

# Welcome to Ferry Lane Market



NICOLA MAY

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Lane Market



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For Emma

‘Every flower is a soul blossoming in nature.’  
Gérard de Nerval



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# Chapter 1

‘I bet even the real Sid Vicious didn’t shit in his bathwater.’ Kara Moon stared down at the noxious poo in the terrapin’s tank.

‘Ooh, I bet he did,’ her boyfriend Jago murmured whilst flattening down his dark-brown Beatles-style haircut and patting his khaki jacket pockets in turn. ‘Seen my keys, Moo Moo?’

Kara cringed inwardly at her once much-adored nickname. Then, retrieving the keys from the orderly rack in the kitchen, she came back through the open archway into their compact living space.

A lone beam of golden sunlight made its jittery mark across the wooden floor as it seeped through the open crack of the balcony door. The sounds of mewling seagulls and creaking yacht masts in the estuary harbour rose up from below, comforting and familiar, yet they did not ease the gnawing feeling in Kara Moon’s stomach. Hoping for a different answer to the one she was expecting, she asked casually, ‘Where are you going this early, anyway?’

As Jago reached for his battered Beatles key ring, Kara caught a whiff of the Gucci aftershave she had given him for Christmas. He looked at her with a perplexed expression. ‘It’s Jobcentre day. You know I always go over to Crowsbridge on a Friday.’



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‘How could I possibly forget?’ Kara said sarcastically. ‘Oh yes, maybe because it’s been eighteen months and you still haven’t come back with a job.’

‘Don’t start.’

‘It’s just, James Bond needs his flea stuff and I’m not sure if there’s enough money in the blue pot and—’

Ignoring her pitiful plea, Jago went to the open hallway, jumped down two stairs at a time, then looked back to say in a patronising tone, ‘My little Ginger Princess. You look quite pretty when you forget to tie your hair up in that stupid ponytail.’

Fighting back tears, Kara put her hand to the back of her long, messy auburn waves as her errant beau of eight years stalled again to say nastily, ‘And why aren’t *you* at work? Or did you stupidly forget about that too?’

Kara sighed deeply and held her palm up to him. ‘Just go, Jago. You mustn’t be late now, must you.’

*She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah.* The famous Lennon-McCartney lyrics that Kara had chosen for his special key ring followed after Jago as he hurried down the stairs, jumped down the last three and went out, slamming the door.

To try and regain a modicum of inner peace, Kara stood still for a minute and stared out of the window at nothing in particular. Here she was, at thirty-three years old, living with a jobless, feckless, twenty-nine-year-old youth, with no mention or hope of plans for the future. And despite her working her butt off to support the two of them, she seemed to barely make ends meet, let alone save any money. The more cash she put aside in the blue ceramic savings pot for unseen eventualities and ‘nice things’ like holidays or week-ends away, the more excuses Jago Ellis found to dip into it. In fact, tragically, the only holiday they had ever been on

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together was a long weekend to Liverpool where she was dragged around every street and tourist attraction to satisfy his insatiable hunger for anything and everything relating to his precious obsession: the Beatles.

Deftly avoiding a bite from Sid Vicious, Kara swore loudly and continued to hold back the tears she had been gripping on to. Then, gagging as she pulled her pink rubber washing-up gloves up as far as they would go, she scooped up the offending smelly mess in the tiny net bought for the purpose.

It was five years ago when Jago had arrived home drunk, carrying a huge tank up the steep stairs, slopping water as he went. And five years ago when the job of looking after this poor little reptile, first seen by Kara hanging on to a rock for dear life, had become *her* responsibility. She lifted her head in thought. Had they been getting on then? She couldn't remember.

Their living room with a view offered an optical illusion of space but despite the long bay window seat and door out on to the balcony, there was barely room for their table/desk with a couple of dining chairs and a sagging, two-seater sofa. Jago had cack-handedly fixed a TV far too big for the room to the wall above the fireplace. And the glass shelf that was eventually put up for the tank to sit on was placed at such an angle that when poor Sid wanted to get out of the water and bask under his heat lamp, it took him several attempts to scabble his way up the slope to his rock. A canvas of the iconic *Abbey Road* Beatles cover hung on the wall above him; it was as if the Fab Four were taunting the little terrapin with their ability to walk in a straight line.

Despite the lack of space in the two-bedroomed flat, when

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Kara had caught sight of the Painted Turtle's cute little prehistoric face, she didn't have the heart to say he had to go back to the pet shop from whence he came. And by the time she had got around to googling 'How long do terrapins live' and realised it could be up to thirty years, it was too late: Sid Vicious, the most aggressive reptile in Cornwall, along with James Bond, the skinny twelve-year-old black-and-white rescue moggy, with his furry white tuxedo and 007 air of nonchalance, were now very much part of their dysfunctional little Ferry Lane family.

Grimacing, she emptied the terrapin's mess into one of the big terracotta flowerpots on the first-floor balcony. Then, taking in the fresh sea air, she looked down to see the welcome sight of her father opening the metal gates of the ferry float and Jago running across the road towards it at full pelt so as not to miss its prompt departure.

As if sensing his daughter's sad eyes on him, Joe Moon looked up, smiled, waved, then turned his attention to beckoning the queuing cars on to the beloved car and passenger ferry service – the thriving business that had been part of the Moon family's life for as long as Kara could remember.

## Chapter 2

Kara scraped her hair back into its customary loose ponytail, pulled the one remaining ten-pound note out of the blue pot on the kitchen windowsill, took her own keys from their usual place on the rack and headed down the flight of stairs to the front door of their flat. As she reached it, James Bond screeched in through the cat flap, stopped briefly to scratch himself frantically and then, as if sensing that a vet's visit was due, he tore up the stairs straight past her without so much as an acknowledgement.

'You stay in now, you hear me? Or I'll be in a whole lot of trouble,' Kara warned her beloved feline in her faint Cornish accent. She paused. Then she did something she never did. She locked the cat flap shut. Feeling a surge of guilt, she quickly ran back upstairs, pulled an old baking tray out from under the oven and filled it with some compost from one of the flowerless pots on the balcony. 'Just in case,' she said aloud as she placed it under the cat flap and shut the door behind her. 'I won't be too long,' she warbled through the letter box.

The door to Number One, Ferry View Apartments opened out on to the bottom end of Ferry Lane. Kara tentatively looked left, then right, then scurried around to the front of the Victorian block and began to walk along the crazy-paved promenade to work.

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Up at the top of the hill, Ferry Lane Market was bursting into life. Every Friday and Saturday since she could remember, all market dwellers would set up outside their fixed, covered premises and sell their wares to not only the inhabitants of Hartmouth and its plethora of second homers, but also to the many seasonal visitors to the small, historic town. With the market having a reputation for being the best in the area, tourists would make the short journey across from Crowsbridge, some by foot, but most by car on her dad's ferry.

Nobody could deny that there was something magical about the community feel on open-air market days. Stallholders and customers alike would mingle and chat. Fresh, locally grown produce and original handmade items and gifts were beautifully displayed and sold. And despite Kara having worked her stall for the past fifteen years, she had never tired of the theatre of it all.

The late-spring breeze today was carrying the regular sales banter from the Dillons' fruit and vegetable stall. 'Come on, ladies, here's your early rhubarb, two quid a kilo. Make the old man a nice crumble with that; put a smile on his face. Give him a bit – no madam, I don't mean that bit. Here, feel my asparagus. Plump and juicy. Have a little squeeze if you like – I won't tell if you don't. Bananas, as long as you need 'em, madam.' And so on.

Despite the miserable start to her morning, Kara managed a smile, then turned to look at Nigel's Catch fish stall – which was so colourful that local artists would often paint pictures of it to sell to visitors. Squid, spider crabs, scallops and clams were arranged in glittering beds of ice, next to the most recent catch of fish; and when she closed her eyes and focused, above the fishy aroma Kara could smell tempting

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wafts of savoury Cornish pasties coming from a stall up the hill.

Ferry Lane Market was her life. She had started working at Passion Flowers, the florist shop and stall run by Lydia Twist, on her eighteenth birthday. But before that, from just twelve years old, she had worked on other stalls at many open Saturday market days. Joe Moon, Kara's dad, was Hartmouth born and bred, as were his parents before him, and with the ferry crossing being essential to everyone, he knew most of the locals. So, he had put the word around that his younger daughter would like some work and if anyone needed an extra pair of hands, then Kara Moon was their girl.

She had been happy then. With her sister Jenifer already away studying business and finance at Leeds University, for a while Kara felt like an only child. She didn't miss the bolshie, forthright Jenifer Moon one bit. With a seven-year age gap, the siblings had never been close. Kara had always been made to feel like an inconvenience, with Jen's bedroom door being slammed shut on her on many occasions and their mother rarely bothering to react to their shouting matches. In fact, if it didn't involve her directly, Doryty Moon had rarely reacted to anything.

At least with her mother walking out long before she had received her A-Level results, Kara didn't have to face the disappointment of her non-reaction. And with the little study she had put in, she had not only been elated to get such good results for all three of her exams, but with the cash that her dad had given her for doing so well, she was also at last brave enough to get her teeth fixed.

With an infinite fear of the dentist and after years of being called Bugs Bunny, she had finally allowed her father to

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gently persuade her to see an orthodontist. Oh God, how she had hated those painful restorative sessions! But the result had been worth it. Thanks to her hair colouring, she continued to get the odd ‘Ginger’ labelling, but she could just about cope with that now that she had a set of Hollywood veneers to beam back at the perpetrator. So it had been with a renewed feeling of confidence that she had turned up for her first day of work at Passion Flowers at the tender age of eighteen – until she saw the bright pink top she was expected to wear, and knew at once that it would clash dreadfully with her colouring. She also realised in that moment that she was as green about floristry as her sparkling emerald eyes.



Today was another first – the first time in fifteen years that Kara had ever taken some last-minute time off work. When Kara had asked Lydia, her boss, the inflexible florist had huffed, ‘I cannot *believe* you are asking me this on the day before market day too. Really, Kara, can’t you rearrange the vet appointment? And a *whole* day? Surely you can come back when the cat has had its bloody injections!’

Lydia’s furious reaction was thoroughly predictable, as it meant that she herself had to get up at 4.30 a.m. to drive over to the flower market in Penrigan, the place where they were certain to purchase the finest and freshest flowers for the shop and stall. For the past five years, this weekly task had been entrusted to Kara, who quite enjoyed doing it and wasn’t afraid of the responsibility – not that she got any thanks. Since handing over the keys of the company van for

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Kara to use at her leisure, Lydia felt justified in demanding that she work ridiculous hours. And Kara, used to the many unreasonable requests from her uptight fifty-year-old employer, just complied for the sake of a quiet life.

But today, for once, Kara had held her ground. Taking James Bond to the vet wasn't a full-on lie, as he did need his annual cat flu injection. The fact that she had told Lydia he always got a weird reaction afterwards was, on the other hand, a downright stinker. But as Kara didn't know how she'd feel once she'd done what she needed to do, rather than take the chance of getting upset at work, she had decided that the best tactic was to just not be there.

With funds so tight, she couldn't afford to take James Bond to the vet any more unless it was an emergency. Her old family cat, Bawcock, had lived to the venerable age of twenty-two and he'd never had an injection in his life. The one and only time he'd had to go to the vet was when his ear was hanging off after a fight with the next door's tabby. Kara's mother had insisted he be treated right away, but Kara's grandad Harry had been round and said that the battered moggy was as brave as old Tom Bawcock, his namesake, and that animals healed themselves quite ably. Grandad Harry would have been quite happy to clean up the raw bits with disinfectant and put a plaster over them. But Doryty Moon had got her way, as she always did. The beloved pet was patched up and to this day Kara still hadn't found out who the old tom's namesake was and what he had done that was so great.



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