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...

Ellie Andrews Has Second Thoughts

Written by Ruth Saberton

Published by Orion

All text is copyright © of the author

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

ELLIE ANDREWS HAS SECOND THOUGHTS

Ruth Saberton



An Orion paperback

First published in Great Britain in 2011
by Orion
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Ruth Saberton 2011

The right of Ruth Saberton to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4091-3549-4

Typeset at the Spartan Press Ltd,
Lymington, Hants

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Mackays,
Chatham, Kent

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

www.orionbooks.co.uk

20 August 2011

6.23 a.m.

I'm having a fat day.

Not the type when I pig out on the sofa eating my way through all the crumbs furring the bottom of the biscuit tin (because everyone knows the bits don't add up). I'm not even having the kind of fat day when I catch a glimpse of my thighs in the glare of changing room lights and desperately tear off to buy some Spanx.

No, it's worse than that because this is a *seriously* fat day, and although it's not even half past six in the morning, I've already scoffed enough to double as a sumo wrestler. In fact, I'm sure I can feel my stomach growing with each passing minute, swelling and straining like a scene from *Alien*.

Well, it's too late to worry now. I might as well carry on eating seeing as I've started. Besides, I'm going to need my strength today. So instead of following a workout DVD for a sweaty hour, I exercise my biceps by yanking open the freezer and lifting out some Häagen-Dazs. Walking to the drawer to fetch a spoon has to burn some calories too, right? You see, I really have thought long and hard about losing weight for today.

Honestly, since the small diamond solitaire was slipped on to my finger, I haven't thought about much else.

At least I've tried not to . . .

In a frenzy of despair I polish off some left-over pizza and then make a round of toast and Marmite.

I promised myself faithfully that by today I'd be a svelte size eight and have better abs than Gavin Henson. I've had months of endless dieting time, weeks to discover a passion for running and a love of salads. I'd sworn that chocolate would never again pass my lips and vegging out in front of the telly would be just a memory. I'd start tomorrow, wouldn't I?

Except that *tomorrow* never actually came, and now it's *today*, the day I've had circled on the calendar for months. The sunny August day when I'm to be shoehorned into lacy underwear, poured into ivory silk and expected to look like a supermodel. If it weren't so desperate it would actually be funny. Even Harry Potter couldn't achieve that kind of transformation.

I close my eyes and experience for the millionth time a plunging elevator sensation. All we've done for months, the love of my life and I, is plan this wedding. We hardly ever see each other without the wedding planner in tow and I can barely remember the last time we had mad, passionate sex.

Or any kind of sex, actually, now I come to think of it . . .

If I could turn back time, would I still be doing this?

6.28 a.m.

'Morning, Ellie,' chirrups my housemate and best friend Samantha, bustling into the kitchen like a dreadlocked sunbeam and whacking four thick slices of Mother's Pride in the toaster. 'You're up early! Excited, huh?'

'Mmm,' I reply. That's one way of describing this piranhas-chewing-on-my-intestines sensation.

'I was going to bring you breakfast in bed,' she continues, attacking the Nutella with a spoon. 'How does smoked salmon with scrambled eggs sound? And maybe a very small glass of champagne? Not too much though, babes, nobody wants to see a pissed bride.'

'I'm fine for breakfast, thanks.' I slap a virtuous expression on to my face. 'I want to fit into my dress.'

'You're not still dieting?' Sam wrinkles her nose. 'Honestly, Ellie, I don't know why you bother.'

'Err, because I need to squeeze my size twelve self into a size eight wedding dress?'

She rolls her eyes. 'You're such a muppet. Why didn't you just buy a bigger size? Dieting is pointless.'

Right. Like Sam Delamere knows anything about dieting. She makes Victoria Beckham look hefty.

'Anyway,' continues Sam, whacking chocolate spread an inch thick on to her toast, 'you're not fat. I was thinking you look really slim this morning.'

'There's an explanation for that.' I peel down my pyjama bottoms to reveal a gargantuan pair of control pants. 'Ta-da!'

'Bloody hell!' Sam sprays toast and Nutella across the kitchen. 'What are those? They're hideous! Tell me you're not wearing them under your wedding dress? Your circulation will be cut off. Actually, never mind your circulation. You don't seriously think you'll get it tonight wearing those? He'll need a crowbar to get into them!'

The pants are practically melded to my skin, a marvel indeed of modern underwear engineering. And yes, they bloody kill, but I wore them all night and I must surely have dropped a dress size by now.

'This is the latest in slimming technology,' I say proudly. 'Bum bra and thinning pants combined.'

Sam shakes her head. 'Ellie Andrews, you're mental. You're about to get married to a man who adores every inch of you. Don't you think he knows what's under the wedding dress by now?'

That's thin people for you. They just don't get it.

'I want today to be about me,' I say. 'I want people to look at me and think I look beautiful, or at least as good as my sisters.'

Sam rolls her eyes again, because she's heard this lament a few thousand times before. We met as first years at St Hilda's School for Girls, hiding beneath the coats in the cloakroom in a desperate attempt to skive PE. A mutual love of Robbie Williams and loathing of lacrosse sealed a sacred bond and now, years on, we share a house in Taply-on-Thames and argue over who is actually going to marry George Clooney.

And just in case you're wondering, George isn't the lucky man.

'Not this again,' groans Sam. 'Those sisters of yours are more plastic than Barbie! Don't beat yourself up about not looking like them.'

I pull a face, because this is easy for Sam to say. If *she'd* grown up with four sisters who make Lily Cole look fat and ugly, Sam might have the McCain factory's worth of chips on her shoulder too. Tall and leggy, with long manes of blonde hair, hourglass figures and creamy skin, my elder sisters have the ability to command attention wherever they go, and have earned themselves the nickname 'the Amazing Andrews'. Being short and curvy, with curly brown hair and freckles, I've given up trying

to compete with them. I like to think I make an interesting contrast.

'Not another word about your sisters,' scolds Sam, adding her plate to the mound of dishes in the sink. 'You've got a million times more personality than any of them. You're funny, you're clever and you are *not* fat. You're sexy and curvy. Men adore women like you!'

I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the glass conservatory doors, but I can't say I recognise the person Sam's describing. The girl who stares dubiously back has wild corkscrew hair and hides her body under a billowing dressing gown. I don't want to be funny and clever and have a good personality. That's just compensation for not being beautiful and thin. After all, no one tells Kate Moss how clever she is, do they?

Sam shakes her head. 'You'll never believe me, no matter how many times I try to tell you. Talk about being screwed up by your family! Well, bugger them. This is *your* day and you're bloody well going to enjoy every minute of it. You're about to get married to a lovely man who totally worships you.'

Just why my fiancé loves me is one of life's great mysteries. Of course I'm delighted he does and I was over the moon when he proposed, but recently I've been starting to wonder if we're doing the right thing. After all, there's more to a marriage than frilly frocks and a finger buffet.

'I really hope I'm doing the right thing,' I say nervously, as the stomach piranhas return for another munch.

'Ellie! Get a grip! Of course you are. Will you please go upstairs and start getting ready?' Sam places her hand in the small of my back and gives me a shove. 'We've got

loads to do before the hair and beauty girls arrive and Poppy turns up with the flowers. Why don't you go and run yourself a relaxing bubble bath and leave everything to me? I'll even crack open some champagne so we can celebrate your last morning as a single girl.'

My last morning as a single girl. Oh. My. God.

In seven and a half hours I'll be following in my sisters' footsteps down the aisle of St Jude's, Taply-on-Thames. An hour later and I'll be married.

I'll never be able to eat toast in bed again or snog another man.

Not that I want to snog another man. But eating toast in bed's a different thing entirely . . .

'Don't look so worried, it's not as though you haven't had enough practice at weddings,' Sam points out, misreading the terror on my face. 'You've been a bridesmaid four times, remember?'

As if anyone who's been forced to wear sickly pastel satin four times could *ever* forget it.

'Have a swig of this,' she orders, shoving a foaming champagne flute into my hand. Unfortunately, the manicurist has Super-Glued talons on to my own bitten stumps and, like a cat that's lost its whiskers, my poor fingers haven't a clue where they begin. Acrylic scrapes against the icy glass and my hand closes around thin air.

The champagne flute hits the slate floor, showering my French-manicured toes with glass and icy liquid.

I stare down, aghast. The pair of champagne flutes was an early wedding present and now only one remains intact. Is this an omen?

'Of course it bloody isn't.' Sam is scathing when I voice this thought. 'Get a grip, Ellie! Everything's going to be

fine. I solemnly swear as your chief bridesmaid that I've got everything under control, so just relax.'

I'd be more relaxed walking on hot coals. My experience of weddings hasn't exactly been positive. The fact that I'm getting married at all is a triumph of hope over experience.

'Give me that,' I say, taking the champagne bottle with slightly too much force. 'I need a drink.'

Sam laughs, but her green eyes are worried.

As I climb the stairs, swigging champagne from the neck of the bottle, I reflect that in many ways if it hadn't been for Sam I might not be getting married at all. Things could have turned out very differently.

I shut my bedroom door, rest my head against the cool wood and close my eyes. The events that have led me to this point flicker through my mind like a badly edited home movie. Have I made the right choices? Have I chosen the right man? Am I doing the right thing? Or will I wake up tomorrow and regret this?

Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.

Breathe, Ellie, breathe!

The alarm clock says it's not even seven a.m. yet. Outside the day is all pearly new and the birds are singing. There's hours to go before I leave for the church.

Plenty of time if I decided to change my mind.

Not that I'm going to change my mind. That's just the nerves talking. I haven't got any more doubts about getting married today than any other bride would have. Every girl's allowed a few nerves on her wedding day. It's only natural to be a bit apprehensive, because getting married is probably the biggest and most important decision anyone ever makes. I'm choosing my life partner. The rest of my

life is at stake. If I *wasn't* nervous, there'd be something wrong with me.

This churning feeling *is* totally normal and there's a perfectly good cure for it. Thank goodness Sam opened the Moët. A few more mouthfuls of champagne and all my nerves will vanish . . .

6.55 a.m.

With the door of my bedroom firmly shut and the best part of a third of a bottle of Moët inside me, I start to feel slightly less panic-stricken. Perching on the bed, I try to pretend this is just an average Saturday morning. In a moment I'll meander downstairs for a bacon sarnie and watch a bit of kids' TV before trawling round the shops with Poppy and enjoying lunch in The Riverman pub. For a moment such is the power of my imagination that I'm almost looking forward to a bowl of cheese-smothered nachos and a glass of icy Chardonnay, until I catch sight of my wedding dress hanging on the outside of the wardrobe and my heart starts racing again.

Oh Lord. This really is it. I'm getting married, really and truly married. At this very moment, all our nearest and dearest are en route for Taply-on-Thames, clutching presents from the long list we made. Like someone in a dream, I'd agreed that I needed a Dyson, and of course I couldn't live without a pasta maker, when actually I was more than happy with my ancient Hoover and diet of tinned spaghetti.

A panicky sweat breaks out between my shoulder blades. What was I thinking by adding a pasta maker to my list? I've never felt the need to make pasta *before* getting married, so what's going to change afterwards?

The answer to this, of course, is everything. I've seen each of my sisters get married and transform from cocktail-swilling party-goers into goddesses so domesticated that Nigella looks slovenly in comparison. Then, after the wedding and the smart dinner parties, along come the chubby babies and endless conversations about first teeth and first steps, followed shortly by fretting about catchment areas and waiting lists.

I feel faint. I can't have a baby! I'm not old enough for all that responsibility. I wouldn't know where to begin. Besides, I'm rubbish at looking after things. I even killed the school stick insects when it was my turn to take them home for half-term. So what if I was only five and didn't realise it wasn't conducive to their health to give them a bath? I haven't changed *that* much since then. Goodness knows what damage I could do to a poor baby.

I chew my new acrylic thumbnail. Everything's got out of hand. I never really wanted a big church do and the guest list longer than Mr Tickle's arm. This wedding has taken on a life of its own, and although it's exactly what my mother wanted, I'm having panic attacks on an hourly basis. I don't need six bridesmaids, a ring bearer or a five-course reception.

I take another gulp of champagne and bubbles shoot up my nose, making me cough. Great. Now I'm too stressed even to drink.

Putting the champagne aside, I fall backwards on to my bed, yelping with pain when my head encounters something hard. Sitting up quickly, I discover I've walloped my skull on my sister's wedding album, loaned to me as a shining example of what the photographer will also do for us. This album is thicker than *War and Peace,* edged with

brass and studded with a huge treasure-chest-style lock, the imprint of which is now stamped into my head.

Maybe I can postpone the wedding due to head trauma?

I pick the album up and the heavy volume falls open at one of the group photos. There, beneath the tissue paper, is a scene already seared into my memory – for all the wrong reasons. My sister Annabelle is beaming into the lens, all big blue eyes and golden curls, her slender hands clutching a bouquet of fat pink roses while the little flower girls tumble at her satin slippers. Our parents flank the happy couple, but my gaze is drawn to a red-cheeked bridesmaid in a tight peach frock who's trying desperately to disguise a Cheddar Gorge cleavage with her bouquet while she hides behind the other guests.

I shake my head in despair. Hadn't I tried to diet then too? How depressing. I flick through the album and pause at a photo of the wedding party, tracing one dear face with my finger, filled with regret. If I had my time again, would I do things the same way? Or would I make some very different choices?

I remember my sister's wedding day vividly. It may have been just over two years ago, but I'm still suffering from post-traumatic stress. Whenever I try to identify the precise point when my life began slipping out of control, I always return to Annabelle's wedding. Not that my life was exactly a bed of roses before that. If I'm honest, it was more like a bit of scrubby wasteland choked up with weeds and rusting tin cans, but at least they were *my* weeds and *my* tin cans.

I was happy in my own way. Just how did I get from there to here?

Snapping the album shut and trying hard not to look at my own beautiful wedding dress, I recall that meltingly hot

June day when, poured into peach satin and looking more porcine than Miss Piggy, I prepared to follow my sister down the aisle . . .