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...

One Hundred Names

Written by Cecelia Ahern

Published by HarperCollins

All text is copyright © of the author

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

CECELIA AHERN

One Hundred Names

HarperCollins*Publishers*

HarperCollins*Publishers*
77–85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

www.harpercollins.co.uk

Published by HarperCollinsPublishers
1

Copyright © Cecelia Ahern 2012

Cecelia Ahern asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

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

ISBN: 978–0–00–735046–9

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.
The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are
the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is
entirely coincidental.

Set in Sabon LT Std by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire

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

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,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publishers.

FSC™ is a non-profit international organisation established to promote
the responsible management of the world's forests. Products carrying the
FSC label are independently certified to assure consumers that they come
from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and
ecological needs of present and future generations,
and other controlled sources.

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at
www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

CHAPTER ONE

She was nicknamed The Graveyard. Any secret, any piece of confidential information, personal or otherwise, that went in never, ever came back out. You knew you were safe; you knew you would never be judged or, if you were it would be silently, so you'd never know. She was perfectly named with a birth name that meant consistency and fortitude, and she was appropriately nicknamed; she was solid, permanent and steady, stoic but oddly comforting. Which is why visiting her in this place was all the more agonising. And it *was* agonising, not just mentally challenging; Kitty felt a physical pain in her chest, more specifically in her heart, that began with the thought of having to go, grew with the reality of actually being there, and then worsened with the knowledge that it wasn't a dream, it wasn't a false alarm, this was life in its rawest form. A life that had been challenged, and would subsequently be lost, to death.

Kitty made her way through the private hospital, taking the stairs when she could take elevators, making deliberate wrong turns, graciously allowing others to walk before her at every opportunity, particularly if they were patients moving at a snail's pace with walking frames or wheeling intravenous lines on poles. She was aware of the stares, which were a result of the current crisis she was in, and the fact she had at times walked in circles around the ward. She was attentive to any bit of conversation that any random

person wished to have with her, anything and everything that she could do to postpone arriving at Constance's room. Eventually her delaying tactics could continue no longer as she reached a dead end: a semicircle with four doors. Three doors were open, the occupants of the rooms and their visitors visible from where Kitty stood, though she didn't need to look inside. Without even seeing the numbers, she knew which room contained her friend and mentor. She was grateful to the closed door for the final delay she had been granted.

She knocked lightly, not fully committing to it, wanting to make the effort to visit but truly hoping she wouldn't be heard, so she could walk away, so she could always say she'd tried, so she could rest easily, guilt free. The tiny part of her that still clung to rationality knew that this wasn't realistic, that it wasn't right. Her heart was pounding, her shoes were squeaking on the floor as she moved from foot to foot, and she felt weak from the smell. She hated that hospital smell. A wave of nausea rushed through her and she breathed deeply and prayed for composure, for the supposed benefits of adulthood to finally kick in so she could get through this moment.

While Kitty was in the process of looking at her feet and taking deep breaths, the door opened and she was faced, unprepared, with a nurse and a shockingly deteriorated Constance. She blinked once, twice, and knew on the third time that she ought to be pretending, that it would not help Constance to see her visitor's true reaction to her appearance. So she tried to think of something to say and words failed her. There was nothing funny, nothing mundane, nothing even nothing, that she could think of to say to the friend she'd known for ten years.

'I've never seen her before in my life,' Constance said, her French accent audible despite her living in Ireland for over thirty years. Surprisingly, her voice was still strong and solid, assured and unwavering, as she had always been. 'Call security and have her removed from the premises immediately.'

The nurse smiled, opened the door wider and then returned to Constance's side.

'I can come back,' Kitty finally said. She turned away but found herself faced with more hospital paraphernalia and so turned again, searching for something normal, something ordinary and everyday that she could focus on that would fool her mind into thinking she wasn't there in a hospital, with that smell, with her terminally ill friend.

'I'm almost finished there. I'll just take your temperature,' the nurse said, placing a thermometer in Constance's ear.

'Come. Sit.' Constance motioned to the chair beside her bed.

Kitty couldn't look her in the eye. She knew it was rude, but her eyes kept moving away as though pulled by magnetic force to things that weren't sick and didn't remind her of people that were sick, so she busied herself with the gifts in her arms.

'I brought you flowers.' She looked around for somewhere to put them.

Constance hated flowers. She always left them to die in their vase whenever anybody attempted to bribe her, apologise to her or simply brighten her office. Despite knowing that, buying them had been a part of Kitty's procrastination, particularly as there had been an enticing queue before her.

'Oh dear,' the nurse said. 'Security should have told you that flowers aren't allowed in the ward.'

'Oh. Well, that's not a problem, I'll get rid of them.' Kitty tried to hide her relief as she stood up to make her escape.

'I'll take them,' the nurse said. 'I'll leave them at reception for you so you can take them home. No point in a beautiful bouquet like that going to waste.'

'At least I brought cupcakes.' Kitty took a box from her bag.

The nurse and Constance looked at one another again.

'You're joking. No cupcakes either?'

'The chef prefers patients to eat food which has come only from his kitchen.'

Kitty handed the contraband to the nurse.

'You can take them home too,' she laughed, studying the thermometer. 'You're fine,' she smiled at Constance. They shared a knowing look before she left, as if those two words meant something entirely different – they must have done – because she wasn't fine. She was eaten away by cancer. Her hair had begun to grow back, but sprouted in uneven patterns around her head, her protruding chest bones were visible above the shapeless hospital gown and she had wires and tubes connected to both arms, which were thin and bruised from injections and tube insertions.

'I'm glad I didn't tell her about the cocaine in my bag,' Kitty said just as the door closed behind the nurse, and they heard her laugh heartily from the corridor. 'I know you hate flowers but I panicked. I was going to bring you gold nail varnish, incense and a mirror, because I thought it would be funny.'

'Why didn't you?' Constance's eyes were still a sparkling blue and if Kitty could concentrate on just them, so full of life, she could almost forget the emaciated frame. Almost, but not quite.

'Because then I realised it wasn't funny.'

'I would have laughed.'

'I'll bring them next time.'

'It won't be so funny then. I've already heard the joke. My dear . . .' She reached for Kitty and they clasped hands tightly on the bed. Kitty couldn't look at Constance's hands, they were so sore and thin. 'It is so good to see you.'

'I'm sorry I'm late.'

'It took you a while.'

'The traffic . . .' Kitty began and then gave up joking. She was over a month late.

There was a silence and Kitty realised it was a pause for her to explain why she hadn't visited.

'I hate hospitals.'

'I know you do. Noscomephobia,' said Constance.

'What's that?'

'Fear of hospitals.'

'I didn't know there was a word for it.'

'There's a word for everything. I haven't been able to poop for two weeks; they call it anismus.'

'I should do a story on that,' Kitty said, her mind drifting.

'You will not. My rectal inertia is between you, me, Bob and the nice woman I allow to look at my bottom.'

'I meant a piece on phobia of hospitals. That would make a good story.'

'Tell me why.'

'Imagine I found somebody who is really sick and they can't get treatment.'

'So they medicate at home. Big deal.'

'Or what about a woman in labour? She's pacing up and down on the street outside but she just can't bring herself to go through the doors of the hospital.'

'So she has the baby in an ambulance or at home or on the street.' Constance shrugged. 'I once did a story on a woman who gave birth whilst in hiding in Kosovo. She was all by herself and it was her first child. They weren't found until two weeks after, perfectly healthy and happy together. Women in Africa have their babies while working the fields, then they go straight back to work. Tribal women dance their babies out. The Western world goes about childbirth the wrong way around,' she said, waving her hand dismissively in the air, despite having no children herself. 'I wrote an article on that before.'

'A doctor who can't go to work . . .' Kitty continued to push her idea.

'That's ridiculous. He should lose his licence.'

Kitty laughed. 'Thanks for your honesty, as usual.' Then her smile faded and she concentrated on Constance's hand wrapped around hers. 'Or how about a selfish woman whose best friend is sick and she wouldn't visit her?'

'But you're here now and I'm happy to see you.'

Kitty swallowed. 'You haven't mentioned anything about it.'

'About what?'

'You know what.'

'I didn't know if you wanted to talk about it.'

'I don't really.'

'Well, then.'

They sat in silence.

'I'm being torn apart in the newspapers, the radio, everywhere,' Kitty said, bringing it up anyway.

'I haven't seen any papers.'

Kitty ignored the pile of papers on the windowsill. 'Everywhere I go, all week, everyone is looking at me, pointing, whispering as if I'm the scarlet woman.'

'That is the price of being in the limelight. You are a TV star now.'

'I'm not a TV star, I'm an idiot who made a fool of herself on TV. There's a distinct difference.'

Constance shrugged again as if it wasn't a big deal.

'You never wanted me to work on the show in the first place. Why don't you just say "I told you so" and get it over with?'

'They are not words that I use. They do nothing productive.'

Kitty removed her hand from Constance's and asked quietly, 'Do I still have a job?'

'Haven't you spoken to Pete?' She looked angry with her duty editor.

'I have. But I need to hear it from you. It's more important that I hear it from you.'

'*Etcetera*'s stance on hiring you as a reporter has not changed,' Constance said firmly.

'Thank you,' Kitty whispered.

'I supported you doing *Thirty Minutes* because I know that you're a good reporter and you have it in you to be a great reporter. We all make mistakes, some bigger than others, but none of us is perfect. We use these times to become better reporters and, more

importantly, better people. When you came to be interviewed by me ten years ago do you remember the story you tried to sell to me?'

Kitty laughed and cringed. 'No,' she lied.

'Of course you do. Well, if you won't say it, I will. I asked you if you were to write a story for me then and there about absolutely anything, what would it be?'

'We really don't have to go through this again. I was there, remember?' Kitty blushed.

'And you said,' Constance continued as though Kitty had never spoken, 'that you had heard of a caterpillar that could not turn into a butterfly . . .'

'Yes, yes, I know.'

'And you would like to examine how it would feel to be denied such a beautiful thing. You would like to know how it feels for the caterpillar to watch other caterpillars transform while all the time knowing he would never have that opportunity. Our interview was on the day of a US presidential election, and on the day a cruise liner sank with four thousand five hundred people aboard. Of the twelve interviewees I saw that day, you were the only person who did not mention anything about politics, about the ship, or about wanting to spend a day with Nelson Mandela, for that matter. What concerned you most was this poor little caterpillar.'

Kitty smiled. 'Yeah, well, I was just out of college. I think I still had too much weed in my system.'

'No,' Constance whispered, reaching out for Kitty's hand again. 'You were the only person who truly told me in that interview that you weren't afraid to fly, that in fact you were afraid that you wouldn't.'

Kitty swallowed hard, close to tears. She certainly hadn't flown yet and was, she felt, further from it than ever.

'Some people say that you shouldn't operate from a place of fear,' Constance went on, 'but if there is no fear, how is there a challenge? Often that is when I've done my best work, because I

have embraced the fear and challenged myself. I saw this young girl who was afraid she wouldn't fly and I thought – a-ha – she is the girl for us. And that is what *Etcetera* is about. Sure, we cover politics but we cover the people behind the politics. We want them for their emotional journeys, not just so we can hear their policies but so we can hear the reason for their policies. What happened to make them believe in this, what happened to make them feel this way? Yes, we sometimes talk about diets, but not organic this and wholewheat that, but of *why* and *who*. We are all about people, about feeling, about emotions. We may sell fewer but we mean more, though that is merely my opinion, of course. *Etcetera* will continue to publish your stories, Kitty, as long as you are writing what is true to you and definitely *not* what somebody else is telling you will make a good story. Nobody can pretend to know what people want to read or hear or see. People rarely know it themselves; they only know it after the fact. That is what creating something original is all about. Finding the new, not rehashing the old and feeding a market.' She raised her eyebrows.

'It was my story,' Kitty said quietly. 'I can't blame anyone else.'

'There are more people involved in telling a story than the writer, and you know that. If you had come to me with this story, well, I would not have covered it, but hypothetically, if I had, I would have pulled it before it was too late. There were signs and someone above you should have been able to see them, but if you want to take the entire blame, well then, you ask yourself why you wanted to tell that story so badly.'

Kitty wasn't sure if she was meant to answer then and there but Constance gathered her energy and continued: 'I once interviewed a man who seemed increasingly amused by my questions. When I asked him what he found so entertaining, he told me that he found the questions an interviewer asked revealed much more about the interviewer than any of his answers revealed about himself. During our interview he learned far more about me than I about him. I found that interesting and he was right,

on that occasion at least. I think that the story one covers often reveals more about the person writing it than perhaps the story is revealing itself. Journalism classes teach us that one must extract oneself from the story in order to report without bias, but often we need to be in the story in order to understand, to connect, to help the audience identify or else it has no heart; it could be a robot telling the story, for all anyone cares. And that does not mean injecting *opinion* into the pieces, Kitty, for that bothers me too. I don't like it when reporters use a story to tell us how they feel. Who cares what one person thinks? A nation? A genre? A sex? That interests me more. I mean inject understanding in all aspects of the story, show the audience that there is feeling behind the words.'

Kitty didn't want to have to think about what covering that story said about her – she never wanted to have to think or talk about it again – but that was impossible because her network was being sued and she was a day away from going into a libel court. Her head was pounding, she was tired of thinking about it, tired of analysing what on earth had happened, but she suddenly felt the need to repent, to apologise for everything she had ever done wrong just to feel worthy again.

'I have a confession.'

'I love confessions.'

'You know, when you gave me the job, I was so excited, the first story I wanted to write for you was the caterpillar story.'

'Really?'

'Of course I couldn't interview a caterpillar, but I wanted it to form the basis of a story about people who couldn't fly when they really wanted to, what it meant to be held back, to have your wings clipped.' Kitty looked at her friend fading away in the bed, big eyes staring up at her, and she fought the urge to cry. She was sure Constance understood exactly what she meant. 'I started researching the story . . . I'm sorry . . .' She held her hand to her mouth and tried to compose herself but she couldn't, and the tears

fell. 'It turned out I was wrong. The caterpillar I told you about, the Oleander, it turns out it does fly after all. It just turns into a moth.' Kitty felt ridiculous for crying at that point but she couldn't help it. It wasn't the caterpillar's predicament that made her sad but the fact her research then as now had been appalling, something that had got her into serious trouble this time. 'The network have suspended me.'

'They've done you a favour. Wait for it to settle and you can resume telling your stories.'

'I don't know what stories to tell any more. I'm afraid I'll get it wrong again.'

'You won't get it wrong, Kitty. You know, telling a story – or, as I like to say, seeking the truth – is not necessarily to go on a mission all guns blazing in order to reveal a lie. Neither is it to be particularly groundbreaking. It is simply to get to the heart of what is real.'

Kitty nodded and sniffed. 'I'm sorry, this visit wasn't supposed to be about me. I'm so sorry.' She bent over in her chair and placed her head on the bed, embarrassed that Constance was seeing her like this, embarrassed to be behaving this way when her friend was so sick and had more important things to worry about.

'Shush now,' Constance said soothingly, running her hand gently through Kitty's hair. 'That is an even better ending than I originally wished for. Our poor caterpillar got to fly after all.'

When Kitty lifted her head, Constance suddenly appeared exhausted.

'Are you okay? Should I call a nurse?'

'No . . . no. It comes on suddenly,' she said, her eyelids heavy and fluttering. 'I'll have a short nap and I'll be all right again. I don't want you to go. There is so much for us to talk about. Such as Glen,' she smiled weakly.

Kitty faked a smile in return. 'Yes. You sleep,' she whispered. 'I'll be right here.'

Constance could always read her expressions, could dismantle her lies in seconds. 'I didn't like him much anyway.'

Within seconds Constance's eyes fluttered closed.

Kitty sat on the windowsill in Constance's hospital room, looking down at the people passing below, trying to figure out the route home where the fewest people would see her. A flow of French snapped her out of her trance and she turned to Constance in surprise. Apart from when Constance swore, in all the ten years she had known her, Kitty had never heard her speak French.

'What did you say?'

Constance seemed momentarily confused. She cleared her throat and gathered herself. 'You look far away.'

'I was thinking.'

'I shall alert the authorities at once.'

'I have a question I've always wanted to ask you.' Kitty moved to the chair beside Constance's bed.

'Oh, yes? Why didn't Bob and I have children?' She sat up in the bed and reached for her water. She sucked the tiniest amount from a straw.

'No, know-it-all. You've killed every plant you've ever owned, I can't imagine what you'd have been like with a child. No, I wanted to ask you, is there any story you wish you'd written but for whatever reason never wrote?'

Constance lit up at the question. 'Oh, that *is* a good question. A story in itself perhaps.' She raised her eyebrows at Kitty. 'A piece where you interview retired writers about the story that got away, ha? What do you think? I should talk to Pete about that. Or perhaps we should contact retired writers and ask them to write the story that they never wrote, especially for the magazine. People like Oisín O'Ceallaigh and Olivia Wallace. Give them their opportunity to tell it. It could be a special edition.'

Kitty laughed. 'Do you ever stop?'

There was a light knock on the door and Constance's husband,

Bob, entered. He looked tired but as soon as he laid eyes on Constance, he softened.

'Hello, darling. Ah, hello, Kitty. Nice of you to join us.'

'Traffic,' Kitty said, awkwardly.

'I know the feeling,' he smiled, coming around and kissing her on the head. 'It often slows me down too, but better late than never, eh?' He looked at Constance, her face all twisted up in concentration. 'Are you trying to poo, my love?'

Kitty laughed.

'Kitty asked me what story have I always wanted to write but never have.'

'Ah. You're not supposed to make her think, the doctors said so,' he joked. 'But that's a good question. Let me guess. Is it that time during the oil spillage when you had the exclusive interview with the penguin who saw everything?'

'I did not have an exclusive with the penguin,' Constance laughed, then winced with pain.

Kitty became nervous but Bob, used to it, continued.

'Oh, it was the whale then. The whale who saw everything. Told everyone who so much as inched near him about what he saw.'

'It was the captain of the ship,' she threw at Bob, but lovingly.

'Why didn't you interview him?' Kitty asked, arrested by their love for one another.

'My flight got delayed,' she said, fixing her bedcovers.

'She couldn't find her passport,' Bob outed her. 'You know what the flat is like, the Dead Sea Scrolls could be in there, for all we know. The passports have since found their home in the toaster, lest we forget again. Anyway, so she missed her flight and instead of Constance's great exclusive, the captain spoke to someone else who we shall not name.' He turned to Kitty and whispered, 'Dan Cummings.'

'Oh, you've done it, you've killed me now,' Constance said dramatically, pretending to die.

Kitty covered her face in her hands, feeling it wrong to laugh.

'Ah, finally we are rid of her,' Bob teased gently. 'So what is the answer, my love? I'm intrigued.'

'Do you really not know this?' Kitty asked Bob. He shook his head and they watched Constance thinking, which really was an amusing sight.

'Ah,' she said suddenly, eyes lighting up, 'I've got it. It's rather a recent idea, actually, something I thought of last year before . . . well, it was somewhat of an experiment but it has occupied my mind since I've been here.'

Kitty moved in closer to listen.

Constance enjoyed making Bob and Kitty wait.

'Possibly one of my greatest.'

Kitty groaned impatiently.

'I'll tell you what, the file is at home. In my office. Teresa will let you in if she's not too busy watching Jeremy Kyle. It's filed under N. Titled "Names". You get it for me and bring it back and I'll tell you about it.'

'No!' Kitty laughed. 'You know how impatient I am. Please don't make me wait.'

'If I tell you now, you might never come back.'

'I promise I will.'

Constance smiled. 'Okay, you get the file, and I'll tell you the story.'

'It's a deal.'

They shook on it.