

The bestselling author of *The Legacy of Lucy Harte*

Emma
Heatherington

A
Part of
Me
& You

You always think
you'll have more time



Emma Heatherington

**A Part of Me and You: An
empowering and incredibly moving
novel that will make you laugh and cry**

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A Part of Me and You: An empowering and incredibly moving novel that will make you laugh and cry / E. Heatherington — «HarperCollins»,

You will love this moving and powerful novel from bestselling author Emma Heatherington. A must read for fans of Jojo Moyes. You always think you have more time... Juliette always thought she'd have more time. But as her fortieth birthday approaches she is dealt the deadliest of blows – she has just weeks to live. As the terrible news sinks in, Juliette's only concern is for her fifteen-year-old daughter, Rosie. Who will take care of her precious child? Who will love her daughter with the same fierce love? The answer lies in a secret Juliette hoped never to reveal... Devastated at the loss of her own baby daughter, Shelley is barely managing to survive. Consumed by her grief, she has pushed everyone away – including the man who loves her the most. With her once happy marriage now in tatters, Shelley has nothing left to live for. But as the lives of these two women collide, could Juliette's secret be the key to solving Shelley's heartache? And could Juliette's death give Shelley one final chance to live again... What readers are loving about A Part of Me and You: 'One of THE most emotional books I have EVER read' Angela Mellor, Netgalley 'Heartbreaking... up there with Me Before You' Tina Wakelin, Netgalley 'Written from the heart, genuine emotion shining out from every page' Audrey Cowie, Netgalley 'An amazingly poignant story... the reader is left with tear filled eyes but a strong belief that love will prevail' Jane Hunt Writer Book Reviews

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For Jim

In memory of our two little angels in heaven who we never got to meet. They will always be a part of me and you x

Chapter 1

Juliette

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, England

FRIDAY

I am just about getting used to the idea of turning forty when I'm told I am going to die pretty soon. Let's face it, you can't get much more ironic than that.

'So much for "life begins",' I mutter to my doctor Michael who looks at me with remorse as I give him a nervous smile and a 'shit happens' style shrug. My face is telling a lie. My tongue is telling a lie. I am trying to pretend I am okay but of course I am not okay. Inside I am crying. I am forty and I am dying and I am not okay at all.

I stare at the floor until the pattern on the carpet makes my head spin and the ticking of the clock seems to get louder and louder as we both try to think of what to say next. The big loud hands of time, chasing each other in circles, taunting me as my life ticks away, hours, minutes, seconds ... stop.

Michael looks up at me like he might cry too, lost for words for once.

We've come quite a long way over the past three years since we were first paired up on this cancer journey and here we are now, reaching the end we had hoped we'd never have to face. The part where he tells me, as my consultant, that there's nothing more we can do except wait for the inevitable, for my share of the journey to end. The part where he tells me, as my friend, that all our battles through treatment, our suffering, our praying and positivity, all of it is now just a waiting game.

If only it was as simple as waiting – but I can't just sit around and wait. I have so much I still want to do in life and now, already, it's all about to end.

I go to the window and look out onto the city rooftops. I open the window and inhale the air, fearing that if I don't focus on something as simple as breathing I might faint, and we don't need to add to the drama, do we?

'Have you spoken to your family about this yet, Juliette?' Michael asks me. He is fidgeting with his pen as he speaks. 'I mean, I realise you didn't know for definite what the outcome was before today, but have you prepared them at all, for the worst?'

I know without having to look at him that he has taken his glasses off to wipe them for the third time since I got here, just to give his hands something to do. He is such a fidget when he has to give bad news but this isn't just bad news. This is the very last piece of news he will ever have to deliver to me. This is the beginning of the end for me.

'My sister knows I'm here today, as does my mum, but they're still holding out hope. It will be a shock to them no matter what's going through their heads, no matter what they've been expecting, this will be the very worst, obviously,' I tell him.

'And Rosie?'

Oh God.

'Rosie thinks ... Rosie thinks I'm having a pamper day for my birthday at a spa with some friends today. She has no idea what's going on ... not yet.'

My voice cracks when I say my young daughter's name aloud. How am I going to tell her? *How?* She doesn't have anyone else to lean on. She's only ever had me.

'And Dan?'

Michael is really making sure this news is sinking in, I'll give him that much, as he lists the most important people in my life. My mouth dries up at the mention of Dan. I try to reply but I can't.

'You're going to have to tell him, for goodness sake, Juliette,' says Michael. 'The man must be going off his head with worry. He is still part of your family too, no matter what you've gone through.'

I turn to face him and lean on the windowsill with my arms folded.

‘It’s a bit more complicated than that, as you know, Michael,’ I say to him, unable to look him in the eye but I can tell he is raising an eyebrow. ‘Oh you know it is, don’t look at me like that!’

I am watching him now and just as I’d predicted, he is giving me a ‘tough shit’ glare.

‘Dan and I have both accepted that he can’t cope with me and my sickness,’ I remind him. ‘And I don’t know that I can cope with him right now either. He has his own problems that he has to deal with, but I will tell him soon – just not yet. For his own good, not mine.’

Michael puts his head in his hands. He is almost as devastated as I am with this mess – and what a mess it really is when you realise you are going to leave behind everything you love. It’s like you need to pack up to go somewhere, but you’re going nowhere really; how the hell do you plan for that?

‘You can’t just block him out of this, Juliette,’ Michael says. ‘The man must be climbing the walls with worry. Do you even know where he is right now?’

I shrug.

‘His mother’s house, probably? Or with his sister?’

The truth is, I don’t know at all. I don’t have any idea where my husband is and right now it’s better that way for me, for him, and for Rosie.

‘And you really think that it’s okay that you don’t know?’

I nod. I shrug again. I don’t know what to say.

‘Today might change all that, obviously,’ I tell him. ‘And maybe it won’t. I will have to think about it carefully as I’m sure you understand – I mean, you probably know me almost as well as he does by now.’

Dr Michael and I long ago ditched the doctor-patient formalities and admitted that we had actually become really good friends. We talk about everything from American rock music to favourite one-pot recipes (he’s newly single) to our shared Irish roots, and I even gave him relationship advice once – though I’m the last person who should be doing so. The very, *very* last person. We’ve argued a lot too when the going got tough.

‘You are the most annoying and stubborn person I have ever met,’ he tells me, managing a light smile. ‘And I mean that in the nicest possible way.’

‘Yes, yes, you’ve told me that many times before,’ I say, rolling my eyes. ‘Look, I just need some time to get my head around this all and then I’ll talk to Dan. I know I don’t have the luxury of time but I need to just ... I need to think about things. No matter how much I’ve dreaded this moment, and I knew that it might come soon, it’s still a massive shock to hear my days are numbered. And the sickening thing is that I don’t *feel* sick right now. I feel fine! How cruel and weird is that?’

We pause in silence.

‘The sickness will come quite soon, unfortunately,’ says Michael. ‘So enjoy this time while it lasts. You will have the option of palliative care of course, when you feel you need it. And you will have to think about home versus hospice care just like we talked about before, plus your steroid management and what sort of pain control you want.’

The clock is ticking again, so loudly.

I don’t have much time to do an awful lot and we both know it.

‘What will I do now? I mean, next, Michael?’ I ask him. ‘What am I actually supposed to *do* right now? I’m so scared even though I’m trying to be brave. Please tell me what to do. Where do I go from here? How do I start preparing for my life to end?’

So many questions hang there in the air, like they are stuck in a cartoon speech bubble above my head. A series of questions that no one has the answers to.

Or so I thought.

‘Are you asking me what you should do now as your friend, or as your doctor?’ he asks me, the pain etched in his eyes.

‘I’m asking you as ... I’m asking you as my friend, I guess.’

He gulps. He waits.

‘As your friend,’ he says. ‘Okay, right now, as your friend, I think you should take a few days to yourself. Get away from it all before you get very sick.’

‘What?’

This is not what I expected.

‘Go somewhere nice where you’ve always wanted to go. I mean now. It’s your birthday, Juliette. Go tomorrow if you can, but just do it,’ he says. ‘Pack up and go away somewhere for a couple of days, even a week if you can manage it. I really think you should do something just for you.’

I roll my eyes again.

‘Oh Michael, that’s a really sweet suggestion but as if I could,’ I tell him. ‘Somehow, I can’t see myself mustering up the energy to jump on a plane to anywhere exotic with this time bomb ticking in my head. I mean the thought sounds good, thanks and all that, but I have the small matter of a teenage daughter to think of. Not to mention my job. I’ve a few features I need to write up. God, that sounds so unimportant in the wider scheme of things, doesn’t it? A job? Who cares about their job when they’re about to die?’

Michael takes his glasses off. This means he really is determined now. He stands up.

‘I obviously wasn’t thinking about jumping on a plane to anywhere exotic,’ he replies. He has dropped his pen onto the table. ‘I’m not talking about New York or the Bahamas or a trip to Niagara Falls, Juliette. I’m merely suggesting you just go somewhere quieter ... well, quieter than *here* for a little while. Away from questions and worry and watching the clock tick your time away. Somewhere to reflect, to think, to savour your own wellbeing, to get your head around all of this ... somewhere not too far away, but away from all of *this*. I am suggesting this as your friend, not your doctor. You should do it for just a few days. Just go.’

‘Just go ...’ I repeat after him and those two simple words echo around my head.

I know he means well but going away somewhere is seriously the last thing on my mind today after what I have just been told. I still have to explain all of this mess to Rosie, not to mention planning the poor child’s future without me, I have a big sister who is tearing her hair out with frantic worry, a devastated mother and father who will be totally inconsolable and Dan, my husband who ... well, he is the one I worry about the most, apart from Rosie. Dan, my true love, my best friend and the person who knows me the best in the whole world. I don’t know if I will be able to tell him at all. I can’t imagine saying the words to him. I just can’t bear to hurt him so much all over again as I know exactly what he will do to cope and it’s something I can’t begin to think about right now.

‘How about a few days in Ireland?’ asks Michael, with a deep breath. ‘Take the ferry. Go to that place you told me about ... what’s it called, Killarney? You said it’s beautiful there. That would be nice, no? Three days? A weekend even?’

Jesus, did he just say Ireland? The very suggestion of going back there fills my stomach with butterflies and my heart flutters at the thought of it.

‘You mean Killara,’ I correct him and I close my eyes. ‘God, Michael, that would be like going to heaven, pardon the pun. The sea, the quiet, the peace ... never mind the memories ... ah, what did you have to mention that place for?’

‘Sorry, I just thought it was somewhere you spoke so fondly of,’ says Michael. ‘It’s accessible. Not a million miles away but far enough away to get away if you know what I mean?’

Killarney. I bite my lip. My sweet, dear Killarney where some of my fondest, maddest, most life changing memories were made. Now, contrary to my initial dismissal of his suggestion of a short getaway, I’m beginning to consider it.

‘Do you really think I could manage a trip there?’ I ask him. ‘It would be really strange to relive all those memories ... but maybe it would be just what I need to distract me from what’s about to happen. Do you think I could?’

Michael’s excitement leaves his face for a second.

‘Ah okay. Maybe not there then,’ he says, knowing exactly what memories I am referring to.

I raise an eyebrow.

‘Maybe that’s not the ideal place,’ he retorts. ‘Forget I suggested it. How about somewhere like Barry Island? Or Weston-super-Mare? Caroline and I spent a great weekend there at Easter. Or Blackpool even?’

‘Too late, you’ve planted the seed of Killara,’ I tell him and his eyes are full of regret. ‘I’ve always wanted to go back, you know I have. Maybe now *is* the right time.’

‘I shouldn’t have said it,’ he replies. ‘What was I thinking? Tenby has a beautiful beach and I know how you love the sea.’

‘Look, I won’t be chasing any memories, Michael, I’m not that stupid,’ I tell him. ‘That would not be on my agenda even if I *was* to go to Killara and let’s face it, it’s a bit late for all that now. I wouldn’t dare to look him up.’

He rubs his temples. ‘Juliette?’

‘Well, you suggested it!’ I tell him. ‘Come on, Michael of *course* it would be on my agenda. How could I go back there and not wonder where he is? Wouldn’t you? It’s something I’ve never faced up to, never told anyone about apart from my sister and obviously Dan knows a little about it, but now might be the right time. It makes sense actually. Imagine if—’

‘Juliette, please no!’ he interrupts me. ‘Your timing to go looking for him is ... I can’t think of the word ... you don’t need that sort of pressure I am saying *that* to you as your doctor.’

‘It wouldn’t be *top* of my agenda to find him, I promise,’ I explain. ‘But you have to agree, it would be so good to put a few old ghosts to bed, not to mention the obvious answers for Rosie. Physically, do you really think I could go there? Even after what you’ve told me today?’

Michael knows what I am asking.

‘Well, what I told you earlier is the unavoidable truth, unfortunately,’ he explains. ‘The brain tumour is like a ticking time bomb, but you’re not going to kick the bucket overnight. You’re feeling good right now so a week away won’t make any difference.’

We both can’t help but laugh at his choice of words. ‘Kicking the bucket’ sounds like something that old people do, not a forty-year-old woman like me who should have the world at my feet.

‘I know exactly what I’ll do,’ I say, as a brainwave hits my good-for-nothing, wasting away skull. ‘I’ll take Rosie with me. Her school holidays start soon ... I could take her and we could spend some quality time together away from reality and it might help her, you know, find some sort of closure or understanding of what’s ahead of us both.’

‘Are you sure?’ he replies. ‘I never thought of that, taking Rosie. That could be good as long as you’re not going to go looking for old skeletons in closets. This is not the right time to tell the child about her—’

‘Oh God, Michael, what *am* I going to tell her about all of this crap?’ I ask him, my head now in my hands. ‘She’s just fifteen years old for crying out loud. She wants to be thinking about boys and makeup tutorials on YouTube and the best way to get tickets to see Ed Sheeran – not her dying mother. My poor baby. What am I going to tell her?’

‘Take her away with you for a rest,’ says Michael, trying to keep me focused. ‘Go and spend some quality time with her as you said, wherever it is you choose to go, and give her some more precious memories to hold on to.’

‘But how do I tell her that I’m going to die?’

Michael pauses. The word ‘die’ hangs in the air.

‘It will come to you when the time is right,’ he whispers to me.

‘You think?’ I frown, squeezing my eyes tight so that I don’t dare cry. I don’t have time to cry.

‘I think, yes,’ he says gently. ‘Do things you can’t do with her here and ... chill out and relax with her.’

‘Oh, Michael.’

‘Talk to her, read to her, walk with her, give her some last amazing memories to cling on to,’ he says. ‘Take pictures, make videos, paint, eat, relax ... take her somewhere nice, Juliette. That’s about the best thing you can do for her – give her your time. You do know how children spell love?’

‘T – I – M – E!’ I say to him. ‘I gave you that line, thief.’

He shrugs at me. But he is right. His suggestion, as casual as I first thought it might be, has actually helped and I will leave this dreary hospital office with a purpose, something to cling on to and to make happen as soon as possible. I like his thinking. I will start to make plans. I’m good at making plans.

‘Will you miss me when I go?’ I ask him as I gather my handbag and coat from the back of the chair.

He looks at me and lets out a deep sigh, then shakes his head and laughs in disbelief, knowing that my question has two very different meanings. Will he miss me when I go on my break, and will he miss me when I go forever?

‘Only you would ask such a question, Juliette Fox. Only you,’ he replies. ‘I can’t bear to think of it and I’m trying not to think about it. We’re good buddies now, me and you. I miss you when you go home after your appointments, never mind ...’ He leaves the rest unsaid.

I close my eyes.

‘Well, I’m going to miss you, that’s for sure,’ I tell him and a huge whoosh of nerves fills my tummy. We shuffle towards the door, not knowing what else there is to say in this sterile, hospital office where bad news is delivered on a daily basis.

‘I won’t miss this office or that carpet,’ I tell him, trying to lighten the mood. ‘And for goodness’ sake change that horrible painting above your desk. You really need to brighten this place up, pronto.’

We both look up at the painting. It’s not that bad really, but I’m trying to make a point.

‘Caroline thought she was quite the artist, didn’t she?’ Michael says to me, and then he reaches up to the painting, takes it down and leans it on the wall with its back to us. ‘There you go. Done.’

‘I bet you feel better already,’ I say to him, folding my arms.

He smiles at me and I wonder why on earth his ex, the free-spirited Caroline could ever have thought she would find better than the gorgeous, gentle being before me.

‘I’m going to miss you. Call me when you need a chat,’ he says when we get to the door of his office. ‘Or when you get back from Ireland if you do decide to go?’

‘I will. I promise...’

His eyes fill up and he bites his lip.

‘I’m so sorry, Juliette. I wish there was more I could do.’

‘Ssh or you’ll have me started,’ I tell him, trying to keep things light in the most impossible of circumstances. I don’t want him to cry but I know that the minute I close this door and walk away from him, he will bawl his eyes out. I know, because as he’s admitted to me before, he’s done that many times before when he has tried his hardest to make things work for his patients against all the odds.

‘Enjoy your break,’ he tells me, and I hear his voice crack under the strain of sorrow. ‘Make sure it’s the best of the best from here on in because that’s exactly what you deserve and nothing less. Oh, and Juliette?’

‘What?’

I know what’s coming. I know exactly what he is going to say next.

‘Find Dan, for goodness’ sake,’ he tells me. ‘Find him and tell him you still love him before it’s too ... you know what I mean.’

‘Before it’s too late?’ I suggest.

His face crumples and he nods his head. He actually is crying now. My doctor, my good old buddy Michael, is crying.

‘Oh my God,’ I whisper, putting my hand to my mouth and closing my eyes to push away the pain.

The reality of this is like a deep blow to my gut and the butterflies return again to my insides.
I nod and my bottom lip starts to wobble. My eyes sting like hell.
So, this is really it then. This really, really is it.
I am actually going to die.

Chapter 2

Shelley

Killara, County Galway, Ireland

FRIDAY

The apple tree sways in our garden and I stare at it through the window until it blurs, unable to decide if its three-year growth heals or hurts me more. Right now, it scoops out my very core just to see it standing there, alive and proud, oblivious to what it represents and so ignorant to the agony I am still going through since I first planted it there in her memory.

Matt's arms snuggle around my waist from behind and I feel his soft stubble on my neck, his familiar smell easing the hurt just a little as I close my eyes tight and fight back the tsunami of tears building inside me.

'Breathe,' he whispers, doing it for me as he speaks. 'You aren't breathing properly, Shelley. Let it out if you have to. Cry hard if you have to. I'm here. I'm right here.'

He rocks me gently before I push him away, and when I finally let go the release of tears is overwhelming, stronger than ever as I recall this time three years ago.

'It's just so unfair,' I manage to say to my husband between choking sobs but he doesn't reply because he too is broken still. I can tell by his own breathing that this is killing him. The cruelty of it all, the deep-rooted pain that will never go away as we struggle to come to terms with the loss that has ruined our lives.

'At least you had her for three precious years,' they said.

'At least you got to hold her and say goodbye ...'

'At least ... at least ... at least ...'

But there is no *'at least'* when it comes to loss.

There will never be an *at least*. Tomorrow we should be celebrating her sixth birthday with balloons and bouncy castles and princesses, but instead all I have is an empty house, boxes of stowed away photos that I can't bear to look at and a tree in the garden that is supposed to remind me of her. There is no *at least*.

'Fancy a walk on the beach before I go?' asks Matt, turning me round and wiping my eyes with his thumbs. We hold eye contact for a few seconds then he leans in and kisses my forehead so softly and somewhere within, I find the strength to thank God for this glorious man I've been blessed with. I lean on Matt's chest and let him hold me close just one more time, feeling his warmth and the sound of his heartbeat, which reminds me that we both are still alive. And then as always, just before it makes me feel better, I let him go – because I don't deserve to feel anything but pain.

'I'd like that,' I reply to him.

He always knows what's best when we find the clutches of grief becoming too much to bear. Or when *I* am too much to bear, I should say. I know that the cracks in our marriage are slowly starting to show, no matter how much I deny it and no matter how patient Matt tries to be. I fear I may be running out of time and I will push him away once too often.

Moments later, we are walking along the sandy Killara beach in silence, with nothing but the lapping of the waves for company and the splashing of our golden retriever, Merlin, as he bounds in and out of the water alongside us.

This place truly is heaven on earth. It is absolute paradise, with the village harbour dotted in the distance and the white sandy beach that our house, Ard na Mara, looks directly upon. We designed it, we built it and we named it carefully, choosing 'Ard' as the Gaelic for height and 'Mara' which means ocean or sea. It sits overlooking Galway Bay on a hilltop that only Matt could have secured with his planning contacts and skills that came from years in his profession.

The coloured shop fronts of the village sit like a smiling rainbow in the distance and seagulls swoop above us as the evening sun sets on the sea. It is paradise indeed and it is home, but for me, it's now a home with no heart or soul. It is empty and so am I.

I close my eyes as we walk, leaning on Matt for guidance and wanting to cling to his body just in case I fall again, or worse, in case he finally lets me go.

'I do still love you, Shelley,' he tells me and the rush I get from his perfect timing almost stops my heart from beating. 'I know this is a nightmare, but I love you so much no matter what we are going through.'

I inhale a smile and but inside I feel nothing. I wish I could say the same back.

'I don't know how you put up with me sometimes,' is all I can tell him and I take his warm hand in mine. We have a private joke between us, one we have repeated often throughout our ten-year marriage when the going gets tough, and his answer is always the same.

'You put up with me too, so we're even,' he replies and kisses my forehead, but we both know that is far from true. Nonetheless, it makes me feel better already. But ... I do know that his love has been tested to the very depths in the past few years as I have gone through every emotion known to mankind and lashed out at him when he didn't deserve it. Our marriage has survived so far and sometimes I don't understand how.

'Do you think this will ever get any easier?' I ask him with a scrunched face, and he shakes his head.

'We have to make it so,' he says to me. 'Yes, she was our whole world and we will always miss that, but we have to learn to live again, Shelley. We still have a lot to live for and I want my wife back. I need my wife back.'

And he is right. He does need his wife back and I so want to be his wife again. I want to be his lover, his girl who laughs with him until I am almost sick with giggles, the one who feels like home to him, who is fun and interesting and who loves jazz, who runs a book club, who is a bit of a hippy and who cooks up a storm and hosts the best parties at any excuse. The one who dances barefoot in our kitchen with him when we are tipsy and feeling in love, the one who curls up to him when we watch a scary movie, the one who would suggest at the drop of a hat that we book a holiday or convince one of our sailor friends to take us on a boat trip or throw a party just because it's Saturday and life is so good. I want to be that person again, but she is gone and I can't seem to figure out how to find her again.

I think of my business, the vintage boutique near the waterfront that attracts locals and tourists all year round and the one thing that has stopped me from tipping over the edge in recent times. I named it *Lily Loves* long before our daughter was conceived. Lily has always been my favourite girl's name – it was the name of my maternal grandmother who was the most stylish woman I have ever known, so I always felt like I knew our own Lily before we even met her. Harry is the boy I never had. Harry or Jack. I often imagine life with the babies I lost through miscarriage before we were blessed with Lily and it soothes me to just picture their little faces. Who would they have looked like? I hoped they would look like Matt. He hoped they would look like me.

I think of Matt's talent, the talent that has made him one of the country's most sought after architects. We only get to see so much of the world because of his job. In fact, he travelled the world for years before we met, researching and studying his art, and when he popped the question just months after we found each other, we knew that this was where we wanted to live and bring up our family. Matt has designed skyscrapers in the Netherlands, hotels in London and homes in some of Ireland's most prestigious locations and I am lucky enough to get to travel with him sometimes to see the fruits of his labour. I am so lucky in so many ways and sometimes I need to remind myself of that.

We have a beautiful life here by the sea on Ireland's famous Wild Atlantic Way, but it still kills me inside that I can't give my husband the one thing we both want the most – a family.

‘Are you sure you’re going to be okay when I’m gone this time?’ Matt asks, just as Merlin jumps up on me, his wet paws covering my top in muddy sand. ‘I could ask Mum to come and—’

‘No, please, Matt, don’t even go there,’ I reply with a pinch. ‘You know I’d rather be alone.’

‘But, Shelley—’

‘No buts, Matt. I don’t want your mother here,’ I say to him, my voice sharp with purpose. ‘I don’t want Mary or Sarah or Jack or flipping Jill, or whoever it is you’re going to suggest next, to pop in and check on me, or take me out to lunch or go shopping with me. I don’t want anyone, okay. Now, please don’t go behind my back arranging things. I will be perfectly fine and much happier left alone, just as I like it.’

The tears are coming, I can feel them. Matt takes a deep breath and kicks the sand.

‘I’m only trying to make sure you’ll be alright,’ he says again, and I can hear the hurt in his voice. I have nothing to give him back.

‘I’m fine,’ is all I can say.

‘But I’ll be gone for a week this time and what are you going to do for seven whole days while I’m away? Mope around here on your own in that empty shell of a house and cry until you’re sick again?’

I can feel my lip tremble at the thought of how ill I can make myself since Lily died.

‘Stop it Matt, please. I just want to be on my own,’ I tell him again. ‘It’s better that way, please.’

Matt’s face crumples with worry but he knows I won’t change my mind. I have developed a routine to get through this heartache; it centres around working at my boutique shop during the day, where I partake only in small talk about clothes or the weather with customers, and then preparing and cooking my evening meal, with which I might have a glass of wine to fill the void I constantly feel. I might then read for a while or take a walk on the beach before bed but I don’t mingle, I don’t mix and I don’t want to. Not yet.

The sun drifts down in the distance and the orange and gold light shines on my husband’s face as he looks at me with despair.

‘We’d better get back home or you’ll miss your flight,’ I tell Matt, ruffling the dog’s head as he obliviously bounces around in excitement. ‘I know you mean well, but I’d rather be alone, Matt. Please don’t worry. Plus, I have this big guy to look after me, don’t I, Merlin?’

The dog barks and jumps higher at the sound of his own name. Matt just shrugs.

‘Sorry for losing it,’ I say to him.

‘Again,’ he says. ‘You mean sorry, for losing it *again*.’

And *again* I know I am pushing it. I can see in his face that he is weary and tired of trying so hard, only to be always told no. God, I dread if day when he has had enough of tiptoeing around me.

‘Yes, I’m sorry, *again*,’ I say, but we both know it won’t be the last time I turn down his offers of help, or the last time I will push him away.

I may have figured out how to exist without Lily, but I have a long, long way to go before I can learn to live without her and my marriage is crumbling under all the pressure and pain that her loss has left behind. I don’t want to live like this anymore.

But least we’re still clinging on.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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