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...

I Love You, Goodbye

Written by Cynthia Rogerson

Published by Black and White Publishing

All text is copyright © of the author

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

Evanton

There is a small town in the Highlands of Scotland that from space looks like nothing, not even a dot. From Fyrish Hill, it looks like debris in a crevice, grey stone houses, snaking down towards the firth. Entering the town at twilight, it becomes the Shire. Cosily lit windows, with smoke curling from chimneys. Who wouldn't want to make their home here? But just a little bit closer, pressing up to these windows, things are not quite so idyllic. Of course not. And not only does every picturesque lane have the requisite unhappiness, every house does too. And every person.

Picturesque happiness being a hollow thing, Evantonians do not yearn for it. In any case, they are too busy to notice the absence of it. Look at them – there they are, living their lives, along with everyone else in the world. And in Inverness, which is two firths from Evanton, there is Ania, the Relate marriage counsellor, sitting in her apricot office at the top of the building. Very like a priest waiting in the dark of his confessional box.

Ania

What else matters, what else is truly interesting and mysterious, but love? Death, of course, but even that is hastened or hindered by love. And death of love is a uniquely human tragedy. There must be an evolutionary purpose for our grief at the end of love. I don't know what it is.

But the death of love brings me my livelihood, so I won't bemoan it too much. I have dipped into the intimate death throes of more than five hundred marriages now – a big tally for someone not yet thirty, but then I heard my calling early, and have devoted my life to resuscitating love. Marriage counselling is an art, and more. I am a doctor for terminally ill marriages. I station myself in the emergency room of relationships, and later, if I have failed, in the hospice. Above all, I am a philosopher of love.

You will be aware, if you are literary, that all happy families are alike, while all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. I cannot add to this. People are lonely, they meet someone, they fall in love. They're better people, in love, and are quite easy to love back. In love, people are all the same. Love, during this phase, relies utterly on ignorance and unfamiliarity. As W. Somerset Maugham said, 'Love is what happens to a man and a woman who do not know each other.'

As for all my clients, by the time I meet them, often a quarter of a century into their marriages, it is different. You've no idea

how fascinating it is, to observe daily how humans keep finding new ways to hurt each other. They *know* each other now. They have stopped trying; they have forgotten all their fears of loneliness and yearn for . . . a multitude of things that love has not, so far, yielded. Love has disappointed them, as it must.

I was born understanding this, but it didn't stop me marrying Ian. I hid my foreknowledge from him. What would be the point of spoiling his illusion? It would be like telling a two-year-old he will certainly die one day.

Love dies. There you go! It shouldn't surprise anyone, but it hits husbands and wives like cannon balls anyway. Most people think they've failed, as if breaking up wasn't inevitable. People whose love lasts a lifetime are aberrations. For the rest of us, even during the first kiss we taste the bittersweet end. And when we're honest, isn't heartbreak as exquisitely intense as the first flush of yearning? There are more poems and songs about falling out of love, than into love. The pain is certainly better than the dull plod of the middle phase. And when a relationship ends, well and truly, there's no more suspense about how it will end. There's anguish, but there is also a small amount of relief in knowing there can be no more. And then one can return to imagining that one will find someone even better.

If there were a government office called the Department of Human Love, a big pink room full of soft-bosomed women and cuddly dark-eyed men, they'd be inundated with complaints and questions every day. People would be suing Love for unimaginable damages.

But they can't, so they come to me.

I always have a moment, after they ring the doorbell, of closing my eyes and praying. Let me help these sore hearts, I ask no one in particular – the swirling atmosphere beyond the stars, the air in this room, the atoms of my own body. It calms me, asking for help. Then I open the door and let them in.

And there it is. There's the doorbell now.

Help me.

Rose

This is how I talk to my husband: 'So, get dressed! We're late for our Relate appointment. Your blue shirt's ironed. Not there, in the closet! Uhuh. And your shoes are needing replaced, look at the soles! Go on Monday to Clarks, they've a sale on.'

As if he's six years old. I can't remember when this started, this kind of patronizing impatience, this bossiness, but the momentum is powerful and now I can't stop even though I'd kill myself if I heard myself speak to me like this.

'I thought you said they had no appointments?' says Harry petulantly, as a six-year-old must, who wants to gain independence from his mother.

'God, do you never listen? I told you. They had a cancellation. We see Ania at eight o'clock.'

'Ania?'

'Yes, Ania.'

'Kind of like the sound of that. Foreign, but kind of soothing and wholesome. Classy. Polish?'

'How should I know? Shut up and get dressed.' Aren't I awful? I hate myself.

'A date with Ania. Yes! What should I wear? My blue shirt with those new black jeans? Those jeans aren't too naff are they?'

'Anything that's not your y-fronts. God you must be the last man in Britain to wear those. Amazing you can still buy them.'

‘Do you not find them sexy then? I know these ones are kind of baggy and grey, but I could put on tighter newer ones, from Marks.’

‘Right, as if that’d make a difference. Like anything would make a difference.’

‘If you wore a nice thong from time to time, it might make a difference,’ says my husband.

Pause, while I yank a brush through my hair and scowl. I am uglier and older tonight than usual. That is what my husband does to me. Uglifies me. A door closes down the hall, and I suddenly remember that I am also a terrible mother, as well as a terrible wife. He appears silently.

‘Sam! Sam, dear, there’s some dinner in the oven, I’ve left it on low. Just mind you switch it off after, right?’

‘Where yous going?’

‘Just out for a quick drink with friends. Won’t be long, promise. Do you mind? You’ll be alright, won’t you? I’ll leave my phone on.’

‘Aye, course I’ll be alright. Stay out all night if yous want.’

‘Sam, don’t be like that. Come back and give me a kiss. Sam!’

But he’s gone back to his room, and there is my husband, standing in his y-fronts, with his white hairy belly protruding, saying: ‘And I really do like that name. Ania.’

So we get in the car and head off. I spot couples everywhere, and none of them look like they’re headed for a Relate date. They all look normal. They hold hands, and laugh. I bet they have songs that are their own songs. We never had a song. I don’t know how, but we missed out on that stage. I wonder if marriages always happen in the same sequence, and whether it’s too late now to get a song. I think it probably is. It’s a lovely evening, but the loveliness is wasted on me. This grates too, this inability to enjoy the loveliness of the evening.

‘Stop the car, I see it. But wait, do you think that’s it? It says forty-seven on the door, it must be. But it looks just like a house.’

‘Of course. They probably try not to draw attention to it,’ says my sensible Harry, who has spent his life avoiding attention.

I feel strange, getting out of the car with Harry, who drives me insane, who drives me to infidelity and ugliness, but who is my familiar Harry. I catch his eye and a giggle begins to rise from my belly – there is cosiness to our own private hell. It contains many unpleasant emotions, but not uneasiness. But there's that momentum of antagonism again – habitual anger is a bitch to shift, even when it's not actually present. It seems to hold its shape even when it's empty.

'Ring the bell. Quick!' I bark, since he's reached the door first.

No noise at all, but there's a light on the top floor.

'You're blushing,' he points out.

'I'm embarrassed. It's the appropriate response to the situation. You would blush too if you were normal.'

'Yeah, like a normal man would've married you.'

'Fuck off,' I say automatically. 'And listen, we are not telling Ania about our sex life, right? Nothing about sex. I know what they're like . . . these therapist types. Feed on the intimate details of strangers' lives. No sex,' I hiss.

'Ok. No problem. No sex.'

'Ever.'

'No sex ever? You wish.'

And then the door opens. My heart is pounding, like it really is a date. I smile inappropriately, as if I'm falling in love.

'Good evening,' says an unlined young woman. I am fascinated by smooth skin these days. Her eyes shine, as if she knows us and is delighted.

'You must be Rose and Harry. I'm Ania, come in!'

Harry must be in love too, he has gone all pink and speechless.

Then he blurts out in his own inappropriate way: 'You have an unusual name, Ania.'

She turns and says: 'Yes. My father – he is Polish.'

Harry just stares – she is very pretty. In an anaemic way.

'Ania is a Polish name. Well, actually, it is a Polish way of saying Anka, another Polish name,' she says very slowly, like

she's sussed already how slow Harry is. 'Which is my real name.'

'Polish!' he says, as if being Polish is like being from Mars.

'Yes, but I've always lived in Evanton. And my husband, he is from Evanton too,' she says almost defensively.

'We live in Evanton too! We've just moved there from Leith.'

'We're neighbours then,' she says coolly.

'Whereabouts in the village are you?'

Ania freezes for a second; there's probably some protocol where they use false names and never give out contact details, in case some estranged and deranged spouse seeks revenge.

'Harry! Don't be so nosey. Sorry, Ania.'

Ania pauses, then shakes her head once in a measured, assessing way. A woman of restraint and order. She'll hate me.

'Not far from you.'

'Amazing! And we never see each other! Isn't that just incredible?' says Harry.

'What an amazing coincidence!' I say.

We cannot stop ourselves; we are in competing gush mode. I feel self-loathing hover a millimetre away, the way it does at parties when I suddenly hear my own loud laugh and notice I am sloshing my fourth wine on the carpet, while dancing to music I hate. Abba.

'I think we probably do see each other all the time,' says Ania in a kind way, not at all my kind of irritated contradiction. 'We must. Evanton is so small. We see each other, but never notice.'

This is said with such calm certainty, and a kind of eerie professional indifference, we are both silenced, and follow this fair vision up two flights of stairs. Past closed office doors, past abstract watercolours, into an attic room painted apricot. Three gorgeous soft armchairs face each other. No furniture for more than one person. I choose a chair first, as if there's a race. I haven't been this nervous, or had this much fun with my husband, for years. Not since that time I thought his secretary fancied him.

'Now, make yourselves comfortable,' says Ania. Her voice is

warm and low and even. No accent, but there is something not quite Scottish about it. Or maybe her name has predisposed me to notice foreignness.

'My goodness, this is lovely. Such a comfy chair! And what a lovely colour on the walls!' I'm still gushing. I can't help it. I want Ania to like me. To be on my side.

'Thank you! I like people to feel at home here. Now, we have an hour, shall we get down to it?'

'Definitely,' says my husband in an uncharacteristically masterful way.

'Good. I believe in cutting straight to the root of the matter, so if you'd like to each tell me what you think the problem is, we can begin to fix it. What seems to be the main issue? You first, Harry. What makes you most unhappy about your marriage?'

'Our sex life,' says Harry.