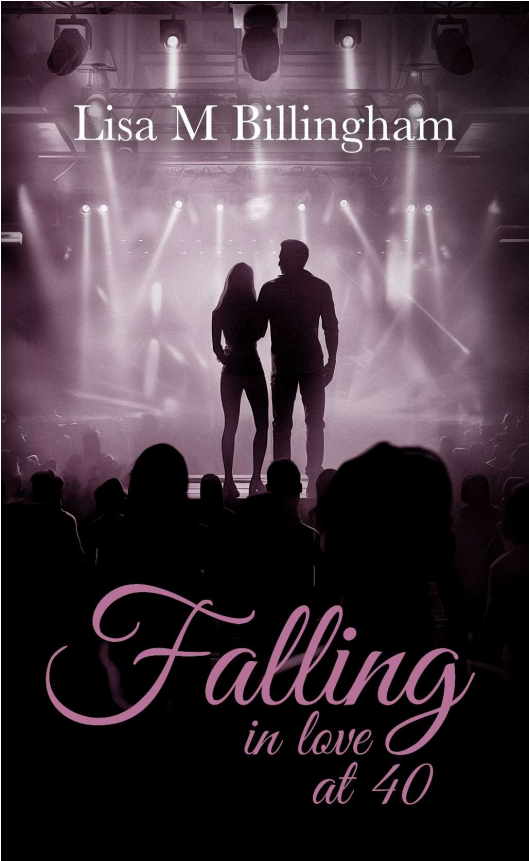


A romantic scene on a stage. A man and a woman stand close together, silhouetted against a backdrop of bright, hazy stage lights. The audience is visible in the foreground as dark silhouettes. The overall mood is intimate and dramatic.

Lisa M Billingham

Falling
in love
at 40

Falling in Love at 40

by Lisa M Billingham

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All mistakes are the authors own. She is human, after all.

WARNING

This book contains scenes of a sexual nature.

This book may inspire you to follow your dreams.

First published in the UK in 2024

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ISBN: 978-1-8382929-4-2 (Paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-8382929-5-9 (eBook)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family, friends and followers who have supported me on my writing journey.

Some of the professional contacts used on this journey are available at the back of this book.

Sunday 6th November 2022 - Morning

Forty years and one day old Laurel feels like a wallflower. She rolls over on her double bed and stares at the space next to her. It has been years since the space had been filled, and her disaster of a birthday party last night has cemented her decision to find a new man. She knows she's ready. But where to look?

She grabs her ridiculously old Samsung mobile from the small chest of drawers at the side of the bed. Switching it on, she stares expectantly at the screen.

Nothing. Nada. No messages, no calls, not even a new notification from social media. Propping herself up on all four pillows Laurel logs into her Instagram account. Clicking the 'search' button, she types 'dating sites.' Pages and pages of accounts glare at her from the screen, 'follow me, follow me,' they appear to be calling to her. Laurel follows the top three and clicks on the first one to find their website details and register.

Oh, well. She sighs. Welcome to the modern world of internet dating.

Before she can click off Instagram a strange advert pops up:

Comedy Classic

Enter here to win two tickets to Parker Small's pre tour show. Winning tickets are for the evening of Thursday 17th November 2022 and include backstage passes.

Click the link in the comments to enter.

Who the devil is Parker Small? Laurel mutters. *And what damn silly algorithm has thrown a comedy show up in my feed? I've never been to one in my life.* Shaking her head, curiosity gets the better of her, and she clicks on the link. *What are you doing, woman?* She groans as she reads through the terms and conditions. She's shocked to learn that she knows the venue. She sings there once a month. *Ah, she laughs, so that's what the pesky algorithm picked up then. I follow the venue. I wonder why I haven't seen any posters for this show there. Invitation only, maybe?* She ponders.

Knowing the venue seals the deal for her as she knows they wouldn't scam anyone. *And you never know, it could be a good night.* Shrugging, she reads on for the competition entry details, *maybe I can buy tickets if I don't win.*

To enter submit a piece of writing which will make the judges laugh. It can be a song, poem, short story, limerick, or flash fiction, but:

- It must be less than 500 words,
- It must make the judges laugh,
- You must be available on the 17th November (19:30 – 21:30)
- You must like and share our page and comment on this post.

Laurel rolls her eyes at the like, comment, and share part. *Typically, algorithmy,* she tuts.

Saving the page and doing as she's been instructed; she likes and follows everything. Planning to write the piece later that afternoon, she goes back to the dating site she'd been looking at before being distracted.

Taking a deep breath, she begins setting up a new account. Of course, they want to know everything including her inside leg measurement. Once she's finished, she checks the time on her phone. 11:15. *Blimey, I'd better get going if I'm going to meet Kimberly for lunch.* Diving out of bed, her phone, the competition, and the dating site forgotten, she races to the shower. Dropping the towel a few minutes later, she dabs on a little deodorant. Pulling on her jeans and jumper, she grabs her car keys and races to her local park to meet her friend.

"Hey, Kimberly." She calls out as she spots her friend at one of the outdoor tables, making the most of the sunny day. Kimberly's head is bowed as she types on her phone.

Feeling around in her bag, *Oh, bother. I left mine on the bed.* Laurel curses as she wanders over to her friend to ask her what she fancies to eat. Scribbling their order on a tissue, so she doesn't forget it, she enters the coffee shop snuggled in the corner of the park to place their order.

Ambling back to her friend, table number in hand, Laurel sits down heavily on the bench opposite her rocking the table as she lands.

"Hey, Laurel, what's up?" Kimberly asks. "You look sad. Life begins at 40, don't you know?"

"Ha, it's alright for you, Kim, you're miles away from 40."

"I'm not, Lol, I'm 40 next year."

"See. Miles away." Laurel waves her hand in the air and they both burst out laughing.

"So, what have you been up to, Lol?" Kimberly asks, placing her phone in her bag so she could be 'in the moment' with her friend.

"Oh, not much. I registered with an online dating agency this morning."

"Ah, that's why you're looking flushed then, you've got yourself a date."

"Nah. I forgot to pick my phone up, so I don't know whether I've even got any messages."

"Are you kidding, Lol, a stunning lady like you, all long fiery red hair and a body to die for! You're bound to get loads of messages."

Laurel shrugs. "Yeah, well, I'll let you know. I just hope they're different to the last one. I don't think I can go through the heartache again."

"You won't. You're different now so you'll attract a good one this time."

"Mmm, I hope so," Laurel answers. "Ooh, I almost forgot, I'm going to enter a competition to see Parker Small's live preview show... Or something like that."

"Or something like that! Laurel, do you even know who he is?"

"Erm, nope, never heard of him."

"Oh. My. Word. Laurel Sage Rivers, where have you been hiding? He's hilarious, and he's a bit of a dish."

Laurel teases. "Is that all you think about, Kim?"

"Urm...no, not really..." Kim looks at her with an innocent face. They both burst out laughing knowing that really is all Kimberly thinks about.

"Are you sure you've never heard of him?" Kimberly asks as she digs her phone out of her bag to search for a picture of him.

Laurel, taking a sip of her drink which had just been delivered to the table, shook her head. "Nope. Never heard of him until that ad popped up on Insta."

"Oh, my gosh, Lol, is it genuine?"

"Yeah. It's where I work every month, Hattie's, in town. I know they're straight."

"Oh, cool, I love that venue. I'm so excited. I'm coming with you when you win." Kimberly can barely contain her excitement.

"I have to win first, Kim." Laurel giggles. Thriving on Kim's positivity.

"Ah, you will. It's just a follow, like, share thing I bet."

"No, actually they're making you work for it. You have to write something."

"Ooh, well, that's easy for you, Miss singer-songwriter extraordinaire." Kimberly is Laurel's number one fan. Has been ever since she took to the stage. She is always positive and encouraging. Even in Laurel's darkest times Kimberly never stopped believing that Laurel would make the big time.

"Ha, ha, very funny. I have one gig a month there and one every three months up the road." Laurel sighs.

"At the moment. That doesn't mean it will be like that forever. You have to believe in yourself, Lol. You know it will happen. When the timing is right."

Laurel nods her head, finishing her drink. Grateful that she has such a good friend in Kimberly.

Later That Day

Laurel's thumbs are tired from scrolling through the ridiculous number of likes and messages she's received. She's only been gone for a couple of hours, but it would take a couple more to go through the messages from the dating app. *Oh, my goodness*, she groans, *can't you guys think of anything more exciting to write apart from 'hi there?'*

Shaking her head she sits on her bed, legs crossed beneath her, her body moaning at the strange angle it finds itself at. After a while, Laurel finally whittles it down to three possible men who may be dating material. Sick to death of one-night stands and empty promises. (She's even written that on her profile,) she takes a deep breath and sends them all a message. At least these had written; *'hi, there, how are you?'* That was progress.

Feeling better after her lunch with Kimberly, Laurel leaves her phone on the bed and grabs her music books from her bedside table. Her spare cupboard sized bedroom has all her equipment set up. She heads there to rehearse the songs for the wedding she is singing at later that month.

Spending the afternoon practicing, she had almost forgotten the dating app. Taking a break to rest her voice, she grabs her phone from her bedroom and scrolls through her notifications. After answering a few queries for singing appearances she turns her attention to the dating app. She spots a red heart against one of the messages she'd sent. Opening the message, she clicks on the profile. He's responded to her message. *Mmm, this looks promising.*

Hi Laurel my name is Ricardo I really like your profile as I'm into travel, singing and reading too. Can we connect please?

Well heeeelllllooo, Ricardo, Laurel giggles. Looking at his profile picture she could see herself curling up in his arms with a good book. "Oh well, here goes nothing," she calls out into thin air.

Hi Ricardo, I'd love to connect, where have you been travelling?

Within seconds she receives a reply.

Oh, everywhere. I've lived on all seven continents but I'm currently back in the UK. How about u?

Laurel takes a break from texting to cook herself her favourite dinner, Spaghetti Bolognese. She's feeling good. Her singing voice is getting stronger with every practice session. She's confident one of the enquiries she received earlier will come off and she's texting a nice young man. What more could a woman want? Back on her phone, Laurel responds.

Wow, that's some travelling, I've only been to Europe, but I've visited Spain, Italy, and Germany. Seems I need to get my finger out to catch up with you.

Again, the reply is there within seconds, leaving Laurel wondering whether it was an algorithm, or a person behind the messages.

I'm sure you will. You just need to book and go.
Where do u live? I'm in Bretown

Ha, I wish it were that easy. Laurel says to her phone as she types her response.

I'm sure I will. One day.
I live in Stream Valley, only a few miles from you.

Perhaps we could meet then?

If you'd like?

I prefer face-to-face, what about u?

Mmm that's a bit quick. Laurel thinks, but she has a good vibe from Ricardo, so she decides to go for it.

Okay, when and where?

Let's meet halfway. There's a nice coffee shop on Bridge Street in Green Vale.

Ah, I know it well. Saturday morning, okay?

Yeh, see you then.

Laurel takes a bottle of wine from the fridge and pours herself a small glass. She doesn't drink much but today feels like it is worth celebrating.

With no more messages forthcoming from the dating app, Laurel finishes her meal and washes up. Settling down she writes her entry for the competition.

"Harriet, Harriet, where are my knickers?" Horrace shouts from the bottom of the stairs to his ever-suffering wife, currently on her hands and knees sorting out said knickers.

"Where do you think they are, Horrace?" she shouts back, astounded that he's having to ask seeing as they haven't changed their hiding place since they moved here 30 years ago.

"Erm, in the drawer?"

"Hurray," she yells. "And why are you looking for them downstairs, when you know full well, they're up here?"

"Because I don't want any old pair, I want the ones with the fishing boats on."

Horrace's voice is growing hoarse, so he stops shouting. Grabbing the handrail, he pulls himself up the stairs, slowly. Taking one step at a time, the effort of it forces him to stop every couple of steps to take a deep breath. Horrace is not a well man, being a coal miner back in the day has left him with various chest complaints.

Finally making it to the top of the stairs, he stops and stares at his beloved wife. Her once golden locks now thin and matted, sticking up at all angles from her head. The love he feels for her just as strong as the first day they met.

"Harriet, what are you doing?" He asks as he wanders into the bedroom and eases himself onto the bed.

"Looking for your knickers with the fishing boats on."

"Why on earth are you doing that?"

"Because, dear Horrace, it's Wednesday. You always wear the knickers with the fishing boats on, on a Wednesday." She answers, her eyes never having left the pile of knickers on the floor in front of her.

"Do I, dear?"

"Yes, you do. You have done since the day we were married. You say they remind you of the first night of our honeymoon when we were on the fishing boat in Poole harbour."

Harriet stops for a moment and reminisces about that day. The food, the music, their vows, and the fishing boat. "Oh, that fishing boat." She sighs to herself as the memories flash before her eyes. The trouble they got into when the fisherman caught them with their knickers round their ankles. Harriet titters to herself when a thud brings her out of her reverie. *Silly old fool*, she curses to herself, *it's just the wind banging the windows*.

Looking up from the pile of knickers she hears Horrace call her name.

"Harriet, have you found them yet?" he asks.

She turns to face him. "No, love, they aren't ... oh, Horace," she laughs as she puts her hand to her mouth, "you're wearing them."

Here goes nothing. Laurel mutters as she prints the short story and the competition entry form out. Filling in all the usual details including all the marketing guff, she grabs her bag and sticks a first-class stamp on the envelope. Before work the next day, Laurel stops at the post box and slides the envelope into its mouth. She has forgotten all about the competition as she steps onto the bus to take her to the office.

To find out what happens to Laurel, visit <https://lisambillingham.com/> to order your signed paperback copy or <https://books2read.com/u/bWYvEY> for an eBook version.

About the Author

Hi, I'm Lisa. I hope you enjoyed reading this romance novella. If you did, please leave me a review, or send me some feedback.

Here's a bit about me.

I am an author, inspirational speaker, and intuitive.

In 2020, I wrote my debut novel, *Katie, A New Chapter*, a self-help work of fiction based on my life experiences. I touch on mental health, abuse, and trauma in my story.

Working recently in a prison I have seen many breakthroughs with the men. I am also proud to say the book has helped to save a life.

I love writing both for enjoyment and to facilitate the healing process for myself and others and often use writing to help channel spiritual messages. My second novel, *Tom, The Next Chapter* was published in 2022, and this, my first romance novella, in 2024.

As an inspirational speaker, I openly share my story and speak on topics including:

- *Being your authentic self,

- *Building your confidence, and,

- *Developing good mental wellbeing.

My talks are interactive so make sure you have a pen and a piece of paper.

Very often, it only requires a small change to make all the difference in your life. I'm here to help you change the areas you feel stuck in or are struggling with. Often a

change in one area has a lasting impact on all the other areas of your life: career, health, wealth, and relationships.

In my spare time, I love to sing, walk, and read.

You can contact me at lisa@lisambillingham.com or via my website: www.lisambillingham.com

Other titles written by me:

Never Look Back Series

Book 1 - Katie, A New Chapter (2020)

Book 2 - Tom, The Next Chapter (2022)

Acknowledgements & Contacts

With thanks to:

Carol McIntyre and Lynne Thomas for being my guinea pigs and giving me pre-publication feedback.
Simon Mansel for his help with the fire research.

Here are a few professional contacts I worked with to produce this book.

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