

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Fourplay

Jane Moore

Jane Moore
fourplay



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For Mum and Ellie

‘Moore’s endearing exuberance and sense of humour are
seductive’ *The Times*

‘An hilarious and assured modern-day Jane Austen romp’
GQ

‘A feel-good read, which sparkles with her trademark funny
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exactly what Jane Moore’s novel feels like . . . Hilarious
cynicism about relationships will appeal to anyone who’s
ever lost in love. As therapeutic for heartbreak as a voodoo
doll!’ *Glamour*

fourplay

Jane Moore is a columnist for the *Sun* and writes articles for the *Sunday Times*. She regularly presents documentaries, including the hugely successful 'Supermarket Secrets' for Channel 4's *Dispatches*, *The Beckhams* for Sky One, and *Spoilt Kids*, also for Channel 4. She is also the author of the bestsellers *Fourplay*, *The Ex-Files* and *Dot.Homme*. She lives in London.

Also by Jane Moore

The Ex-Files
Dot.Homme
The Second Wives Club

'All this divorce - when I meet a man now, the first thing I think about is: is this the sort of man I want my children to spend their weekends with?'

RITA RUDNER

Part One

To this day, she doesn't know what made her do it. Feminine intuition perhaps.

The day started the same as any other. Jo was rushing around getting the kids ready for school; Jeff was rushing around thinking only of himself. As usual, he had already asked several moronic questions as if he were merely a guest in the house in which they'd lived for four years. 'Where are the clean towels? Is there any milk? How does the central heating timer work? We're running out of loo roll.' And so on. It was a never-ending assault on Jo's senses, like having a third child.

Trouble was, Jeff was one of those men who had grown up with a mother who did everything for him. All his life, he had been accustomed to just dropping an item of clothing on the floor and not seeing it again until it miraculously reappeared in his wardrobe, washed, ironed, and hung neatly on a padded hanger. Jo suspected Jeff's mother prided herself on being there to catch her son's discarded clothing before it touched the floor. There was little doubt she had been disappointed by her son's choice of such a shambolic, dishevelled wife.

This morning, the Planet Hollywood T-shirt Jo had worn in bed the night before was tucked into a pair of baggy-bummed, black tracksuit bottoms, and her dark blond hair was scraped back into a messy ponytail. On her feet were a pair of those flat, airline socks designed for people with no ankle, heel or arch.

Thomas and Sophie were sitting at the breakfast table. Thomas, who was eight, wore only the bottoms of his Batman pyjamas; the top was tied around his head like a pint-size commando. His shock of blond hair was in its early morning Woody Woodpecker style, and he was spilling cornflakes over the floor as he turned to watch the TV set flickering in the corner.

Like most six-year-old girls, Sophie was in her pink phase. Barbie pink phase to be more precise, with Barbie nightdress and slippers, and a Barbie hairslide wedged on one side of her head, giving her hair the attractive swept-over look favoured by Arthur Scargill. She was drawing a misshapen heart on a piece of scrap paper with one hand and eating a jam-covered bagel with the other.

Jo was frantically buttering two rounds of Marmite sandwiches for their lunchboxes when Jeff burst into the kitchen adjusting his tie. He had two pieces of tissue stuck to his face where he'd cut himself shaving.

'Have you been using my razor on your legs again? It's blunt.'

'No.' Jo wiped a buttery finger on her trouser leg. Well, it wasn't strictly a lie. She *had* used the razor - but on her bikini line.

Jeff looked businesslike in a dark blue Jasper Conran suit and royal-blue shirt. His hair was still damp from the shower and combed back in the Gordon Gecko 'lunch-is-for-wimps' look favoured by the eighties yuppie. As soon as it dried it fell forward into a more attractive flop, making him look less like a solicitor, Jo thought. Jeff was a partner in a local practice that relied heavily on conveyancing work, divorces and legal aid cases. It wasn't exactly Kavanagh QC but it paid the bills.

'Where's my—'

‘Behind the door.’ Jo answered him before he could complete the question he asked every morning.

Grabbing his briefcase, he rushed up to each of the children and kissed the top of their heads.

‘Be good, you two,’ Jo mouthed to herself.

‘Be good, you two.’ Jeff’s voice was in perfect sync with her mime.

‘Daddy, look!’ said Sophie excitedly, waving a scrap of paper at him as he headed out of the kitchen door. ‘This is for you.’

Clearly irritated by this delay, Jeff stopped in his tracks and came back to the cluttered table where Sophie was brandishing her little drawing of a heart. ‘To Daddy, lots of love, Sophie’ was scribbled on it.

‘That’s a lovely apple, darling,’ he said, glancing at it then leaving it on the table. Jo’s heart lurched as she saw the disappointment on her daughter’s face.

‘Silly Daddy, it’s a heart, isn’t it, sweetie?’ she said, picking up the drawing and holding it out to Jeff. ‘Here, take it to work and pin it on your wall.’

With an ostentatious I’m-a-terribly-busy-person sigh, he threw his briefcase on to the table and flipped open the lid. Inside was a packet of photographs. ‘Oh here, I forgot. I got that film developed. There are some nice snaps of you and the kids from that weekend at your mum and dad’s.’ He threw the packet on the table.

‘Thanks. What time will you be home tonight?’ Jo tried desperately to sound casual. It was her greatest fear in life that she might turn into a nagging wife, but life with Mr Slippery sometimes made this hard to avoid.

‘Not sure. Got a late meeting I think. Call you later.’ And he was gone.

She stood and stared down the hallway as the front door closed behind him, and wondered at what point they had stopped communicating with each other. He had stopped kissing her goodbye in the mornings some months ago, and it now seemed their lives were linked by little other than the children and a hefty mortgage.

She sent the children upstairs for their morning ritual of washing faces and cleaning teeth, then wandered down the hallway to the large, sunny room at the front of their Victorian semi in leafy West London.

She stood in the bay window and let other people's lives wash over her for a moment. The block of flats opposite was always a good source of amusement, whether it was the gay couple in 4c having a loud row with all the windows open, or Mrs Hobbs, the eighty-year-old woman who lived on the ground floor. Jo had made quite an effort to get to know her when they had first moved in, knowing she would be useful for keeping a curtain-twitching eye on the house whenever they were out. Then, one day, when they were chatting about the other residents in the block, Mrs Hobbs had brought the subject round to the poetically suited Derek and Eric in 4c.

'They're homosapiens you know,' she whispered conspiratorially, screwing up her deeply wrinkled face in disapproval.

Jo laughed, and replied, 'So am I.' Mrs Hobbs had given her a wide berth ever since.

This morning, a smartly dressed young couple came out of the communal doorway, both clutching briefcases and umbrellas. It was starting to drizzle slightly, and he took her umbrella from her, opened it out, and handed it back. It was a simple act of consideration, but one that reminded Jo of how detached her and Jeff's lives had become. Those little gestures were so important. Someone pouring you a

drink before you'd got round to asking for one, running you a bath because you looked tired, or opening your umbrella before you even thought of doing it yourself. The last time Jeff had done anything for her had been about six months ago when she was struck down by food poisoning. And that was only because he had to, she thought ruefully. The young couple shared a tender kiss and went their separate ways.

With a sigh, Jo walked back through to the kitchen, pausing briefly at the foot of the stairs. 'Get a move on you two, your uniforms are on your beds.' She picked up the photographs from where they lay on the kitchen table, half covering Sophie's heart drawing which, after all that, Jeff had forgotten to take.

The first two pictures were of her dad, Jim, peering round the door of his potting shed at her parents' Oxford home, where he did more pottering than potting. It was his bolt-hole from Jo's mother Pam, and he would spend his time reading old crime novels or trying to have a crafty fag without being nagged to death. Jo often wondered why they were still together as they seemed to have so little in common. A couple of years earlier she had asked her father that exact question and he'd replied, rather bitterly she thought, 'Saves spoiling another couple.'

The next few photographs showed her mother, pinched and uptight, standing with the children on the small patio area at the back of the house. She was not a naturally affectionate woman and obviously found it difficult having them to stay. Thomas hated going there because his grandparents' television was too old to accommodate his PlayStation - a blessed relief as far as Jo was concerned. The thought of her mother catching sight of 'Mortal Kombat' was right up there with another Status Quo comeback concert on the list of things you don't want to see. And as for Sophie, Jo lived in constant fear of her

breaking one of the hideous but plentiful ornaments that adorned the neat little bungalow with its ruched lace curtains and latticed windows.

Adding to the stress of staying with her parents was the fact that Jo worked as an interior designer, and had been itching to get her hands on their dreadful decor for years.

‘Don’t come here with your fancy ideas,’ her mother said sharply when Jo once dared to suggest redecorating. ‘We like it this way.’

The rest of the photographs were taken up with Sophie’s sixth birthday party at the house, a couple of weeks after their Oxford visit.

Jo and Jeff had invited fifteen of Sophie’s friends along and booked a children’s entertainer to keep them occupied. But on the morning of the party ‘Jolly Jake’ had rung to say he had flu and couldn’t make it, so Jeff got out his old guitar and tried to amuse the children with his appalling rendition of ‘Smoke on the Water’. Within seconds of one of Sophie’s more forward friends declaring, ‘Your dad’s crap,’ he had resorted to putting on the Spice Girls CD and took several photographs of all the children high-kicking their way round the room to the torturous strains of ‘Wannabe’.

Jo’s brow furrowed as she patted the photographs into a neat pile to place back in the packet. There didn’t seem to be enough. She counted them. Nineteen prints out of a possible twenty-four. Strange, she thought. The film had been developed digitally so there were no negatives, just a small plastic cassette. The contact sheet that usually came with them was nowhere to be seen.

‘Can I see, Mum?’ Thomas had come back downstairs and was looking over her shoulder. Sophie stood in the doorway picking her nose, with her school skirt tucked into the back of her knickers.

'No, we haven't got time now. You can both see them when you get back from school. Come on.' Jo stuffed the photographs into her overflowing handbag and they all headed out of the door.

It was still niggling her as she walked to the local shops after dropping off the children. Only nineteen prints and no contact sheet. Maybe the shop had cocked up the developing and were trying to pull a fast one. Most people would have let it go, but Jo could be obsessive about detail. Her best friend Rosie called her an anal retentive.

So, fifteen minutes later, she walked through Boots to the photographic counter at the back. The place was quiet except for a confused pensioner with a problem she couldn't quite get to grips with. The assistant was speaking in loud, deliberate tones.

'You've used the same film twice, madam,' she bellowed, showing the woman a picture of herself in ghostly form standing over some bougainvillea.

A bored second assistant came out from a back room. Silently, she extended a hand in Jo's direction.

'Hello, could I have another set of prints and a contact sheet off this please?' Jo handed over the little cassette.

'When d'ya want 'em for?' She had six gold studs in one ear and a necklace which spelt out the name 'Cheyenne'.

'Um, is one hour OK?'

'Cost ya.'

'That's fine. I'll be back at about ten-thirty then.'

She headed for a little French café just down the road, stopping briefly to buy a copy of the *Sun*. Heaven was a child-free time slot in which to read a newspaper from cover to cover.

Before Thomas and Sophie came along, she and Jeff had always enjoyed the same Sunday routine. They would sleep

in late, then one or other would go downstairs and make a breakfast of fresh coffee, warm croissants, and scrambled eggs with smoked salmon. Then they would sit and eat in silence, each reading a different section of the *Sunday Times* and only conversing when a particular article prompted discussion.

Last Sunday, Thomas and Sophie had come into their room at 7 a.m., bickering about the ownership of a Cyberpet. Jo confiscated it from both of them and left Jeff to have a lie-in while she went downstairs and threw cereal into two bowls. As the children wolfed it down, she tried to read a three-day-old paper which had been left lying on the sideboard, but gave up after the fifth interruption from Sophie whinging about her brother's teasing.

Ordering a caffe latte, she settled down in a quiet corner of the café and lost herself in the day's news.

By the time she lifted her head and checked the time, it was 10.20. Leaving payment and a generous tip, she left and crossed the road to Marks & Spencer to stock up on food for the next couple of days.

It was the rule rather than the exception these days that she never knew when Jeff would walk in the door each night, so she'd pretty much given up any attempt at home-cooking. Instead she would buy a variety of precooked meals, and when she heard the key in the lock she'd take one out of the freezer, peel off the plastic film and stick it in the microwave. Frozen meal, frozen relationship.

It was 10.45 by the time she found herself back at Boots's photographic counter. Handing over the paper slip, she decided she'd look at the pictures there and then so she could point out any discrepancies immediately. Ripping open the packet, which definitely felt chunkier than the first one, she started sifting through the photos. Dad and his potting shed, Mum and the kids, Sophie dancing to the

Spice Girls. Nestling halfway through the pile, between the Oxford visit and Sophie's birthday party, were the five missing photographs.

She looked in her early twenties, with hazel eyes and blonde curly hair down to her shoulders. In the first three pictures, she was lying on a brass bed that was covered in a thick white cotton throw. On the wall behind her head was a framed print of a Degas nude. Propped up by her elbow on two square white pillowcases, the girl was wearing a thin-strapped, green, floral dress, her long legs outstretched. There was nothing on her feet but pastel-pink varnish, and her laughing face reached out towards the camera. By the fourth picture, one of the straps had fallen down her arm, revealing the firm, round top of a young breast. Her eyes were fixed on the lens, her mouth slightly open in a provocative fashion. This picture was at a slightly different angle and her bedside table was visible. Lying on it was the Tag Heuer watch Jo had bought Jeff for his thirtieth birthday. In the final shot she was naked, her legs modestly tucked to one side. Her arms were stretched above her head, making her full breasts look perfectly shaped, and her eyes were full of mischief. A small area of pubic hair was just visible – enough to register she was not a natural blonde.

She had absolutely no idea who the woman was, but Jo was sure of one thing. This picture was taken just seconds before she had passionate sex with whoever was behind the camera.

She knew she had stumbled across something she shouldn't have but, clutching at straws, she toyed with the idea that there had been some kind of mistake. It was what she needed to believe. She would go back to the counter and Cheyenne would tell her there had been a terrible mix-up.

‘Don’t worry, madam. Someone else’s pictures have been muddled up with your own,’ she’d say, ‘so your husband hasn’t been having sex with someone else after all. Have a nice day.’

Then she remembered the contact sheet that had been missing from the first packet Jeff had given her. Her fingers fumbling with nerves, she re-opened the new batch and pulled out the small contact sheet tucked inside. Taking a deep breath, her eyes ran along the tiny images in front of her. The five pictures were there, right in the middle.

Jo closed her eyes and started to sway unsteadily on her feet.

‘You alright?’ The assistant’s voice startled her and she opened her eyes to find a concerned Cheyenne and her colleague staring at her.

‘F-f-fine thanks.’ She had to get out of here.

Tucking the pictures under her arm, she ran from the shop and didn’t stop until she reached the busy junction at the end of the main street.

She had no idea how long she stood on the corner with cars speeding past her. It was as though the world had suddenly become a place she was no longer part of. Other shoppers looked curious as they walked past her, standing frozen, a carrier bag in each hand. Jo hardly registered them.

God knows, she tried to come up with an explanation, but there was no doubt about it.

Jeff was having an affair.

She got through the next few hours on automatic pilot. The children were picked up from school, given tea, bathed, and finally – at 8.30 – they were asleep.

There was no sign of Jeff. He hadn’t even called. He used to call up and bluster about some ‘damn late meeting’,

but now he'd stopped bothering. It was taken as read that he'd be late home most nights, and she was generally too exhausted to care. There was a repetitive pattern to their evenings that made one completely indistinguishable from another. The only variant was the TV schedules. If Jeff got home before Jo had collapsed, exhausted, into bed, they would exchange a cursory, 'Hello, how was your day?' 'Fine thanks,' conversation, then sit in silence watching the television. Inevitably, about an hour after getting home, Jeff would fall asleep on the sofa, his mouth open, emitting loud snores. Jo would sigh, turn down the volume on the TV, then go upstairs and leave him to it. Most of the time he would wake up in the early hours and creep in beside her. Some mornings she came down to find him still scrunched up on the sofa.

It hadn't always been that way. When they first met they couldn't keep their hands off each other, even rushing home on the occasional lunch hour for a passionate session. Then the children were born. Now their sex life was more endangered than the Giant Panda.

On the rare occasions he showed an interest, Jeff would roll over and whisper, 'How about a quickie?'

As opposed to what? she thought to herself as he made the cursory attempt at foreplay by twiddling her nipple as if he were fine-tuning Radio Five.

'I think I'm hermetically sealed it's been so long,' Jo had said wistfully to her friend Rosie a few weeks earlier.

Now Jeff's lack of interest made perfect sense.

Jo watched *News At Ten*, but absorbed none of it. Bong! Jo Miles discovers photos. Bong! It has to be her husband's girlfriend. Bong! She castrates him.

All her thoughts centred on the moment when Jeff finally bothered to come home.

When the programme had finished she walked down their dark hallway and flicked on the kitchen light. The long wooden table in the centre of the room was cluttered with colouring books, papers, and unread newsletters from the children's school. Jo used her arm to sweep the lot onto the floor. She wanted a clean surface for what she was about to do. One by one, she placed the five photographs in a line across the centre of the table, in order of undress. Then she sat down in the large wicker chair at the far end and waited.

For half an hour, there was only the sound of the clock ticking and Jo's breathing. Then finally she heard a key in the lock. It was 11 p.m.

She heard Jeff's footsteps coming down the hallway before he peered round the kitchen door, surprise registering on his face. He had assumed she would be in bed by now. His dark brown hair looked mussed and his cheeks were bright red. His tie had been loosened and his suit looked like it had been trampled by a herd of wildebeest. Crumpled of the Bailey. I wonder if he's been with her, thought Jo. She felt completely numb.

'Hello. I thought you'd probably have gone for an early night. What are you—' He stopped mid-sentence as he caught sight of the photographs. 'What are these?' He had gone deathly white and his pupils had expanded to the size of dinner plates.

Jo stared at him impassively, knowing it was important for her to stay calm at this point. She had to admit she was relishing his obvious discomfort. She glanced at the photographs again, before looking him straight in the eye.

'I was hoping you'd be able to tell me that.'

He stared at her like a rabbit caught in headlights. She could see he was desperate to come up with a simple explanation, but clearly knew there wasn't one. Running a hand through his hair, he sat down at the other end of the table and made an attempt to worm his way out of the situation.

'She's nobody, Jo, honest.' He looked beseechingly at her.

'Try again.' Her voice was clipped.

Jeff looked down at his feet. He was a solicitor and Jo knew he could recognise conclusive evidence when he saw it. There was no point lying. With no dramatic pause or build-up, he came out with it in a matter-of-fact, could-you-pass-the-salt kind of way.

'I've been seeing her for about six months.' He looked pathetically sheepish.

Six months. Six, deceitful, conniving, duplicitous bloody months, thought Jo as she struggled to take it in. Was this really happening? To her, Jo Miles? Right now she felt she was in the middle of someone else's nightmare or cruel joke.

'Are you in love with her?' The knot of emotion at the back of her throat made it difficult to speak. She hoped - prayed even - that the answer would be no.

He said nothing for a moment, then slowly began to nod his head. 'I am, yes.'

The unmistakable feeling of cold fear began to creep along Jo's arms. Every major argument they had ever had became insignificant. People have arguments because they still care. This was different. She felt she was facing her emotional Armageddon. A million questions raced through her mind, but the raw need to know what she was up against won through.

'Who is she?'

She was fascinated by how calm she sounded. Fear of what was coming next had paralysed her senses. She waited for an answer from the man who now seemed like a complete stranger to her. Behind his head on the kitchen wall was a collage of family holiday snaps from over the years. Jeff holding Sophie as a baby, playing football on the beach with Thomas, the four of them tucking into a huge paella. In every picture they were all glowing with happiness.

'I said, who is she?'

She watched him shuffle uncomfortably and start picking at a piece of loose wickerwork on the arm of the chair. He didn't want to have this conversation. Jo knew he'd rather run out of the front door and put it all in a detailed letter. But there was no way she would let him get away with that.

'She's one of the secretaries at work.'

His voice was barely audible as he fixed his gaze on one of the Italian ceramic floor tiles they had spent a fortune on. The same tiles they had uncharacteristically made love on after a drunken night out two weeks earlier. It took a lot of alcohol these days. Jo burst into bitter laughter. For a second, she thought he must be joking, that this whole laughable scenario was his idea of fun and Noel Edmonds was going to walk through the door at any second clutching

a 'Gotcha' trophy. But there was no telltale twinkle in Jeff's eyes nor even the faintest trace of a smirk.

'Oh God, the bloody boss-shags-secretary cliché,' she spat, close to hysteria now. 'No doubt you've told her your wife doesn't understand you or that I'm paralysed from the waist down.'

Sarcasm suited her mood right now. Other men were pathetic enough to go off with their secretaries, but not her husband. Not the man she had respected and trusted enough to marry and have children by.

Jeff's face was pinched. 'She's not a shag, Jo. I'm in love with her. Believe me, I've tried not to be, but I just can't stop it and I can't carry on pretending any more - it's not fair on you and the kids.'

The kids. The words snapped into her consciousness.

'Are we having this conversation because you're going to leave us?' Her voice sounded cracked and distant. She was beginning to feel *really* scared.

Jeff stood up and walked towards her. He knelt down in front of her chair and took her hands in his.

'I have to leave, Jo. Believe me, I would stay and sort things out if I could, but the whole thing is completely out of my control now and I can't contemplate life without her.'

He was looking up at her, waiting for a reaction. But Jo was completely numbed by what she'd just heard. She was bright, funny and self-motivated - she had to be. But when she stood at that altar, 'she' became a 'we'. They were a unit. Now she was terrified by the prospect of it ending.

'The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you,' he said softly, laying his head in her lap.

She sat staring down at the back of his head as the enormity of the situation began to sink in. 'But I know

you'll be able to cope because you're so strong. She would fall to pieces if I left her. She's so vulnerable.'

Jo felt it slowly at first, a dull sensation that began in her chest and rose in a tidal wave through the rest of her body. A violent, unstoppable surge of pure anger.

Grabbing her half-empty coffee cup from the table, she used all the force she could muster to bring it smashing down on the back of his head.

'Jesus fucking Christ,' he cursed, his hand shooting to where a small trickle of blood was now mingling with the cold coffee. 'What the fuck did you do that for?'

But Jo didn't answer. She grabbed Jeff's head and pushed him to the floor with a strength that surprised even her, then leapt to her feet. As he scrambled around trying to stand up, she stood over him, her face twisting with rage and searing pain. At that moment, her loathing of him was absolute. Suddenly, he was standing in front of her.

'Jo, please . . .' He raised his arms as if he were about to embrace her, but her response was swift.

The first blow struck him across the right side of his face and he fell back against the oven door, gasping in pain as his lower back struck the handle. Jo couldn't have cared less. She flew at him, pummelling his chest with clenched fists until he managed to grab one of her arms and restrain her. Sobbing, she sank to the floor in front of him.

'Bastard . . . bastard,' she whispered, shaking her head in disbelief.

Jeff didn't move. Jo knew her extreme behaviour had stunned him because she'd never been the emotional sort. She hadn't even cried on their wedding day, but her mother had made up for that.

'Why *do* mothers always cry at their daughters' weddings?' Jeff had whispered in her ear as they walked

back down the aisle to the sounds of her mother's loud nose-blowing.

'Because they know girls always marry a man like their father,' she'd laughed.

Now here she was crumpled at her husband's feet.

Bending down, Jeff gently placed a hand under her arm and helped her up. 'Sit down. I'll get you a drink.'

He walked over to the cupboard above the sink and got out the bottle of whisky they kept there. She watched as he poured a generous measure and placed it in front of her. Amazing, isn't it? she marvelled to herself. Men spend their lives making decisions and cut-throat deals, planning wars, erecting buildings - or whatever it is they damn well do. Yet throw a bit of young totty in a short skirt into the mix and they all lose ability to take control of their lives. Here was the man she loved suddenly throwing everything away on the 'love' of someone he'd known five minutes. Another suspicion crept in. She had to ask.

'How old is she?'

'Is that relevant?'

'For fuck's sake, Jeff, we're not in court. Just answer the question.'

'Twenty-three.'

Her chair made a loud scraping noise as Jo pushed it backwards and stood up. Jeff flinched, expecting another blow to the head. But her desire to get away from him was all-consuming. She ran down the hallway and into the sitting room where she sat in darkness on one of the two faded floral sofas. Jeff followed her, as she knew he would, and switched on the lights. She winced at the brightness.

'Twenty-three? Jesus Christ. Are you seriously going to walk out on me and the kids because you want to shack up