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...

The Soldier's Daughter

Written by Rosie Goodwin

Published by Canvas

All text is copyright © of the author

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

Constable & Robinson Ltd
55–56 Russell Square
London WC1B 4HP
www.constablerobinson.com

First published in the UK by Canvas,
an imprint of Constable & Robinson Ltd., 2014

Copyright © Rosie Goodwin 2014

The right of Rosie Goodwin to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either
the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any
resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events or
locales is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. This book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold,
hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover
other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A copy of the British Library Cataloguing in Publication
Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-47210-171-6 (hardback)
ISBN 978-1-47210-172-3 (B-format paperback)
ISBN 978-1-47211-349-8 (ebook)

Printed and bound in the UK

13 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Chapter One

'Just try and eat a few mouthfuls, Mum,' Briony pleaded as she placed some sausage and mash in front of Lois. 'You'll make yourself ill if you go on like this, and you'll feel better with something in your stomach.'

But it was soon apparent that her pleas were falling on deaf ears. Her mother had barely moved from the chair since early that morning following her husband's departure, and now her stunning blue eyes were red and swollen from crying. She hadn't even bothered to do her hair or put her make-up on for the first time that Briony could remember. The mood of depression in the house was so tangible that Briony felt she could almost reach out and touch it.

Sighing, she turned her attention to her younger brother and sister. Thankfully they had cleared their plates, so now she tried to inject a little cheer into her voice as she told them, 'Come on, you two, we'll get you washed and into

your pyjamas, shall we? You can listen to the wireless for a while then before I tuck you in, if you're both good.'

Sarah scraped her chair back from the table and carried her dirty plate to the deep stone sink whilst Alfie scrambled down too and went to his mother for a hug. Normally she was very affectionate towards him – towards all of them, if it came to that – but today she hardly seemed to notice that he was there, let alone show him any attention. He found this thoroughly confusing. He knew that his daddy had gone away, but he had promised to come home again just as soon as he could – so why had Mummy been crying all day?

'Come on, sweetheart,' Briony urged, holding her hand out to him as he hovered at his mother's side. 'We'll get you washed first, shall we? And look, I have your clean pyjamas hanging on the clothes-horse by the fire so they'll be lovely and warm for you to put on.'

Alfie instantly cheered up and skipped towards his sister, who lifted him up and hugged him tightly before washing him from head to toe in the bowl of warm water she had ready.

Shortly after eight o'clock that evening, when Briony had Sarah and Alfie tucked safely up in bed, she told her mother, 'I might pop round next door for half an hour. Is that all right?'

'What? Oh yes . . . yes, of course, love. You go,' her mother said absently, so Briony pulled her coat on and stepped out into the back yard that divided the two houses. She shivered as she looked towards the dark shape of the Anderson shelter that was being erected in the back garden, then crossing the yard she tapped at the neighbour's door and without waiting to be asked, hurried into the kitchen and out of the cold.

Martha Brindley was sitting knitting at one side of the

fire whilst her youngest son Ernest, or Ernie as he preferred to be called, sat at the other listening to the wireless. Briony had hoped to find a slightly happier atmosphere here but she was instantly disappointed as Mrs Brindley raised reddened eyes to her.

'You'll never guess what this daft bloody ha'porth has gone an' done,' she said crossly, glaring at Ernie, who lowered his own eyes sheepishly. 'He's only gone an' signed up, ain't he? An' him not even eighteen till the New Year. For two pins I'd go down to that recruitin' office an' tell 'em he's lied about his age. I mean, he would have had to go soon enough anyway – so why hurry it along, eh?'

Briony's heart sank as she looked towards Ernie for confirmation; he shrugged as a lock of his thick dark-brown hair flopped onto his forehead. 'It wouldn't make much difference even if yer did, Mam,' he pointed out. 'They need all the lads they can get now an' I'm sure they wouldn't quibble over a couple o' months or so.'

'I think he's right, Mrs Brindley,' Briony said quietly, but her heart ached at the thought of him going as well. She and Ernie had grown up together but lately their relationship had changed and she had found herself looking at him through different eyes. Suddenly he was so much more than just the boy next door. He was handsome and kind, and although neither of them had actually acknowledged it yet, they both knew that there was something special growing between them. But Briony knew that now he was going away, that special feeling might be lost and it saddened her.

'*You* understand why I've done it, don't yer, Briony?' His deep-brown eyes held a silent plea for understanding as he gazed towards her. 'Nearly all me mates have gone already as well as me dad, an' I don't want people thinkin' I'm a yeller belly.'

Feeling as if she were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, Briony wrung her hands together. Strangely, she *could* understand why he'd done it, but she didn't want to upset his mother further by taking sides, so she said tactfully, 'Well, as you say, you would have had to go in the New Year anyway.'

'Hmm!' Mrs Brindley's knitting needles clicked furiously, and rising from his seat, Ernie suggested, 'Why don't we go fer a walk?'

'In *this* weather?' His mother shook her head, exasperated. 'Why, you'll likely catch yer death o' cold – an' then it'll be that what kills yer instead o' Adolf!'

Despite the tension in the air, Ernie grinned as he towered over Briony and pushed his long arms into the sleeves of his coat.

'We won't be long,' he said, taking Briony's elbow and they left hurriedly before his mother had a chance to start again.

After feeling their way down the long whitewashed entry that was acting as a wind tunnel, they wound their scarves around their necks and set off down Eadie Street. Once at the end of it they turned up Church Road and had almost reached the Round Towers, the entrance to the grounds of Arbury Hall, before Ernie said quietly, 'Yer *do* understand, don't yer, Briony?'

'I think so.' If she had been a young man she would probably have done just the same, but it didn't stop the hurt from throbbing through her. 'I don't know how Ruth's going to feel about it though.'

'Ruth?' He stared at her through the gloom.

'Oh come on, Ernie. You must know that Ruth is nuts about you?'

'Is she *really?'*

Men could be really dim sometimes, thought Briony; how he could have failed to notice was anyone's guess. Ruth Teagles was Briony's closest friend and she had worshipped the ground that Ernie trod on for as long as Briony could remember, which was why she herself had held back. She sighed into the darkness now, wondering why everything had to become so complicated when you grew up. Not so very long ago they had all been at school together with not a care in the world – and now here was Ernie going off to fight for his King and Country.

A thick frost was forming on the deserted pavements, making them sparkle like diamonds, and as he felt a shudder ripple through Briony, Ernie drew her arm through his and said, 'Come on, that's blown a few cobwebs away. Let's get back an' see if me mam is in a better frame of mind, eh? I might even make yer a brew. Might as well make the most o' the time we've got left. I shall be off to start me trainin' in a couple o' weeks' time. Did I tell yer it were the RAF I've joined? I'm goin' to train to be a pilot. Just as well I got good marks at school, ain't it?'

Briony shivered again, but this time it was nothing to do with the cold. It was the thought of Ernie flying a plane that made fear pulse through her veins. No wonder Mrs Brindley was so upset. It was bad enough knowing that your loved ones were joining the Army, but everyone knew that the RAF pilots stood a chance of being blown out of the sky by enemy planes every time they took off. For some reason she had assumed that he had enlisted for the Army, as his father had. Briony was suddenly glad of the darkness that hid the tears that had sprung to her eyes. This was turning out to be one of the worst days of her life, what with her father leaving and now finding out that Ernie would shortly be going too. Suddenly she just wished that it could be over.

*

Ruth was waiting for her at the bottom of Church Road the next morning when Briony set off for work and they began the walk into town together as they normally did.

'Did yer dad get off all right?' the other girl asked conversationally.

Briony nodded miserably. 'Yes, but Mum's hardly stopped crying since he left.'

'Well, I think we expected that, didn't we?' Ruth plunged her hands deep into her coat pockets and shuddered. 'I ain't never known a pair like your mam an' dad. They're like a couple o' love birds. Not like mine.' She explained: 'Me dad were in the pub again last night after he finished his shift down the pit, an' me mam went fer him wi' the big umbrella when he finally came in.'

She chuckled as she slid her arm through her friend's. The two girls had gone all through school together, and although they were as close as could be, they were as different to look at as chalk from cheese. Ruth was short and dumpy, with wild mousy hair that tended to curl, and pale-blue eyes, whilst Briony was slim with straight hair that shone as black as a raven's wing. Ruth had always been envious of Briony's looks, not that it had affected their friendship. Briony often thought Ruth didn't have a nasty streak in her whole body and she wasn't far wrong. Ruth had a heart of pure gold and would have done anything for anyone, and Briony wondered how she was going to break it to her that Ernie was joining the RAF. Ruth had never made a secret of the fact that she adored Ernie and when they were younger she had followed him about like a puppy, which had complicated things when Briony suddenly realised that she had feelings for Ernie too.

They were almost at the top of Haunchwood Road when

Briony plucked up the courage to say bluntly, 'I heard that Ernie had enlisted too last night.' There didn't seem to be any easy way to say it so she decided to just get it over and done with.

Ruth stopped walking, and the ready smile she normally wore slid from her face as she asked hoarsely, 'You *are* kiddin', ain't yer?'

She looked so distraught that Briony felt a pang of guilt stab through her as she shook her head.

'Bloody hell!' The colour had drained out of Ruth's plump cheeks and Briony hugged her.

'I dare say he would have done it after his birthday anyway,' she said consolingly. 'He's just brought things forward a bit, that's all. But try not to worry; I'm sure he'll be fine. Before he left, my dad reckoned this war would be over before we knew it.'

Ruth swallowed deeply and nodded. 'Yes . . . course it will be,' she said, trying to be optimistic. Then: 'So when is he goin'?'

'In a couple of weeks, from what I could gather, but he'll have to complete his training before they send him off anywhere.'

They walked on into Tomkinson Road through the thick freezing fog, and for the rest of the way Ruth was very quiet.

The day passed slowly. In the accounts department, Briony was kept busy preparing everyone's wage packets and Ruth was almost rushed off her feet down on the shop floor. On the way home after work, Briony called into the corner shop in Cross Street and bought some vegetables before going on to the butcher's in Church Road, where she purchased some lamb chops. She doubted her mother would have bothered to cook for the children and had resigned herself to going home and cooking them a meal

herself. The fog had lifted late that morning and now the frost was beginning to sparkle on the pavements again as she hurried through Stockingford. Everyone had closed the blackout curtains against the freezing night and Briony felt as if she were walking through a ghost town. Even the lamp-posts were no longer turned on now, and the odd car that crawled through the streets had its headlights dimmed. Ruth's mood hadn't lightened as the day progressed and now Briony just wished that this day could be over. It would be the first evening without her father's fond smile to welcome her after a long day at work, and she wasn't looking forward to it at all. Her spirits plunged even deeper once she stepped into their small terraced home to see Lois curled up in the chair at the side of a low fire still in her dressing gown. She clearly hadn't bothered to get dressed all day and her eyes were dull and swollen from weeping.

Sarah ran to meet her with a look of relief on her small face, saying, 'Mam hasn't stopped crying all day, Briony, but I got some coal in – look.'

'Good girl.' Briony stroked her sister's hair affectionately before she took her coat off and hung it on a nail at the back of the door. 'And have you and Alfie had any dinner?'

Sarah solemnly shook her head. 'Not yet, but I waited for Alfie after school and brought him home like you asked and I gave him some milk and a biscuit.'

'Then we'll have a nice warm cuppa, eh? And then I'll get the dinner started. While I'm doing that, you could help Alfie get into his pyjamas for me. I'll give him his wash later.'

Her brother was lying on his stomach looking at the pictures in his comic but he went willingly enough, and once the children were out of the way, Briony fixed a smile on her face and said brightly, 'I'm going to put the kettle on

now, Mam. I've bought us some nice lamb chops for tea as a treat. We may as well enjoy them while we can. Once this rationing that they keep on about comes into force it might not be so easy to get hold of some things – and even when we can, we'll be limited in how much we can have.'

'I'm not hungry,' Lois said dully, and Briony felt a little stab of anger. Didn't her mother realise that they were all missing her father just as much as she was? Even so she kept her voice level as she turned to fill the kettle at the sink.

'Well, I still want you to eat something,' she answered firmly. 'You'll be no use to Sarah and Alfie if you get ill, will you?'

Receiving a sniffle as an answer she sighed inwardly and began to prepare the teapot and the mugs before starting on the vegetables. It looked set to be a very long evening.

By the end of the week, Briony was exhausted. Each day she would go off to work then each evening she would come home and see to the children and cook them all a meal. Then when that was done, she would tackle the washing and ironing whilst her mother sat curled in her chair, a mere shadow of her former self, locked in self-pity. Lois had always relied heavily on her handsome husband, and now that he was gone she didn't seem to be able to cope with anything.

It was Mrs Brindley who brought it all to a head one evening when she appeared at the kitchen door clutching a chipped cup.

Briony was up to her eyes in ironing the children's school clothes and she looked up as the woman entered the room.

''Ello, luvvie.' Mrs Brindley was dressed in her customary wrap-around flowered pinny. 'Yer couldn't lend me a bit o' sugar till in the mornin', could yer? I don't fancy goin' up

the corner shop in this cold.' Then as her eyes settled on Lois she abruptly stopped talking and said, 'So what's this then? Why is young Briony doin' the ironin' when she's bin to work all day, Lois? Are you ill?'

'She's missing my dad,' Briony explained as her mother broke into a fresh torrent of weeping. Martha Brindley seemed to bristle before her very eyes.

'Is that so? Well, I'm missin' my Clal an' all, but it won't do no good to sit about weepin', will it? Then young Ernie will be off an' all soon, an' I'll be all on me own, not like you, Lois, who still have yer family about yer. Stop feelin' so bloody sorry fer yerself, woman, an' get up off yer arse, fer Christ's sake. You ain't bein' a bit fair on yer kids, especially young Briony 'ere.'

Lois was so shocked at being spoken to in such a manner that she stopped crying and stared at the older woman open-mouthed.

'That's better.' Mrs Brindley nodded approvingly. 'Now get yerself over to that sink an' wash yer face then go an' get yerself dressed, 'cos I'm tellin' yer now, I ain't goin' nowhere till yer do. Then when you've done that, yer can make us all a nice cup o' tea an' make yerself useful. Meantime I'll sit an' have a chat to young Briony 'ere.' And with that she plonked herself down in the chair opposite Lois and glowered at her until the woman stood up and hurried off to do as she was told.

Once Lois had washed her face and gone upstairs to get dressed, Briony smiled at Mrs Brindley gratefully.

'Thanks for that,' she said. 'I was beginning to get really worried about her, wondering if she was ever going to get out of that chair.'

'Hmm, trouble with yer mam is she's been spoiled,' Mrs Brindley said matter-of-factly. 'I reckon she had yer dad

eatin' out o' the palm of her hand, waitin' on her hand an' foot. But he ain't here now so she's goin' to have to join the real world like the rest of us. Not that I don't like yer mam,' she added hurriedly, seeing Briony's face fall. 'It's obvious that she were brought up different to the likes of us.' She chuckled then. 'She's made many a head turn round 'ere, I don't mind tellin' yer, what wi' her lipstick an' her powder an' never a hair out o' place, but I reckon the majority o' the women are just jealous of her 'cos she's so attractive. Trouble is, yer dad's gone fer now, so she's goin' to have to pull her socks up an' look after them little 'uns – if they don't get evacuated, that is. Between you an' me I don't understand how she's managed to avoid it fer so long. But it certainly ain't right that you should have to come home an' do all this just 'cos you were the firstborn. You're still not much more than a slip of a kid yerself, even if yer have left school an' got yerself a job.'

She heaved herself out of the chair then and placed the kettle on the hob to boil. Soon afterwards, Lois reappeared dressed and looking slightly better than she had before.

'I didn't mean to bully yer, Lois,' Mrs Brindley apologised as Lois spooned tea leaves into the teapot. 'But sometimes, as me old mam allus used to say, yer have to be cruel to be kind. Now let's have that cup o' tea, shall we?'

Briony stared at her mother. Lois's eyes were still red and swollen, but at least she had stopped crying – which was a step in the right direction.

'Our Ernie'll be off next week,' Mrs Brindley glumly reminded them then, and Briony's heart missed a beat. It seemed that everyone she cared about was leaving – and there wasn't a single thing she could do about it.