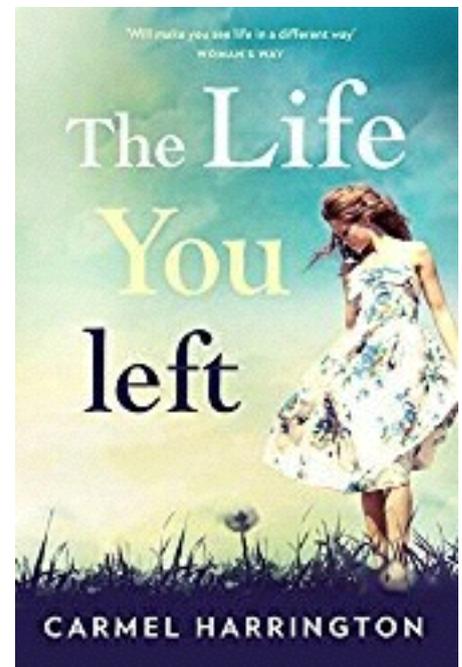


Irish Times Bestseller

Heartwrenching & heartbreaking, a story of love, family and second chances



Prologue

Ballyaislinn, Co. Wexford

<Inbox (2)

To: sarahlawlor0902@yahoo.ie

From: paul.lawlor@cgqh.ie

Subject: Sorry

Sarah, I'm not coming home tonight. Don't try to find me or call my office, I'm taking some time out to get my head sorted. If I don't get away, I'm not sure what I'll do.

If you love me, you will give me the space I need.

Tell the children I love them and I'll be in touch when I can.

Paul

Sarah blinked back tears, confused and disorientated by the email she had just opened. She didn't understand. Those meagre sentences made absolutely no sense to her and mocked her by their cruelty.

She struggled to let the words sink in but no matter how many times she re-read the email, she could not fathom what was happening. She quickly hit re-dial on her husband's mobile, knowing that it was a futile exercise. Yes, damn it, still going to voicemail. She checked the time; it was getting close to 10pm. She hadn't worried at first when Paul didn't appear home for dinner. She figured that he had a late meeting

and had forgotten to tell her about it. But by 8pm she was worried and started to call him. His phone kept repeating the same infuriating message.

She ran through the mornings events once again in her mind. Paul had gotten up for work at his usual time, showered and dressed himself, whilst she got the children ready for school. Mornings were always frantic in their house with Sarah making the children their breakfast and school lunches and then dressing them in their uniforms. At some point in the mayhem, Paul would leave for the office, with a quick goodbye kiss for them all if they were lucky.

She supposed he had been quiet this morning, she didn't recall him saying one word to her really, but then again he rarely did these days. She felt scared once again. What had she missed? Their lives had become so frantic – Sarah with the three children and Paul with work, it often felt like they were ships that passed in the night.

A flash of guilt overwhelmed her, almost suffocating her. How could she have been so blind to her husband's distress? Had they drifted so far apart that she, his wife, would not notice her husband falling apart at the seams? So bad that he was having a breakdown of such magnitude that he needed to stay away from his family. An image of Paul in a psych ward popped into her head and she reeled from it, as it evoked a memory so painful it pierced her heart. She quickly threw that image from her mind and went back to this morning. Had he seemed any different when he kissed them all goodbye? She tried to be objective but no matter how much analysis she gave to their humdrum movements, she couldn't pinpoint anything that should have alerted her to this email.

Paul had been his usual slightly moody self but nothing new there. Her stomach started to flip again and she started to pace the living room floor, feeling that somehow or other she was to blame for all of this.

She pondered his request that she not try to find him, but decided that it was impossible to obey. She had to at least try to talk to him, so she began ringing likely candidates that he might have confided in. She started with the obvious, his mother Rita.

'Sarah here. Is Paul with you?'

'No, I haven't seen Paul since last Sunday when you all came for lunch.' Rita replied.

'What's wrong?'

Sarah wasn't sure how to answer that. She glanced at the email again and quickly decided it wasn't fair to worry Rita – yet.

'He's not home, that's all.' Sarah replied, trying hard to disguise her anguish. 'Just a bit worried, as he's not normally this late. I thought he might have popped into you on his way home. I'm sure he'll walk in the door any minute.'

She could hear Rita sigh with relief in response. 'Course he will love. Sure, Paul has always been a workaholic. He's probably on his way home right now.'

Sarah doubted that. A feeling of foreboding overcame her and somehow or other she knew life was never going to be the same again.