LoveReading

YOU LOVED YOUR LAST BOOK...
BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO READ NEXT?

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

Opening Extract from...

REWIND

Written by **Catherine Ryan Howard**
Published By **Corvus, an imprint of Atlantic Books**

All text is Copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is brought to you by **LoveReading**. Please print off and read at your leisure.

REWIND



CATHERINE
RYAN HOWARD



REWIN pages Hardback v1s02.indd 3 11/06/2019 08:45

In a room of shadows, a woman sleeps.

She is the bulge on the right side of the double bed. Strands of dark hair splayed across a pillow. One bare arm outside the sheets, a wedding band visible on her ring finger.

Unaware that she isn't alone.

This room is an unfamiliar one for her, even more so in the dark. Were she to wake up right now she might lift her head, prop herself up on her elbows and turn her head to look around it. Gradually her eyes would adjust and shapes would emerge from the dark.

After a moment, she would remember where she was and why she had gone there.

How long would it take her to see the shape that doesn't belong?

It stands stock still in the corner, arms down by its sides. The clothes are dark and bulky – layers, perhaps against the winter cold. Gloves on the hands, a balaclava on the head. The balaclava is twisted slightly to one side so the eyes are barely visible and the slit for the mouth shows only some cheek.

Watching.

Watching and waiting.

Waiting to use the knife with the long, serrated blade pressed against its side.

Time passes.

The sleeping woman stirs – her legs move; she turns over; the arm slips beneath the covers – but she does not wake. The dark figure moves closer to the bed until it is standing beside it, looming over her. She does not wake. The gloved hand that isn't holding the knife reaches out and gently strokes the woman's face and still, she does not wake.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 1 10/06/2019 14:55

The intruder makes a circle with a thumb and middle finger and flicks the woman's cheek, hard, because – it's clear now – it *wants* her to be awake.

A moment's delay.

Then a frenzy of motion.

The woman's eyes open. Her body rises, head and shoulders lifting from the pillows, legs rising beneath the sheets. She opens her mouth as if to scream but the figure clamps a hand over it, pushing her back down. The hand that's holding the knife lifts to pull back the sheets with a finger. The woman is wearing a pair of shorts and a camisole top, her pale limbs are bare, exposed now. She sees the blade and her efforts to get away instantly intensify. Now her arms are flailing wildly, her legs kicking, her whole body jerking and contorting and squirming in the bed, fingers clawing at the balaclava—

The knife rises slowly in the air and then comes back down quickly, with force, plunging through the thin material of the woman's top and disappearing into the concave flesh of her stomach.

Lifts again. Down again.

Into the chest.

Lifts again. Down again.

A slash across the woman's forearm.

Lifts again. Down again.

Deep into the right side of her neck, just under the jawline.

The intruder steps back.

The woman's hands go to her neck and almost immediately her fingers are stained by the blood that flows from the wound there. Her mouth is open as if in a silent scream.

Dark, spreading stains.

She turns, rolling on to her right side. Her uninjured arm reaches out, past the edge of the bed, towards the intruder, as if asking for help.

The figure in black bends to lay the knife on the bedside table before going to the chest of drawers pushed against the wall opposite the foot of the bed and destroying the camera hidden there.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 2 10/06/2019 14:55



REWIND

0:00:17

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 3 10/06/2019 14:55

It took Natalie most of the day to get away from Dublin City. From *all* cities. Cork was the last one she'd seen. She'd taken the train there first thing this morning, then transferred to this bus. It had snaked through Midleton – goodbye towns, too – and onwards, ambling along narrow, winding roads, the kind where the single white line painted down the middle was already more gone than still there. By the time she caught her first glimpse of the sea, she was 300 kilometres from her own front door. The traffic had thinned to the occasional passing car but the road twisted so much that the driver felt the need to blast the horn before each and every bend.

Natalie watched the bars signalling reception in the corner of her phone's screen disappear one by one. She'd already lost her mobile data; it had dropped out somewhere between Castlemartyr and Ladysbridge. The device in her hand was now rendered almost useless. She pushed through the urge to connect to the bus company's wifi for the last few minutes of the journey and let the phone slip into the depths of her handbag instead.

For all of a minute it felt like peace, a welcome release.

Then her fingers started to twitch and her palms grew clammy.

Natalie turned to concentrate intently on the view out the window. There was a stretch of smooth, grey sea wedged between the horizon and the darkening sky, marred only by two blots, one large, one small. Islands. She could just about make out the lighthouse sitting atop the larger one, looking like the nib of a fine pen from this distance. Then the bus took a hard right and there were only fields and trees and neat, old-fashioned bungalows, all surrounded by low pebble-dashed walls and set close to the road.

Then a sign for THE KILN DESIGN STORE & CAFÉ 500m.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 4 10/06/2019 14:55

Another one right behind it: WELCOME TO SHANAMORE.

She was here.

For the entire journey, a burning heat had been rushing against the back of Natalie's legs from a grille beneath her seat. She was desperate for some cold, fresh air but also to stay on the bus, to let it take her back out of here again, to go home and talk to Mike and to forget about this while there was still time to.

But when the bus lurched to a stop, she got up and got off it.

She wasn't prepared for the icy blast of late November air that pricked at her skin and instantly infiltrated her clothes. Gasping at the shock of it after the thick heat of the bus, Natalie hurried to pull on the coat she'd carried outside draped over an arm.

The train journey from Dublin to Cork had been just under three hours and she'd spent it obsessing over images of Shanamore she'd found online. This was having a disconcerting effect now that she was here. It was as if she was touring the set of a movie she'd watched a hundred times: everything was strangely familiar and yet totally foreign at the same time.

The bus had stopped outside the entrance to the car park of The Kiln, a trendy design store shaped like a barn that presumably flogged its locally produced crafts to well-heeled foreigners and its flat whites to local farmers. Its car park was the only smooth stretch of tarmacadam surface in Natalie's line of sight. There was the church, rising up behind her, the tallest thing for miles. There was the small public park alongside it, although in real life the rubbish bins had beer bottles in them and the picnic tables were liberally spotted with dried bird shit. The dull, sparse grass sloped away from her, falling to the level of the next bend in the road. Beyond it, the logo of a service station glowed bright against the dark sky. Directly opposite was a row of squat terraced houses bookended by two pubs. One of them was perfect Instagram fodder, the other was in dire need of knocking down.

Next to the picturesque pub was the mouth of a small road. Natalie could see a giant pothole at its start, concrete crumbling at its edges, the crater filled with murky water. When she lifted her eyes, she

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 5 10/06/2019 14:55

saw a cardboard sign had been tacked to the nearest telephone pole: SHANAMORE COTTAGES, 1KM. It pointed down the potholed road.

Everything else in her eyeline was hedge or tree or sky.

The light was fading. Natalie didn't wear a watch but she figured she'd turned off her phone ten minutes ago, at the most, and it had been just after five o'clock then. She needed to get to the cottages before it got *actually* dark.

She set off, pulling her case behind her.

Plastic wheels against crumbling tarmacadam produced a hollow, rumbling noise. In the dead quiet, the noise she was making seemed to grow louder and louder. At least, she thought, the road was relatively straight, so any oncoming cars would see her before they hit her – she hoped.

When Natalie finally spotted the sign marking the entrance to Shanamore Cottages, she guessed it was fifteen minutes since she'd got off the bus. Pretty much the length of the walk that Google Maps had promised, then. The cottages, however, were not entirely as advertised.

Individually, the six of them were identifiable from the images she'd seen online. Which is to say, they didn't look much like cottages at all. Each one was an identical assembly of cubes. Some smooth, unpainted cement and some thick, green-ish glass. The smallest cube was the entranceway, a space about the size of two telephone boxes, where the only non-glass piece was the wooden slab of a front door. A larger cube behind it formed the home's ground level, with mini cubes making a couple of postmodern bay windows, one at the front and one at the side. Another cube half its size formed the second storey, pushed a few feet to the rear. The entire front section of that cube – the master bedroom, from what Natalie remembered of the website – was made of glass.

But it was obvious now that the photos online had been taken at carefully considered angles. Their frames had conveniently omitted the breeze-block shell of an unfinished McMansion sitting in the overgrown field next door, and they didn't convey at all just how close together the cottages were. They were sitting in two rows

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 6 10/06/2019 14:55

of three, facing each other, with only the narrowest of laneways separating each one from its immediate neighbour. Natalie suspected that if you stood in one of those lanes and stretched your arms out, you'd touch a cottage on each side. She'd found an old newspaper article online, property section, which suggested these were the work of an ambitious young architect who'd qualified at the height of the Boom and had been gifted a swathe of Daddy's land. Crowding it with cottages must have been him trying to get as much bang for his buck as he could. If that was his plan, it hadn't worked. The cottages had stood empty for years, no buyer willing to be the first, until some foreign investment firm had bought the lot for a song and turned the entire estate into a holiday 'village' of short-term lets instead.

Movement.

A man had emerged from the nearest cottage and was striding towards her. The house had a sign in the front window that Natalie couldn't read in the dim but she thought it might say RECEPTION.

He waved, called out, 'Marie?'

He must be Andrew, the manager.

Natalie waved back. 'That's me.'

Marie was her middle name. She'd made the booking over the phone just a few hours ago, giving her first name as Marie and her last as Kerr – Mike's last name, her married one, which she never used. If she had to produce a credit card now or show some photo ID the jig would be up, but maybe the check-in procedure at Shanamore Cottages was more of a casual operation. She'd only needed to give a name and a telephone number to secure her reservation, after all.

There was a red hatchback sitting in Andrew's driveway and he met her at its rear. The car's licence plate was almost completely obscured by a thick layer of dried mud.

'Welcome to Shanamore,' he said.

It had a streak of apology in it.

They shook hands, limply, Natalie conscious of the fact that hers was warm and damp from dragging her case.

Andrew was wearing dark corduroy trousers and a thick, Aran-style sweater that seemed much too big for his wiry frame;

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 7 10/06/2019 14:55

he gripped the too-long cuffs of it in his palms with the tips of his fingers. His dark hair was long and flopped in front of his eyes, the kind of style the boys at school used to have back when Natalie was in it. (Curtains? Isn't that what they called it?) It all conspired to create a first impression of youth and boyishness but here, up close, Natalie could see that this man was easily her age, late twenties, early thirties.

'You found us all right?' he asked.

'No problem at all.'

He looked around, behind her. 'You didn't *walk* here?'

'Only up the road,' she said. 'The bus dropped me off by The Kiln.'

'You've been here before? To Shanamore?'

'No, never.'

'And you're *not* here to make pottery – right?'

He'd already asked her this on the phone. There was a local potter who offered week-long classes and had some arrangement whereby attendees got a discount if they stayed here.

'No.' Natalie smiled. 'I'm just after a few days' peace and quiet, that's all.'

'Well, let me show you to your cottage.'

They started walking, him leading the way.

'You live on site?' she asked.

'Yep.'

'All year round?'

'All year round.'

'And you said on the phone you only keep one or two of these open at this time of the year?'

'It's easier that way,' Andrew said. 'Makes more sense.'

'So can I ask which one …?'

Andrew pulled a key from his pocket and held it up to the light. It had a large '6' printed on its plastic tag.

Natalie tried to keep her expression neutral while her entire body flooded with relief.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 8 10/06/2019 14:55

She didn't know what she would've done if he'd shown her to a different cottage. She'd had vague notions of finding a way to get inside No. 6 by other means, later, or making up some complaint that would necessitate a move there first thing in the morning. But mostly she'd tried to not worry about this detail. Now, finally, she could stop.

No. 6 was the cottage directly opposite Andrew's, No. 1. He unlocked the front door and hurried inside ahead of her. There was no hall or foyer; you were immediately in the living room, facing the foot of the stairs. The entire ground floor of the cottage was one big, open space.

'Meant to do this earlier,' he muttered as he scurried about the room, turning on lights. Two floor lamps, the pendant hanging over the dining table, spots recessed in the ceiling positioned strategically over faded prints of Shanamore Strand in cheap IKEA frames. He pushed a button and transformed the pane of black glass stuck low on the (fake) chimney breast into a scene of (fake) glowing fire. He fiddled with the thermostat until the nearest radiator started to splutter and click. Plumped a sofa cushion. Straightened the coffee table.

Natalie stepped inside, closing the door behind her, and watched him move around the room. He reminded her of an air steward in the galley before trolley service: practised to the point of automation.

'Oh,' he said suddenly, 'I forgot your welcome basket.'

Before Natalie could respond, he was gone and the front door was closing with a *thunk* for the second time in as many minutes.

She parked her suitcase and advanced into the room.

Two three-seater black leather couches and a matching armchair were arranged in a U-shape around the fire and the flat-screen TV that hung above it. Behind the furthest couch, at the rear of the ground floor, was a solid wood dining table with space for eight and beyond that, the clinically white cabinets of an ultra-modern kitchen. Their glossy finish made them gleam in the lights.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 9 10/06/2019 14:55

The only walls were the exterior ones. The one at the rear was made entirely of glass, a huge window with one door inset. The staircase clung to the side wall and had only air between its steps and no railing; Natalie felt nervous just looking at it. Floor-to-ceiling windows interrupted the remaining two walls. It was dark enough outside now for all the glass to be showing only interior reflections.

Natalie touched a hand to one of the cushions on the armchair and felt cold with a hint of damp.

And a lump forming in her throat.

A squeeze of heartbreak in her chest.

This can't be the place … Can it?

The door swung open. Andrew was back, carrying a small wicker basket. The air swirled and changed, suddenly charged with the presence of another person, chilled with the draught the open door was letting in.

He looked at her, eyebrows raised, awaiting a verdict.

'It's nice,' she said. 'Lovely.'

'Good. Glad you like it. Sorry about the cold. I should've put on the heating earlier. It should warm up pretty quick.' He set the basket on the coffee table. 'So – any questions?'

'No, no. I think I'm all set.'

She smiled. His eyes met hers and she realised it was for the first time. Eye contact, evidently, wasn't his thing. Andrew proved this by looking away again almost immediately.

Then he gave a little wave, turned on his heel and left.

The *thunk* of the front door locking shut echoed around the house again and then everything was quiet and still.

Too quiet and still.

Natalie cast about for a remote control but couldn't find one, so she went to the TV and randomly pressed the slim buttons hidden on its side until loud voices boomed into the space, banishing the silence.

She took a quick inventory of the contents of the wicker basket. A box of Irish soda bread mix; six mismatched eggs; a bag of Cork Coffee Roaster's 'Rebel' blend; a bar of chocolate with a pencil sketch

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 10 10/06/2019 14:55

of Shanamore Strand on the label; a single bottle of beer from the Franciscan Well; a small carton of milk.

She was patting her coat pockets for the hard shape of her phone before she even realised she was doing it. It was like a muscle memory, a tic. But she didn't need a photo of the basket. She didn't need any photos at all, because she wouldn't be posting online about this trip.

For a change.

A search of the kitchen turned up a drawer filled with things swiped but not consumed by previous guests: hardened sachets of salt and pepper, a few pouches of ketchup and mayonnaise, individually wrapped teabags.

Natalie supposed she could bake the bread and have it toasted with scrambled eggs, but she was missing a crucial ingredient: being arsed enough to. She wasn't even hungry, not really. So she made herself a cup of hot, sweet tea and took it to one of the couches, and idly ate her way through the chocolate bar square by square without even taking off her coat.

What she was really doing, she knew, was stalling. Putting off going upstairs. Because being here in the cottage was one thing, but to see the bed, to have to – at some point – get *into* it …

On the TV, the talk show had been replaced by a *Friends* rerun. The one with the wedding dresses.

By the time Phoebe and Monica had persuaded Rachel to get into one too, it was pitch black outside.

Natalie got up to draw the curtains.

According to the front window there was nothing out there in the night except for a buttery gold square directly opposite: a view into Andrew's living room via the window at the front of his cottage. Same layout, same furniture, just all turned the other way around like a mirror image. There was no sign of him and no lights on upstairs, although his car was still parked in the drive.

She pulled the curtains closed until their edges overlapped. The material was thin, the orbs of the streetlights easily filtering through.

There was nothing to cover the wall of black glass, yawning like the mouth of a great abyss at the rear of the cottage. Either the owners

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 11 10/06/2019 14:55

were trying to save money or they thought there was no need for window dressings when all that was behind the house was a patio, a few feet of communal garden and a hedgerow. But it made Natalie uneasy. What was on the other side of that hedge? She couldn't tell in the dark.

There could be another house looking directly into hers.

There could be someone looking at her right now.

As Natalie stood at the glass, contemplating this, it morphed from a mere lack of privacy into a structural vulnerability. How strong was that glass? Could someone hurl a rock through it? What would she do if someone did?

Here it comes, she thought. The Anxiety Train. Express service to Crazytown unless she applied the brakes. Natalie tried to, now, telling herself that the glass was fine and that there was no one out there. That hundreds if not thousands of people had stayed in Shanamore Cottages before her and nothing had happened to any of them. That if it were daytime, she wouldn't even have noticed this. This wouldn't even be a thing.

She silently repeated this several times until she felt herself relax.

But she also wished she'd found a bottle of wine in that bloody wicker basket.

It was when she turned to go back to the couch that the shelf beneath the coffee table revealed itself and the several small piles of books on it. Natalie knelt on the floor and started pulling them out, appraising each one. Battered paperbacks. Airport bestsellers, for the most part. A newish copy of *Jurassic Park*. Two or three in a foreign language.

A library of left-behind holiday reads.

Natalie stopped and stared at the narrow, hard, cornflower-blue spine.

And she knew. She knew even before she reached out and picked it up and turned it over in her hands: it wasn't just a copy of *Percy Bysshe Shelley selected by Fiona Sampson*. It was *her* copy.

Their copy, hers and Mike's.

Then she opened it and got confirmation.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 12 10/06/2019 14:55

Stuck on the first page was the bookplate she'd bought in the Keats–Shelley House by the Spanish Steps, along with the book itself, a few years before. It was stuck on slightly askew because Natalie had done it quickly, surreptitiously, in the doorway of the gift shop, before Mike could catch her in the act. The *For my M* she'd scrawled beneath the sticker was in a messy version of her handwriting for the same reason. When she'd presented it to him that night over a candlelit dinner off the Via Veneto, the first thing he'd said was, 'When did you buy this?' The next question he'd asked her was if she'd marry him, the proposal his plan for their supposedly last-minute weekend away in Rome all along.

Last week she'd been arranging the bookshelves in the room she was supposed to be using as a home office when it had occurred to her that she hadn't seen that book in a while. When she'd asked him about it, Mike had reminded her that there were a few things they hadn't seen since the move. He'd said it was probably down the bottom of a box they hadn't unpacked yet. He'd seemed confident that it would show up soon.

Natalie clutched the book to her chest as if it were something precious. And it was, but not for the reasons it had been in the past.

Now, it was evidence.

Now, she had proof.

The clock on the TV screen said it was almost eight. Natalie decided to have a bath. It would warm her up and give the cottage time to warm up too. Afterwards, she'd crawl into bed and let herself sink into a night of blissful sleep. She could face facts tomorrow.

She'd have to face the bed now, though.

Reluctant to put the poetry book back with the others or to leave it out, Natalie pulled open drawers in the kitchen until she found a relatively empty one and then slipped it in there. After double-checking the doors and windows were locked, she turned out the living-room lights and lugged her case up the stairs. She kept her

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 13 10/06/2019 14:55

free hand on the wall to steady herself and tried not to focus on the empty space between the steps or the yawning open space to the right of them.

There were two closed doors at the top, one off either side of the small, carpeted landing. The bathroom was through the one on the right. Simple, white and very clean. There were no windows save for a tiny frosted square above the sink. Natalie dropped the plug in the bath and ran the tap until it got hot, adding a few drops from the miniature bottle of shower gel that had been left on the edge.

She sat on the closed lid of the toilet and watched the bubbles grow.

Until an alien noise pierced the air.

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP-BEEP-BEEP.

Her phone, Natalie realised on a delay.

Had it always been that loud? And that annoying? She got up to retrieve it from her bag, which she'd dropped in the doorway. A single bar of service had appeared on screen, letting a flood of text messages and notifications come through. The newest one said she had a voicemail.

Natalie put the phone to her ear and played it.

It was him.

'Nat, where are you? What's going on? I'm—'

She threw the phone across the room and watched as it smacked off the tiled wall, dropped into the bath water and sank beneath the bubbles.

Natalie blinked.

Had she really just done that?

She'd done it unthinkingly, or rather *before* she could think about it, and now, in the moment immediately after, she felt like she might throw up.

No phone? The idea made her feel clammy, anxious, unmoored. *No phone*. *No phone*. *No phone*. She couldn't contact anyone and no one could contact her. No one even knew where she was—

But that had been her plan, hadn't it? She had intended to turn off the phone while she was here. This would make things easier now.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 14 10/06/2019 14:55

Simpler. She wouldn't be *able* to turn it back on, so she wouldn't need to waste any energy trying to stop herself from doing it.

This was a good thing, even if it didn't feel that way.

Natalie found the phone beneath the water – the screen, somehow, had remained intact – and put it in the plastic bin under the sink.

The bath wasn't full yet. She pictured herself lying in there with the breach of the bedroom still ahead of her and decided that wasn't the right recipe for relaxation. She should go in there now. Just get it over with.

It was only a bed, for God's sake. An inanimate piece of furniture.

She crossed the landing.

The bedroom was cold with a hint of damp, just like downstairs, and just like downstairs, this space had a gaping wall of glass. The difference was that this one was to the front of the cottage.

There was an amber streetlight right outside and it lit the room well enough to see the outlines of everything in it, but Natalie flicked on the ceiling light to get a better look. The bed was king-sized, the sheets plain white and pulled smooth across the mattress. She got down on her hands and knees to look underneath it, imagining that she'd see the glint of a cufflink or a lost earring, like people do in the movies.

There was nothing.

It didn't matter. She had the poetry book.

The bed faced built-in wardrobes with mirrored doors. There was a dressing table, a small TV screen mounted on the wall and a table and two tub-style armchairs set right in front of the wall of glass, just in case you wanted to play a game of Exhibit in a Zoo.

This wall of glass, at least, had curtains. Natalie was pulling them closed when she caught a flicker of movement in her peripheral vision: someone moving in the downstairs window of Andrew's cottage. But when she looked, there was no one there.

She wondered what Andrew's deal was. Was he from Shanamore? Did he live alone over there? She hadn't seen a wedding ring or any evidence of children. And there was something about him, something she couldn't quite articulate, that made it hard for her to believe he

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 15 10/06/2019 14:55

wasn't alone and easy to assume that he was.

The wall of black glass that fronted the second storey of Andrew's cottage – his bedroom window – suddenly lit up with a flash of eerie blue light, revealing—

A woman.

Standing at the window, looking out.

Natalie yanked the curtains closed, then immediately regretted being so obvious about it.

There'd barely been time to collect an impression but it was definitely a woman she'd seen, not Andrew. She was wearing a skirt. Knee-length, maybe. And her hair was pulled back from her face, perhaps in a ponytail …

'No,' Natalie said aloud, catching herself. *Don't start down that road*. She'd only seen this woman for a fraction of second; she couldn't describe her in any detail with any certainty. And she didn't think she'd been wearing glasses. The light that revealed her was so odd, it was as if she was lit from the chest up—

Natalie realised what the weird blue light had been, where it had been coming from.

The woman's phone.

That had been *all* the light, which meant that until some call or message had lit up that phone's screen, that woman had just been standing there in total darkness, at the window, in Andrew's bedroom.

Watching.

Watching Natalie.

REWIN pages Hardback v1s01.indd 16 10/06/2019 14:55