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Mad About You

Written by Sinéad Moriarty

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Mad about You

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ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

To my girlfriends, for your loyalty, love and laughter

Trust: firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of
someone or something.

Oxford Dictionaries (British and World English)

I

I pulled a heavy box marked *Miscellaneous* towards me and peered inside. It was full of photo albums. There must have been ten of them, all overflowing with photos of our life together. I opened the first. There was a photo of me and James on holiday in Greece. It was almost painful to look at – we were so happy. James was beaming at the camera, tanned and fit. Beside him, I was white as milk and covered with heat-rash. Why he hadn't dumped me then and there was a mystery.

I couldn't believe how young we were in the photos, young and carefree. Well, if I was honest, I looked a bit hot and bothered. I really didn't need to get heat-rash on my first foreign holiday with my boyfriend. Who wants to have sex with a girl who hides in the shade wearing a burka? The other hotel guests kept asking if I was allergic to the sun. And the sad truth was: yes. No redhead should sunbathe in 38-degree heat; it's not how God made us. He made us to sit under umbrellas in big floppy hats, sipping cold wine. So that was what I did for the second week of our holiday and things were a lot more fun. While James surfed, water-skied and paraglided in the burning sun, I waved encouragingly from my permanent position under a large parasol, surrounded by books and a bottle of rosé. Life was good.

I turned the pages of the album. There was a photo of us on our last night in Greece – the night James proposed. I was absolutely radiant and bronzed (the miracle of fake tan). We were so happy and in love. I rested the album on my lap and

gazed around the empty, soulless room. Where were those two people? When had life got so complicated and daunting?

I flicked forward to our wedding day. Wow! Look at my waist! So slim. I was at least two sizes bigger now. I'd have to lose that extra stone this year. I wanted to get back to that slim girl. I wanted to go back to that day. I wanted to be relaxed and joyful again.

Sighing, I flipped forward to the photos of Yuri. I stopped then, overcome with emotion. There was one of us at the airport, coming through the arrivals door, holding our precious Russian angel. My sister, Babs, must have taken it. You could see Mum rushing towards me, holding a bunch of enormous 'Congratulations' balloons. Yuri was fast asleep on my shoulder; James and I were exhausted, but elated. I looked closer: Mum was crying and so am I. Remembering that day still brought tears to my eyes. I peered at Yuri's sleeping face, the baby boy from Russia who saved my sanity and gave me the gift of motherhood.

I shuddered, remembering how I had shouted at him yesterday when he vomited all over me instead of into the bag I was holding for him. The boat trip over had been a nightmare. Yuri had thrown up the whole way from Dublin to Wales. And then his little sister, Lara, had proceeded to vomit the whole way from Wales to London in the car. I thought we'd never get here. But we did.

The room was still dusty, in spite of my best efforts. All of the windows were open to air the house, but it still smelt stale and stuffy. I'd have to scrub it from top to bottom. The walls were painted magnolia and the floors had that cheap, rope-like carpet that rented houses tended to go for because it was low cost and hard-wearing. There weren't many aesthetic touches in this place. The carpet felt rough and scratchy under my toes. I'd buy some big rugs to cover it. I looked

around and sighed again. It would take a lot of work to make this house into some kind of home. It was so drab and bleak.

Panic rose in my throat. ‘Stop it, Emma,’ I scolded myself. ‘It’s not a big deal. People move all the time. James is happy about his new job. Be supportive. Don’t show him how you really feel.’ But he wasn’t here now. He’d taken the children to the park to leave me in peace to unpack – or to get away from me, my snapping and shouting and general grumpiness. I found it hard to hide my feelings, but I was trying.

It isn’t easy to give up everything you love. I’d said goodbye to our house in Dublin, which I’d spent years making into the perfect home. I’d left behind my friends, my family – although, truth be told, my younger sister lived in London and my brother was in New York, but still, I’d left my parents. And I’d given up a job I loved. It was all for James, for his new job, for his career, for his well-being and happiness. I wanted him to be happy, of course I did, especially as he’d been so miserable since the last job fiasco, but I didn’t really know anyone in London and it felt like starting all over again. The problem was, I’d loved my old life. Yuri and Lara were so happy at their playschool and everything had been perfect. Well, OK, not perfect. The last six months had been far from perfect. They’d been really stressful, actually, but now I was afraid. What if London didn’t work out? What if James didn’t succeed? What would happen to us then?

I looked at another photo to try to calm my nerves. It was one of James and me at Lucy and Donal Brady’s wedding, about four years ago. We’re all standing arm in arm, heads thrown back in laughter. My best friend marrying James’s best friend – how perfect was that? We’d all had so much fun together. Their wedding was also the day I found out I was pregnant with Lara, our little miracle. Such wonderful, happy times. I felt a lump forming in my throat.

When I told Lucy we were uprooting and moving to London, she said it would be the making of us, that we'd have all this quality time together as a family and that it would get us back on track. I wasn't so sure about that. We'd been here exactly nineteen hours and I felt desperately lonely and homesick.

I pinched myself in exasperation. 'Get a grip, you dramatic cow. You're a forty-year-old mother of two. Make the most of this new adventure. Work at it, focus on making it a success. Turn this strange house into a home. Make your marriage work. Be nice to James. Be positive. Feel the fear and do it anyway. Forget your troubles – come on, get happy . . . blah blah blah.' The positive rant wasn't working.

My phone rang. I could see from the caller ID that it was my mother. I hesitated, then answered it.

'And they call this summer!'

'Hi, Mum.' I crossed my legs and propped my chin in my hand – if it started with a complaint, it could go on for some time.

'It hasn't stopped raining since you left. Honestly, the weather in this country is a farce. We'll be getting a toonami next, mark my words. I've never seen such rain. It's all that global warning.'

'It's "tsunami" and "global warming", Mum.'

'That's what I said. And, let me tell you, putting your newspapers in a green bin isn't going to stop the ozone layer burning us all to death.'

'I thought you said the tsunami was going to kill us?'

'It'll be one or the other. Your father has me demented, dividing everything into separate bins. He now has a compost heap in the garden. Did you ever? This is a man who has only ever given nature a cursory glance while pounding around the golf course. Now he's insisting that banana skins

and tea bags and God knows what else go into this big pot he has on the windowsill. It stinks out the kitchen, not to mention looking awful. Honestly, Emma, he's getting very peculiar in his old age.'

I knew from experience that there was no point in interrupting my mother's flow. I put the phone on loudspeaker and got up to continue unpacking.

'How are my little pets? I think Yuri's grown over the summer. He's still very small, mind you, but that's the awful food they fed him in that orphanage. Hopefully, in a few years' time, he'll be as big as the other boys in his class.'

'Mum!' I warned her. 'I've told you before, don't be negative about the orphanage.'

'Why not? You told me it was a terrible place, and didn't you save him from it?'

I gritted my teeth. 'We didn't save him, he saved us. We're the ones who should be grateful.'

'Well, there's no need to bite my head off. I know how lucky we are to have him. Sure, amn't I besotted with him? He's my favourite grandchild. And before you give out, I love Lara and Sheila, too.'

'Mum! It's Shala,' I corrected her, for the millionth time. 'You know perfectly well how to pronounce it and it's annoying for Sean and Shadee that you insist on saying "Sheila". The child has a lovely Iranian name and you need to accept that.'

Mum sniffed. 'I don't know why my children couldn't call their babies nice simple names. None of this Yuri and Shala nonsense.'

'Yuri was named before we adopted him, and it's a beautiful name, and may I remind you that your daughter-in-law is Iranian and Shala is also a beautiful name?'

'I just don't see why Sean couldn't have married a nice

Irish girl. Why did he have to find an Iranian girl who doesn't want the children baptized or raised as Catholics? It breaks my heart.'

'Mum, Shadee is amazing and Sean is blissfully happy. The fact that she isn't Catholic doesn't matter. She's a great wife and mother, and a lovely person. And, besides, we all know you baptized Shala under the kitchen sink the minute they had their backs turned.'

Mum changed the subject, as she always does when she's found guilty. 'Anyway, that's enough about that. How are you, pet? All unpacked?'

I sighed. 'No, I still have about twenty boxes to go.'

'Well, chop-chop, Emma. James needs a nice home to come back to after work.'

'Thank you, Mum. I'm going as fast as I can.' I childishly made faces at the phone – this was the kind of behaviour my mother often reduced me to.

'It's important that a man wants to come home to his wife, Emma. Put a smile on your face and make the most of it. London is an exciting place to be.'

'But . . . what if we never come back to Dublin?' I said, finally admitting my biggest fear.

'If you don't, you don't,' Mum said, reassuring as always. 'Life isn't straightforward, Emma. You should know that by now.'

'I *am* aware of it. I have an adopted son and I've just moved country for my husband's job. Straightforwardness isn't something I expect or demand.'

'Marriage is all about compromise,' announced the woman who had never compromised in her life. 'You just have to get on with it. London is your home now. Make the most of it. Life is a long and bumpy road.'

I tried to keep the annoyance out of my voice. I loved

Mum to bits, but she wasn't exactly a soft shoulder when you needed one. 'All right, Mum, thanks for checking in with me. I appreciate it. James will be back from the park soon, so I'd better go and sort out dinner.'

'Well, mind yourself and call me if you're feeling lonely or want to talk.' The phone clicked and she was gone.

Life had certainly been bumpy lately. I hoped it would be smoother now that we had made the move. But what if it wasn't? I tidied the photo albums away into a cupboard. I had to leave the past behind. Those carefree days were over long ago. I had to focus on our future, whatever that might be. Smile, Emma, I ordered myself. Everything will be fine.