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Goodbye, Ruby Tuesday

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Published by Orion

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Prologue

1970

Sadie Moon stubbed out her cigarette in the rose bushes and climbed back in through the window of the Willow Lodge Diocesan Home for Unmarried Mothers, pulling her dressing gown around her.

Her room-mate Janey looked up, her baby clamped to her breast. 'You're taking a risk. Mrs Walcross would kill you.'

'I'd like to see her try.' Evelyn Walcross didn't scare Sadie. She called herself the home's Moral Welfare Officer, but she was a sadistic bitch who made sure the girls in her care suffered for their 'sins'. They slept in chilly rooms and worked like slaves, cleaning the home and scrubbing shirt collars in the laundry until their hands were raw. The whole place reeked of damp and carbolic soap.

All the other girls were terrified of Mrs Walcross, but Sadie was a rebel. She wore her skirts short, bleached her hair and sneaked outside to smoke Woodbines while all the other girls were in the chapel praying for their souls.

Mrs Walcross had had it in for Sadie ever since she'd caught her smuggling in a bottle of Cherry B under her maternity smock. She'd done her best to make Sadie mend her ways. She'd had her on her hands and knees cleaning floors. She'd given her extra kitchen duties. She'd taken away every last privilege she had, done everything but beaten the sin out of her with her bare hands. But Sadie just laughed at her, undaunted and defiant.

Janey stroked her baby's face, murmuring to him. She'd given birth three weeks before Sadie, the day before her eighteenth

birthday. Her little boy had chunky limbs and a shock of black hair. Just like his father, Janey said. Her boyfriend played rugby for Wakefield Trinity. He'd wanted to marry her but her parents wouldn't allow it because he was Catholic and they didn't want their daughter to marry a Papist.

Today was Janey's last day at Willow Lodge. Mrs Walcross had come to her last night and told her to be ready to leave by teatime.

'I am doing the right thing, aren't I?' she said.

Sadie shrugged. 'What choice did you have?'

Mrs Walcross had spelled it out when she gave her the adoption papers to sign. If she didn't, her baby would be taken away from her and put in a children's home. There was no way she would be allowed to keep it. If she tried, she would end up on the streets and the authorities would never allow her to have more children.

'It's up to you,' she'd said. 'Do you want your baby to be brought up in an orphans' home, or in a proper family?'

'It's going to be so hard to say goodbye,' Janey said.

'I know.' Sadie stared at the pokerwork plaque on the wall. 'THEN LUST WHEN IT HAS CONCEIVED GIVES BIRTH TO SIN – James 1:15.' It was the first thing she saw every morning.

She looked into her baby's cot. She slept soundly, her long dark lashes curling on her soft round cheeks, her tiny starfish hands flung up on the pillow beside her. Seeing her made Sadie's stomach flip.

No one told her it would be like this. No one warned her she would be ambushed by love.

It shouldn't have happened, not after the nightmare of everything that had gone before. Finding out she was five months pregnant – how could she not have realised sooner? – then having to break the news to her mum. And of course *she* told Sadie's brother Tom who, being the man of the house, decided Sadie should come to Willow Lodge. Did he know what this place was like? she wondered. Not that it would have mattered to him. He would have sent her to hell if it might stop the neighbours gossiping.

At the time she hadn't cared what became of her. She was past

caring about anything by then. She didn't want a baby, especially not this one.

Anyway, she had other plans. She was going to be a singer, move to London and become as rich and famous as Shirley Bassey. She had it all worked out in her head. She even had a stage name – Sadie Starr. She could almost see it, up there in lights at The Talk of the Town.

But then, a week ago, this thing she'd been carrying around inside her had become real. A little person who grunted in her sleep and screamed with rage and curled her tiny fingers tightly around Sadie's and stared up at her with dark, unfocused intensity, as if she was the only person in the whole world who mattered.

It wasn't her fault, she reasoned. She couldn't help how she'd come into the world, or who her father was. She was Sadie's and Sadie was hers. She'd even given her a name, although she'd never said it out loud. Only in her head.

She knew she'd have to give her up eventually, but she tried not to think about it. She couldn't take care of a baby, and her family wouldn't allow it. Tom wouldn't, anyway. It was the only thing that stopped her packing her bags and leaving the misery of Willow Lodge, the fact that she would have to leave her baby behind, too.

Mrs Walcross came into their room just before lunch. Janey's suitcase was on the bed. She'd dressed her little boy, Stephen, in the blue leggings and matinee coat she'd spent so long knitting that Sadie had got sick of the laborious click of her needles and threatened to throw them out of the window. Now she was feeding him again, sitting in the hard armchair between their beds.

Sadie was on her third attempt at changing her baby's nappy. She still hadn't got the hang of folding all that bulky towelling, or where to stick the pins. But the baby didn't seem to mind. She kicked her little naked legs, surprising herself when they moved. She looked so funny Sadie couldn't help giggling.

But she stopped when Mrs Walcross walked in with a grim-looking social worker. She went straight across to Janey and said, 'Time to say goodbye.'

Janey looked up, startled. 'But you said teatime! Can't I just finish feeding him?'

'His mother and father are waiting for him.' Mrs Walcross nodded to the social worker, who lunged at Janey and roughly took Stephen from her. Janey screamed and Sadie yelled, 'Leave her alone, you bitch!' but the social worker was already gone, her soft shoes squeaking down the corridor.

Sadie's scream startled her baby. Her tiny face crumpled and she wailed. Janey cried too, rocking in her chair and howling like a wounded animal.

'Shh, shh, it's all right, Ruby.' She swept her into her arms and held her close.

Mrs Walcross turned. 'What did you call her?'

'Ruby. It's her name.'

Mrs Walcross gave her a look of pure spite. 'We'll see what her new parents say about that.'

Sadie sat on the edge of the bed as the door closed, holding her baby close, trembling with shock and rage.

Over my dead body, she said to herself.

Irene Moon sipped her sherry with a grimace and tried to listen as Glenys Kitchener droned on.

'You're so lucky to be able to get away with such a small do, Mrs Moon.' She was only twenty but looked and acted much older, in a prissy pastel-blue two-piece and white gloves, a hat shaped like a fruit bowl perched on her curls. Her legs were buckling under the weight of the baby propped on her hip. He was trussed up in a sailor suit, his fat red face framed by a frilly bonnet. 'When little William was christened we had to go all the way to Leeds to find a place big enough. Such a fuss! But I suppose you have to expect these things when you're in public life, don't you?'

Irene fought to keep the smile off her face. Public life indeed! Glenys might have come up in the world since she married Bernard Kitchener, just because he was a local councillor and ten years older than her, but it wasn't that long since she'd been playing hopscotch down their street. Now to listen to her anyone

would think she'd been brought up in a palace instead of a poky flat over a fish shop in Coalpit Lane.

She looked around at the small gathering in her front room. Her son Tom was parading around with baby Catherine in his arms, showing her off to everyone. At twenty-one, he looked too young to be married, let alone a father. It didn't seem too many years since she'd brought him home from hospital herself.

Jackie stood at his side, smiling nervously. Irene knew what her daughter-in-law was thinking. She was hoping Tom wouldn't wake the bairn. There were already purple shadows under Jackie's eyes from all the sleepless nights she'd had.

Poor Jackie, Irene thought. Motherhood hadn't come easily to her. Many was the time she'd heard her crying through their thin bedroom wall.

Glenys lowered her voice. 'I do think you're terribly brave, having a party at all in the circumstances.'

'And what circumstances would those be, Glenys?'

'You know. With your Sadie being . . . away.' Glenys glanced around then leaned forward confidingly. 'Is there any news of her?'

Her concern didn't fool Irene for a moment. All she wanted was the latest gossip. Just like the rest of them.

That was why she hadn't wanted a big christening do. She couldn't face those friends and neighbours she'd known for years, all pointing the finger at her family.

'You will tell her we're thinking about her, won't you?' Glenys' voice dripped sympathy. 'I do feel sorry for her. Although I did warn her what would happen if she ran around with the likes of *him*.' Her mouth pursed. 'You did the right thing, Mrs Moon, sending her away.'

'Did I?' She was beginning to wonder. The only reason she'd done it was to silence nasty gossips like Glenys Kitchener. Now she felt disgusted with herself.

'Definitely. You couldn't have it in the house, could you? Think of the shame. And besides, could you honestly imagine Sadie caring for a baby? She can hardly look after herself, let alone a—'

They were all suddenly aware the room had gone very quiet. Irene turned round.

There, standing in the doorway, was Sadie, her suitcase at her feet and a baby in her arms. She looked pale, exhausted, but utterly defiant.

'Hello, Mum,' she said. 'We've come home.'

Tom reacted before Irene could summon her thoughts. Ignoring the guests, he grabbed Sadie's elbow and steered her out of the room into the kitchen. Jackie hurried after them.

Everyone tactfully started to leave. Glenys was the last to go.

'Are you sure there isn't anything I can do?' she said, craning her neck to catch a glimpse of what was going on in the kitchen.

'We can manage.' Irene hustled her towards the door and closed it firmly in her face. She leaned against it and shut her eyes. Give me strength, she prayed. Then she headed for the kitchen.

'I'm telling you, you're not having it in this house.'

'It's my baby.'

Sadie sat at the kitchen table, still clutching the bundle in her arms. Her hair was damp with rain and she was shivering inside her pink mohair coat. Tom loomed over her, while Jackie looked helplessly from one to the other. Somewhere upstairs, baby Catherine yelled at being left out of the action.

'It's a little bastard. And you're not keeping it under this roof. Tell her, Ma!' But before his mother could speak, he went on. 'And I hope you're pleased with yourself, ruining my daughter's christening?'

'I didn't plan it, did I?'

'Trust you to make a spectacle of yourself. Never mind anyone else, Sadie Moon always has to be the centre of attention.'

'I had nowhere else to go. What did you want me to do, sit in the bus shelter in the rain until you'd finished showing off to the neighbours?'

'I wanted you to do as you were told for once and leave that behind.' He pointed at the baby in her arms.

'I changed my mind.'

'You can't do that! We agreed—'

'She's my baby and I'm keeping her.' Sadie's face was thin and wretched, but her eyes blazed with determination.

'But—'

'That's enough, Tom.' Irene spoke up. 'We're not going to get anywhere by shouting, are we? Jackie, love, go upstairs and see to Catherine before she screams the place down.' Jackie ran off, relieved to have something useful to do. Irene reached for the kettle and filled it under the tap. 'Have you eaten?' she asked Sadie.

'Not since this morning. But I'm not hungry.'

'You've got to have something. I'll get you some sandwiches from the buffet in a minute.'

'What is this?' Tom demanded. 'Has everyone in this house gone mad? She turns up out of the blue with that . . . that thing, and you treat her like she's the flaming vicar dropped in for Sunday tea!'

'Like I said, there's nowt to be gained by shouting.' Irene turned to Sadie. 'So what did the social workers say when you told them you'd changed your mind?'

Sadie fiddled with the baby's shawl. 'I didn't tell them. I just walked out.'

Tom snorted with rage. 'You did what?'

'I walked out. You don't know what it was like there. They were so cruel—'

'What did you expect? Bloody Butlins?'

Irene looked at the bundle in her daughter's arms. It was only a week old, just a few weeks younger than Catherine. She longed to see if the baby had her cousin's soft, fair colouring.

Ever since Catherine was born, Irene had been haunted by thoughts of her other grandchild, the one she'd never know. That vile woman at Willow Lodge had tried to make out it was none of her business when she telephoned every day to find out if the baby had arrived, but she'd got it out of her in the end.

And now she was here. 'You're in no state to be out of bed, let alone traipsing halfway across the country,' she said.

'I had to leave. They would have taken her away from me.'

'That was the point!' Tom said. 'You don't get it, do you? Do you really think they're going to let you keep her after this?'

'They can't stop me. I didn't sign any papers. Besides, I'm her mother.'

Tom laughed unkindly. 'Some mother you are! If you really cared about that kid you'd do what's best for it and give it the chance of a decent home.'

'She's got a home here.'

'I told you, you're not bringing it into this house. Haven't you done enough to drag this family's name through the mud? Ma can't hold her head up any more as it is, without you making it worse for her!'

Sadie stared at him for a moment. Then, gathering her baby to her, she stood up. 'All right. If that's the way you want it—'

'Wait. You're not going anywhere.'

'Ma!'

'Tom, your sister's just given birth. Can't you see she's not in a fit state?' She looked at Sadie. 'Why don't you go upstairs and rest? You look dead on your feet. I'll bring you up some food in a minute.'

Sadie shot a wary look at Tom, then left. They listened to her footsteps climbing the stairs, then Tom turned on Irene. 'Why did you say she could stay?'

'She's my daughter. And that baby's our flesh and blood, whether you like it or not.'

Tom's hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. 'If she stays, we're going.'

'Don't be daft, Tom.'

'I mean it, Ma. It's her or us.'

Irene looked pleadingly at him. 'I can't put her out on the street, Tom.'

'Fine. We'll move out, then.'

'Where will you go?'

'We'll find a flat somewhere. Don't worry about us. Worry about *your daughter.*' Tom slammed out of the room. A moment later the bedroom door banged overhead and she heard him

shouting something to Jackie, and her quiet voice trying to reason with him. Not that it would do any good.

Irene sighed. She couldn't seem to please one of her children without upsetting the other.

She felt torn. Tom had been so good since his father died three years ago. But she couldn't turn her back on Sadie, no matter how much trouble she brought with her.

Sadie shivered in bed, the covers pulled up to her chin. It was strange to see her there, surrounded by all her teenage paraphernalia – posters on the walls, Dansette record player propped up on the chest of drawers. It reminded Irene that she was only sixteen, barely more than a child herself.

The baby was tucked in beside her, sleeping peacefully. How she'd slept through all that shouting Irene had no idea. She seemed very contented, unlike her screeching cousin next door. Her daughter must be doing something right, she decided.

'Sorry, Mum,' Sadie whispered. 'I didn't mean to cause trouble.'

'You never do, do you? It just seems to follow you around.' Irene put the tray of sandwiches and tea on the bedside table.

Sadie looked down at the baby, tucked in the crook of her arm. 'Do you think I've done a stupid thing?'

'It doesn't matter what I think. It's done now, and we've got to make the best of it, haven't we?' She held out her arms. 'Can I?'

Sadie warily handed her over, as if afraid Irene might take her away. Irene looked closely at her granddaughter for the first time. She was heartbreakingly beautiful, as dark as Catherine was fair. Just like her father. Sadie had stubbornly refused to tell anyone his name, but like everyone else Irene had a good idea who it was. Especially as the lad in question had left town just after finding out Sadie was pregnant.

She was better off without him, anyway. Irene pushed the shawl back off the baby's face with the tip of her finger. She would never admit it to Sadie or Tom, but she was secretly relieved her grandchild was home where she belonged. 'So does this one have a name yet?'

'Ruby Tuesday.'

'What kind of a name is that?'

'It's a song by the Rolling Stones. I like it.'

'I might have known you'd come up with summat daft!' She looked down at the baby again, smiling in spite of herself.

Daft name or not, she couldn't have given her up either.