

Prologue

The clouds burst open like eggs being cracked for a cake. As Luna Lark hoicked up her dress and swung her feet out of the car, the rain came tumbling down onto her silver shoes.

‘Did anyone bring a brolly?’ she laughed, looking up expectantly at her one and only bridesmaid.

‘No, I’m so sorry!’ Lottie bit her lip, shielding her face with her silver clutch bag. ‘It was sunny when we left, I checked the weather on my phone and everything.’

Lottie moved the clutch bag to hover over Luna’s head as she got out of the car. Luna’s peculiar naturally white hair fishtailed its way down her back and her blue eyes glistened as she looked up at the church. Down the pathway in front of the doors of the church, she could see her fiancé’s brother and Best Man, Stephen, waiting for them.

‘It’s not far. I’ll just have to make a mad dash for it!’ Luna bundled up the skirt of her second-hand dress into her arms, pushed herself to standing and teetered down the cobbled pathway as quickly as she could. She giggled and shivered as the rain splashed her bare shoulders, but it only lasted for a few seconds before she was safe under the archway next to Stephen.

Stephen was wiry, not unlike his younger brother, except he was short where Noel was tall, and self-assured where Noel was self-conscious. In the eight years that she’d been dating his brother, he had never warmed to Luna. She didn’t mind too much though, because unfortunately for him Stephen had all the charisma of a spider. He was distant and cold, strategic and pragmatic; the one positive thing Luna could say for him was that he was the kind of guy you’d call in a crisis! Her mother-in-law-to-be had once called Stephen ‘a funny fish’ and Luna couldn’t think of a better way to describe him. Now

that he was to be her brother-in-law, however, she had resolved to embrace his quirks and his chilly nature once and for all.

‘Here you are at last, Luna . . .’ he started.

‘I know, I know, I’m a little late but you know me and driving. I must have made that poor chauffeur go at about five miles per hour. I think the traffic behind us thought we were a hearse!’ She wiped her dress down as best she could. ‘How do I look?’ She twirled for Stephen. He looked unmoved.

‘Beautiful, Luna,’ answered Lottie as she joined them, wobbling slightly as one of her heels got trapped between the uneven paving stones. ‘I’ve told you a million times, and I’ll tell you a million more if I have to!’

‘Luna . . .’ Stephen tried again.

‘Oh, your mum would be weeping right now if she were here!’ Lottie sobbed and lifted her bouquet to hide the sudden onslaught of tears.

‘I think Dad would be the one sobbing!’ Luna smiled but felt a similar lump fill her own throat. ‘And Jeremy would just be laughing at them both.’

‘They’re all watching you from up there,’ Lottie sniffed, pointing to the darkening clouds above them. ‘I just know it.’

‘Yes, this rain is probably J’s doing!’ Luna peeked her head out from under the archway and lifted her gaze to the sky just as a large drop of rain splashed right between her eyes and slid down the bridge of her nose.

‘Thanks, bro!’ She laughed, giving the sky a thumbs-up.

‘*Luna*, are you even listening to me?’ Stephen huffed.

‘Yes, *Stephen*, but you’ve not really said anything yet. Honestly, I couldn’t have gotten here any faster. You know what I’m like!’

Once upon a time Luna had been an avid driver, and knowing her car was always parked just outside was liberating. She could jump in her getaway vehicle and go anywhere and everywhere. If anyone else was behind the wheel she'd feel cramped and nauseous; the passenger seat wasn't the place for her. If things had been different she might even have insisted on driving herself to her own wedding. Luna hadn't been the safest driver on the road, though. She'd scroll through songs on her iPod, she'd answer text messages, even apply her lipstick in the rearview mirror without a second's thought. She'd heard the horror stories about being complacent when driving, of course she had. Who hadn't! But . . . she was a *good* driver. Nothing bad would ever happen to her! And she was right. It didn't. It happened to her family.

She was eighteen years old and had been staying over at her Noel's house when she had received the call. As the result of someone else's arrogance behind the wheel, her mother, father and brother had been killed in a crash. The other driver had been on the phone – speeding – and didn't pause for even a split second before darting across a road. They had hit the rear of her parents' car, sending it spinning into the front garden of someone else's house. Luckily, the home owners had been upstairs asleep when it happened, but had they been in their living room watching the TV more fatalities may well have been added to an already too long list. Her parents' car had been crushed entirely, like a giant had tried to turn it into an accordion. Her mum and dad, she was told, were killed instantly upon impact but her brother had held on just long enough for her to be able to say goodbye. Ultimately, he had died of his injuries in hospital.

'But . . . I'm such a *good* driver,' sobbed the defendant in court, but no amount of tears or apologies would reverse that one fateful, fatal night. The night that had robbed Luna of her entire family.

Luna mourned and tried her hardest to continue through life but it was difficult when she felt like she had nothing good to latch onto, no light at the end of a seemingly million-mile-long tunnel. Her mother's twin brothers came and stayed for a while, their jolly nature helping to brighten her up as much possible. Together they sorted out

all the outstanding family affairs, whilst sharing stories long into many whiskey-fueled nights. There were so many stories Luna had never heard. Wild tales of her parents' past that they would have trusted her with when she was older, but now would never be able to tell her themselves.

'You know your mum used to smoke?' Uncle Bryce said, sloshing more brown liquid into Luna's glass.

'You're *kidding*,' she sputtered.

'Oh yeah! Like a chimney!' Uncle Bill bellowed.

'She could do all the tricks, too. Smoke rings, that French inhale thing . . . ' Bryce swirled his fingers through the air.

'Like Frenchie in *Grease*?' Luna asked.

'Isn't that what Dave from next door used to call her? Is that why?' Bryce asked his brother.

'Yeah! That's why!' Bill hid his smirk by taking a sip of his drink.

'*Sure* it is!' Luna and Bryce howled, as Bill sprayed his whiskey into the air.

Luna couldn't have been more grateful for their company. They couldn't stay with her for ever, though, and as soon as they left, the full weight of her family's tragedy came plummeting down around her once again. The one person, the one constant left in her life, was Noel. Once in a blue moon Luna wondered what would have happened to their relationship if they hadn't been fused together by the intensity of her grief. But she was a big believer in fate, and years later when Noel proposed she felt gloriously happy to have her faith rewarded. Although Noel had proposed a little halfheartedly, didn't have a ring and most certainly wouldn't have wanted to get his clean, pressed trousers dirty by getting down on one knee, Luna was still thrilled.

A self-confessed ‘hopeless romantic’, Luna had read every vaguely romantic novel the library carried by the time she was sixteen, so it was no wonder that she now wrote them herself. She could dream up a romance between two unlikely lovers in moments and have the first draft of a novel done and dusted in six months. She had her dream job writing romantic fiction, and now she couldn’t wait to start a dream life with her new husband and leave all the horror behind her. If anyone deserved a little bit of happiness it was Luna. A new life, a new husband and one day a new house and children . . . At last she felt like she had everything to live for.

‘Luna . . . he’s not here,’ Stephen blurted out.

‘Who’s not here?’ Luna’s smile was still plastered on her face.

‘*Noel.*’ Stephen wiped his forehead with a flat hand. ‘Noel’s not here.’

‘Well, why not?’ She laughed, tapping an imaginary watch on her wrist. Something twinged in her gut – she wasn’t sure if it was panic or one of the bones in her second-hand dress poking through the fabric.

‘The traffic that side of town was a bit dodgy when I checked it out this morning.’ Lottie reached out for Luna’s shoulder. ‘He’ll be here soon!’

‘It’s not the *traffic.*’ Stephen shot Lottie a meaningful look under his untamed eyebrows.

‘He’s never late.’ Luna adjusted her veil.

‘He’s not *late,*’ Stephen said, shooting Luna the same look.

‘Well, then where *is* he?’ Lottie demanded. Stephen sighed. ‘*Well?*’

‘He’s . . . not coming,’ Stephen shrugged. And with that, Luna’s ivory bubble burst . . . as did Lottie’s temper.

‘What do you mean, *he’s not coming?*’

‘He’s just not quite . . . ready.’ Stephen shrugged again.

‘That little *shit!* Urgh, I could just KILL him! I always knew he was a total weirdo – sorry, Luna – he was always acting aloof and he was a right arse at your birthday party! This is just the arrogant icing on a very gigantic cake made up of his bullshit! A bullshit cake! And I actually can’t believe that he would just . . . ’ Lottie wandered out into the rain to take out her anger on the bushes that lined the path with her clutch bag.

‘Luna, I’m sorry. He said to tell you he thought he was ready, but he isn’t. I’m sorry, too.’ Stephen tilted his head and Luna wanted to punch the only-ever-so-slightly apologetic look off his face.

‘Let me speak to him.’ She could feel the sob rise in her throat as she held out her hand for Stephen’s phone.

‘He’s asked you not to call.’ Stephen checked his phone again, a message very clear on his screen.

‘Not to *call?* Won’t he even see me?’

‘I’m sorry.’ He didn’t look up as he swiped to the right and tapped out a response.

‘You keep saying that.’

‘Because I am.’ He shrugged again.

‘Is that him?’ Luna leant over but Stephen quickly returned his phone to his inside jacket pocket.

He looked like he was going to say ‘I’m sorry’ again but thought better of it. With his work done, Stephen went to squeeze the top of Luna’s white lace clad arm, but Luna pulled away. Stephen rolled his eyes and had Luna not felt so elegant and demure in her dress, she was sure she would have hit him. He stepped out into the now pouring

shower and left Luna outside of the church. A church filled with family and friends, waiting for a wedding that would never happen.