Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Last Anniversary

Written by Liane Moriarty

Published by Penguin Books Ltd

Please note that this extract is taken from an uncorrected proof.

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

The Last Anniversary

LIANE MORIARTY



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 707 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3008, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, Block D, Rosebank Office Park,
181 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parktown North, Gauteng 2193, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published by Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited 2005
First published in Great Britain in Penguin Books 2014
001

Copyright © Liane Moriarty, 2005
All rights reserved

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Extract from 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' by Dylan Thomas, from *Collected Poems* (published by Dent), reprinted with kind permission of David Higham Associates Limited

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

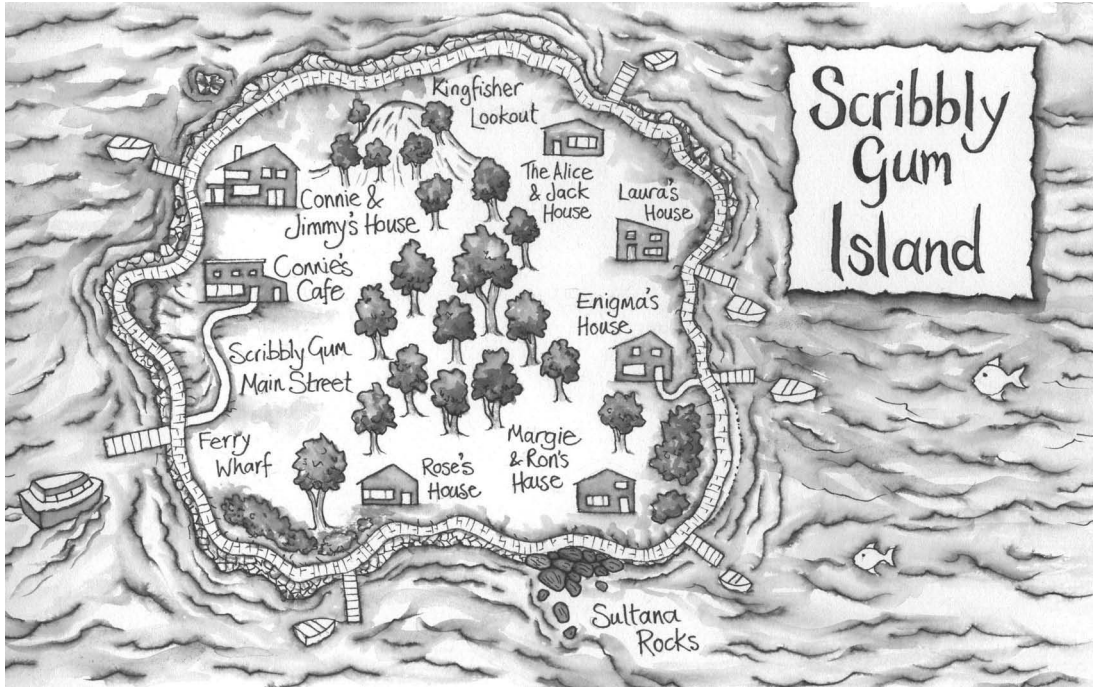
ISBN: 978–1–405–91851–0

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



Penguin Books is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council™ certified paper.

This uncorrected advance proof is made available on a confidential basis and may not be sold or otherwise circulated. The appearance and contents of this proof may not resemble the finished book and under no circumstances may it or any of its contents be reproduced before publication of the finished book without the publisher's consent.


Scribbly Gum Island
Kingfisher Lookout
The Alice & Jack House
Laura's House
Connie & Jimmy's House
Connie's Cafe
Enigma's House
Scribbly Gum Main Street
Ferry Wharf
Rose's House
Margie & Ron's House
Sultana Rocks

Chapter One

'Do you really think we can get away with it?'

'If I didn't think so, I wouldn't be suggesting it, would I?'

'We could go to jail. That's my third worst fear. First funnel-webs, then childbirth, then jail.'

'Neither of us is going to jail, you ninny. One day we'll be sweet little old ladies and we'll probably forget that it didn't happen the way we said it did.'

'I can't imagine us as sweet little old ladies.'

'It does seem unlikely.'

Chapter Two

'A marriage is hard work and sometimes it's a bit of a bore. It's like housework. It's never finished. You've just got to grit your teeth and keep working away at it, day after day. Of course, the men don't work as hard at it as we do, but that's men for you, isn't it? They're not much good at housework either. Well, they weren't in my day. Of course, these days they cook, vacuum, change nappies – the lot! Still don't get equal pay in the workforce, though, do you? You've got a long way to go, you girls. Not doing much about it, though, are you?'

'Yes, OK, Aunt Connie, but the thing is I'm not interested in marriage in *general*. I'm interested in Alice and Jack's marriage. How would you describe it? Ordinary? Extraordinary? Cast your mind back! Even the tiniest detail would be helpful. Did they love each other, do you think?'

'Love! Pfff! I'll tell you something, something important. Write this down. You ready?'

'Yes, yes, I'm ready.'

'Love is a decision.'

'Love is a decision?'

'That's right. A decision. Not a feeling. That's what you young people don't realise. That's why you're always off

divorcing each other. No offence, dear. Now, turn that silly tape-recorder off and I'll make you some cinnamon toast.'

'I'm stuffed full of food, Aunt Connie. Really. Look, I have to say you haven't been at all helpful. See, the Munro Baby Mystery is like a jigsaw puzzle. You're a piece of the puzzle. If I found all the pieces I could actually solve it. Imagine that! After all this time. Wouldn't you like that? Wouldn't that be *fascinating*?'

'Oh, Veronika, love, why don't you just get a job? A good steady job in a bank, perhaps.'

Chapter Three

Out of the blue, just after the Easter break, Sophie Honeywell's ex-boyfriend, Thomas Gordon, calls her at work to ask if they can meet for a drink. He says he needs to talk to her about something 'quite serious'.

'But nothing *too* serious, I hope?' Sophie hears herself sounding bright and brittle. Her heart beats fast, as if she's just had a bad fright, and in fact it did give her a start when she heard that familiar but now strange voice. This is the first time they've spoken since their very messy break-up three years ago.

'Nobody's died, I hope?' she asks, all hale and hearty.

What a stupid thing to say. She never says that sort of thing. It must be nerves.

There is a pause and then Thomas says, 'Well, yes, actually, somebody has died.'

Sophie hits the palm of her hand against the side of her head. She has a moment of dithery throat-clearing and then, just in time, she remembers the polite thing to say to bereaved people. 'Thomas,' she says gently and sadly, 'I am so sorry.'

'Yes, thank you,' replies Thomas briskly. 'So, can we meet for a drink?'

'Yes, of course we can. But, ah, well, who died?'

'I'd rather talk about it tonight.'

All of a sudden it's like they have never broken up. Why can't he just come out and *say* things? Her mouth begins to gape into one of those silent shrieks of frustration that used to characterise so many of her phone conversations with Thomas. 'But I'll be worrying all afternoon wondering who it is. Who? Who died?'

He sighs heavily and says, as if proving a point, 'My Aunt Connie.'

'Oh.' Sophie tries not to sound relieved. 'I'm sorry.' She remembers his Aunt Connie well, but the old lady must have been at least ninety and it's not as if she had ever been likely to see her again, since she and Thomas aren't together any more. Surely, after three years of stony, betrayed silence, he hasn't asked her for a drink just to tell her that his Aunt Connie has died?

'I guess it will be in the papers,' she says. 'She was something of a celebrity, wasn't she?'

'Yes, it probably will. Look, I'll see you tonight. It will be nice to catch up. So, the Regent at six. Are you right to get there?'

The Regent is a five-minute walk from her office. 'Yes, of course. I'll see you then.'

She puts down the phone and slowly writes '*Thomas, 6 p.m.*' on a Post-it note and sticks it to her computer, as if there's a chance it will slip her mind. She had forgotten his habit of worrying about how women, being such helpless, fragile creatures, could cope with transporting themselves from place to place.

That's unfair. She gives herself a mental rap across the knuckles for pretending that Thomas is sexist, when in fact he is a sweet-hearted person who is always worrying about transport arrangements for both men and women. He is like everyone's worrywart of a dad.

Of course, he is now a real dad. It seems his heart has recovered from when she 'fed it through the paper shredder' (his words, written in a drunken, pitiful email full of weird

metaphors) as he is now married to a girl called Deborah and they have a new baby, called Millie or Lily or Suzy, or something similarly cutesie.

She is only pretending not to know the baby's name. She knows perfectly well that it is Lily.

Sophie looks back at her computer screen. When Thomas called she had been in the middle of writing a memo to the Morale Committee. So far she has a heading:

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

This is how she always cheerily begins her memos to the Morale Committee. She dislikes the Morale Committee because it is a ridiculous concept (in place before she started) and its members are all so relentlessly upbeat and self-righteously whiny about the need to have more 'fun in the workplace'. But it would not do for the Human Resources Director to disband the Morale Committee. Morale would surely plummet without the Morale Committee!

She types:

☺ COMMITTEE MEMBERS! IT'S TIME TO PUT YOUR THINKING CAPS ON! ☺

Then she types: GET A LIFE YOU LOSERS.

One of the sales reps walks by her office, taps on the glass wall and calls out, 'Yo, Soph!' She calls back 'Yo, Matt!' and waves a fist in the air like a homeboy.

She is such a fraud.

She taps quickly on the delete key, thinking with pleasurable horror of the reaction if she had accidentally clicked on 'send'. Their hurt, earnest faces!

What can Thomas possibly want, after all this time?

She finds herself remembering a sugary-brown smell. It is the smell of cinnamon toast, frangipani blossoms and Mr Sheen – the smell of his Aunt Connie's house.

Sophie had been going out with Thomas for nearly a year when she decided to break up with him. The decision was the

result of weeks of agonised self-analysis. Yes, she loved him, but did she love him for the right reasons?

She knew, for example, that it was right to love a man for his kind heart, but wrong to love him for his bank account. It was fine to love him for his gorgeous blue eyes, but shallow to love him for his tanned muscles. (Unless, of course, they were uniquely *his* muscles, for example if they were as a result of his profession as a shearer or an acrobat, or from being in a wheelchair.)

But was it right or wrong to love a man for his marzipan tart? Thomas could cook like an angel and Sophie is a woman who likes her food. Watching him chop garlic could make her weak with desire, and eating a slice of his marzipan tart was equivalent to a multiple orgasm. His seafood risotto brought tears of joy to her eyes. But wasn't that a gluttonous, superficial basis for love? Especially when you sometimes secretly, shamefully wished he could just drop off the marzipan tart rather than having to stop and tell you some long, worrying story about his car registration.

And was it wrong to love someone because he was the grandson of the Munro Baby, and you'd always been just slightly obsessed with the Munro Baby Mystery? Wasn't that like loving someone because he was a member of the Royal Family, when you were really meant to fall in love with him when he was disguised as a simple peasant and then be pleasantly surprised when he turned out to be a prince?

It seemed to Sophie that she didn't love Thomas the way he deserved to be loved. He deserved to be with a woman who adored that fraught, scrunched-up expression he got whenever he had to do a difficult reverse park. He deserved a girl who thought it was cute the way he scrupulously read every line of the passenger safety card every time he flew, and took his responsibilities so seriously that when he was seated in the exit row he spent ten minutes asking a bemused flight steward questions about exactly what he'd need to do with the exit door in the unlikely event of an emergency.

Most importantly, Thomas deserved to be loved the way he loved Sophie. Once, she'd found a document on his computer called 'Sophie', which she opened of course, to find a list of reminders about how to be a good boyfriend. As if Sophie was a puzzle he could solve if he just followed the rules. It said things like: '*If S. suggests outdoor activity, don't mention possibility of rain. Pessimistic.*' '*Don't say "whatever you feel like" when S. asks about weekend plans. Irritating.*'

Reading it made Sophie cry.

Thomas was good-looking, intelligent, very sweet, and occasionally – when he relaxed – quite witty, but Sophie had begun to feel terrified that she might be unfaithful to him. Once they had been out to dinner and a waiter had said to Sophie, 'Cracked pepper with that?' and she'd met his eyes and felt such a jolt of sexual attraction she'd had to look away.

Not that she hadn't enjoyed their sex life. It was just that sex with Thomas was so very pleasant and . . . clean. While he was giving her generous amounts of patient, gentlemanly foreplay, she'd find herself thinking wistfully that she'd quite like to be thrown on the bed and ravished. Of course, if she'd ever told Thomas that he would have dutifully thrown her on the bed, carefully so as not to bump her head, no doubt with that same worried expression on his face as when he reverse-parked.

Wasn't there more to love than this friendly, slightly irritable affection? Wasn't it morally wrong to stay in a relationship if you didn't feel weak-kneed passion for your partner? Wasn't there something noble about leaving a nice comfortable relationship and heading off on a quest for The One?

This was the deluded train of thought that led Sophie to recklessly break up with the nicest man she had ever dated.

Her timing for breaking up with him had been quite bad. Quite spectacularly bad, actually. She had deliberately picked a Friday because she thought that would give him the weekend to get the worst of his shock out of the way. He was a pathologist and she didn't want to be responsible for him misdiagnosing somebody's specimen.

Unfortunately, by horrible coincidence, Thomas had his own plans for that particular Friday.

It really wasn't her fault. How was she to know they were booked on a flight to Fiji that afternoon for a surprise holiday, which would begin with a marriage proposal on a white sandy beach bathed in moonlight while a string band wearing traditional Fijian dress serenaded them? How was she to know that he'd spent fifteen thousand, four hundred and twenty-five dollars on an engagement ring? How was she to know that at least a dozen friends and family members were excitedly involved in this careful, but not exactly covert, operation? There were the girlfriends who had secretly packed her bag with her sexiest lingerie; the various people who had been recruited to water her plants; her boss, who had agreed to give her time off work.

Naturally, all these people who had been sworn to secrecy had sworn at least three other people to secrecy too. It was annoying to discover that so many people knew about her forthcoming marriage proposal before she did, but that, of course, as Thomas so passionately pointed out, was no longer relevant.

'I need to talk to you about something,' she'd said bravely, on their way to what she thought was a new seafood restaurant in Brighton, although actually they were on their way to his sister Veronika's place, who was on standby to drive them to the airport.

'Well, I need to talk to *you* about something too!' said Thomas, rather gleefully she realised later. 'But you go first,' he said generously.

So she went first, and his eager face had crumbled and cracked like a six-year-old trying not to cry after he'd scraped his knee, and Sophie had had to look out the car window at the passing traffic and press a guilty fist against her stomach.

What would have happened if *he'd* gone first?

She would have put it off a week of course, and gone to Fiji. And when he proposed she would have said yes. How could she possibly have said no? It would have been farcical, with Thomas

dolefully brushing white sand off his knee and signalling to the string band to stop playing by slicing a finger across his throat. Besides which, she loved nothing more than a romantic marriage proposal!

'I'm going to look like such a stupid fool,' he had moaned with his head down, hugging the steering wheel, after he'd pulled over in a no-stopping zone (evidence of his distraught state of mind that he didn't even check the sign) and revealed all his thwarted plans in a bitter, triumphant rush. He even pulled out the box with the ring heartbreakingly wrapped in bubble-wrap and hidden in a pair of black socks in the zippered compartment of his carry-on luggage.

'You're not going to look like a fool. *I'm* going to look like a bitch,' she had said, while she guiltily patted his hand and looked warily at that (really rather gorgeous, unfortunately) ring that had come so close to being hers and wondered if it would be in very poor taste to ask if she could try it on, just to see how it would have looked.

'Everyone loves you, Sophie,' Thomas had said bitterly. 'No matter what you do.'

She'd been flattered to hear that everybody loved her and then horrified at her own narcissism while poor Thomas was having his heart broken.

Actually, people had been upset with her, especially those involved in planning the secret proposal, as if she'd rejected them too. Thomas's sister Veronika, who was the reason Sophie had met Thomas in the first place, didn't speak to her for eleven months. (This was actually something of a relief, as Veronika could be hard work, and Sophie had found it difficult to show sufficient gratitude when Veronika magnanimously decided to forgive her.)

It seemed that Sophie had been both greedy and wasteful. Greedy for wanting something more than a perfectly nice, intelligent, good-looking man when she was in her mid-thirties and lived in Sydney, gay capital of the world. Wasteful of a perfectly lovely, expensive, carefully planned marriage proposal.

Of course, she'd got her comeuppance.

Thomas had been 'snapped up', just like his mother had cheerfully told Sophie he would be. 'Don't worry, Sophie. Some other nice girl will snap him up!' He got a refund for the Fiji holiday from a sympathetic travel agent – actually an excessively sympathetic travel agent called Deborah, who sensibly accepted his proposal just a few months later (remarkably similar in execution, except the location was Vanuatu and the string band was a string quartet).

Sophie, on the other hand, has been mortifyingly single ever since.

Over the last three years she has been on three first dates, two second dates and no third dates. She's had a drunken one-night stand after a charity ball, a drunken kiss after a fancy-dress fortieth, and a very weird sober kiss with a fat man in the hallway at a christening. (Who never called! The humiliation!) She has now been celibate for two years and sex has begun to seem as unlikely a possibility as when it was first explained to her in a disturbingly graphic drawing by Ann-Marie Morton when they were in second grade.

In spite of conscientiously accepting every social invitation, going to parties where she knows no one except the host, joining clubs and taking part in sporty, unpleasant activities likely to appeal to available men, she hasn't even come close to beginning a new relationship. It is laughable to think she'd been worried about being unfaithful to Thomas – just who did she think she'd be unfaithful with?

Last month, terrifyingly, she turned thirty-nine. It seems to make no difference that she still feels exactly the same person as when she was twenty-five, the birthdays just keep right on coming. She is actually going to turn forty – such a dry, grown-up-sounding age – and she's still going to be Sophie.

Lately, her biological clock, which has never given her much trouble before, has begun to tick with an increasingly feverish 'Umm, excuse me, don't you think you'd better hurry up, hurry up, hurry up?' She has caught herself staring at babies in strollers

with the same resentful, lustful look that mid-life-crisis men give teenage girls. When she heard the news about Thomas having a baby, she said, 'Oh that's lovely', and then hours later, in the bath, she burst into tears and said out loud, 'You *idiot*.'

But by the next day her natural optimistic state had re-asserted itself. She has a great career and a fabulous social life. She is hardly a lonely old spinster with a cat. She is out nearly every night of the week and she doesn't even like cats. Everything will be fine. He is just around the corner. He will turn up when she least expects him.

In fact, perhaps Thomas wants to see her tonight so he can set her up with a tall, dark, handsome friend? Ha. Funny. At least if she never finds anyone she'll always be able to laugh at her own hilarious wit while she eats baked beans on toast.

She wonders if Thomas will be smug. Surely even a man as sweet-natured as him would have to feel a bit pleased at the way things have turned out. Well, let him be smug, thinks Sophie as she goes back to typing her lively memo to the Morale Committee. (☺ *A fun idea from Fran!* ☺) You tore his heart to shreds. Be generous. Let him be smug.