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...

They All Fall Down

Written by Tammy Cohen

Published by Black Swan

All text is copyright © of the author

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

Tammy Cohen

TRANSWORLD PUBLISHERS
61–63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA
www.penguin.co.uk

Transworld is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

First published in Great Britain in 2017 by Black Swan
an imprint of Transworld Publishers

Copyright © Tammy Cohen 2017

Tammy Cohen has asserted her right under the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

This book is a work of fiction and, except in the case of historical fact, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Every effort has been made to obtain the necessary permissions with
reference to copyright material, both illustrative and quoted. We apologize for any omissions in this respect and will be pleased to make the appropriate acknowledgements in any future edition.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBNs
9781784162467 (B format)
9781784163013 (A format)

Typeset in 11/14pt Sabon by Falcon Oast Graphic Art Ltd.
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk.

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable
future for our business, our readers and our planet.
This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

For the Tuesday Club – Ed, Steve and Jo.
Because every day should be a Tuesday.

How do you stop a serial killer no one believes is real?

1

Hannah

Charlie cut her wrists last week with a shard of -caramelized sugar.

We'd made the sugar sheets together in the clinic's kitchen earlier in the day, under Joni's beady-eyed supervision.

'Yours are thick enough to do yourself an injury,' I'd said to Charlie, as a joke.

'I wonder if that's what gave her the idea,' Odelle commented afterwards, pointedly.

After Charlie died, *Bake Off* went on the banned-programmes list.

I don't feel guilty, though, because I don't think Charlie killed herself. Just as I don't think poor Sofia killed herself. In a high-suicide-risk psych clinic like this, people die all the time. It's one of the clinic's USPs. That's what makes it so easy for a killer to hide here, in plain sight. That and the fact that the only witnesses are us, and no one believes a word we say.

You don't have to be mad to live here but . . . oh, hang on, yes, you do.

I'm frightened. I'm frightened that I'm right and I'll be next. I'm even more frightened that I'm wrong, in which case I'm as crazy as they all think I am. Shut away in here, the only escape is in my own head. But what if my own head's the most dangerous place to be?

Stella comes into my room and lies across the end of my bed without speaking. Her skin is stretched tight over the sharp points of her cheeks and I can't look at

it for fear it might tear.

'It's not true,' I tell her.

My room is at the side of the building. I am sitting by the window in the beige armchair, looking out across the rose garden to where a half-hearted rain is drip, drip, dripping from the flat roof of the dance studio and -running down the wall of folding glass doors. All the furniture in my room is a variation on beige. Ecru. Biscuit. Stone. The whole of the upstairs is the colour of a surgical bandage. To avoid us getting over-stimulated, I imagine. Not much chance of that in here.

Stella turns her head so her wide blue eyes are fixed on mine. The necklace she always wears has fallen to the side so that the tiny silver cat seems to be nestling into the duvet.

'How do you know?' she says at last, in her soft, smoker's voice.

I frown at her.

'Come on,' I say. 'It's Charlie.'

'Was,' she says. And starts to cry.

The Meadows is an old Georgian-style country house, complete with ivy growing across the front and elegant floor-to-ceiling sash windows. From the semicircular gravel drive at the front you might imagine yourself on the set of a Jane Austen adaptation where at any moment the grand front door will burst open to disgorge a gaggle of giggling young women in bonnets. But drive around to the car park behind the

house and the impression is ruined by a large modern extension stuck on to the back, giving the overall effect of a stylish man with a bad toupee.

All the consulting rooms and the day room and admin and therapy rooms are in the old part, while the -cafeteria and the bedrooms are in the new bit. Sofia told me once the old part was haunted, but I've never sensed anything weird. Mind you, I was so numb when I first arrived a ghost could have climbed right on to my lap and I wouldn't have registered it. The thing about staying in a place like this, where we have group therapy twice a day and keep journals detailing our every thought, is that we're so busy gazing inwards we're blind to what's going on all around us.

Which might explain how two women have been killed and nobody seems to have noticed but me.

The art therapy room is at the back of the old house with two huge windows giving out on to the car park and beyond to the flower garden and then the vegetable plot. The jewel in the Meadows' crown – the manicured lawn leading down to a lake that is disproportionately large and deep, a legacy of an earlier, grander in-carnation of the house – is hidden from view by the ugly jut of the new extension on the left.

It is ten o'clock on Wednesday morning and we are at art therapy. Laura gets out the poster paints and asks us to do a self-portrait. The last time we did this exercise she gave us mirrors made of plastic instead of glass, so our reflections were smudgy, like we were looking at ourselves through smoke. 'Sorry,' she said

when we complained. ‘Regulations. You know how it is.’ But today is different.

‘I want you to paint yourselves the way you see yourselves when you close your eyes,’ she says. ‘Where are you? What are you doing? What are you wearing? Don’t overthink it. And don’t pay any heed to the camera. Just forget it’s there.’

The film crew – which most of the time consists only of director/presenter Justin Carter and his cameraman Drew Abbott – have been installed at the clinic for the last seven weeks, just one week less than me. I arrived on the third Monday in January, auspiciously known as Blue Monday, which is officially the most depressing day of the year, although, as you can imagine, com-petition for that title is fierce in here. Justin and Drew turned up the following week in an SUV loaded with equipment which they carted through from the rain-soaked car park, propping the door to reception open so an icy draught swept through the building and Bridget Ashworth, the clinic’s frowning admin manager, bustled about adjusting thermostats and ordering cleaning staff to mop up muddy footprints.

They’re calling it a fly-on-the-wall documentary. But Dr Roberts spun it differently: ‘An important film in breaking down the taboos surrounding mental illness,’ he said. ‘Of course, you are all perfectly entitled to opt out of the filming and at any stage you can be retro-spectively edited out. But just think what your example could mean to a young woman going through what you’ve been through, feeling there’s nobody out

there who could possibly understand.'

On the first day, Justin said, 'Just imagine we're not really here.'

'That's how most of us ended up in this place,' Charlie told him. 'For seeing things that aren't there, or not seeing things that are there. You could seriously set back our recovery.'

Justin had smiled without committing himself to laughing, just in case it wasn't appropriate, not understanding that appropriateness is something you leave at the door in here.

Today, in my painting, I am sitting in the low blue velvet chair in Emily's room. Through the sash window behind me the sky is navy and I put in a perfectly round yellowy-white moon so it's obvious it's nighttime. I am looking at something over to the right, out of sight. I'm wearing my pale blue dressing gown. My face is a pink blur, streaked with black because I didn't wait long enough for the paint to dry before trying to do the eyes.

'Nice dress,' Laura says when she comes round to look. 'Is that in your house? Your bedroom, maybe?'

I nod. I don't want to tell her the truth because when I talk about Emily it gets noted down in a book and then I have to talk about it at Group. And then Dr Roberts will cock his head to one side and write something in his notebook and I might have to stay here longer. So I don't tell her that the me in the picture is looking at the right-hand corner of Emily's room, where her cot used to be.

Stella's painting is all black, except for a tiny figure at the bottom, naked apart from her long, yellow hair, which reaches almost to the floor. Laura looks at it for a long time and then puts her hand on Stella's narrow shoulder and squeezes before moving on to someone else.

Since Charlie died, all Stella's paintings have been black.

As usual, Odelle has painted herself hugely fat. She's wearing the same black top and skinny jeans the real Odelle has on today and is looking into a mirror in which a slimline version of herself is reflected back. Or maybe it's the other way around and the slim Odelle is the real one and the fat one the reflection. Either way, it's just another variation of Odelle's sole enduring theme. Herself and her body.

'It's very . . . narrative, Odelle,' says Laura. Odelle glances towards the camera at the back of the room, wanting to be sure they are capturing this. 'But just once, I'd love to see you really let rip. This exercise is about here' – Laura taps her chest lightly – 'not about here,' tapping her head.

The mild rebuke sets Odelle's bottom lip trembling. Odelle tends to fixate on people. That's one of the -reasons she's in here. That and the fact she weighs around eighty-five pounds. When Charlie first arrived, Odelle apparently fixated on her too for a short while, following her around, sitting too close to her at dinner and on the sofa in the lounge. But mostly it's authority figures she goes for. Roberts is basically God as far

as Odelle is concerned, and Laura comes a close second. Odelle's always loitering in the art room after class, offering to help clear away or asking for extra, one-to-one help.

The Meadows believes in niche therapy. We have people who come in to cure us through horticulture, music, baking and movement. Last week, Grace, the aptly named movement therapist, had us fling ourselves around the dance studio pretending to be leaves blown about by the wind and Odelle actually cried. 'I feel so insignificant,' she said. Judith said the reason Odelle got upset was probably because she really did get blown about by the wind, on account of weighing so little.

Basically, nothing happens in here that can't be turned into some kind of therapy. There's even recreational therapy, which really means watching TV. Charlie and I had a running joke about that. Instead of asking if I was going to dinner, she'd say, 'Are you coming to eating therapy?' One time, when I was late down to breakfast, I said I'd been doing some 'pooing therapy' and we laughed for about ten minutes, until Odelle told us we were being childish and also 'insensitive' to all the people in here who 'can't find much to laugh about'.

But Laura is the therapist people get closest to. She used to be a nurse in her younger days, and she still emits that I-can-make-you-better aura. She has her own little office at the back of the art room, with a fan heater and a kettle and several different types of tea,

and you can pop in there and curl up on the armchair and wrap yourself up in the soft woollen tartan throw for a chat without feeling like what you say will be noted down in your file somewhere. Laura can be a little bit new-agey. For those who are into that sort of thing, she offers informal meditation or relaxation therapy, which is basically hypnosis. Charlie used to love it in there. 'It's the only part of the clinic where I can be myself,' she told me once. Odelle nips in there at any opportunity. She installs herself in the armchair, with the tartan -blanket wrapped around all those other layers she -habitually wears, and discusses her favourite subject. Namely, herself.

Laura spends a few moments murmuring something to Nina, who is slumped in front of a piece of paper which is blank apart from a faintly drawn oval. Last week in art she produced seven paintings in one class, her brush flying over the paper, colours bleeding into one another, but today she can hardly summon the energy to lift her stick of charcoal.

Frannie is crying again, tears tracking slowly down her cheeks, and she brushes them away as if she hardly notices them. Her painting has two figures in it, which, strictly speaking, is cheating, but no one is judging. Firstly, there's a huge face with a long, fine nose and a small, full mouth and massive green eyes. The face is Frannie's, and in one of the eyes is another face. It's too small for the features to be identifiable but the black curls mark it out as Charlie.

'Because she's in your thoughts?' asks Laura.

My chest feels tight when I look at the straight brown bob Frannie has given herself in her portrait, hanging just below her chin. The real Frannie is wearing a blue-and-white striped beanie hat, but underneath it her hair is sparse and thin with bald patches that break your heart, vulnerable as the soft part on a newborn baby's head.

My baby was called Emily.

And now I don't want to paint any more.

Later on, in Evening Group, we start, as always, by going round each one of us in the circle, reporting back on whether we've achieved the two goals we each set ourselves this morning. Mine were to start reading a proper book, as opposed to the celebrity magazines which are all I've read for the last two months, and to wash my hair. I failed at the first, the letters moving across the page like lines of tiny ants. But in the second goal I can claim some success, having dragged myself, finally, into the shower, so that my hair, while still a tangled mess, is at least clean for the first time in days. I hate myself for the glow of pleasure I feel when Dr Roberts says 'Well *done*, Hannah,' and everyone gives me a round of applause, as if I've climbed Mount Kilimanjaro or something.

After about half an hour we go back to talking about Charlie. Odelle shares a story about when she first arrived here and was missing her family and had just gone through her first meal with someone sitting next

to her monitoring everything that went into her mouth and was curled up on her bed, crying into her pillow – Odelle holds a hand to her face to demonstrate, visibly moved by her own story – and Charlie knocked on her door and sat on the end of the bed and chatted to her, and even made her laugh. That was the thing about Charlie. She could say things to make you laugh so hard your tea came out of your nose. Then she'd go back to her room and make bite marks on her own arm. Of all the people I've met in my life, she was the one who was most forgiving of others – and the least forgiving of herself.

'But she didn't kill herself,' I say, when it's my turn to speak.

Dr Roberts sits back in his seat with one leg crossed over the other at the knee and one elbow hooked over the back of the chair. He has a pen in his hand and he clicks the end in and out as he listens, and nods. His eyes are narrowed so I can't see them, but I know they are blue in some lights and green in others. His hair, brown but liberally threaded with silver, is swept back from his face, although a lock often falls over his left eye when he gets animated. His close-cropped beard is equal -measures of silver and brown, and when he smiles, two dimples appear in his cheeks and the lines around his eyes concertina into folds a person could get lost in.

The transference rate – that thing where patients end up in love with their shrinks – is pretty high in our clinic.

‘It’s a very interesting theory, Hannah.’ His voice is warm and honey-coated. ‘But you know – we all knew – that Charlie was deeply, chronically depressed. Just because we loved her doesn’t mean we could help her. It’s inevitable that we all feel some sense of failure that we couldn’t do more, and failure is a damned un- comfortable feeling. It’s far preferable to imagine she was done away with against her will, because that’s not anything we could have prevented or seen coming. But the fact is, we weren’t responsible. There’s nothing anyone could have done.’

‘Yes, we have to forgive ourselves,’ adds Odelle.

I look around the circle, where twelve women sit on chairs, one leg twisted around the other, heads bowed, hands fidgeting. I see Frannie plucking at her almost non-existent eyelashes. She studies a hair and then pops it into her mouth. I see Stella staring impassively ahead through her widely stretched eyes. She’s wearing a -powder-blue dress today that has a tight bodice and a flared skirt. I try not to look at the waist, made -artificially tiny by the removal of a rib, nor at the painful swell of her surgically enhanced breasts. I see Odelle, who layers clothes on to her body like she is making papier mâché, leaning forward earnestly, sniffing for approval like a blind laboratory rat. I see Judith and Nina and the eight other inmates – service users, as we’re officially known – and Justin and Drew, shadowing our every move with the camera. And though my back is towards the door, in my head I see, through the safety-glass panel be-

hind me, across the hallway and up the sweeping wooden staircase that leads to the plush consulting rooms, to where Dr Chakraborty, the clinic's deputy director, sits in his office, reading through notes with his sad, brown eyes, while downstairs in the therapy rooms I see Laura and Grace and the other part-time therapists. At the back of the staircase, through the door that leads to the new building, and the cafeteria and kitchen and the Mindfulness Area and the tiny staffroom where the medicines are kept, I see Joni and Darren, the psychiatric nurses, clutching their notebooks, and Bridget Ashworth, the clinic's brisk admin manager, and the well-meaning volunteers and the kitchen staff and the orderlies. All the people charged with keeping us safe. And then my gaze is pulled back here again and I see Dr Oliver Roberts, guru, Svengali, saint, sage, saviour.

Murderer?

It could be him. It could be any of them.

But it definitely happened.

I'd have to be crazy to make a thing like that up.