

“A riveting story so wild you don’t know how she’ll land it, and then she does, on a dime.”

—ANNE LAMOTT, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Liane Moriarty



HERE ONE
MOMENT

ALSO BY LIANE MORIARTY

Three Wishes

The Last Anniversary

What Alice Forgot

The Hypnotist's Love Story

The Husband's Secret

Big Little Lies

Truly Madly Guilty

Nine Perfect Strangers

Apples Never Fall

FOR CHILDREN

The Petrifying Problem with Princess Petronella

The Shocking Trouble on the Planet of Shobble

The Wicked War on the Planet of Whimsy

Here One Moment

A NOVEL

Liane Moriarty



DOUBLEDAY CANADA

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Contents

Dedication

Epigraph

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Chapter 51](#)

[Chapter 52](#)

[Chapter 53](#)

[Chapter 54](#)

[Chapter 55](#)

[Chapter 56](#)

[Chapter 57](#)

[Chapter 58](#)

[Chapter 59](#)

[Chapter 60](#)

[Chapter 61](#)

[Chapter 62](#)

[Chapter 63](#)

[Chapter 64](#)

[Chapter 65](#)

[Chapter 66](#)

[Chapter 67](#)

[Chapter 68](#)

[Chapter 69](#)

[Chapter 70](#)

[Chapter 71](#)

[Chapter 72](#)

[Chapter 73](#)

[Chapter 74](#)

[Chapter 75](#)

[Chapter 76](#)

[Chapter 77](#)

[Chapter 78](#)

[Chapter 79](#)

[Chapter 80](#)

[Chapter 81](#)

[Chapter 82](#)

[Chapter 83](#)

[Chapter 84](#)

[Chapter 85](#)

[Chapter 86](#)

[Chapter 87](#)

[Chapter 88](#)

[Chapter 89](#)

[Chapter 90](#)

[Chapter 91](#)

[Chapter 92](#)

[Chapter 93](#)

[Chapter 94](#)

[Chapter 95](#)

[Chapter 96](#)

[Chapter 97](#)

[Chapter 98](#)

[Chapter 99](#)

[Chapter 100](#)

[Chapter 101](#)

[Chapter 102](#)

[Chapter 103](#)

[Chapter 104](#)

[Chapter 105](#)

[Chapter 106](#)

[Chapter 107](#)

[Chapter 108](#)

[Chapter 109](#)

[Chapter 110](#)

[Chapter 111](#)

[Chapter 112](#)

[Chapter 113](#)

[Chapter 114](#)

[Chapter 115](#)

[Chapter 116](#)

[Chapter 117](#)

[Chapter 118](#)

[Chapter 119](#)

[Chapter 120](#)

[Chapter 121](#)

[Chapter 122](#)

[Chapter 123](#)

[Chapter 124](#)

[Chapter 125](#)

[Chapter 126](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[*Epigraph*](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

[*Here One Moment Discussion Questions*](#)

For Marisa and Petronella

I have noticed that even people who claim everything is predestined and that we can do nothing to change it look before they cross the road.

—Stephen Hawking, *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays*

When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

—Samuel Johnson

Chapter 1

Later, not a single person will recall seeing the lady board the flight at Hobart Airport.

Nothing about her appearance or demeanor raises a red flag or even an eyebrow.

She is not drunk or belligerent or famous.

She is not injured, like the bespectacled hipster with his arm scaffolded in white gauze so that one hand is permanently pressed to his heart, as if he's professing his love or honesty.

She is not frazzled, like the sweaty young mother trying to keep her grip on a slippery baby, a furious toddler, and far too much carry-on.

She is not frail, like the stooped elderly couple wearing multiple heavy layers as if they're off to join Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition.

She is not grumpy, like the various middle-aged people with various middle-aged things on their minds, or the flight's only unaccompanied minor: a six-year-old forced to miss his friend's laser-tag party because his parents' shared custody agreement requires him to be on this flight to Sydney every Friday afternoon.

She is not chatty, like the couple so eager to share details of their holiday you can't help but wonder if they're working undercover for a Tasmanian state government tourism initiative.

She is not extremely pregnant like the extremely pregnant woman.

She is not extremely tall like the extremely tall guy.

She is not quivery from fear of flying or espresso or amphetamines (let's hope not) like the jittery teen wearing an oversized hoodie over very short shorts that makes it look like she's not wearing any pants, and

someone says she's that singer dating that actor, but someone else says no, that's not her, I know who you mean, but that's not her.

She is not shiny-eyed like the shiny-eyed honeymooners flying to Sydney still in their lavish bridal clothes, those crazy kids, leaving ripples of goodwill in their wake, and even eliciting a reckless offer from a couple to give up their business-class seats, which the bride and groom politely but firmly refuse, much to the couple's relief.

The lady is not anything that anyone will later recall.

—

The flight is delayed. Only by half an hour. There are scowls and sighs, but for the most part passengers are willing to accept this inconvenience. That's flying these days.

At least it's not canceled. "Yet," say the pessimists.

The PA crackles an announcement: Passengers requiring special assistance are invited to board.

"Told you so!" The optimists jump to their feet and sling bags over their shoulders.

While boarding, the lady does not stop to tap the side of the plane once, twice, three times for luck, or to flirt with a flight attendant, or to swipe frantically at her phone screen because her boarding pass has mysteriously vanished, it was there just a minute ago, why does it always do that?

The lady is not useful, like the passengers who help parents and spouses find vanished boarding passes, or the square-shouldered, square-jawed man with a gray buzz cut who effortlessly helps hoist bags into overhead bins as he walks down the aisle of the plane without breaking his stride.

Once all passengers are boarded, seated, and buckled, the pilot introduces himself and explains there is a "minor mechanical issue we need to resolve" and "passengers will appreciate that safety is paramount." The cabin crew, he points out, with just the hint of a smile in his deep, trustworthy voice, is also only hearing about this now. (So leave them be.)

He thanks “folks” for their patience and asks them to sit back and relax, they should be on their way in the next fifteen minutes.

They are not on their way in fifteen minutes.

The plane sits on the tarmac without moving for ninety-two horrendous minutes. This is just a little longer than the expected flight time.

Eventually the optimists stop saying, “I’m sure we’ll still make it!”

Everyone is displeased: optimists and pessimists alike.

During this time, the lady does not press her call button to tell a flight attendant about her connection or dinner reservation or migraine or dislike of confined spaces or her very busy adult daughter with three children who is already on her way to the airport in Sydney to pick her up, and what is she meant to do now?

She does not throw back her head and howl for twenty excruciating minutes, like the baby, who is really just manifesting everyone’s feelings.

She does not request the baby be made to stop crying, like the three passengers who all seem to have reached middle age with the belief that babies stop crying on request.

She does not politely ask if she may please get off the plane now, like the unaccompanied minor, who reaches his limit forty minutes into the delay and thinks that maybe the laser-tag party is a possibility after all.

She does not demand she be allowed to disembark, along with her checked baggage, like the woman in a leopard-print jumpsuit who has places she needs to *be*, who is never flying this airline *again*, but who finally allows herself to be placated and then self-medicates so effectively she falls deeply asleep.

She does not abruptly cry out in despair, “Oh, can’t someone *do* something?” like the red-faced, frizzy-haired woman sitting two rows behind the crying baby. It isn’t clear if she wants something done about the delay or the crying baby or the state of the planet, but it is at this point that the square-jawed man leaves his seat to present the baby with an enormous set of jangly keys. The man first demonstrates how pressing a particular button on one key will cause a red light to flash and the baby is stunned into delighted silence, to the teary-eyed relief of the mother and everyone else.

At no stage does the lady make a bitter-voiced performative phone call to tell someone that she is “stuck on a plane”...“still here”...“no way we’ll make our connection”...“just go ahead without me”...“we’ll need to reschedule”...“I’ll have to cancel”...“nothing I can do”...“I *know!* It’s unbelievable.”

No one will remember hearing the lady speak a single word during the delay.

Not like the elegantly dressed man who says, “No, no, sweetheart, it will be tight, but I’m sure I’ll still make it,” but you can tell by the anguished way he taps his phone against his forehead that he’s not going to make it, there’s no way.

Not like the two twentysomething friends who had been drinking prosecco at the airport bar on empty stomachs, and as a result multiple passengers in their vicinity learn the intimate details of their complex feelings about “Poppy,” a mutual friend who is not as nice as she would have everyone believe.

Not like the two thirtysomething men who are strangers to each other but strike up a remarkably audible and extraordinarily dull conversation about protein shakes.

The lady is traveling alone.

She has no family members to aggravate her with their very existence, like the family of four who sit in gendered pairs: mother and young daughter, father and young son, all smoldering with rage over a fraught issue involving a phone charger.

The lady has an aisle seat, 4D. She is lucky: it is a relatively full flight, but she has scored an empty middle seat between her and the man in the window seat. A number of passengers in economy will later recall noting that empty middle seat with envy, but they will not remember noting the lady. When they are finally cleared for takeoff, the lady does not need to be asked to please place her seat in the upright position or to please push her bag under the seat in front of her.

She does not applaud with slow sarcastic claps when the plane finally begins to taxi toward the runway.

During the flight, the lady does not cut her toenails or floss her teeth.

She does not slap a flight attendant.

She does not shout racist abuse.

She does not sing, babble, or slur her words.

She does not casually light up a cigarette as if it were 1974.

She does not perform a sex act on another passenger.

She does not strip.

She does not weep.

She does not vomit.

She does not attempt to open the emergency door midway through the flight.

She does not lose consciousness.

She does not die.

(The airline industry has discovered from painful experience that all these things are possible.)

One thing is clear: the lady is a lady. Not a single person will later describe her as a “woman” or a “female.” Obviously no one will describe her as a “girl.”

There is uncertainty about her age. Possibly early sixties? Maybe in her fifties. *Definitely* in her seventies. Early eighties? As old as your mother. As old as your daughter. As old as your auntie. Your boss. Your university lecturer. The unaccompanied minor will describe her as a “very old lady.” The elderly couple will describe her as a “middle-aged lady.”

Maybe it’s her gray hair that places her so squarely in the category of “lady.” It is the soft silver of an expensive kitten. Shoulder length. Nicely styled. Good hair. “Good gray.” The sort of gray that makes you consider going gray yourself! One day. Not yet.

The lady is small and petite but not so small and petite as to require solicitousness. She does not attract benevolent smiles or offers of assistance. Looking at her does not make you think of how much you miss your grandmother. Looking at her does not make you think anything at all. You could not guess her profession, personality, or star sign. You could not be bothered.

You wouldn't say she was *invisible*, as such.

Maybe semitransparent.

The lady is not strikingly beautiful or unfortunately ugly. She wears a pretty green-and-white-patterned collared blouse tucked in at the waistband of slim-fitting gray pants. Her shoes are flat and sensible. She is not unusually pierced or bejeweled or tattooed. She has small silver studs in her ears and a silver brooch pinned to the collar of her blouse, which she often touches, as if to check that it is still there.

Which is all to say, the lady who will later become known as “the Death Lady” on the delayed 3:20 p.m. flight from Hobart to Sydney is not worthy of a second glance, not by anyone, not a single crew member, not a single passenger, not until she does what she does.

Even then it takes longer than you might expect for the first person to shout, for someone to begin filming, for call buttons to start lighting up and dinging all over the cabin like a pinball machine.