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...

Dream a Little Dream

Written by Sue Moorcroft

Published by Choc Lit

All text is copyright © of the author

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

Dream a Little Dream

Sue Moorcroft



Extract:

Prologue & first chapter

Copyright © 2012 Sue Moorcroft

First published 2012 by Choc Lit Limited
Penrose House, Crawley Drive, Camberley, Surrey GU15 2AB, UK

www.choclitpublishing.com

The right of Sue Moorcroft 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 characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental

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 publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the UK such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1P 9HE

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

ISBN-978-1-906931-90-2

Liza wasn't dancing-on-the-table drunk. But she'd spent the evening getting stuck into the Friexenet with Rochelle and Angie.

And Adam's mum, Ursula Überhostess, was semaphoring disapproval across the room with frowning eyebrows. *You're drinking too much, Liza.*

Liza sent back a cheery wave. *No, I'm not. Leave me alone.*

Rochelle nudged Liza, raising her voice to be heard over the aunties and uncles singing along with Rihanna about her umberella-ella-ella. 'Do we have to stay? If it's supposed to be Adam's birthday party, why are hardly any of his mates here? I've wasted an updo on rellies.' She pulled at one of the blonde tendrils that had been allowed to escape artfully from the roll on the back of her head.

'Because it's a "do",' Angie put in, wisely. 'Friends know there'll be stacks of rellies, so they stay away.' She drained her wineglass and Rochelle immediately refilled it from the satiny black bottle of Friexenet – the fifth of the six they'd brought from Liza's fridge.

Glumly, Liza extended her glass for refilling, too. 'The others are already clubbing at Muggies, waiting for us. They keep texting.' She could see Adam, over the heads of those on the dance floor, on the stage, talking to the DJ – one of his army of cousins – and laughing. Adam wouldn't hurt the family's feelings by making an early escape. She sighed, tragically. 'I'll have to stay till Adam leaves. You two can go, though. I'll survive wasting a new dress and pin heels on a hall full of balloons, paper tablecloths, cardboard plates and homemade buffet.'

Rochelle and Angie rolled their eyes but remained in their seats under the bobbing *You are 30!* and *30 Today!* balloons as red-faced, laughing relatives gyrated on the dance floor under a glitter ball. 'Booooring,' Rochelle muttered.

'Sorry, hon.' But at least relieving boredom was one of Liza's talents. Her gaze fell on one of the blue-and-silver foil balloons. Reeling it in by its slinky satin ribbon, she put its seal to her mouth, and giggled.

Rochelle brightened immediately. ‘Yeah, Liza, do duck-voice.’

The foil made Liza’s teeth feel funny as she bit down, but soon a little puff of helium hissed out and she could put her lips over the hole and suck, until her head gave a tiny telltale spin. ‘*Hello Rochelle, hello Angie!*’ Her voice felt curiously smooth as it hit a note at least an octave higher than usual.

Angie giggled. ‘Hello, Donald Duck!’

Liza laughed – like a cartoon duck – which made Rochelle and Angie snort Friexenet bubbles of mirth. She inhaled again. ‘*Maybe I should talk duck to Ursula?*’

‘Yeah, yeah,’ they gurgled. ‘Ursula will love you talking duck!’

Squeezing the deflating balloon, Liza sucked her hardest, trying to see how high she could make her voice go. Then, suddenly, relatives began shouting and looking at her, beaming and applauding.

‘*What’s up with them?*’ she quacked.

Rochelle shook her head, unable to speak for laughing, wiping at her mascara with a fingertip.

Adam, still up on stage with Cousin DJ, boomed through the microphone. ‘Liza? Come up here, sweetheart.’

‘*Oh. Shit.*’ Suddenly duck voice didn’t seem such a good idea.

Rochelle laid her head on Angie’s shoulder and sobbed with laughter.

‘LIZA!’ Adam insisted.

‘*Oh, SHIT*!’

Clutching her stomach, Angie began to slide sideways off her chair.

And the relatives clapped harder, shouted louder, ‘Lie-zah! Lie-zah! Up on the stage, Lie-zah!’

‘You … you’ve got to!’ wept Rochelle. ‘It’s a “do”. Adam’s going to make a speech.’

And a scrum of relatives descended, arms outstretched. Liza, drink-drenched and helium-headrushed, was powerless to avoid being hoisted up the three wooden steps and left teetering at Adam’s side. He smiled, boyishly, taking her clammy hand in his warm one.

The room fell into waiting silence.

Adam pressed his lips gently to her palm then suddenly – hideously – dropped to one knee, dark brown eyes smouldering up at her. Enunciating every word, he said into the microphone, ‘Liza Reece, will you marry me?’

People whooped and began to clap. Others shushed, wanting to hear Liza say, ‘Yes!’

‘I think it’s what we both want.’ Adam held the microphone up to her lips and winked, playfully.

Liza recoiled from his hand and the spongy microphone that smelled like bad breath. In what universe did he think she’d want to be publicly cornered into relinquishing Singledom? Had she missed a discussion about radically changing her life? Tying herself to Adam? Her heart pounded in her ears, making it impossible to think logically about the audience, the occasion, or how to handle a delicate situation so as not to hurt Adam.

She just opened her mouth and the truth quacked out. ‘*No, I don’t want to marry you.*’

Chapter One

PWNsleep message board:

Tenzeds: Just found this forum. It's not long since I was diagnosed and, coincidentally(!), not long since I came out of a relationship. How easy will it be to hook up with someone new?

Sleepingmatt: Hmm, can be tricky. Try and find a hot woman who understands about meds, naps, sleep hygiene and that you're not just being dull when you need rest …

Tenzeds: Wow. That's all, huh?

Not exactly the reassurance he'd been looking for … Dominic Christy shut down the People With Narcolepsy Sleep message board and passed his iPad to Miranda. 'Can you keep hold of this for me while I have my toes twiddled? Which is going to have zero effect, by the way.' He leaned back in the seat he'd been shown to by the teen receptionist. The room was airy and warm, though October rain beat on the window. As well as two chairs and a desk, a black leather treatment couch extended diagonally into the room, its back raised. A holistic centre. So not him. 'I don't even like people touching my feet. Does reflexology tickle?'

'Of course not.' Miranda peered at him over the top of her glasses with her I'm-the-slightly-older-and-wiser-cousin expression, no less irritating now than it had been twenty years ago.

Dominic grinned. 'Nutty vegetarian idealists, like you, think anything can be cured through massage and green tea.'

'And illogical people dismiss complementary medicine without trying it.'

He narrowed his eyes. To cast a slur on his logic was to hit him where he lived. Much as he loved Miranda, he couldn't let her get away with that. And he knew exactly how to invoke cousinly rage in return … 'Reflexology's only going to help me if this therapist of

yours is young, gorgeous and has a chest like a shelf full of melons.'

But Miranda actually smiled. 'Big oops, Dominic. Big, big oops.'

And a new voice came from behind him. 'Tick one, tick two. Three, I'm afraid, is just your sad fantasy, unless you revise downward to grapefruits. But my appearance doesn't affect your treatment.'

Dominic froze as a woman stalked into his field of vision. Slight and blonde, a cross between a nurse and a nymph in dark green trousers and tunic, she seated herself in the other chair and directed a sweet smile at his cousin. 'Hello, Miranda.'

Despite dancing eyes, Miranda somehow managed to return a smile of studied sorrow. 'I apologise, Liza. My cousin can't help his shallow maleness.' She tucked Dominic's iPad under her arm. 'I'll wait in reception – unless you feel you need a chaperone?'

Liza turned to her desk. 'I'll shout if I do.'

The door closed. Dominic found himself torn between running after his cousin to demand her instant return to explain that he'd only been pretending to be a sleazebag.

And just running.

Liza consulted a clipboard, then glanced up between twin wings of blonde hair that curved to points exactly level with her chin. 'Dominic Christy?' Her voice and her smile were polite but in her eyes lurked something unspoken. Probably: *I'm being professionally polite. You try to be the same.* They were the bluest of eyes, lined with turquoise, lashes thick with mascara.

He tried to regain control of the situation. 'I can't apologise enough. You overheard macho crap meant only to infuriate my cousin. That's not the real me, I promise. You must think I'm a moron.'

'I'm Liza Reece. Shall we talk about what's brought you here, today? This is your first reflexology treatment, I gather? I'd like to get an idea of your history and circumstances, so that my treatment can be informed and the reflexes will make sense to me.'

Evidently, she'd decided that the best way to deal with his

motormouth moment was to ignore it, but he wanted to protest, *'C'mon, if you can't reassure me that I'm not a moron, at least acknowledge the possibility that I was only winding Miranda up!'* But he sighed and played it her way. 'Miranda thinks that I ought to, um, open my mind to complementary medicine. I've already been here for aromatherapy and ear candling.' Only because Miranda badgered him into it, but Liza Reece didn't need to know that. He needed the brownie points.

Her eyebrows rose, as silky and fine as a child's. 'And how did you find those therapies?'

'Interesting.' A non-reply, but better than lying. Or telling the truth, as one of the words he'd used to Miranda had been 'nonsense'. The other had been basic, but descriptive.

She began to take details about his age, past or planned operations – sending dark thoughts Miranda's way, he was tempted to say he needed a cousinectomy – was he a diabetic? Epileptic? Did he suffer from high blood pressure? She moved quickly down a questionnaire, glancing up politely for his answers, until, finally, he responded, 'Yes.'

'Sleep disorder?' She stopped, and let her gaze rest properly on his.

'I was diagnosed with narcolepsy about ten months ago.'

Instant interest blazed in her eyes. Stunning eyes, and even though he realised that her interest was engaged by his weird condition, not him, he still found himself wishing that he'd worn something newer than the comfortable shirt Natalie had bought him because she'd said its dark purple made his grey eyes look silver. When she'd been his girlfriend, not his ex.

'Narcolepsy?' Liza Reece propped her chin on her fist. 'That's a rare one. How's it affecting you?'

'It's no fun. Daytime sleep attacks are the worst, they just suck me down. And I have vivid dreams, which can be disorientating.' As if he'd taken something. A bad something.

'How's your night-time sleep?'

‘If I’m feeling OK and I follow my routines, it’s usually good. It’s forcing myself awake in the mornings that can be next to impossible.’

She made notes, frowning in concentration. ‘Isn’t there some muscle weakness associated with narcolepsy?’

‘Cataplexy.’ He nodded. ‘It’s occasional. And just a fuzzy feeling around the knees, usually, and a sort of glimmer to my vision. It’s only occasionally that my legs really disappear.’

‘Medication?’

He gave the details of what he usually referred to as ‘the yellow pills’ and ‘the white pills’, and watched her hands as she wrote. She wore no rings and her fingernails were clean and trim. White, soft skin. No watch on either delicate wrist. ‘My condition’s mild, compared to some, and I’m a bit drug averse so I try to take only what I absolutely need, and accommodate the condition with lifestyle.’

‘How does that work?’ Her blue gaze was intent. It might have been alluring to be subjected to such scrutiny if only it was him prompting it, rather than his bloody narcolepsy. But at least she was engaging with him. And if he kept on talking, she’d keep on being engaged, and he could watch the way she moved and the expressions flitting through her amazing eyes. ‘Scheduling controlled daytime naps and keeping my sleep routines regular – you’ve probably heard it called sleep hygiene. Eating well. Exercise. Avoiding soporific situations. Avoiding stress.’

The frown slotted back between her fine eyebrows. ‘But isn’t narcolepsy neurological?’

‘Yes. For me, it’s a genetic thing combined with an autoimmune disorder, where the wrong cells were killed in the part of the brain that governs sleep. In hindsight, I’ve fought mild narcolepsy symptoms for ages. Wild dreams right from childhood – you know how kids think there’s something under their bed? For me it was a goblin, slurping away. And I once did genuinely believe that a dog had eaten my homework. Variable energy, not hearing alarm clocks, being late. I went into a profession with a rotating shift pattern and a

doctor taught me to manage my sleep by splitting it. I was operating in a fast-paced environment, which is helpful, and I coped until pneumonia triggered narcolepsy and then it was like someone had cast a spell over me. I needed to sleep and sleep and I just couldn't get over it.'

'Where does the stress come in? Are you stressed?'

'Only to head-exploding stage.' The attempt to get her to smile didn't work. But, hey, she was great to look at even when she was solemn. 'High anxiety increases the frequency and intensity of episodes. Diagnosis and the end to my relationship came in quick succession, which was pretty stressful.' *Personal relationships can be affected*, it had said, in the information he'd been given. Slowly, he breathed in, willing himself not to betray by so much as a tremor how much it hurt to say the next words. 'And I had to leave my job.' Another long, slow breath. 'I'm … I was an air traffic control officer at Stansted Airport. Pilots prefer us to be awake.'

She still didn't smile. But that was refreshing, considering how many people seemed to think narcolepsy a joke. Maybe she even had a handle on how unfunny it was, because her gaze softened. 'That's tough on you.'

He kept his expression neutral. *Depression and feelings of isolation are common* … 'No matter how many naps I schedule, I can't be relied upon to operate efficiently for the necessary spans of time. Lives are at stake and controllers have to pass medicals, so I lost my licence. I'd just passed a board to become a deputy watch manager and my employers wanted to keep me but all they could offer was Air Traffic Paperpusher in the offices at the bottom of the control tower while people did my dream job, up top. Narcolepsy is no place for sissies.'

'I can see that.' Chin in hand, she clicked her pen in and out, thoughtfully. Then, when he volunteered no more, she completed the rest of the form, which only involved him in saying 'no' a lot. She flicked her hair back and put down her pen. 'So Miranda Sheldrake's your cousin but you don't share her interest in holistic medicine?'

‘I don’t, but she’s trying to convert me while she gives me and my dog houseroom for a few weeks.’

She finally managed a smile. The backs of his hands tingled as he smiled back. Not just a Pavlovian response to anyone hot and female, but in real pleasure at the way even a therapist-to-client smile made her beautiful. Her skin was fine and white, her mouth drawn by an artist, her eyes as blue as a summer sky. For the first time since Natalie did what she did, he felt a proper tug of attraction.

‘Perhaps she’s already explained that complementary medicine is exactly that. It complements allopathic medicine, it doesn’t replace it.’ She talked about pressure points, releasing blocked energy channels, stimulating circulation, removing toxins, promoting healing and relaxation. ‘I may be able to help you in terms of relaxation and wellbeing – reducing stress and improving the quality of your night-time sleep, which may help your daytime issues. But I can’t cure you and I’m not going to be able to make those irresistible daytime sleep urges magically disappear.’

‘Nothing does.’

She recommended six treatments – if he didn’t perceive a benefit in that time there wouldn’t be any point in continuing – asked him to sign her notes and then moved her clipboard to a trolley beneath large multi-coloured diagrams of feet and hands. ‘Would you like to take off your shoes and socks?’

He fumbled with his laces, feeling unexpectedly uncomfortable, even vulnerable, though she was washing her hands and not watching him. He’d received no complaints about cheesy feet or gnarly toenails but he could think of better first physical contact with a woman.

She settled him on the couch with his back angled comfortably and a light blanket across him, talking about the background music as she raised the couch via an electronic control. Her voice filled his airspace. Her eyes were on him. She saw to his comfort. He lay back to enjoy being the centre of her attention.

She began by cleansing his feet. Although he’d showered only an

hour ago, he couldn't help a thread of unease.

But part of him – a significant part – found it intensely erotic.

He knew he wasn't meant to be fascinated by her slender white hands sliding the cool wipe up his instep and between his toes, tracing the sensitive soles of his feet with long, soothing strokes, but he was suddenly glad that he had another foot waiting for the same treatment. In fact, he wished he had a couple extra.

He watched as she pumped cream from a large white dispenser, spread it between her palms, and seated herself on a stool. 'First, I'm going to relax you.' She cupped his heels. Mmm. Then, wrapping his left foot in a soft towel, she passed her cool fingers smoothly from his right ankle over the top of his foot to his toes, her thumbs sliding along the sole. Reversing, she swept her palms down from toe to heel – and the movement went straight to his groin.

In fact, the wave of pleasure nearly whooshed him vertically into the air. He actually had to grip the sides of the couch. He'd never suspected there might be an upside to sensitive feet but … *whooh*. He wasn't sure that sensation was legal.

'Try to sink into the couch and let go.' She'd obviously spotted that he hadn't relaxed. Her thumbs began circles just below his anklebone. 'Perhaps if you close your eyes and drop your head back?'

He did both, while her hands continued to sweep over his foot. Not tickling. Definitely not tickling. Whoa … Not relaxing, either. Yeah, he *liked* this. He could lie here with Liza Reece's hands on his feet until the end of time.

'And now I'm going to begin to apply pressure. Just listen to the music and enjoy. Feel free to share with me anything you're experiencing but we'll talk after the treatment.'

'Mmm.' If he shared what he was feeling, she'd scream for Miranda. He checked that the blanket covered his lap.

Her hands had warmed. She began, delicately, to manipulate his big toe and, unexpectedly, relaxation did begin to take over. He would never have anticipated that 'toe twiddling' would make him

feel as if layers of tension were flipping from him in slow motion. This was great.

She began to press his toe tips. ‘Is this pressure OK?’

He opened one lazy eye. ‘Bearing in mind how this meeting began, I’m quite relieved you’re not digging with your nails.’

She smiled. Not the formal bending of the lips she’d sent him earlier, but a fleeting grin of sparkle-eyed mischief, though her tone remained strictly professional. ‘If you feel as if I’m using my nails then you’re experiencing tenderness, which might reflect an issue in your body.’

‘OK.’ He digested that idea. ‘Is that how you diagnose—’

‘Assess.’

‘—assess, what the issues might be?’

‘Mainly, I pick up reflexes. These could feel like grittiness or bubbles, hardness or hollowness.’

Silence grew for long minutes, except for peaceful music rippling around the room. The base of his toes. The ball of his foot. As she worked along the side of his foot she paused to pay attention to one area, provoking a strange sensation. ‘That prickles.’

‘I’m picking up a reflex from your shoulder. Has it been injured?’ She paused, leaving one hand on his foot. He heard the scratch of a pen. Then her fingers went back to work.

‘I cracked my right shoulder in a fall. But it’s healed.’ That was weird. He considered and rejected the idea of Miranda feeding Liza information about his shoulder. Miranda might be utterly convinced of the efficacy of alternative medicine but cheating wasn’t her style.

Then his thoughts parted and floated away as Liza’s fingers sang their lullaby. Flesh heavy. Bones melting—

The headset was so familiar that he hardly felt its weight. The aerodrome spread out below the tower like a scale model, aircraft glowing spectacularly white in the sunlight, taxiing, or drawn up in orderly rows between the stands. Sebastian, in the left-hand seat, saw the aircraft safely between ground and air and Dominic, in the right-hand seat, watched his ‘strips’ progress across his screens as he

delivered the aircraft between runways and stands.

But he became aware of an incident. Ryanair 9272 had a medical emergency. He strained to hear the pilot, holding all other aircraft on Delta apron as he anticipated a request to return Ryanair 9272 to its stand. Sebastian stared at Dominic. Looking, not speaking.

Relief flooded over him as he saw the problem. He should be in the deputy watch manager's seat, further back. 'Ryanair 9272, stand by.' He unplugged his headset and moved to his correct station where he could see the runway over the heads of the controllers or glance left at the inbound aircraft hanging in the clear blue sky on approach.

A warm tide of satisfaction rolled over him. He was back where he belonged—

Liza rose, wiping her hands on a paper towel. She studied the tall man lying on her couch, his breathing deep and even. His streaky dark blond hair shone softly under the lights, tumbled, as if he'd combed it with his fingers. His mouth was set in a line of determination, even in repose, beneath hand-carved cheekbones. In other circumstances, she would have liked him a lot.

His chest rose. Fell. One hand twitched.

She washed her hands at the basin in the angle of the wall behind a curtain and readied a tall glass of cold water. He hadn't moved. She watched him uncertainly. She knew you weren't supposed to wake sleepwalkers. Was it the same for narcoleptic nappers?

At least Miranda was in the waiting room.

Then his eyes flickered open. For several moments she was stranded in his gaze, the pale eyes emphasised by eyelashes and brows darker than his hair.

'OK?' She smiled, not sure whether offering him the water would help him rouse, or if it would embarrass him if he had trouble gripping the glass. He seemed to be taking a little time to surface. She waited, giving him time. Letting him collect his thoughts.

Finally, he blinked, and stretched. 'Can I take you out to dinner, some time?'

Her heart gave a tiny lurch. Obviously he was back on Planet Earth. She made her voice light. ‘Sorry – I don’t. Just stay where you are for a few minutes. Perhaps you could drink this while we talk? It’ll help with detoxification.’

He took the glass of water in both hands. ‘Hydration’s always good.’

She resumed her seat beside the little desk, picking up the blue clipboard. ‘How do you feel?’

‘Great. Very relaxed. That trick with the shoulder was impressive.’

‘It’s not a trick.’ She added a smile, with an effort. ‘I picked up a reflex, explained by the fact that the shoulder was injured in the past.’ Bloody man. ‘I also picked up quite a top-of-the-head reflex, on both feet, which might correspond with your narcolepsy. I’d be interested to know whether you notice any improvement in your night-time sleep, but feel that’s more likely to happen after several treatments. Is there anything you’d like to ask me?’

His grey eyes sparkled. ‘I think I just asked you about dinner?’

Her smile fell away. ‘If you’d like to discuss your treatments, later, ring the front desk and if I’m with a client they’ll arrange for me to return your call.’ Giving him a Stables Holistic Centre card, she touched the electronic control. Gently, slowly, the couch hissed back to disembarkation height.

Dominic pulled himself upright, slipped into his socks and laced his black Timberlands. He paused on the side of the couch, then stretched, until he was on his feet, smiling down. ‘I know we got off on the wrong foot—’

‘Ho ho,’ she interpolated, obligingly, as if she hadn’t heard all the puns a thousand times.

He grinned. ‘Thank you for the feeble joke appreciation. The dinner invitation is an apology for what you overheard, which was, honestly, just the remnants of years of winding each other up—’

‘You’ve already apologised.’ She opened the door and stood aside to let him pass. ‘If you decide to have further treatments, I’ll do some reading on your condition.’ And, as he didn’t seem inclined to move

ahead of her, she stepped out to the short passageway to reception.

That did draw him out, but only to position himself between her and the waiting area. ‘You’re in a relationship?’

She looked up into his eyes and wondered if he was always this focused on what he wanted. He reminded her of a lion, tawny, stalking, watchful, but with the potential to explode into action at any time. ‘No. By choice.’

‘You’re going to be single for life?’

‘Yes. I’ll probably get a cat.’ Not a lion.

He laughed. His eyes narrowed, as if he was trying to weigh her up. ‘Implying that a cat would be better company than me isn’t enough to put me off. What else can you come up with?’ His gaze became thoughtful. ‘That I’m your patient? Then I won’t have further treatments.’ His face fell easily into a smile. His teeth were white, his cheeks smooth and his jaw line firm; his feet had been long and strong in her hands. He was easily the hottest man she’d treated this week. This month. This age.

She held his gaze. ‘It’s not because you’re my client.’

Slowly, he settled a shoulder against the wall, cocking his head to study her. ‘I won’t fall asleep and drool in my gravy. Or feed the goblin at the dinner table. Probably.’

She flushed. ‘It’s not that!’

His smile gleamed. He probably thought that her refusal was a form of flirting and she had to admit that something breathless and skippy was going on. It had been ages—

But remember Adam.

Her breath took a longer pause. Adam shouldn’t matter now but … But hideous experiences had a way of piercing vital organs with a pain that was designed to educate the brain to avoid similar situations. She made her lungs work. ‘I make a bad girlfriend.’

His eyebrows lifted. ‘I only asked you out to dinner.’

‘And I don’t do one-night stands.’

‘Look, I know what you overheard didn’t present me in my best light—’

‘No. And macho bullshit is something that no amount of reflexology can help you with.’

To be continued ….

Ebook released 1 October 2012, Paperback 7 November 2012.