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...

Full House

Written by Maeve Binchy

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.

Full House

Maeve Binchy



An Orion paperback

First published in Great Britain in 2012
by Orion Books Ltd,
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 © Maeve Binchy 2012

The right of Maeve Binchy 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 3661 3

Typeset at The Spartan Press Ltd,
Lymington, Hants

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd,
St Ives plc

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

Chapter One

It had been a long day for Dee Nolan. Up at four in the morning and a quick clear-up of the kitchen, then down to the end of St Jarlath's Crescent to wait for Josie. Josie had a van and would come by at four-thirty on the dot. The van was full of vacuums and cleaning materials.

Josie and Dee were J.D. Contract Cleaners.

From five to seven they cleaned offices. Then they went to apartment blocks and did halls, stairs and landings. Dee liked that, they weren't messy like the offices that she had to clean. It was only a question of running a Dyson over a smooth thick carpet and wiping the skirting boards.

Josie would sing old music-hall songs to herself, it helped the hours go by. Dee would clean on cheerfully and imagine to herself what it must be like to live or work in the places she cleaned.

Sometimes she knew what it was like to live in such comfort because J.D. Contract Cleaners did work in people's homes from nine to one

o'clock. They had more keys than a jailer, and they found the places in varying degrees of mess. Like that woman Sonia, who was a real tramp. Her clothes were all over the place. They had once found her bra up on the light shade. She always left wet towels in a puddle on the bathroom floor. She seemed to eat food all over the house, there were dirty plates in every room.

She also left little notes.

Ladies

Please be sweethearts and take all the dirty sheets and things to the launderette down the road for a service wash. Thank you so much, you are such angels . . .

She had never seen them, met them, thanked them, or bought them a Christmas drink. The money was paid by a direct debit from the bank. There must be rich parents somewhere. Some people had it very easy.

Then there was Miss Mason. She cleaned up before the cleaners arrived. They could spend real time polishing up her lovely sideboard until it gleamed, then arranging her glassware on it. Miss Mason was retired and lonely, and she loved the chat as much – if not more than –

the cleaning. She knew all about Dee's husband, Liam, and the three children, Rosie, Anthony and Helen. And she knew all about Josie's husband, Harry, who played in a band, and the dog Pepper who was the light of Josie's life.

There were other people they worked for who were almost unknown. There was that one who was on television. People would be very surprised if they knew how many vodka bottles Josie and Dee took from *her* apartment to the recycling bin . . .

That was eight hours' cleaning work a day. And at the minimum wage. It didn't matter that they had a van and business cards with the name of a company on them. Other people would call to doors and offer their cleaning services at a cheaper rate. Customers were always anxious to get things cheaper, even people who lived in really expensive places.

Dee wondered about that. If she ever had a lot of money, she would be generous, pay people much higher than the minimum wage, encourage them. Or maybe she only thought that now . . .

At one o'clock Josie and Dee would go to the cut-price supermarket and fill a bag with bargains. Then they would have a bowl of soup

and a sandwich in a grand cheap place that they had found. Two small, blonde, cheerful forty-somethings. People would often smile at them and call them over to join a group. But Josie and Dee had no time for such delays. They were both keen to get home. Their day wasn't nearly over yet. They would just laugh, wave goodbye and climb into the van.

Josie would drop Dee at the end of St Jarlath's Crescent and then drive back home to walk Pepper round the park. She'd prepare some simple supper that Harry could eat whatever time he returned from whatever his musical career had called him to this time. And Dee would walk down her road to a full house.

They hadn't intended it to be a full house. Dee and Liam had thought that their children would leave home one by one and come to see them at weekends. It had started out fairly normally: Rosie got married at the age of twenty-two. But now at twenty-five she said the marriage was over, that Ronan was a pig. She was back in St Jarlath's Crescent, her home that she never should have left.

She shared the bedroom as before with her sister Helen, who was a teacher. Helen had never left home. She was a dreamy girl, full of

ideals and hopes. There was nothing that she wasn't going to do for her pupils.

Anthony had left home for a year when he went around the world like everyone did or should. He was amazed that his mother had never been to Cambodia and his father hadn't made it to Australia. Anthony was a musician. He wrote his own songs, which he accompanied on his guitar. Hour after hour they heard him at the kitchen table or in his room uploading them on to YouTube. One day, someone somewhere would hear one of his songs. That's how all the greats were discovered.

She loved them all, who wouldn't love their three children? But there were times like today when she could have done with coming home to a quiet house. Maybe put her feet up for a while until Liam came in and brought her a mug of tea. There would be no time for anything like that.

Dee Nolan, who had spent eight hours cleaning other people's places, would have to make a start on her own.

At four-thirty this morning, Dee had glimpsed a big bundle of clothes beside the washing machine. Clean, she thought, so that would mean ironing. She needed to give the fridge a bit of a clear-out before putting in all

the low-fat yoghurt that was the Bargain of the Week. She had got a piece of lamb to make an Irish stew, she would have to cut that up and slice the vegetables. That left very little time to put her feet up and have a mug of tea.

She saluted her neighbours as she headed for number sixteen.

Noel and Faith Lynch were at their garden gate. They had recently bought a house in the street just down from Noel's parents. Their little girl, Frankie, was playing at the railings. Dee wondered whether Frankie would still be living there in twenty years' time. Would her parents, like so many, never experience the strangeness but the peace of an empty nest?

Dee passed Lizzie Scarlett's house. Lizzie wasn't home. She worked day shifts in Ennio's restaurant, where her granddaughter was engaged to the son of the house, Marco. Dee had known Lizzie forever and, in the years since her husband Muttie died, Lizzie had lived quietly on her own. There would be plenty of time in that household for a feet-up and a mug of tea, Dee thought wistfully. Lizzie's children were all settled in their own homes and didn't expect her to run around after them.

In her own house everyone was sitting around the kitchen table. It was covered with

dishes. They must have all gathered for lunch. The saucepan might have held pasta, there was a ring of tomato sauce dried on it. It had dripped on to the hob and the burned bits would have to be scraped off.

Dee could see they had eaten the apple tart that she had been planning for the evening meal. There was no milk left. There had been at least a litre there this morning. There was an empty wrapper from a packet of biscuits.

'How's everyone?' she asked brightly through gritted teeth.

'Well for you, Mam, work finished for the day.'

Rosie must have come home on a late lunch break. She worked in a shopping centre doing free make-ups for clients. She would target women likely to buy the cosmetics and apply foundation, blusher and eye shadow. They got a percentage of what the customers paid for the products. It wasn't a proper living. They would have to convince a lot of women about the worth of tawny this or shiny that before they could bring home a decent wage.

'Poor Mam got up very early when we were all asleep,' Helen said, reaching out to take the last biscuit. Dee saw that the teapot was empty.

'Teachers have it made,' Rosie grumbled.

'Months of holiday every year and home in the middle of the afternoon.'

Anthony had obviously eaten some lunch too; there was an empty plate with a knife and fork on it. As usual, all she could see of Anthony was the top of his head as he bent over his iPod or whatever it was. Dee had seen a lot of Anthony's head and his hair parting over the past couple of years. She had addressed questions to it and reminded it to put its dirty clothes into the washing machine. She suggested that it might apply itself more frequently to tidying up the garden, or painting the hall door. Always Anthony's head would nod eagerly in agreement, but his eyes never left the small screen in front of him.

Dee felt very tired. She sat down at the kitchen table. Liam got up to get her some fresh tea. There was something in the way he moved that alarmed her. He was walking very slowly. There was a sense that he was taking every action very seriously, filling the kettle, rinsing the teapot.

'You're home early, Liam?' she said.

She hoped he hadn't felt sick or anything and left before the working day was over. He had a great job as an electrician for Mash Macken, a small builder. Liam had worked with Mash for

nearly twenty years. It was a solid firm, a good job, working with decent people.

She watched his strange, soldier-like movements with increasing concern.

'Mash let us all go at two o'clock. He's buying us a drink at seven, so I won't be in for supper,' he said.

'A drink? In the middle of the week?' Dee was surprised.

'That's what he said.' Liam was tight-lipped.

None of the children seemed to notice that anything was wrong. Rosie was yawning and examining her already flawless face in a magnifying mirror. Helen had her part of the table spread with brochures of Paris: she was planning a school outing. Anthony was concentrating on his texting.

'Maybe you'd bring it upstairs to me, Liam,' Dee said. At least in their bedroom they could talk.

He nodded and put two mugs on a tray.

She didn't even wait to unpack her shopping. So what if the yoghurt should go straight into the fridge, the bread into the big airtight tin. The biscuits should be put into the plastic box where they would remain for the next ten minutes until someone downstairs wanted one.

Upstairs in the bedroom that looked out on

the street, they sat in the two little chairs with the round table between them. When Dee was young her mother had said that a table with a cloth over it was the height of class in a bedroom. Especially the Master Bedroom. People still used that word to describe the front bedroom. Dee and Liam would laugh at it. Nothing very masterful about their room.

There was a big bed with built-in cupboards on either side. There were suitcases for holidays that they didn't take any more, and Dee's salsa dress for dance classes she didn't go to nowadays. She was too tired for one thing and they were too dear for another.

On the wall was a poster of Taormina in Sicily where they had spent their honeymoon and a Spanish hat they had bought in Majorca when they had the family holiday there long ago. It always made them laugh.

Today they didn't laugh as they sipped their tea. They both looked troubled.

'What is it, Liam?' Dee asked eventually.

'It's Mash. He's gone. The whole thing is over.' His face looked bleak and empty.

'Mash Macken in trouble? I don't believe it. Hasn't he a load of work?'

'Had. But people aren't paying him. Because

of the downturn. You know those fourteen townhouses we did?'

'I do, weren't they marvellous?'

'Yes, but not any more. The guy who developed them is skint. He ran off to England and left a letter for Mash saying he was sorry. Sorry? That was what we were all relying on.'

'Didn't Mash get any money in advance, like a deposit? Or anything?' Dee felt a cold lump beginning to form inside.

'You know the way it is. Mash told us straight. This guy put so much business his way and always paid up before. It would be like spitting in his face to ask him for a deposit.'

'And now look what's happened. Will he be letting people go, or giving short hours to everyone?' Dee searched his face for the answer. But she didn't need to search any longer.

'He's paying us off tonight, and he's going to sell whatever stuff he has around the yard and divide it up. It won't get much, nobody's building now. And then he's off to live with his daughter in Australia.'

'And . . . ?' Dee could barely speak.

'And we're all on the scrap heap, Dee. As from tomorrow I'm unemployed.'