

Leila Chapter 57

After he'd finished playing, Leila got up to leave and paid the barman hurriedly in cash. She realised that she'd not taken her heavy coat off during the entire hour she'd been there, sipping her drink and picking at her chips.

Must be cooler next time I try to pass for eighteen.

She stepped out onto the sunlit street and set off down the road towards the derricks and the ships.

Something was different. Leila drew on her photographic memory. *A missing funnel.* One of the boats had sailed.

Please don't say he's left, just coz I was having that stupid coffee.

When she reached the harbour, she found to her dismay that it was really nothing more than a concrete slab marking the end of the railway line, and the beginning of the dockside. There were a few hi-vis jackets milling about on the quay, and a ladder or drawbridge leading up to a small doorway on the side of the container ship. She'd never seen anything that size before, but it looked like it was ready to leave.

She sat alone on a bench overlooking the quayside, and took a swig from the water bottle she'd brought with her. She watched as the jackets started unhooking huge twisted ropes from the bollards adorning the dock. The ship started to groan and sway in the swell.

As the boat started to creep down the waterway, one of the men, his job done, made as if to join her on the bench. She was sure he looked her way. *Didn't he?* She was going to get up, as if she knew she shouldn't be sitting there, but then thought better of it, as he turned away with just a sideways glance in her direction from under his protective clothing. The song still played in her head.

Her heart bumped noisily at her chest. She got up. Watched the yellow jacket walk towards a shed. She started to walk after him. There was a small prefab office just beyond a metal-link fence where, now the ship was on its way, the men were heading. She kept her eye on the man she had seen. His hi-vis gear was a slightly darker shade than the others, and his hood was up.

She jogged slightly until she could see him closing in on the office building. Without thinking, she quickened her pace until she was within a few yards of him. She could almost smell him. The body shape was the same, and the hair and beard were unmistakable.

'Hello!' she called out quietly. No response. He carried on.

A little louder this time. 'Hello! Excuse me!'

She expected him to turn round and fall into her arms. He did not. But he did stop and turn.

She faced the figure now staring her down.

'Staff only beyond this point, love. Sorry. Stop following me. Go away.'

The voice was as hard as granite, devoid of emotion. His words came from a face younger than Leila had expected. His voice was flat and monochrome. He looked tired. Twelve-hour shifts were hard

going.

She shrunk back and turned away.

One thing was clear.

She'd not found her man.