Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Blackout

Written by Emily Barr

Published by Headline Review

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Blackout

EMILY BARR



Copyright © 2013 Emily Barr

The right of Emily Barr to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2013 by Headline Review
An imprint of Headline Publishing Group

1

Apart from any use permitted under UK copyright law, this publication may only be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, with prior permission in writing of the publishers or, in the case of reprographic production, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Cataloguing in Publication Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4722 1248 1

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Ltd, Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Headline's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

HEADLINE PUBLISHING GROUP
An Hachette UK Company
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.headline.co.uk
www.hachette.co.uk

As soon as I wake up I know I am going to be sick.

The room is blurry and I am woozy. My head hurts. Everything is fuzzy around the edges. I cannot think. There is no space in my brain for anything except the sickness and my head, which hurts so much that I think it might have an axe or a knife sticking out of it.

I roll over. I have to get to the bathroom.

I am ill. I have become ill in the night. I am going to be sick. That is all. It is the only thing in the world right now.

Daylight makes my head pound. I try to stand up, but I cannot make my legs move the way I want them to. The wall jumps forward, and then so does the floor, and I feel myself land on it.

I fell out of bed because my legs didn't work.

That is almost funny, except that it is so scary it takes my breath away.

Then the vomit comes. I cannot do anything other than turn my head. My stomach heaves and contracts, and the liquid gathers on the floorboards and then starts dripping down the cracks between them. That is awful, but also weird, as the bedroom floor should have a carpet. We don't have floorboards in the bedroom. There is a wooden floor in the sitting room, but I was in bed. Things come slowly into focus. The edges of them sharpen.

This is not my bedroom. It is nothing like my bedroom. It is a strange room with a bed in it. The light coming through the window is bright. The ceiling is sloping like an attic.

I close my eyes and drift back to sleep, lying on the floor in a puddle of my own sick.

Chapter 1

Inside

The next time I open my eyes I have forgotten all over again. Again I think I am at home. I still feel weird and ill. This time, though, I wake lying on the floor with my face and half my hair caked in dried sick. The smell of it makes me retch and I am nearly sick all over again.

I struggle to sit up, trying to make sense of this. I am in someone's attic. I have never been here before. I need water and, when I manage to pull myself up and look round, I see that there is a basin in the corner of the room, with a glass.

I make it as far as sitting on the bed, staring at the basin. I will have to see if my legs are working. If I can get there, I can drink and rinse my hair. I take a deep breath.

I smell some air beyond the sick, and it smells strange. It is not like the air at home. This is the air of a place I do not know. It is warm and breezy. I lie back on the bed and close my eyes

and try to remember where I am, and how I got here, and what has happened.

I went to bed in my own bedroom, exactly as normal. I remember it clearly. I live in London, and I went to bed after Rob. I got into bed next to him and went to sleep. That is what happened last night.

Yet I cannot have gone to sleep in one room and woken up in another.

This should be a dream, but I know that it isn't. My eyes are sore. Everything about me is wobbly and unstable. I pinch my arm, because that is what you do if you think you're dreaming, but it hurts, and my nails leave little crescents in my skin.

Time passes. I get up and stumble to the basin. Here, the ceiling slopes too much for me to stand up straight. There is no furniture except the bed, and oddly I seem to have nothing with me. No bag, no purse.

I drink three glasses of water quickly, and then hold on to the edge of the basin and wait for the sudden sick feeling to pass. I splash my face until the dried vomit has gone, and I do my best to rinse my hair, which sticks wetly to the side of my face. The walls are white and peeling with damp in some places. Red and

white checked curtains flap in the breeze. There are sounds coming from outside. They are sounds of cars and horns, raised voices.

Suddenly I notice that I am fully dressed – but in clothes I have never seen before. They are far nicer than my own clothes, and they fit me perfectly. I am wearing a stiff cotton dress and a cardigan. The dress is white and green. The cardigan is green too, the kind of tight one that Audrey Hepburn might have worn. I am more confused than ever. Normally I wear jeans and T-shirts and anything I happen to find in a charity shop. I am not myself any more.

I go to the window, my new dress swishing as I walk properly now, and pull back the curtains.

This is, of course, an attic. I am at the top of a tall building, leaning out of the window and seeing a straight drop down to a street below. There are cars and people down there, shops at ground level and windows like mine further up. The building opposite is grand, with wrought-iron bars around the windowsills and painted wooden shutters. It goes straight up like a mountain. It is far away, across a wide street.

The cars are driving on the wrong side of the road.

*

A search of the room confirms that I have no phone, no bag, no purse, no money. I check my strange new clothes for pockets, but I know already that they don't have any.

I wonder whether I have time-travelled, whether I am somehow in a different era. I am wearing clothes from the forties. Perhaps I am in the forties? Or perhaps I am in the afterlife? I could have died. I might be in a coma, and this could be the world my mind has created for me. That seems more likely than any other explanation.

The door is closed, and I run to it, suddenly certain that I will find I am locked in. However, it opens quickly and easily, and I am on a landing. There is a door opposite mine. I try the handle but it is locked. I see a wooden staircase that I start down, holding the handrail, my shaky legs creaking every step of the way.

I run down staircases, across landings, down the next flight, across more, and finally I am in a gloomy hallway, tiled in black and white checks. Dust drifts around in the light that slants down from a small pane of glass above the top of the door.

I pause before I pull it open. I have no idea what I am going to find.