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

The Outcast

Sadie Jones

Prologue

August 1957

There was nobody there to meet him. He stood in line behind three other men and watched them get their things and sign the papers and walk out, and they all did it just the same way, as if you couldn't choose how to do a thing like that after all the time you'd been waiting for it. It made the same man out of all of them.

When it came to his turn there were only the clothes he'd been in when he arrived and his wallet and cut-throat razor. They made him sign for them, and for the postal order his father had sent, and he was put to get changed in a side room. His clothes didn't fit him properly any more; the trousers were an inch too short and the arms of the shirt didn't cover his wrists.

He went back to the desk and put his wallet in his back pocket with the postal order inside it, and the razor in his other pocket, and waited while the doors were all unlocked again to let him through. He didn't look at the guards, but crossed the yard to the small door in the wall to the side of the big gate. The door was unlocked, and opened, and he stepped out into the street.

There was no sign of the men who'd gone before him, or of anyone at all. He kept a hold of himself and didn't feel too much about it. He had been in a state of waiting, but the waiting wasn't for his release, it was for his homecoming.Two years is not a long time, but maybe longer from seventeen to nineteen than at other times of your life.

It was the colours that struck him first, the colours and the very bright sunlight. His eye could see far away, down the street to where a small, pale blue car was turning a corner and disappearing.

He looked up and down the street and thought that he could stand there for ever in the clean air and look at the distance, and the bricks in the houses that were different shades of yellow and brown, and the bits of grass

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

between the paving and the way there was nobody there. Then he remembered the prison at his back and wanted to get away from it. Then he thought that it was all he'd known for a long time, and he didn't want to get away from it, but he stopped himself thinking that and walked down the street, away from the prison and towards where the pale blue car had gone.

Lewis needed to cross the river to Victoria to catch the train home. He had to get to a post office to cash the postal order and he had to get to the station, then he decided he needed to buy something to wear because he felt foolish, and going home would be hard enough without looking stupid as well.

Getting from one place to another and having to speak to people he didn't know made him feel frightened and more like a convict than he had expected to, and when he got to Victoria he stood across the road from the station, trying to make himself go in.

There was no shade. He had bought two white shirts and a light-grey suit that came with an extra pair of trousers, and some cigarettes and a pack of cards and a metal lighter with a hot flame. He was wearing one set of clothes and the man in the shop had sold him a cardboard case to put the other things in, and now he put the case down, and took cigarettes from the pocket of his new trousers and lit one with his new lighter and waited to be able to go into the station.

He'd never bought clothes for himself before. It was odd that he could have done the things he'd done and not know how to clothe himself. His father had sent him enough money not to come home, but he hadn't asked him not to.

Thinking about what he'd done and what his father thought of him wasn't helping, so he watched the people on the streets instead. The colours were still very bright. There was a lot of blue sky and the trees on the pavements seemed marvellous and the women looked wonderful and he had to stop himself from staring at all of them. He felt the flicker of life inside himself, looking at them, and it was a bright flame and not a dark one and there was promise in the way the women walked and the lightness of them. He tried not to stare and was dazzled and hypnotised by every woman who passed him. Trying not to stare at women, but still looking at them as much as he could was a game, and a good way to stop his head from getting away from him, and made him feel alive again. He wondered if you could get arrested for staring at women for an hour outside Victoria station, and imagined the judge putting him away again the day he got out for picturing them under their clothes, and after a while he was able to cross the street and go into the station and buy his ticket.

The train had the same rhythm and the same sound and the same varnished wood as every other time he'd made the journey. The seats were hard, with parts of them worn to a shine. He had gone without thinking to the last second-class carriage towards the front, and sat in a window seat facing the back of the train so he could see the platform pull away from him.

RANDOM HOUSE

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

Alice had been dreaming a lot about Lewis, knowing he was coming out, and in her dreams he was always very young and was being taken away, or being lost, and in some of them she was a child too and she wasn't sure if she was him or herself as a little girl.

She made sure Lewis's room was ready. She aired it and asked Mary to make up the bed and saw it was dusted and then she closed the door again, but she didn't know what time they would have let him out and he hadn't written to say if he was coming. If he didn't come, she thought, they wouldn't know where he was.

It was a hot summer and it had become a habit to leave the windows and the French doors to the garden open, and the inside was often as warm as the outside and the carpet felt hot from the sun coming in. Alice went to her room and checked her face and then went down to the kitchen and spoke to Mary about supper. Then she sat in the drawing room by the empty grate and tried to read, not knowing if she was waiting or not.

The platform at Waterford was as empty as the street outside the prison. Lewis walked down the steps from the platform without seeing anyone. The road had trees arching over it and sunlight came through the branches of the trees and dappled the road. Lewis walked with his head down and when he heard a car engine behind, he kept to the side, not looking.

The car passed him. It stopped. He heard it reversing and then it drew level.

'Hey you! I know you.'

He looked into the open-topped car, at the blonde girl driving. It was Tamsin Carmichael and she smiled at him.

'Hello, Tamsin.'

'I'd no idea you were back!'

'Well, just.'

'Hop in.' He didn't move. 'Are you getting in, or not?'

He got in next to her. The car was an Austin and Tamsin wore short white gloves and a pale summer dress. Lewis didn't look at her after the first look, but away and out of the car at the country going by.

'How's it feel?' she asked, as if he'd just scored a century in a cricket match. 'You've missed absolutely nothing, I can assure you. Caroline Foster got married, but apart from that, do you know, I don't think a single thing's happened. Home, is it?'

'If that's all right.'

'Not exactly what you'd call a detour.'

RANDOM HOUSE

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

Tamsin let him out at the end of his drive and drove off, waving a gloved hand, and the sound of her car faded. Lewis didn't think she knew what it meant to him for her to be nice like that, but then he forgot about her, because his father's house was ahead of him and he was home.

He walked up to the house and felt as if he was doing it in a dream. When he knocked, Alice opened the door immediately, smiling very brightly.

'Lewis!'

'Alice . . .You knew I was coming?'

'We knew they were releasing you. Sorry. Hello.'

He went into the house and she shut the door and they looked at each other in the dim hall for a moment and then she kissed his cheek.

'You've grown,' she said. 'We just didn't know whether to expect you. You look so different. Your room's ready.'

Lewis went upstairs and Alice stood in the hall wondering if she should phone Gilbert and tell him Lewis was back, and if Lewis really looked as different as she thought, or if she had just remembered him wrongly.

It was like having a man in her house. A man she didn't know. He had been in prison and she had no idea what he'd been through there and he had never been predictable. She felt alarm and she waited in the hall, but Gilbert would have left his office already and there was no phoning him.

Lewis's bedroom was roughly the same size as his last cell in Brixton; a little bigger, maybe. That had been green and not white and he had shared it. He put his case on the bed and went over to the window and lit a cigarette and looked out at the garden.

There was a bluebottle crashing against the glass. It explored the edges, and seemed to search for an opening and then went straight at the panes of glass in a series of small assaults and then back to the edges again, and then it rested and then it went for the glass again, hitting itself, and it didn't stop, but carried on with it, trying to get out and not getting out and trying again.

The mantelpiece clock had a light, metallic chime and the sound of it striking six reached Lewis in his room.

Alice quietly started to assemble the ingredients for her jug of Pimm's, which would be ready at exactly six-thirty, just before Gilbert walked through the door. She made it slowly, and a small one for herself as a taster, to get the Pimm's and gin mix right. When she went into the kitchen for mint and apple and ice, she tried to make things better with Mary. Mary hadn't known Lewis was coming out; the first she knew of it was hearing his voice in the hall, and she was angry and she didn't want to be in the house with him.

RANDOM HOUSE

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

There had been a row and Alice had to beg her not to give notice. Now she found herself practically following Mary around the kitchen trying to ingratiate herself, and after a while she gave up and took her mint and her slices of apple and went back into the drawing room.

When Lewis heard his father's key in the door he went to the top of the stairs. Gilbert stood in the doorway with his briefcase in his hand, still wearing his hat. Alice came out of the drawing room and watched them. Gilbert took off his hat and put it on the straight-backed chair by the door.

'You're home.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Come with me.' He said it quietly, but with rage.

'Gilbert—'

'Come!'

Lewis started down the stairs to his father and followed him out of the house. They got into the car without a word.

Gilbert drove quite fast towards the village and Lewis didn't need to ask him where they were going. It was hard to be next to his father again and to have his presence filling the car up like that and Lewis tried to remember what he'd planned to say.

Gilbert pulled over and stopped and turned off the engine. Lewis found he couldn't raise his eyes, but stared down at his hands. He'd been going to make a promise. He'd been going to make his speech and his promise and reassure his father, but now he couldn't even raise his eyes from his hands and Gilbert said, 'Look, can't you?'

He looked, obediently.

The church was ahead of them, warm with evening sunshine and very quiet and peaceful.

'It's just the same,' said Lewis.

'Yes. We wanted it to be just the same. Lots of people chipped in. Dicky Carmichael helped enormously. It was very important to everybody that it be just the same.'

Lewis looked at the church and there was silence as he looked.

'Well?' said Gilbert, 'Do you have anything to say?' Lewis said nothing.

Gilbert started the engine and drove home without speaking to his son again.

RANDOM HOUSE

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

The family sat in the dining room by the open window and Mary brought in the dishes and put them on the table before she left for the night. The sky was still light and the candles stood unlit. Lewis was distracted by the things on the table. There were holders and containers for everything; silver and glass and lace that were almost hypnotically diverting. He worked hard not to think about the wine that Gilbert was pouring for himself and Alice. He could smell the red wine as it was poured, mixing with the smell of the damp vegetables. The only talking was to do with the passing of things, and thanking, and Lewis wanted to laugh because he was nostalgic for the huge noise of the mass mealtimes in prison. It had been not unlike school, and quite relaxing, but this was just self-conscious and tense and everything he'd hated about home before. He thought there must be something really wrong with a person who would rather be in Brixton prison than their own home.

Gilbert made a speech about what was expected of Lewis; how he must behave and get a job and be polite and not drink and as his father spoke, Lewis kept staring at the things on the table, but he couldn't see them properly any more.

Alice stood up, pushing her chair back crookedly. She excused herself and left the room and Lewis and his father finished their supper in silence. Gilbert placed his knife and fork together and wiped his mouth carefully. He put the napkin on his side plate and stood up.

'Good,' he said.

He waited to see if Lewis would get up too, but Lewis continued to stare at the table. After watching him for a moment Gilbert went to join Alice in the drawing room.

Lewis waited until he heard his father say something to Alice, and then the sound of the door, closing. The wine bottle on the table was empty. He looked at the liquor on the sideboard. There was no gin. There was brandy and whisky, in decanters, and glasses next to the decanters. He hadn't had a drink since the night he'd been arrested. He could have one now. It wasn't as if he'd decided not to drink, he wouldn't be breaking any promise. He took a breath and waited and then got up and stepped out of the open window onto the grass and walked up the lawn.

The woods were dark already. The sky was pale and the house was lit up behind him, but there was dark ahead. Lewis looked into the trees and he thought he could hear the river – but he couldn't hear the river, the river couldn't have got closer. He felt a coldness go over him at the thought of the water coming closer to the house.

'All right?'

Alice was standing next to him and he hadn't realised and he hadn't heard her.

RANDOM HOUSE

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

He looked at her and tried to pull his mind back to where they were.

'I wanted to say,' she began, 'I wanted to say – let's try and be friends, this time, shall we?'

'Of course.'

She looked so worried, he couldn't disappoint her.

'Your father,' she said, 'he missed you.'

It was kind of her to say so, but he didn't think it was true.

'Was it bad?'

He wasn't sure what she meant, and then realised she was asking him about prison. She didn't really want to know, though.

'There are worse things.'

'We didn't come.'

They hadn't come. At the beginning, when he was so frightened, it had been unbearable that they didn't, and he had written to them a few times, asking, but after that it was easier not seeing them and hardly hearing from them, and he'd forgotten about it – or nearly.

Alice let the silence go on as long as she could and then she tried again. She put her hand out, indicating his arm, stretching her fingers lightly towards it.

'No more silliness?' she asked.

He pulled his arm away and put his hand in his pocket.

'Right,' she said, 'right,' and she smiled again, apologetic this time. The grass was wet with dew and she had taken off her shoes to come out to him and carried them now as she went back to the house.

RANDOM HOUSE

Copyright © Sadie Jones 2008

Published by Chatto & Windus,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd