

# Love Bites:

## *A Collection of Short Stories*

By Valeria Kogan

## Foreword

Creating a series of short stories seemed like the best way to write my first book, since it reassured me that I had the stamina for it, but didn't tie me to a single narrative for its duration. I enjoyed playing with the characters and seeing how they would develop, but did try to create some symmetry among the stories so that they wouldn't seem too disparate. Without intending to, this resulted in a book of 'could haves.' I'm not sure that I intended some of the characters to be as tragic as they became, or for the impact of other people's love to have such an impact on some of the protagonists, but, as I wrote, the stories themselves began to unravel and I felt it was more important to stay true to the characters than it was to pursue my own idea of what the story should be.

I examined the characters using myself and people I knew as a basis (sometimes blatantly, and other times only borrowing elements of a personality), so the book functioned as an alternate plane for relationships. In some way, I think my own relationship has elements of some of the stories without being taken to the same extremes. While I'm not entirely adverse to 'traditional' relationships, there don't appear to be many in the book. This wasn't a completely unconscious decision, but I like the idea of finding love in unexpected places. I also disagree with the notion of *needing* to have a particular kind of life, even if it doesn't make you happy. I'm aware that some of my characters could be seen as morally dubious and it was not my intention to shock. These were the characters based on friends, who are wonderfully 'normal' people, who happen to do things that aren't quite so normal, but are brave enough to pursue their own happiness without feeling constrained by other people's expectations.

In the end, it is a book about love... even if it's about leaving some loves behind to find others.

## Silent

As a faded coastal town, Llandudno was an apt place for misery; once standing proudly on the northern Welsh beaches, it corroded slowly from its Victorian splendor to become a town populated by those who remembered it in better days, and those who were too tired to leave. Or at least people who could not find the opportunity to do so. It was a town filled with nothing but second-hand stores and bars, which waited in their bland decor for the weekends when they would be filled with drunken teens and women past their prime, maybe an unromantic version of those one-horse towns everybody talked about. Naturally, when somebody exceptional lived in a place like this they were easily noticed.

Carla was not only noticed, but was also resented by many; leaving for university was almost unforgivable in the eyes of some of her school friends, who secretly understood that she possessed a methodical charm that they would never master. Of course, it was never phrased that way; usually, just accusations of thinking too much of herself, or believing she was better than the people surrounding her. She was not necessarily the most beautiful girl, but she had the air of a fictional character in a black-and-white photograph; somebody invented and immortalized, but fleeting. There were things that people remembered her for: the fluorescent blue cigarette holder she used, with crystals around the tip (an exercise that took far more time and patience than it deserved); the silver charms on her bracelet. Her mother had bought the bracelet on the day that her first pet died and, every year on the same day, it would gain a charm and her eyes would be tinged with red. Naturally, such superficial things could never define a person, but it was what near-strangers associated with her, so these objects unwittingly became part of her identity.

Their sole respite came when she returned happily to her hometown after finishing her degree, determined to carry on living in what she saw as idyllic tranquillity, far away from the sprawling mess of Manchester and its endless strangers. This, however, did not last long. She brought with her a husband, a man who complemented her with contradictions. It seemed that not a day went by when they were not seen walking hand in hand and talking incessantly, furrowing their brows when topics carried far too many syllables for eavesdroppers to convey to gossips, or simply laughing. All theories on their fast, young marriage were negated when it turned out that she was the wealthier of the two, and her stomach did not swell as time went on.