less than a year after Jimmy had been born.

'You give her these from me,' Bob said, reaching above his head and selecting a box of Milk Tray from the shelves behind him without even looking. He slipped it into a brown paper bag and handed it over to Jimmy. 'But don't let the nurses see, mind,' he warned, 'or you'll get me in trouble.'

Jimmy didn't have the heart to tell Mr Wilson that his gran was too far gone these days to care much about chocolates one way or the other. 'Thanks,' he said, tucking the box into his black-and-white Adidas gym bag.

Back outside, Jimmy cycled on another twenty yards before pulling up next to a green park bench, which had been set into a gap in the black railings, facing out to sea.



He propped his bike up against its wooden slats and looked back across the street.

There, next to W. H. Smith, was the wide white front of the Grand Hotel. He swallowed, all ideas of calm now forgotten. The Grand was where Verity Driver lived and she'd be coming out of there soon, ready to go to school and sit in the same English class as him at nine thirty, and open the same book at the same page and discuss the same W. B. Yeats poem, which he'd pictured her reading as he'd read it himself over the weekend.

Jimmy and Verity had been at school together since they'd been five. He'd known her for most of his life. Or rather, he'd known of her. He'd never actually hung out with her, never been invited to one of her birthday parties, or sat next to her on the bus.

But he knew plenty about her. He knew she liked wearing pink, but looked better in red. He knew she mostly wore her hair down, but sometimes looked great with it tied up. He knew a flash of her green eyes could turn his head from a hundred yards. He knew she always took a packed lunch to school with her and never ate the crusts on her sandwiches. He knew she'd had good-looking boyfriends over the years, but that the latest one, Tim, had stopped walking her home from school, which probably - *hopefully* - meant they were no longer an item.

But these were things that anyone who'd grown up near Verity Driver could have known about her. What Jimmy wanted now was more. So why hadn't he made a move on her sooner? Could it have been because he was shy? Sometimes he thought that was the answer. Sometimes he did feel awkward in front of girls he was attracted to. But he'd had girlfriends before. He wasn't even a virgin. So it couldn't really have been that.

Could it, then, have been because Ryan had always thought that crushes were dumb, and had further stated that he and Jimmy were too young to get fixed on one girl?

Could that have been why Jimmy had kept his feelings for Verity hidden over the years, because he hadn't wanted to appear uncool? Or could it have been that since Ryan's death – nearly a year ago now – Jimmy had felt too screwed up to risk getting involved with anyone new?

It could have been. It could have been any of these things. But Jimmy wasn't going to let any of them stop him any more.

He felt unsuccessfully for the CD cover through the stiff material of his gym bag. He'd burnt it for her, using one of the computers at school. The tunes on it (mostly chart-friendly garage and R&B) weren't his kind of thing. But all the girls he knew (with the exception of Tara and Steph) were into it, so chances were Verity would be as well.

Doubt hit him. Maybe giving her a CD was too over the top? Maybe it was laying his cards on the table too quickly? Where was the mystery, where the intrigue, he now worried, in such a bald statement? Maybe he should forget that idea for the time being. After all, he didn't want to look desperate. But then again, he had to mark himself somehow, and the CD showed thought, right? A little care? Yeah, he'd give it to her, but just do it with a bit of chat so as to make the gesture less corny. Something like: *Hey, Verity. How's things?*

*Good, Jimmy. Yourself?*

*Yeah, good, you know. I did this compilation over the weekend and ... you should listen to it ... here, I'll tell you what, why not borrow it?*

*Thanks, Jimmy. That's really sweet.*

And then he could ask her out. This Saturday night and – who knew? – they could be sitting right here after the pub, his arm round her shoulders, her eyes staring into his, and him leaning his head towards her, feeling like he was falling into her, and then kissing her so tenderly that he'd feel like he'd gone to heaven.

Then a great certainty swamped him: it wasn't going to happen. It hit him like a bullet in his guts. Verity Driver walked like a model and was top of her class, and she could sing and she could dance, and she'd only ever looked past him and not at him. And even if she was sometimes quiet, even if she sometimes looked nervous, or – the same as Jimmy – acted awkward, as though she didn't quite fit into this town ... Even then, what did he have to offer her? What could he show her that she hadn't already seen?

Jimmy lit a cigarette to calm his nerves. He took out his phone to see if he had any messages. There was one from Tara, a few minutes old, asking him if he wanted to hook up at the Jackpot Café for a pre-class coffee, but he decided he'd better not reply. She'd only want to know where he was, and once she found out she'd guess straight away what he was doing here. And then she'd be over in a flash to persuade him to do anything but. Because Tara didn't like Verity. Because Tara thought Verity Driver was stuck-up and prissy.

The growl of a car engine cut through the noise of the wind. Jimmy saw a sky-blue Land-Rover Discovery twenty yards up the High Street, driving towards him at about one mile an hour. Tourist, Jimmy thought automatically, not only because of the flashiness of the car, but also because he could clearly see an ordnance survey map held up against the dashboard by whoever it was who was sitting in the passenger seat.

As the car drew parallel with him and came to a halt, the inevitable happened: the passenger window hummed down and the passenger – a woman in her thirties with the kind of styled blonde hair that Tara would have called 'newsreader', but Jimmy just thought of as plain fit – leant out. She smiled at Jimmy in the same way that Marianna Andrews, Jimmy's boss at the video store on South Parade where he worked part-time, always did whenever she was

about to ask him to cover an extra shift or run an errand in the rain.

Jimmy spoke first: 'Where are you trying to get to?'

'Is it that obvious?' the woman asked, smiling again, only differently this time, with her whole face instead of just her mouth.

'The map's kind of a give-away,' he said, mellowing towards her.

Flipping open a titanium-cased electronic organiser, she read aloud, 'Harbour Cottage, Number Four, Quayside Row. Do you know where it is?'

Jimmy's gran's great friend Arnold lived two doors along. Jimmy was surprised at the address, though. Judging by her car and her clothes, he'd had the woman down for one of the pricey apartments built into the old town walls. He peered past her and saw a thickset younger man drumming his fingers on the brown leather steering wheel.

'Well?' she asked.

Jimmy toyed briefly with the idea of giving her wrong directions, just for the hell of it. He and Ryan had always been doing that as kids, competing with each other to see just how far from their destinations they could con the tourists into going. But he wasn't a kid any more and the woman looked like she'd had a long enough start to her day already. He checked his watch. Yeah, he thought. Why not? Chances were he was going to be waiting here at least another half-hour anyway before Verity showed. He could risk it and - who knew? - perhaps it might tip the karma balance that Tara was always on about in his favour. He scuffed out his cigarette on the pavement and clambered on to his BMX. 'Follow me,' he said.

He pedalled a further ten yards along the High Street, before peeling off to the left and freewheeling down the steep cobbled length of Crackwell Street. When he reached the bottom, he glanced back over his shoulder to check the Land-Rover was still with him, before swinging left into the

harbour car park. Ten yards more and he skidded to a halt at the top of the path that led down to Quayside Row, the boatyards and the harbour proper.

The Land-Rover pulled up behind him, and the man who'd been driving got out and stood with his hands on his hips for a moment, surveying the view out to sea. He was two or three inches shorter than Jimmy and was wearing a tired old pair of jeans and a heavy red and black checked jacket with the collar turned up. He grinned out across the water at nothing in particular, just looking happy to be here.

Jimmy turned back to the car to see the woman striding purposefully over towards him, the wind riffling like invisible fingers through the fur on her coat.

'It's the one with the rusted cockerel weathervane,' Jimmy told her, pointing down the path to the terrace of pastel-coloured cottages, 'and the pale-blue window ledges.'

'Thanks,' she said, but there was a note of apprehension in her voice. She glanced between the car and the cottage as if she were mentally gauging the distance. 'Can't we get any closer?' she asked.

'No,' Jimmy told her.

Her gaze kept moving, sweeping past Jimmy and not stopping until it reached the harbour master's office over by the car park entrance. Next to this squat red-brick building was a closed barrier and beyond that a variety of vehicles could be clearly seen parked down on the quayside. 'What about them?' she asked.

'They belong to the fishermen,' Jimmy told her. 'And the sailing school people. But it's off-limits for tourists. There's not enough space.'

The short man said in an Australian accent, 'Don't sweat it, Ellen. It's no real distance anyway.' He turned to Jimmy. 'We've got a few heavy bags in the back here,' he said. 'Any chance of you giving us a hand with them?'

Anxious to get back to his vigil opposite the Grand, Jimmy checked his watch, but he was still all right, he reckoned. 'So long as we're quick,' he said, following the man round to the back of the car.

Five minutes later and the three of them were standing on the mossy cobbled path outside the cottage, with the heavier of the man's and woman's bags on the path beside them.

'Thanks,' the man said, reaching out his hand to Jimmy, 'I'm Scott, by the way.'

'Jimmy,' Jimmy mumbled, shaking Scott's hand. The wind was stronger here and Jimmy pulled his cap down tighter still on his head. 'Not very good holiday weather,' he commented.

Scott shrugged. 'We're not here on holiday.'

'No?'

'No. We're shooting a documentary.'

Jimmy found himself staring at them. He buzzed with excitement. Film ... TV ... this was his thing. Contacts, that's what his media teacher had told the class it was all about. And that's the one thing Jimmy had been missing. But now here they were - two of them - walking into his life. His mind started working on how he could swing this accidental meeting round - maybe shadow them or something - to boost his chances of getting into film school. 'Yeah?' he finally asked, trying to sound casual, determined that they wouldn't perceive him as unworlly and overawed. 'About what?'

The woman - Ellen, Scott had called her - was staring at the front door. 'Lost Soul's Point,' she said without turning round.

Jimmy's heart dodged a beat. His skin prickled and he could picture the colour draining from his face. Lost Soul's Point was the tourist trail name for the suicide black spot up on the cliffs overlooking North Beach and the town.

'You heard of it?' Scott asked.



Jimmy nodded warily. Who in this town hadn't? The drop from the cliffs to the rocks below at low tide was nearly two hundred feet. And the drop from the cliffs to the sea at high tide was just as fatal. Since Jimmy had been alive, there'd been maybe ten suicides up there. Most of them had been men and women from up-country, people who'd ditched their cars up on the cliff-side. Most, but not all.

'Then you probably know the story behind it, as well,' Ellen said.

Again, Jimmy nodded. Every kid in the town got the legend passed down to them by older kids in the primary school playground: something about some crazy rich girl throwing herself off the cliff a hundred years ago or more; something about her having done it because she'd been ditched by some bloke; something about his ghost walking the cliffs at night, forever damned for what he'd done to her. Something that smelt a whole lot like bullshit, in other words.

But Jimmy didn't give a damn about the legend right now. He just wanted to know that there was where their interest in Lost Soul's Point ended.

'Well, we're here to do a history of it,' Ellen continued, encouraged by his attentive silence. 'We want to cover the legend and then we want to look at the modern victims as well, to examine the lives of the people who've committed suicide up there in the last few years and to ask what drove them to it and to this place in particular ...'

With each word that Ellen spoke, the sparks of excitement inside Jimmy faded and died. *Victims* ... the word reverberated round his skull. *Victims* ... like Ryan ... These people were here to investigate Ryan's death. They were here to find out why Ryan had done what he'd done.

Ellen picked up on his shift in mood immediately. 'What?' she asked.

Panic was building inside Jimmy. What was he doing even talking to these people? How could he have ended up

talking to them about *this*, the one thing he never wanted to discuss with anyone ever?

‘Are you all right, mate?’ Scott asked.

‘I –’ But Jimmy couldn’t speak. He looked between Scott and Ellen. Their eyes felt like searchlights on his face. He had nothing to say. Not to them. Not about Ryan. He felt dizzy, breathless, like the air was being sucked from his lungs. ‘I gotta go,’ he said, turning his back on them and hurrying away.

## *Chapter II*

‘WAS IT ME? What did I say?’ Ellen asked Scott, as they both watched the boy cycle away. He’d been so helpful, so why had he gone silent like that?

‘So much for charming the locals,’ Scott replied.

Ellen glanced at the young Australian by her side, suddenly remembering all the positive things she’d said on their long drive down here from London. ‘Thank you,’ she called out after the boy. But it was far too late and her voice was lost in the wind.

She turned to see Scott failing to hide an amused smirk. ‘Oh, get on with it!’ Ellen exclaimed, pushing the Australian playfully in the direction of the car.

Beside the cottage’s scuffed front door, Ellen groped inside the wooden post box until she found the key. So much for the friendly welcome note, she thought, as she waggled the old-fashioned iron key in the lock, but the door was swollen with damp and wasn’t budging.

She let out a growl of frustration and glanced towards the car, but she was determined not to rely on Scott for help yet again. She might be nearly ten years older than him but, at thirty-four, she wasn’t past it yet. Standing tall in her fake-fur coat, she twisted the brass handle again and heaved her shoulder against the door. It took a few more hefty pushes before the door suddenly gave and she fell down the step into the living room, twisting her foot on the way.

Inside, the cottage was so lopsided it would’ve made her feel like limping, even if she hadn’t fallen. The low plaster ceiling sloped down at an acute angle and the staircase

looked as if it had collapsed drunkenly against the wall, so that the only way to climb up would be to skulk up sideways.

‘Jesus. It’s minute,’ said Scott, pushing in behind her with one of the camera cases and heaving the oversized chintz armchair out of the way to make room.

With two of them in the doorway, the cottage felt horribly oppressive.

‘It’s ... er ... quaint,’ said Ellen, searching for the right word, as she surveyed the dusty arrangement of dried flowers in the fire grate and the dresser crammed with an audience of sour-faced china figurines. ‘It’ll just have to do.’

Hobbling across the threadbare rug to the far corner of the room, she pushed aside the bead curtain and peeped into the tiny square of kitchen. An ancient gas cooker was wedged level with a telephone directory and a tap dripped against a green beard of limescale in the sink. ‘Ah!’ she said ominously. She turned back to face Scott, blowing up over her face in the idiosyncratic gesture she’d kept, even though her fringe-heavy bob had recently been replaced by a sleek blonde crop. ‘OK. So we’ll get the rest of the stuff in,’ she said, injecting as much bravado into her voice as she could, ‘then we’ll have a cuppa and work out what to do.’

‘You’re the boss.’

By the time they’d lugged in all their equipment, Ellen was sweating as she hauled her bag up the stairs. Pushing down the latch on the arched wooden door, she dipped her head and stopped on the threshold of the first bedroom, her nostrils filling with the acrid smell of damp. It was then that her positive attitude cracked and the picture of rustic charm she’d drawn in her mind finally crashed around her like a broken mirror.

Instead of the sunlight-infused sanctuary of her imagination, complete with a gigantic iron bed, sumptuous