



Truly Madly Guilty, by Liane Moriarty
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, December 2016

Liane Moriarty's novel, *Truly Madly Guilty*, is a thriller of sorts. For sure, the plot is not espionage-driven, nor are there any tense courtroom scenes or serial killers on the loose. Instead, the suspense builds from a seemingly ordinary event: a neighbor barbecue gone wrong.

Set in a comfortable suburb of Sidney, Australia, *Truly Madly Guilty* centers on three couples whose lives are upended by what happened one afternoon. We readers are three-quarters into the novel before we learn the terrible thing that they all experienced. The story unfolds in flashbacks, as the characters keep asking themselves, "What if we hadn't gone?"

Clementine and Sam, with their two little girls, Holly and Ruby, reluctantly accept a last-minute invitation to a barbecue at the mansion-like house of Tiffany and Vid. Clementine, an accomplished cellist, is anxious about her forthcoming symphony audition. She and Sam, who has started a new job himself, were hoping for a quiet afternoon with Erica, Clementine's oldest friend, and her husband Oliver. Instead, when Tiffany and Vid invite Erica and Oliver next door for a barbecue, they insist that Clementine, Sam, and the kids come along.

The longtime friendship of Clementine and Erica is complicated. From childhood on, Clementine has had a hard time saying "no" to Erica, who was reared by a difficult mother. Clementine equally resents and cherishes her relationship with Erica. So when Erica coaxes Clementine to join them at the barbecue, how could she resist?

Like the house they live in, Tiffany and Vid are a larger-than-life couple. Their sensitive ten-year-old daughter Dakota seems nothing like either of her parents. Vid loves entertaining and showing off his bombshell second wife Tiffany, who has a checkered past. While Sam is attracted to Tiffany, Vid flirts with Clementine. But then things go wrong, everyone feels guilty. And we readers don't see it coming.