

Leila Chapter 3

Duke closed the bin with a crash and flung himself back in his chair, the echo of the wooden structure resonating like a drum around the small room. His eye was drawn to the rough wooden wall of the kitchen, which seemed to have acquired yet another new crack or mark.

It had all started so stupidly. He and his brother had quibbled over a small amount of money and Duke had felt that he was the loser. Although they had drifted apart before that, the money had briefly brought them together - there was even a meeting with lawyers - and then torn them apart for good. They'd not spoken since.

Then when Duke's wife got sick that became all consuming for nearly two years.

Alison was the love of his life.

They had been in the same class at primary school, and she'd insisted that he should be her boyfriend. Ten years later and they were married. *Too young*, everyone said, but they'd been happy, most of the time.

As she deteriorated he'd felt a part of him slipping away with her.

He'd felt compelled to give up his job at the school, so that he could care for her and deal with all the constant visits to the hospital and then the hospice.

And then the graveyard.

They'd had their occasional quarrels, but he had loved her.

Although the family had tried to put on brave faces, none of them could cope with it all really. She was gone.

The brothers didn't speak at the funeral. He'd turned up unexpectedly, so Duke had been taken by surprise. And more importantly, Duke needed to grieve alone.

Nearly twelve years ago.

Duke had moved out without thinking, trying to extinguish his thoughts of the years of married life they could have lived together. The family. The foundations their daughter would have built and grown from.

But Kerry was gone too.

Long gone. Far gone.

Inappropriate boyfriend.

That was his official reason, but she was twenty-two, still living at home. It wasn't right. Kerry and her dad had bickered constantly and although Duke wasn't proud of forcing her out, he genuinely had felt that it was right at the time.

Alison had not agreed of course, and it had been a source of tension between the parents right up until the end of her life. Too late now.

‘You never tried to understand her, did you?’

But she'd always been a difficult daughter to understand. Wrong friendship groups. Wrong company. Trouble at school. Trouble with the police. In the end Australia had seemed a blessing, and the last he knew, she was doing well.

New man.

New life.

She'd not come to her mother's funeral.

Too far.