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THE **LAST LETTER**
FROM **YOUR LOVER**



Jojo Moyes

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Praise for Jojo Moyes

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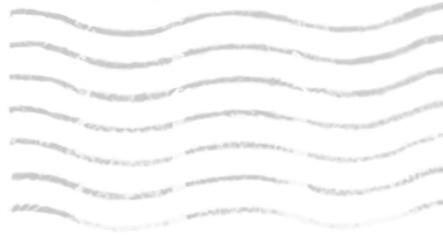
—Emilia Clarke

“Moyes’s easy way of making you instantly care for her characters deeply prevails.”

—*goop*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jojo Moyes is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Giver of Stars*, *Still Me*, *Paris for One and Other Stories*, *After You*, *One Plus One*, *The Girl You Left Behind*, *Me Before You*, *The Last Letter from Your Lover*, *The Horse Dancer*, *Night Music*, *Silver Bay*, *The Ship of Brides*, and *The Peacock Emporium*. She lives with her husband and three children in Essex, England.



THE

Last Letter

FROM YOUR

Lover

JOJO MOYES



PENGUIN BOOKS

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To Charles, who started it all with a paper message

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Part 1

Chapter 1

OCTOBER 1960

“She’s waking up.”

There was a swishing sound, a chair was dragged, then the brisk click of curtain rings meeting. Two voices murmuring.

“I’ll fetch Dr. Hargreaves.”

A brief silence followed, during which she slowly became aware of a different layer of sound—voices, muffled by distance, a car passing: it seemed, oddly, as if it were some way below her. She lay absorbing it, letting it crystallize, letting her mind play catch-up, as she recognized each for what it was.

It was at this point that she became aware of the pain. It forced its way upward in exquisite stages: first her arm, a sharp, burning sensation from elbow to shoulder, then her head: dull, relentless. The rest of her body ached, as it had done when she . . .

When she . . . ?

“He’ll be along in two ticks. He says to close the blinds.”

Her mouth was so dry. She closed her lips and swallowed painfully. She wanted to ask for some water, but the words wouldn’t come. She opened her eyes a little. Two indistinct shapes moved around her. Every time she thought she had worked out what they were, they moved again. Blue. They were blue.

“You know who’s just come in downstairs, don’t you?”

One of the voices dropped. “That singer. The one who looks like Paul Newman.”

“I thought I heard something on the wireless about it. Lend me your thermometer, will you, Vi, mine’s acting up again.”

“I’m going to try and have a peek at him at lunchtime. Matron’s had newspapermen outside all morning. I’ll wager she’s at her wits’ end.”

She couldn’t understand what they were saying. The pain in her head had become a thumping, rushing sound, building in volume and intensity until all she could do was close her eyes again and wait for it, or her, to go away. Then the white came in, like a tide, to envelop her. With some gratitude she let out a silent breath and allowed herself to sink back into its embrace.



“Are you awake, dear? You have a visitor.”

There was a flickering reflection above her, a phantasm that moved briskly, first one way and then another. She had a sudden recollection of her first wristwatch, the way she had reflected sunlight through its glass casing onto the ceiling of the playroom, sending it backward and forward, making her little dog bark.

The blue was there again. She saw it move, accompanied by the swishing. And then there was a hand on her wrist, a brief spark of pain so that she yelped.

“A little more carefully with that side, Nurse,” the voice chided. “She felt that.”

“I’m terribly sorry, Dr. Hargreaves.”

“The arm will require further surgery. We’ve pinned it in several places, but it’s not there yet.”

A dark shape hovered near her feet. She willed it to solidify, but, like the blue shapes, it refused to do so, and she let her eyes

close.

“You can sit with her, if you like. Talk to her. She’ll be able to hear you.”

“How are her . . . other injuries?”

“There’ll be some scarring, I’m afraid. Especially on that arm. And she took quite a blow to the head, so it may be a while before she’s herself again. But given the severity of the accident, I think we can say she’s had a rather lucky escape.”

There was a brief silence.

“Yes.”

Someone had placed a bowl of fruit beside her. She had opened her eyes again, her gaze settling on it, letting the shape, the color, solidify until she grasped, with a stab of satisfaction, that she could identify what was there. *Grapes*, she said. And again, rolling the silent word around the inside of her head: *grapes*. It felt important, as if it were anchoring her in this new reality.

And then, as quickly as they had come, they were gone, obliterated by the dark blue mass that had settled beside her. As it moved closer, she could just make out the faint scent of tobacco. The voice, when it came, was tentative, perhaps a little embarrassed, even. “Jennifer? Jennifer? Can you hear me?” The words were so loud; strangely intrusive.

“Jenny, dear, it’s me.”

She wondered if they would let her see the grapes again. It seemed necessary that she did; blooming, purple, solid. Familiar.

“Are you sure she can hear me?”

“Quite sure, but she may find communicating rather exhausting to begin with.”

There was some murmuring that she couldn’t make out. Or perhaps she just stopped trying.

Nothing seemed clear. “Can . . . you . . . ,” she whispered.

“But her mind wasn’t damaged? In the crash? You know that there will be no . . . lasting . . . ?”

“As I said, she took a good bump to the head, but there were no medical signs for alarm.” The sound of shuffled papers. “No fracture. No swelling to the brain. But these things are always a little unpredictable, and patients are affected quite differently. So, you’ll just need to be a little—”

“Please . . .” Her voice was a murmur, barely audible.

“Dr. Hargreaves! I do believe she’s trying to speak.”

“. . . want to see . . .”

A face swam down to her. “Yes?”

“. . . want to see . . .” *The grapes*, she was begging. *I just want to see those grapes again.*

“She wants to see her husband!” The nurse sprang upward as she announced this triumphantly. “I think she wants to see her husband.”

There was a pause, then someone stooped toward her. “I’m here, dear. Everything is . . . everything’s fine.”

The body retreated, and she heard the pat of a hand on a back. “There, you see? She’s getting back to herself already. All in good time, eh?” A man’s voice again. “Nurse? Go and ask Sister to organize some food for tonight. Nothing too substantial. Something light and easy to swallow. . . . Perhaps you could fetch us a cup of tea while you’re there.” She heard footsteps, low voices, as they continued to talk beside her. Her last thought as the light closed in again was, Husband?



Later, when they told her how long she had been in the hospital, she could barely believe it. Time had become fragmented, unmanageable, arriving and departing in chaotic clumps of hours. It was Tuesday breakfast. Now it was Wednesday

lunchtime. She had apparently slept for eighteen hours—this was said with some disapproval, as if there were an implied rudeness in being absent for so long. And then it was Friday. Again.

Sometimes when she woke it was dark, and she would push her head up a little against the starched white pillow and watch the soothing movements of the ward at night; the soft-shoe shuffle of the nurses moving up and down the corridors, the occasional murmur of conversation between nurse and patient. She could watch television in the evenings if she liked, the nurses told her. Her husband was paying for private care—she could have almost anything she liked. She always said, No, thank you: she was confused enough by the unsettling torrent of information without the endless chatter of the box in the corner.

As the periods of wakefulness stretched and grew in number, she became familiar with the faces of the other women on the little ward. The older woman in the room to her right, whose jet-black hair was pinned immaculately in a rigid, sprayed sculpture upon her head, her features fixed in an expression of mild, surprised disappointment. She had apparently been in a moving picture when she was young, and would deign to tell any new nurse about it. She had a commanding voice, and few visitors. There was the plump young woman in the room opposite, who cried quietly in the early hours of the morning. A brisk, older woman—a nanny perhaps?—brought young children in to see her for an hour every evening. The two boys would climb onto the bed, clutching at her, until the nanny told them to get down for fear they would “do your mother an injury.”

The nurses told her the other women’s names, and occasionally their own, but she couldn’t remember them. They were disappointed in her, she suspected.

Your Husband, as everyone referred to him, came most evenings. He wore a well-cut suit, dark blue or gray serge, gave her a perfunctory kiss on the cheek, and usually sat at the foot of

her bed. He would make small talk solicitously, asking how she was finding the food, whether she would like him to have anything else sent along. Occasionally he would simply read a newspaper.

He was a handsome man, perhaps ten years older than she was, with a high, noble forehead and serious, hooded eyes. She knew, at some deep level, that he must be who he said he was, that she was married to him, but it was perplexing to feel nothing when everyone so obviously expected a different reaction. Sometimes she would stare at him when he wasn't looking, waiting for some jolt of familiarity to kick in. Sometimes, when she woke, she would find him sitting there, newspaper lowered, gazing at her as if he felt something similar.

Dr. Hargreaves, the attending physician, came daily, checking her charts, asking if she could tell him the day, the time, her name. She always got those right now. She even managed to tell him the prime minister was Mr. Macmillan and her age, twenty-seven. But she struggled with newspaper headlines, with events that had taken place before she arrived here. "It will come," he would say, patting her hand. "Don't try to force it, there's a good girl."

And then there was her mother, who brought little gifts—soap, nice shampoo, magazines—as if they would nudge her into a semblance of who she apparently used to be. "We've all been so worried, Jenny darling," she said, laying a cool hand on her head. It felt nice. Not familiar, but nice. Occasionally her mother would begin to say something, then mutter, "I mustn't tire you out with questions. Everything will come back. That's what the doctors say. So you mustn't worry."

She wasn't worried, Jenny wanted to tell her. It was quite peaceful in her little bubble. She just felt a vague sadness that she couldn't be the person everyone evidently expected her to be.

It was at this point, when the thoughts got too confusing, that she would invariably fall asleep again.



They finally told her she was going home on a morning so crisp that the trails of smoke broke into the blue sky above the capital like a spindly forest. By then she could walk around the ward occasionally, swapping magazines with the other patients, who would be chatting to the nurses, sometimes listening to the wireless, if they felt so inclined. She had had a second operation on her arm and it was healing well, they told her, although the long red scar where the plate had been inserted made her wince, and she tried to keep it hidden under a long sleeve. Her eyes had been tested, her hearing checked; her skin had healed after the myriad scratches caused by fragments of glass. The bruises had faded, and her broken rib and collarbone had knitted well enough for her to lie in a variety of positions without pain.

To all intents and purposes, she looked, they claimed, like “her old self,” as if saying it enough times might make her remember who that was. Her mother, meanwhile, spent hours rummaging through piles of black-and-white photographs so that she could reflect Jennifer’s life back at her.

She learned that she had been married for four years. There were no children—from her mother’s lowered voice, she guessed this was a source of some disappointment to everyone. She lived in a very smart house in a very good part of London, with a housekeeper and a driver, and plenty of young ladies would apparently give their eyeteeth to have half of what she had. Her husband was something big in mining and was often away, although his devotion was such that he had put off several very important trips since the accident. From the deference with which the medical staff spoke to him, she guessed he was indeed

quite important and, by extension, that she might expect a degree of respect, too, even if it felt nonsensical to her.

Nobody had said much about how she had got there, although she had once sneaked a look at the doctor's notes and knew that she had been in a car accident. On the one occasion she had pressed her mother about what had happened, she had gone quite pink and, placing her plump little hand on Jennifer's, had urged her "not to dwell on it, dear. It's all been . . . terribly upsetting." Her eyes had filled with tears, and not wanting to upset her, Jennifer had moved on.



A chatty girl with a bright orange helmet of hair came from another part of the hospital to trim and set Jennifer's hair. This, the young woman told her, would make her feel a lot better. Jennifer had lost a little hair at the back of her head—it had been shaved off for a wound to be stitched—and the girl announced that she was a wonder at hiding such injuries.

A little more than an hour later she held up a mirror with a flourish. Jennifer stared at the girl who stared back at her. Quite pretty, she thought, with a kind of distant satisfaction. Bruised, a little pale, but an agreeable face. My face, she corrected herself.

"Do you have your cosmetics on hand?" the hairdresser said. "I could do your face for you, if your arm's still sore. Bit of lipstick will brighten any face, madam. That and some Pan-Cake."

Jennifer kept staring at the mirror. "Do you think I should?"

"Oh, yes. A pretty girl like you. I can make it very subtle . . . but it'll put a glow into your cheeks. Hold on, I'll pop downstairs and get my kit. I've got some lovely colors from Paris, and a Charles of the Ritz lipstick that'll be perfect on you."



“Well, don’t you look fetching? It’s good to see a lady with her makeup on. Shows us that you’re a little more on top of things,” Dr. Hargreaves said on his rounds, some time later. “Looking forward to going home, are we?”

“Yes, thank you,” she said politely. She had no idea how to convey to him that she didn’t know what that home was.

He studied her face for a moment, perhaps gauging her uncertainty. Then he sat on the side of her bed and laid a hand on her shoulder. “I understand it must all seem a little disconcerting, that you might not feel quite yourself yet, but don’t be too concerned if lots of things are unclear. It’s quite common to get amnesia after a head injury.

“You have a very supportive family, and I’m sure once you’re surrounded by familiar things, your old routines, friends, shopping trips, and the like, you’ll find that it’s all popping back into place.”

She nodded obediently. She had worked out pretty quickly that everyone seemed happier if she did so.

“Now, I’d like you to come back in a week so that I can check the progress of that arm. You’ll need some physiotherapy to recover the full use of it. But the main thing is simply for you to rest and not worry too much about anything. Do you understand?”

He was already preparing to leave. What else could she say?



Her husband picked her up shortly before teatime. The nurses had lined up in the downstairs reception area to say good-bye to her, bright as pins in their starched pinafores. She still felt

curiously weak and unsteady on her feet, and was grateful for the arm that he held out to her.

“Thank you for the care you’ve shown my wife. Send the bill to my office, if you would,” he said to the Sister.

“Our pleasure,” she said, shaking his hand and beaming at Jennifer. “It’s lovely seeing her up and about again. You look wonderful, Mrs. Stirling.”

“I feel . . . much better. Thank you.” She was wearing a long cashmere coat and a matching pillbox hat. He had arranged for three outfits to be sent over for her. She had chosen the most muted; she didn’t want to draw attention to herself.

They glanced up as Dr. Hargreaves put his head out of an office. “My secretary says there are some newspapermen outside. You might wish to leave by the back entrance if you want to avoid any fuss.”

“That would be preferable. Would you mind sending my driver round?”

After weeks in the warmth of the ward the air was shockingly cold. She struggled to keep up with him, her breath coming in short bursts, and then she was in the back of a large black car, engulfed by the huge leather seats, and the doors closed with an expensive clunk. The car moved off into the London traffic with a low purr.

She peered out of the window, watching the newspapermen, just visible on the front steps, and muffled photographers comparing lenses. Beyond, the central London streets were thick with people hurrying past, their collars turned up against the wind, men with trilbies pulled low over their brows.

“Who was the singer?” she said, turning to face him.

He was muttering something to the driver. “Who?”

“A singer. Apparently he’d been in some kind of accident.”

“I have no idea who you are talking about.”

“They were all talking about him. The nurses, at the hospital.”

“Oh. Yes. I think I read something.” He appeared to have lost interest. “I’ll be dropping Mrs. Stirling back at the house, and once she’s settled I’ll be going on to the office,” he was saying to the driver.

“What happened to him?” she said.

“Who?”

“The singer.”

Her husband looked at her, as if he was weighing something up. “He died,” he said. Then he turned back to his driver.



She walked slowly up the steps to the white stucco house and the door opened, as if by magic, as she reached the top. The driver placed her valise carefully in the hallway and retreated. Her husband, behind her, nodded to a woman who was standing in the hallway, apparently to greet them. She was in late middle age; her dark hair was pulled back into a tight chignon, and she was dressed in a navy two-piece. “Welcome home, madam,” she said, reaching out a hand. Her smile was genuine, and she spoke in heavily accented English. “We are so very glad to have you well again.”

“Thank you,” she said. She wanted to use the woman’s name, but felt uncomfortable asking it.

The woman waited to take their coats, and disappeared along the hall with them.

“Are you feeling tired?” He dipped his head to study her face.

“No. No, I’m fine.” She gazed around her at the house, wishing she could disguise her dismay that she might as well have never seen it before.

“I must go back to the office now. Will you be all right with Mrs. Cordoza?”

Cordoza. It wasn't entirely unfamiliar. She felt a little surge of gratitude. *Mrs. Cordoza*. "I'll be quite all right, thank you. Please don't worry about me."

"I'll be back at seven . . . if you're sure you're fine . . ." He was clearly keen to leave. He stooped, kissed her cheek, and, after a brief hesitation, was gone.

She stood in the hallway, hearing his footsteps fade down the steps outside, the soft hum of the engine as his great car pulled away. The house seemed suddenly cavernous.

She touched the silk-lined wallpaper, took in the polished parquet flooring, the vertiginously high ceilings. She removed her gloves, with precise, deliberate motions. Then she leaned forward for a closer look at the photographs on the hall table. The largest was a wedding picture, framed in ornate, highly polished silver. And there she was, wearing a fitted white dress, her face half masked by a white lace veil, her husband smiling broadly at her side. I really did marry him, she thought. And then: I look so happy.

She jumped. *Mrs. Cordoza* had come up behind her and was standing there, her hands clasped in front of her. "I was wondering if you would like me to bring you some tea. I thought you might like to take it in the drawing room. I've laid a fire in there for you."

"That would be . . ." Jennifer peered down the hallway at the various doors. Then she looked back at the photograph. A moment passed before she spoke again. "*Mrs. Cordoza* . . . would you mind letting me take your arm? Just till I sit down. I'm feeling a little unsteady on my feet."

Afterward she wasn't sure why she didn't want the woman to know quite how little she remembered about the layout of her own house. It just seemed to her that if she could pretend, and everyone else believed it, what was an act might end up being true.



The housekeeper had prepared supper: a casserole, with potatoes and fine French beans. She had left it in the bottom oven, she told Jennifer. Jennifer had had to wait for her husband to return before she could put anything on the table: her right arm was still weak, and she was afraid of dropping the heavy cast-iron pot.

She had spent the hour when she was alone walking around the vast house, familiarizing herself with it, opening drawers and studying photographs. My house, she told herself over and over. My things. My husband. Once or twice she let her mind go blank and her feet carry her to where she thought a bathroom or study might be, and was gratified to discover that some part of her still knew this place. She gazed at the books in the drawing room, noting, with a kind of mild satisfaction, that while so much was strange she could mentally recite the plots of many.

She lingered longest in her bedroom. Mrs. Cordoza had unpacked her suitcase and put everything away. Two built-in cupboards opened to reveal great quantities of immaculately stored clothes. Everything fitted her perfectly, even the most well-worn shoes. Her hairbrush, perfumes, and powders were lined up on a dressing table. The scents met her skin with a pleasant familiarity. The colors of the cosmetics suited her: Coty, Chanel, Elizabeth Arden, Dorothy Gray—her mirror was surrounded by a small battalion of expensive creams and unguents.

She pulled open a drawer, held up layers of chiffon, brassieres, and other foundation garments made of silk and lace. I am a woman to whom appearances matter, she observed. She sat and stared at herself in the three-sided mirror, then began to brush her hair with long, steady strokes. *This is what I do*, she said to herself, several times.

In the few moments when she felt overwhelmed by strangeness, she busied herself with small tasks: rearranging the towels in the downstairs cloakroom, putting out plates and glasses.

He arrived back shortly before seven. She was waiting for him in the hall, her makeup fresh and a light spray of scent over her neck and shoulders. She could see it pleased him, this semblance of normality. She took his coat, hung it in the cupboard, and asked if he would like a drink.

“That would be lovely. Thank you,” he said.

She hesitated, one hand poised on a decanter.

Turning, he saw her indecision. “Yes, that’s it, darling. Whiskey. Two fingers, with ice. Thank you.”

At supper, he sat on her right at the large, polished mahogany table, a great expanse of which was empty and unadorned. She ladled the steaming food onto plates, and he placed them at each setting. *This is my life*, she found herself thinking, as she watched his hands move. *This is what we do in the evenings*.

“I thought we might have the Moncrieffs to dinner on Friday. Might you be up to it?”

She took a little bite from her fork. “I think so.”

“Good.” He nodded. “Our friends have been asking after you. They would like to see that you’re . . . back to your old self.”

She raised a smile. “That will be . . . nice.”

“I thought we probably wouldn’t do too much for a week or two. Just till you’re up to it.”

“Yes.”

“This is very good. Did you make it?”

“No. It was Mrs. Cordoza.”

“Ah.”

They ate in silence. She drank water—Dr. Hargreaves had advised against anything stronger—but she envied her husband

the glass in front of him. She would have liked to blur the disconcerting strangeness, to take the edge off it.

“And how are things at . . . your office?”

His head was down. “All fine. I’ll have to visit the mines in the next couple of weeks, but I’ll want to be sure that you can manage before I go. You’ll have Mrs. Cordoza to help, of course.”

She felt faint relief at the thought of being alone. “I’m sure I’ll be all right.”

“And afterward I thought we might go to the Riviera for a couple of weeks. I have some business there, and the sun might do you good. Dr. Hargreaves said it might help your . . . the scarring . . .” His voice faded.

“The Riviera,” she echoed. A sudden vision of a moonlit seafront. Laughter. The clinking of glasses. She closed her eyes, willing the fleeting image to become clear.

“I thought we might drive down, this time, just the two of us.”

It was gone. She could hear her pulse in her ears. *Stay calm, she told herself. It will all come. Dr. Hargreaves said it would.*

“You always seem happy there. Perhaps a little happier there than in London.” He glanced up at her and then away.

There it was again, the feeling that she was being tested. She forced herself to chew and swallow. “Whatever you think best,” she said quietly.

The room fell silent but for the slow scraping of his cutlery on his plate, an oppressive sound. Her food suddenly appeared insurmountable. “Actually, I’m more tired than I thought. Would you mind terribly if I went upstairs?”

He stood as she got to her feet. “I should have told Mrs. Cordoza a kitchen supper would suffice. Would you like me to help you up?”

“Please, don’t fuss.” She waved away the offer of his arm. “I’m just a little tired. I’m sure I’ll be much better in the morning.”



At a quarter to ten she heard him enter the room. She had lain in the bed, acutely aware of the sheets around her, the moonlight that sliced through the long curtains, the distant sounds of traffic in the square, of taxis slowing to disgorge their occupants, a polite greeting from someone walking a dog. She had kept very still, waiting for something to click into place, for the ease with which she had fitted back into her physical environment to seep into her mind.

And then the door had opened.

He did not turn on the light. She heard the soft clash of wooden hangers as he hung up his jacket, the soft vacuum *thuck* of his shoes being pulled from his feet. And suddenly she was rigid. Her husband—this man, this stranger—was going to climb into her bed. She had been so focused on getting through each moment that she hadn't considered it. She had half expected him to sleep in the spare room.

She bit down on her lip, her eyes shut tight, forcing her breathing to stay slow, in semblance of sleep. She heard him disappear into the bathroom, the sluice of the tap, vigorous brushing of teeth and a brief gargle. His feet padded back across the carpeted floor, and then he was sliding between the covers, causing the mattress to dip and the bedstead to creak in protest. For a minute he lay there, and she fought to maintain her even breaths. *Oh, please, not yet*, she willed him. *I hardly know you.*

“Jenny?” he said.

She felt his hand on her hip, forced herself not to flinch.

He moved it tentatively. “Jenny?”

She made herself let out a long breath, conveying the blameless oblivion of deep sleep. She felt him pause, his hand still, and then, with a sigh of his own, he lay back heavily on his pillows.