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...**

# Never Coming Home

Written by Evonne Wareham

Published by Choc Lit

All text is copyright © of the author

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

# *Never Coming Home*

Evonne Wareham




Copyright © 2012 Evonne Wareham

First published 2012 by Choc Lit Limited
Penrose House, Crawley Drive, Camberley, Surrey GU15 2AB, UK
www.choclitpublishing.com

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

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopyin g, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the UK such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1P 9HE

A CIP catalogue record for t his book is available from the British Library

ISBN-978-1-906931-70-4

## *Prologue*

*October 4th*

He wasn't meant to be there.

Not on that road, at that time, on that day – but the job in Atlanta had fallen apart, the client was screaming and someone had to sort out the mess.

Sometimes owning the company sucked.

Once he'd cleaned the brown stuff off the fan – and the walls and the floor – any sensible man would have taken the next plane out.

Except Devlin hated to fly.

Driving – well – that was something else. He'd take the plane in the end, but he could afford an hour or two on the road first. And right now –

Right now the sun was going down, with a lot of bright, hot colour. Dusk and the empty highway ahead, and the Boss on the radio, keening about bad desire.

He could take the time, if he wanted.

Sometimes owning the company wasn't so bad.

He almost drove past it.

There wasn't much to see. Some rubber on the road, a few broken bushes. Something – that weird sixth sense, that had saved his ass more times than he ever wanted to think about – made him pull over. Just to take a look.

Then he was scrambling through the bushes and down the gritty slope, feet sliding on loose shale, towards the car.

It was a beat-up black Chevy. On its back, wheels in the air. Like an upturned bug.

The briefest look at the woman behind the wheel, dangling grotesquely from the still-fastened seatbelt, told him she was beyond anything but prayer.

All Devlin's attention was on the other side of the car.

In the scrubby dust beside a rock, lit by the dying rays of the sun, was another victim.

This one was still moving.

*5th October*

Kaz Elmore had the corkscrew in her hand when the doorbell rang. She let out a low-pitched groan. It had been a long day. With no pressing need to get home, she'd lingered on-site, then found herself driving across London at the height of the rush hour. Her back was aching and her skin prickling from the unexpected afternoon sun.

There was a full bath upstairs, with her name on it. The fragrance of lavender bath oil drifted through the house. Only the sudden impulse for a glass of wine, to drink while she soaked, had brought her back down. She could already taste it – cool and slightly tart, condensation beading the rim of the glass … *Grrr!* Opportunities for self-indulgence didn't come by that often. She was trying to make the most of this one. If she was allowed to!

Her mouth twisted in a rueful grin. Five minutes more and she could have ignored whoever was standing on the step, finger pressed to the bell. Now, silhouetted by the kitchen light, she was clearly visible through the glass.

'If you're selling double glazing, mate, I know *exactly* where I'm going to bury the body.'

Kaz padded along the hall. A pile of mail was stacked, unopened, on the side table. Her eyes skittered towards it. She'd leafed through it already. There was nothing there. It was much too soon to expect a postcard, even if Jeff … The doorbell pealed again.

'Hold on!' Flipping the catch, she eased the door open a crack, peering through the gap. 'Uncle Phil!' Annoyance forgotten, she unhooked the chain and threw open the door. 'Hi! This *is* a surprise. I was opening a bottle of wine, or are you still on duty? Come in.'

Kaz was half-way down the hall before she realised her uncle wasn't following.

'What?' She turned towards him, a sudden tightness in her chest. His face was bleak. His official face, eyes flat. Her stomach lurched. 'What is it?'

'There's no easy way to tell you this, love. It's bad news. The worst.'

# *Chapter One*

‘You know, Dev, you don’t have to do this.’ Bobby Hoag leaned on the doorjamb of his partner’s office. Devlin was tossing files into drawers and packing his laptop into its travel case. ‘Have you thought about it?’ Bobby persisted. Behind him the reception area was deserted, the lights dim. An open window wafted the smoke from Bobby’s cigarette into the rainy Chicago night. ‘It’s been more than six months. By now these people will have settled, put it behind them. And you’re going to rake it all up again?’

That got Devlin’s attention. He looked up, scowling.

‘Would you ever put something like that behind you?’

‘Well – no,’ Bobby admitted. ‘But even so – if no one has got in touch, in all this time –’

‘I’ve thought about this, Bobby.’ Devlin zipped the slim travel case and propped himself against the desk, folding his arms. ‘Christ, it’s not something I want to do. Maybe I won’t, when it comes down to it. This trip is about work, first and foremost. It just happens to be London, and the woman is in London.’

‘Cheyne Walk, Chelsea – you’re not the only one round here who can use the Internet.’ Bobby answered the raised eyebrows. ‘Classy address?’

‘One of the best – which makes the whole thing …’ Devlin shrugged.

‘Curiosity.’ Bobby’s face opened up in relief. ‘Now *that* I can understand.’

‘Don’t worry, mate, I’m not going soft on you.’ Devlin picked up the case. ‘Maybe I’ll still decide not to bother the lady.’ He shrugged. ‘In six months, she hasn’t bothered me.’ He looked at his watch. ‘I have to go.’ He pointed a finger. ‘Hold the fort. Stay away from fast women and slow horses. Don’t let anyone pay us in nine-dollar bills.’

‘Hah!’ Bobby snickered. ‘I wasn’t the one who got scammed into taking those shares in a diamond mine.’

'You can laugh buddy – if that mine ever comes good, I'm gonna be up to my ass in pretty wimen. Pretty wimen *love* diamonds.'

Devlin settled grudgingly into his seat. He'd been prowling the aisle of the plane until one of the exasperated stewardesses, perky blonde, with dimples, had suggested he might like to stretch out and relax. He'd given in, but only because of the dimples.

It wasn't the flying that got him. It was the whole business of putting himself in someone else's hands. The airport thing, trapped in ever-lengthening limbo between check-in and actually boarding the damn aeroplane, and then the plane itself. Someone else had to drive it, and that bugged him. For all he knew, there was a bunch of assholes up there in the cockpit, playing strip poker, while this high-tech piece of scrap metal flew itself into the handiest mountain.

He scrubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands and accepted a mineral water from the flight attendant. She was watching him warily. Probably wouldn't have served him whisky, even if he'd wanted it. So – yeah – he was a control freak. With attitude. The hell with it. It had kept him alive for thirty-six years. With concentration he relaxed his limbs, focusing on the end of the journey. The job he had come to finish was no problem. It was the other thing. Was he going to find this Katarina Elmore or not?

Now that was the question.

He was no nearer an answer when the taxi pulled in to a quiet street, off Park Lane, and set him down. The hotel was discreet and comfortable, his two major requirements these days. It was also expensive. Money hadn't been an issue for a year or so, but in this case the client was paying. Probably a trade-off against tax, or something. Devlin didn't know and didn't care. He didn't do money on a corporate scale. Left all that to Bobby, who was sharp, reasonably honest and keen to stay attached to his balls. They went back a long way, him and Bobby.

Devlin sighed. These days Bobby also dealt with corporate

relations. He set up the deals. Devlin got wheeled out to add gravitas, once the contract was ready to sign – and handled the bulk of the hands-on stuff. To each his strengths. It hadn't always been that way. They'd watched each other's backs, out in the field. But that was a different life. Another place, another time. His name hadn't been Devlin then. And Bobby hadn't been Bobby. When you dropped out of that world, everything changed.

He checked in, emptied his bag, rang the client and arranged to meet the next day. It was nearly six. Lunch time in Chicago. He'd slept on the plane – nothing much else to do. He wasn't going to want his bed for a while. So – he could have an early dinner and reacquaint himself with English TV on the set in his room. He could do a show, or find a club with cold beer and hot women. He still remembered a few of those. He could just go for a walk. He rang down to reception. 'Can somebody call me a cab? Yeah – Cheyne Walk.'

The house was in a kind of mews, not directly on the river. Compact, made of old brick. It was a world away from the backstreets of Hackney where he'd grown up. That was an even longer time ago. Yet another name, and another life. He frowned. He didn't need stuff like that surfacing. He was American, nowadays – it said so on his passport.

He'd asked the cab to drop him on the opposite side of the road. Reconnaissance. Even now he didn't have to knock on that neat, blank front door. Bobby's words echoed. He would be stirring up something that maybe was better left. She'd made no attempt to contact him.

The paint on the house was shiny; the windows were clean, with boxes on the sills overflowing with spring stuff. He could recognise daffodils but the other things, blue and white, kind of like bells? No idea what they were. Pretty though. Like someone cared. There was a slim tree in a pot beside the door, with more daffodils. Someone had made an effort. Life was going on here.

*If the woman has got herself together? Are you just going to fuck it all up?*

Leaving now would be the easy way.

*Since when did you choose the easy way? If it was you – God help you – you'd want to know. Maybe she'd been afraid to ask?*

He crossed the street and rang the bell.

He thought for a moment that there wasn't going to be an answer. He couldn't deny the flicker of relief. Then the door opened.

'That was quick. I didn't expect – oh!'

The woman was a looker. Still youthful, with a pale cashmere sweater and jeans, clinging to an admirable figure – but the expression lines around the eyes and mouth told him she was too mature to be the one he was looking for.

'Can I help you?' She'd taken a pace back, frowning, as if she was trying to place him.

'My name is Devlin.' He had a card ready. Not that it said a lot. He handed it over. She was frowning now at the slip of pasteboard in her hand.

'Security consultant?'

'I was hoping to see Mrs Elmore?'

'Ah.' She looked as if she was about to hand the card back. Instead she slipped it into a pocket. No reaction to his name, Devlin noted, puzzled. 'My daughter isn't here at the moment. Perhaps you can call again.' She was closing the door.

Devlin tamped down the gut reflex to stick his boot in the narrowing gap. The palm of his hand was the civilised way. 'Can you just tell me when she will be home?' He'd started this thing, now he had to finish it. Besides, there was something going on here that he didn't understand.

'I …' The woman hesitated.

'It's important that I speak with her.'

Something in the woman's expression changed. Her focus on him sharpened.

'Important to whom, Mr Devlin?'

'I think to both of us. You, too.' He took a breath. 'I was there … I was with your granddaughter when she died.'

# *Chapter Two*

‘With Jamie? Oh God!’

The woman’s hand went to her mouth and her eyes widened. Devlin had a sudden panic flash that she might faint.

*Keep talking Devlin. Keep her attention.*

‘Look – I’m sorry. I know it’s been a while. I didn’t know whether I should get in touch or not. I thought that if Mrs Elmore wanted to speak to me then she’d have contacted me. But as I was in London …’

She wasn’t reacting, just staring. She was made of sterner stuff than he’d thought, though. There was a little more colour in her face.

‘Look –’ He was floundering. ‘Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea, after all. I’ll just go.’ He raked his hand into his hair, starting to turn away.

‘No! Please.’ She did react then, putting out a hand to him. ‘It’s just … No one told us … We didn’t know anything about you.’ She let the door swing wide. ‘I think you’d better come in, Mr Devlin.’ She gestured for him to enter. ‘This has been a shock. I think we should start again. I’m Suzanne Saint.’ She held out her hand. Devlin took it. The familiar ritual of a handshake seemed to steady her. ‘My daughter should be home at any minute. When she gets here you can tell us both. Go through, please.’

Devlin went through the door she indicated. The room stretched from the front to the back of the house, cool, airy, lots of white paint, luxuriant plants, pictures on the walls. One in particular.

It was hanging alongside rather than over the fireplace. The oil paint was thickly applied. The smudgy, mixed-white background made the central tracery of lines, in multiple shades of red, stand away from the canvas. The pattern seemed abstract until you looked closer. Then you saw it – the clear profile of a woman.

Devlin’s eyes went automatically to the right-hand corner. The signature he’d expected was there – a slashing letter K incised, like

the mark of Zorro, in red paint. ‘An Olivier Kessel.’ His voice sharpened. ‘This is you, isn’t it?’ Realisation hit him as she nodded. ‘Hell – you’re the other Suzanne!’

She grimaced before she smiled. ‘A long time ago. I’m flattered that you saw it. Not so many people remember that story now – which can be a blessing.’ The smile grew rueful. ‘It got a little stale, hauling around that *other* label.’

Devlin raised his eyebrows, intrigued, betting that if he kept quiet, she’d say more.

She hooked a strand of pale gold hair behind her ear. ‘It was one of those bright ideas that got stuck and kept being replayed.’

Devlin suppressed a smile. Let a silence lengthen for long enough and the impulse to fill it became almost unbearable. First rule of interrogation. Her eyes had narrowed, assessing him, aware of what he was up to. Smart lady. He nodded encouragingly and got a soft laugh in response.

‘You want me to rake over my old glories for you, Mr Devlin? All right then. It came from a young journalist who interviewed Oliver, oh – sometime in the early seventies – Oliver was still Oliver then, that important extra ‘i’ came a little later.’ The expressive eyes sparkled with knowing mockery. ‘The reporter needed an original angle to sell a story about a more-or-less unknown artist. He came up with this idea of linking two *brilliant* –’ she made quotation marks in the air with her fingers, grinning ‘– artistic talents, who’d both used a woman named Suzanne for inspiration. Of course, at the time, Oliver was delighted to be linked to Leonard Cohen. People were only just beginning to suggest that *his* talent was in any way remarkable and not many of them – ’ The grin was decidedly wicked now. ‘It was a totally daft comparison – there was absolutely nothing else to link Oliver with Cohen, but you know how these things go. Then the article got syndicated in the States. Oliver’s career began to take off and he declared, very dramatically, that I was his Muse.’ The grin widened. ‘Being a muse is a very ambiguous activity, you know. No job description. In retrospect it seems principally to have consisted of

cleaning a great many paintbrushes and standing around in draughty studios, half-naked. But I was young, and in love to the point of imbecility.' She gave the painting a considering look. 'I sat for hours for that thing. It seemed only fair that I should end up owning it. And a few others.' She was still smiling, but her eyes had narrowed again. 'Oliver's early work isn't that well publicised these days. You know your art, Mr Devlin.'

'Just Devlin, please.' She'd given him information. Interesting information. He'd enjoyed hearing it, so he owed her. 'I once babysat a private art collection from L.A. to New York, for an exhibition, and back again. There were a number of Kessels. The guy was a fan. The whole art thing interested me, so I did some research, browsed a few galleries.'

'Babysat? Oh yes – Security consultant.'

Abruptly her face folded in on itself. She'd remembered why he was here.

*That's how it must be, this far down the line. For a few minutes you forget – have a conversation, get lost in a memory, something from before … Then the unthinkable comes crashing in again.*

'Would you like some tea?' she asked jerkily. 'I'll put the kettle on.'

He let her go ahead, taking time to survey the rest of the room. There were photographs, family groups, in happier times. Katarina Elmore – another looker, if these informal shots were anything to go by – but in a totally different style. The husband was there too – ex-husband – tan, good chin, good teeth. And a child. Another girl, dark like her mom, aged about four or five. Devlin picked up the slim silver frame to get a closer look. He hadn't realised there was a younger daughter. No pictures of *his* girl. Too painful to have the memories around? Might be a comfort to the mother and grandmother, but for the other kid? How hard was it going to be, growing up in the shadow of an older sister? A dead older sister.