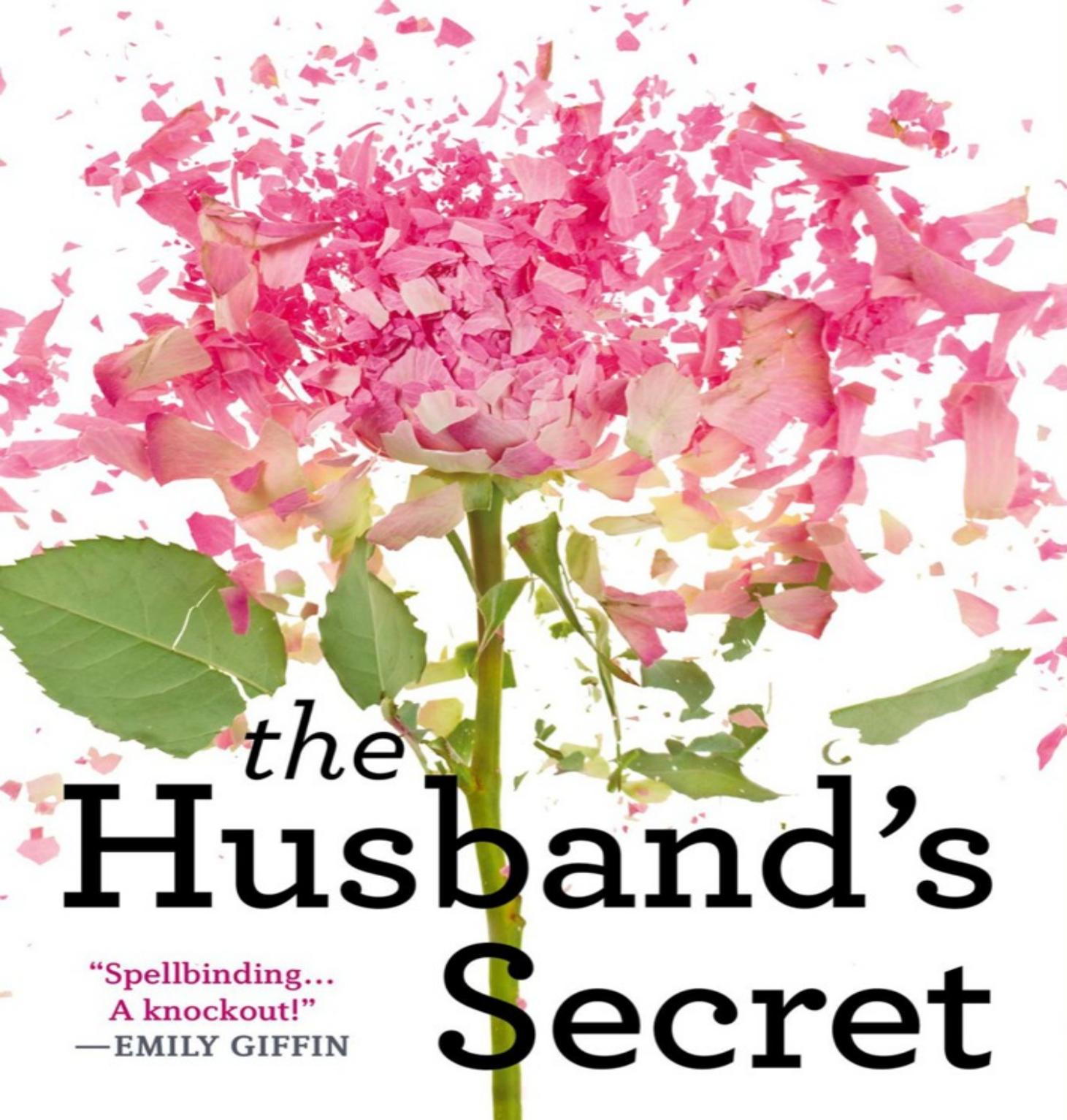


The #1 New York Times Bestseller

LIANE  
MORIARTY



*the*  
**Husband's  
Secret**

"Spellbinding...  
A knockout!"  
—EMILY GIFFIN

"So good, you won't be able to keep it to yourself." —USA Today

## PRAISE FOR *THE HUSBAND'S SECRET*

“In *The Husband's Secret*, Liane Moriarty has created a contemporary Pandora whose dilemma is spellbinding. Shocking, complex, and thought-provoking, this is a story reading groups will devour. A knockout!”

—Emily Giffin, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Brilliant.”

—Sophie Hannah, international bestselling author

“I really enjoyed *The Husband's Secret*, and raced right through it in two days. It's a knowing, touching, and entertaining page-turner. What a wonderful writer—smart, wise, funny.”

—Anne Lamott, *New York Times* bestselling author

“A novel that's perfect for vacation reading: There's humor, suspense, a circle of appealing women whose dilemmas intersect with Cecilia's . . .”

—*People*

“Liane Moriarty is far more than the skillful writer of potboilers. Her compelling characters could be your friends and neighbors, nice and neurotic in equal doses . . . Amid three intertwined storylines and terrific plot twists, Moriarty presents a nuanced and moving portrait of the meaning of love, both marital and familial, and how life can hinge on a misunderstanding or a decision made in haste. *The Husband's Secret* is so good, you won't be able to keep it to yourself.”

—*USA Today*

“Reading groups rejoice. This meaty novel from the bestselling author will probably land on many must-read lists.”

—*Dallas–Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

“A smart, thoughtful read . . . [a] lip-smacking and intelligently written novel.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Moriarty may be an edgier, more provocative, and bolder successor to Maeve Binchy.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“At first, this reviewer wanted to warn readers not to be taken in by the light tone of Liane Moriarty's *The Husband's Secret*. On second thought, maybe readers should let this rather crafty novelist's deceptive breeziness and humor sweep them along. It makes the shocks just that much more deliciously nasty, including the gob-smacking twist in the epilogue . . . The genius of *The Husband's Secret* is that it makes us start to wonder what in our own lives would—or would not—have happened if, say, we had waited just five more minutes before we walked out the door, had not said that hurtful thing, had applied a bit of logic to that situation.”

—*BookPage*

“Secrets can be sinister; they can eat you alive. But they can also set you free. *The Husband's Secret* by Liane Moriarty demonstrates this power with one of the most entertaining stories I have read in ages. Perfect for book clubs—lots to debate in these pages. I just loved it.”

—Dorothea Benton Frank, *New York Times* bestselling author

“This great summer read is hard to put down.”

—*Library Journal*

“A provocative page-turner . . .”

—*Woman’s World*

TITLES BY LIANE MORIARTY

*Big Little Lies*  
*The Husband's Secret*  
*The Hypnotist's Love Story*  
*What Alice Forgot*  
*The Last Anniversary*  
*Three Wishes*

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so beautiful and tiny and helpless. I've never felt anything like wh  
when I held her for the first time. I'm already terrified that somethi  
ever happen to her. And that's why I have to write this down. Just in  
something does happen to me, at least I have done this. At least I ha  
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Cecilia, because everything is black-and-white for you. I know I'm  
but I didn't have the balls to go through with it. Maybe that just sou  
awful. It does sound awful. I'm so sorry to leave you with this, Ceci  
know you're strong enough to handle it. I love you and our baby so  
and you've given me more happiness than I ever deserved. I deserved  
and I got everything. I'm so sorry. With all my love, John-T

# THE HUSBAND'S SECRET

Liane Moriarty

My darling Cecilia, if you're reading this, then I've died, which sou  
melodramatic to write down, but I guess everyone dies. You're in the  
right now, with our baby girl, Isabel. She was born early this morn  
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Version\_11

*For Adam, George and Anna.  
And for Amelia.*

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To err is human; to forgive, divine.  
—ALEXANDER POPE

**P**oor, poor Pandora. Zeus sends her off to marry Epimetheus, a not especially bright man she's never even met, along with a mysterious covered jar. Nobody tells Pandora a word about the jar. Nobody tells her *not* to open the jar. Naturally, she opens the jar. What else has she got to do? How was she to know that all those dreadful ills would go whooshing out to plague mankind forevermore, and that the only thing left in the jar would be hope? Why wasn't there a warning label? And then everyone's like, Oh, Pandora. Where's your willpower? You were told not to open that box, you snoopy girl, you typical woman with your insatiable curiosity; now look what you've gone and done. When for one thing it was a *jar*, not a box, and for another—how many times does she have to say it?—nobody said a *word* about not opening it!

# ONE

## MONDAY

It was all because of the Berlin Wall.

If it weren't for the Berlin Wall, Cecilia would never have found the letter, and then she wouldn't be sitting here, at the kitchen table, willing herself not to rip it open.

The envelope was gray with a fine layer of dust. The words on the front were written in a scratchy blue ballpoint pen, the handwriting as familiar as her own. She turned it over. It was sealed with a yellowing piece of sticky tape. When was it written? It felt old, like it was written years ago, but there was no way of knowing for sure.

She wasn't going to open it. It was absolutely clear that she should not open it. She was the most decisive person she knew, and she'd already decided not to open the letter, so there was nothing more to think about.

Although, honestly, if she did open it, what would be the big deal? Any woman would open it like a shot. She listed all her friends and what their responses would be if she were to ring them up right now and ask what they thought.

Miriam Oppenheimer: *Yup. Open it.*

Erica Edgecliff: *Are you kidding, open it right this second.*

Laura Marks: *Yes, you should open it and then you should read it out loud to me.*

Sarah Sacks: . . .

There would be no point asking Sarah because she was incapable of making a decision. If Cecilia asked her if she wanted tea or coffee, she would sit for a full minute, her forehead furrowed as she agonized over the pros and cons of each beverage, before finally saying, "Coffee! No, wait, tea!" A decision like this one would give her a seizure.

Mahalia Ramachandran: *Absolutely not. It would be completely disrespectful to your husband. You must not open it.*

Mahalia could be a little too sure of herself at times with those huge brown ethical eyes.

Cecilia left the letter sitting on the kitchen table and went to put the kettle on.

Damn that Berlin Wall, and that Cold War, and whoever it was who sat there back in nineteen forty-whenever-it-was, mulling over the problem of what to do with those ungrateful Germans; the guy who suddenly clicked his fingers and said, “Got it, by Jove! We’ll build a great big bloody wall and keep the buggers in!”

Presumably he hadn’t sounded like a British sergeant major.

Esther would know who first came up with the idea for the Berlin Wall. Esther would probably be able to give her his date of birth. It would have been a man, of course. Only a man could come up with something so ruthless, so essentially stupid and yet brutally effective.

Was that sexist?

She filled the kettle, switched it on and cleaned the droplets of water in the sink with a paper towel so that it shone.

One of the mums from school, who had three sons almost exactly the same ages as Cecilia’s three daughters, had said that some remark Cecilia had made was “a teeny-weeny bit sexist,” just before they started the Fete Committee meeting last week. Cecilia couldn’t remember what she’d said, but she’d only been joking. Anyway, weren’t women allowed to be sexist for the next two thousand years or so, until they’d evened up the score?

Maybe she *was* sexist.

The kettle boiled. She swirled an Earl Grey tea bag and watched the curls of black spread through the water like ink. There were worse things to be than sexist. For example, you could be the sort of person who pinched your fingers together while using the word “teeny-weeny.”

She looked at her tea and sighed. A glass of wine would be nice right now, but she’d given up alcohol for Lent. Only six days to go. She had a bottle of expensive Shiraz ready to open on Easter Sunday, when thirty-five adults and twenty-three children were coming to lunch, so she’d need it. Although she was an old hand at entertaining. She hosted Easter, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and Christmas. John-Paul had five younger brothers, all

married with kids. So it was quite a crowd. Planning was the key. Meticulous planning.

She picked up her tea and took it over to the table. Why did she give up wine for Lent? Polly was more sensible. She had given up strawberry jam. Cecilia had never seen Polly show more than a passing interest in strawberry jam, although now, of course, she was always catching her standing at the open fridge, staring at it longingly. The power of denial.

“Esther!” she called out.

Esther was in the next room with her sisters watching *The Biggest Loser* while they shared a giant bag of salt-and-vinegar chips left over from the Australia Day barbecue months earlier. Cecilia did not know why her three slender daughters loved watching overweight people sweat and cry and starve. It didn't appear to be teaching them healthier eating habits. She should go in and confiscate the bag of chips, except they'd all eaten salmon and steamed broccoli for dinner without complaint, and she didn't have the strength for an argument.

She heard a voice from the television boom, “You get nothing for nothing!”

That wasn't such a bad sentiment for her daughters to hear. No one knew it better than Cecilia! But still, she didn't like the expressions of faint revulsion that flitted across their smooth young faces. She was always so vigilant about not making negative body-image comments in front of her daughters, although the same could not be said for her friends. Just the other day, Miriam Oppenheimer had said, loud enough for all their impressionable daughters to hear, “God, would you look at my stomach!” and squeezed her flesh between her fingertips as if it were something vile. Great, Miriam, as if our daughters don't already get a million messages every day telling them to hate their bodies.

Actually, Miriam's stomach *was* getting a little pudgy.

“Esther!” she called out again.

“What is it?” Esther called back, in a patient, put-upon voice that Cecilia suspected was an unconscious imitation of her own.

“Whose idea was it to build the Berlin Wall?”

“Well, they're pretty sure it was Nikita Khrushchev's!” Esther answered immediately, pronouncing the exotic-sounding name with great relish and her own peculiar interpretation of a Russian accent. “He was, like, the

prime minister of Russia, except he was the premier. But it could have been —”

Her sisters responded instantly with their usual impeccable courtesy.

“Shut up, Esther!”

“Esther! I can’t *hear* the *television!*”

“Thank you, darling!” Cecilia sipped her tea and imagined herself going back through time and putting that Khrushchev in his place.

*No, Mr. Khrushchev, you may not have a wall. It will not prove that communism works. It will not work out well at all. Now, look, I agree capitalism isn’t the be-all and end-all! Let me show you my last credit card bill. But you really need to put your thinking cap back on.*

And then fifty-one years later, Cecilia wouldn’t have found this letter that was making her feel so . . . What was the word?

Unfocused. That was it.

She liked to feel focused. She was proud of her ability to focus. Her daily life was made up of a thousand tiny pieces—“Need coriander”; “Isabel’s haircut”; “Who will watch Polly at ballet on Tuesday while I take Esther to speech therapy?”—like one of those terrible giant jigsaws that Isabel used to spend hours doing. And yet Cecilia, who had no patience for puzzles, knew exactly where each tiny piece of her life belonged and where it needed to be slotted in next.

And okay, maybe the life Cecilia was leading wasn’t that unusual or impressive. She was a school mum and a part-time Tupperware consultant, not an actress or an actuary or a . . . poet living in Vermont. (Cecilia had recently discovered that Liz Brogan, a girl from high school, was now a prizewinning poet living in Vermont. Liz, who ate cheese-and-Vegemite sandwiches and was always losing her bus pass. It took all of Cecilia’s considerable strength of character not to find that annoying. Not that she wanted to write poetry. But still. You would have thought that if anyone was going to lead an ordinary life, it would have been Liz Brogan.) Of course, Cecilia had never aspired to anything other than ordinariness. *Here I am, a typical suburban mum*, she sometimes caught herself thinking, as if someone had accused her of holding herself out to be something else, something superior.

Other mothers talked about feeling overwhelmed, about the difficulties of focusing on one thing, and they were always saying, “How do you do it

all, Cecilia?" and she didn't know how to answer them. She didn't actually understand what they found so difficult.

But now, for some reason, something to do with this silly letter, everything felt somehow at risk. It wasn't logical.

Maybe it wasn't anything to do with the letter. Maybe it was hormonal. She was "possibly perimenopausal," according to Dr. McArthur. ("Oh, I am *not!*" Cecilia had said automatically, as if responding to a gentle, humorous insult.)

Perhaps this was a case of that vague anxiety she knew some women experienced. *Other* women. She'd always thought anxious people were cute. Dear little anxious people like Sarah Sacks. She wanted to pat their worry-filled heads.

Perhaps if she opened the letter and saw that it was nothing, she would get everything back in focus. She had things to do. Two baskets of laundry to fold. Three urgent phone calls to make. Gluten-free muffins to bake for the gluten-intolerant members of the School Website Project Group (i.e., Janine Davidson), which would be meeting tomorrow.

There were other things besides the letter that could be making her feel anxious.

The sex thing, for example. That was always at the back of her mind.

She frowned and ran her hands down the sides of her waist. Her oblique muscles, according to her Pilates teacher. Oh, look, the sex thing was *nothing*. It was not actually on her mind. She refused to let it be on her mind. It was of no consequence.

It was true, perhaps, that ever since that morning last year, she'd been aware of an underlying sense of fragility, a new understanding that a life of coriander and laundry could be stolen in an instant, that your ordinariness could vanish, and suddenly you're a woman on your knees, your face lifted to the sky, and some women are running to help, but others are already averting their heads, with the words not articulated, but felt: Don't let this touch me.

Cecilia saw it again for the thousandth time: little Spider-Man flying. She was one of the women who ran. Well, of course she was, throwing open her car door, even though she knew that nothing she did could make any difference. It wasn't her school, her neighborhood, her parish. None of her children had ever played with the little Spider-Man. She'd never had coffee with the woman on her knees. She just happened to be stopped at the lights

on the other side of the intersection when it happened. A little boy, probably about five, dressed in a red and blue full-body Spider-Man suit was waiting at the side of the road, holding his mother's hand. It was Book Week. That's why the little boy was dressed up. Cecilia was watching him, thinking, *Mmmm, actually Spider-Man is not a character from a book*, when for no reason that she could see, the little boy dropped his mother's hand and stepped off the curb into the traffic. Cecilia screamed. She also, she remembered later, instinctively banged her fist on her horn.

If Cecilia had driven by just ten minutes later, or even five minutes later, she would have missed seeing it happen. The little boy's death would have meant nothing more to her than another traffic detour. Now it was a memory that would probably cause her grandchildren to one day say, "Don't hold my hand so *tight*, Grandma."

Obviously there was no connection between little Spider-Man and this letter. He just came into her mind at strange times.

Cecilia flicked the letter across the table with her fingertip and picked up Esther's library book: *The Rise and Fall of the Berlin Wall*.

So, the Berlin Wall. Wonderful.

The first she knew that the Berlin Wall was about to become a significant part of her life had been at breakfast this morning.

It had been just Cecilia and Esther sitting at the kitchen table. John-Paul was overseas, in Chicago until Friday, and Isabel and Polly were still in bed.

Cecilia didn't normally sit down in the mornings. She generally ate her breakfast standing at the breakfast counter while she made lunches, checked her Tupperware orders on her iPad, unpacked the dishwasher, texted clients about their parties, whatever, but it was a rare opportunity to have some time alone with her odd, darling middle daughter, so she sat down with her Bircher muesli, while Esther powered her way through a bowl of rice bubbles, and waited.

She'd learned that with her daughters. Don't say a word. Don't ask a question. Give them enough time and they'll finally tell you what's on their minds. It was like fishing. It took silence and patience. (Or so she'd heard. Cecilia would rather hammer nails into her forehead than go fishing.)

Silence didn't come naturally to her. Cecilia was a talker. "Seriously, do you ever shut the hell up?" an ex-boyfriend had said to her once. She talked

a lot when she was nervous. That ex-boyfriend must have made her nervous. Although she also talked a lot when she was happy.

But she didn't say anything that morning. She just ate, and waited, and sure enough, Esther started talking.

"Mum," she said, in her husky, precise little voice with its faint lisp. "Did you know that some people escaped over the Berlin Wall in a hot-air balloon they made themselves?"

"I did not know that," said Cecilia, although she might have known it.

*So long, Titanic; hello, Berlin Wall,* she thought.

She would have preferred it if Esther had shared something with her about how she was feeling at the moment, any worries she had about school, her friends, questions about sex. But no, she wanted to talk about the Berlin Wall.

Ever since Esther was three years old, she'd been developing these interests or, more accurately, obsessions. First it was dinosaurs. Sure, lots of kids are interested in dinosaurs, but Esther's interest was, well, exhausting, to be frank, and a little peculiar. Nothing else interested the child. She drew dinosaurs, she played with dinosaurs, she dressed up as a dinosaur. "I'm not Esther," she'd say. "I'm T. rex." Every bedtime story had to be about dinosaurs. Every conversation had to be related somehow to dinosaurs. It was lucky that John-Paul was interested, because Cecilia was bored after about five minutes. (They were extinct! They had nothing to say!) John-Paul took Esther on special trips to the museum. He brought home books for her. He sat with her for hours while they talked about herbivores and carnivores.

Since then Esther's "interests" had ranged from roller coasters to cane toads. Most recently it had been the *Titanic*. Now that she was ten, she was old enough to do her own research at the library and online, and Cecilia was amazed at the information she gathered. What ten-year-old lay in bed reading historical books that were so big and chunky, she could barely hold them up?

"Encourage it!" her schoolteachers said, but sometimes Cecilia worried. It seemed to her that Esther was possibly a touch autistic, or at least sitting somewhere on the autism spectrum. Although Cecilia's mother had laughed when she mentioned her concern. "But Esther is exactly like you were!" she said. This was not true.

“I actually have a piece of the Berlin Wall,” Cecilia had said that morning to Esther, suddenly remembering this fact, and it had been gratifying to see Esther’s eyes light up with interest. “I was there in Germany, after the Wall came down.”

“Can I see it?” asked Esther.

“You can have it, darling.”

Jewelry and clothes for Isabel and Polly. A piece of the Berlin Wall for Esther.

Cecilia, twenty years old at the time, had been on a six-week holiday traveling through Europe with her friend Sarah Sacks in 1990, just a few months after the announcement that the Wall was coming down. (Sarah’s famous indecisiveness paired with Cecilia’s famous decisiveness made them the perfect traveling companions. No conflict whatsoever.)

When they got to Berlin, they found tourists lined along the Wall, trying to chip off pieces as souvenirs using keys, rocks, anything they could find. The Wall was like a giant carcass of a dragon that had once terrorized the city, and the tourists were crows pecking away at its remains.

Without proper tools it was almost impossible to chip off a proper piece, so Cecilia and Sarah (well, Cecilia) decided to buy their pieces from the enterprising locals who had set out rugs and were selling a variety of offerings. Capitalism really had triumphed. You could buy anything from gray-colored chips the size of marbles to giant boulder-size chunks complete with spray-painted graffiti.

Cecilia couldn’t remember how much she had paid for the tiny gray stone that looked like it could have come from anyone’s front garden. “It probably did,” said Sarah as they caught the train out of Berlin that night, and they’d laughed at their own gullibility, but at least they’d felt like they were a part of history. Cecilia had put her chip in a paper bag and written “MY PIECE OF THE BERLIN WALL” on the front, and when she came back to Australia she’d thrown it in a box with all the other souvenirs she’d collected: drink coasters, train tickets, menus, foreign coins, hotel keys.

Cecilia wished now she’d concentrated more on the Wall, taken more photos, collected more anecdotes she could have shared with Esther. Actually, what she remembered most about that trip to Berlin was kissing a handsome, brown-haired German boy in a nightclub. He kept taking ice cubes from his drink and running them across her collarbone, which at the time had seemed incredibly sexy, but now seemed unhygienic and sticky.

If only she'd been the sort of curious, politically aware girl who had struck up conversations with the locals about what it had been like living in the shadow of the Wall. Instead, all she had to share with her daughter were stories about kissing and ice cubes. Of course, Isabel and Polly would *love* to hear about the kissing and ice cubes. Or Polly would; maybe Isabel had reached the age where the thought of her mother kissing anybody would be appalling.

Cecilia had put "Find piece of Berlin Wall for E" on her list of things to do that day (there were twenty-five items—she used an iPhone app to list them), and at about two p.m., she had gone into the attic to find it.

"Attic" was probably too generous a word for the storage area in their roof space. You reached it by pulling down a ladder from a trapdoor in the ceiling.

Once she was up there, she had to keep her knees bent so as not to bang her head. John-Paul point-blank refused to go up there. He suffered from terrible claustrophobia and walked six flights of stairs every day to his office so he could avoid taking the elevator. The poor man had regular nightmares about being trapped in a room where the walls were contracting. "The walls!" he'd shout, just before he woke up, sweaty and wild-eyed. "Do you think you were locked in a cupboard as a child?" Cecilia had asked him once (she wouldn't have put it past his mother), but he said he was pretty sure he wasn't. "Actually, John-Paul never had nightmares when he was a little boy," his mother had told Cecilia when she asked. "He was a *beautiful* sleeper. Perhaps you give him too much rich food late at night?" Cecilia was used to the nightmares now.

The attic was small and crammed, but tidy and well organized, of course. Over recent years, "organized" seemed to have become her most defining characteristic. It was like she was a minor celebrity with this one claim to fame. It was funny how once it became a thing that her family and friends commented on and teased her about, it seemed to perpetuate itself, so that her life was now *extraordinarily* well organized, as if motherhood were a sport and she were a top athlete. It was like she was thinking, *How far can I go with this? How much more can I fit in my life without losing control?*

And that was why other people, like her sister, had rooms full of dusty junk, whereas Cecilia's attic was stacked with clearly labeled white plastic storage containers. The only part that didn't look quite Cecilia-ish was the