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...

Home Front Girls

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.

Home Front Girls

Rosie Goodwin



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, 2013

Copyright © Rosie Goodwin, 2013

The right of Rosie Godwin 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 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: 978-1-47210-100-6 (hardback edition)
ISBN: 978-1-47210-101-3 (paperback edition)
ISBN: 978-1-47210-102-0 (ebook)

Printed and bound in the UK

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Chapter One

Coventry, November 1939

'I'm sorry, darling, but the long and the short of it is, you will have to find yourself a job immediately.'

'What!' Annabelle Smythe's beautiful blue eyes stretched wide with horror as she stared back at her mother, who was nervously wringing her hands. They were in Annabelle's bedroom and the young woman leaped up and began to pace up and down the length of the soft flowered carpet as her pure silk dressing-gown swirled about her slim legs. Annabelle was twenty years old and had never done a day's work in her entire life. Nor did she intend to. The only child of wealthy parents, she had been indulged in everything she had ever wanted from the moment her mother had held her in her arms, and she was not going to let that change now.

'But why, Mummy?' she whined as she raised a perfectly plucked, pencilled eyebrow. 'Is it the latest clothing bill I ran

up in town yesterday? I know I was a little extravagant, but I won't do it again, I promise. It's just that after I'd bought the new dress I had to have shoes and a handbag to go with it – and a coat, of course, didn't I? And if what people are saying is true, then it's going to be very hard to get hold of any decent clothes soon and you wouldn't want me to walk about like a tramp, would you?' She gazed at her mother imploringly.

'Oh, Annabelle!' Miranda Smythe sank down onto the bedroom chair, which was upholstered in a soft pink colour to match the bedding and the curtains. 'You must realise, surely, that the war has affected Daddy's business badly. People aren't buying luxury cars any more and the thing is . . . Well, the truth of the matter is – we're struggling a little bit.'

'Hmph!' Annabelle snatched a silver-backed hairbrush from the dressing-table and began to yank it through her shoulder-length blonde hair, which only that afternoon had been primped and teased into marcel waves at a hairdresser's in the city centre. 'Is that why you've sacked Mrs Fitton? It's going to be horrible now, having no one to do our washing and ironing.'

'I'm afraid it is,' her mother replied as patiently as she could. She adored her daughter and would have walked over hot coals for her if need be, but sometimes, just sometimes, she wondered if she hadn't spoiled her just a little too much. However, now she had started she ploughed on, 'And you may as well know, Mrs Brookes will be finishing at the end of the week too.'

'*What!* But who will do the cleaning and cooking then?'

'We shall have to learn to do it ourselves,' her mother replied steadily.

'You must be joking, Mother!' Annabelle spluttered,

utterly horrified. She was not capable even of boiling an egg, and the thought of having to do menial things like cleaning and cooking was more than she could comprehend.

'You have to accept that the war is affecting everyone, darling. We have been very lucky up to now, but we must all make sacrifices. I'm sure we shall manage admirably once we get into some sort of a routine. After all – how hard can it be?'

Annabelle glared at her mother as she slammed the hairbrush back down, barely able to take in this unwelcome news. Her mother had always been so easy to get round. Usually the girl had only to drop her bottom lip and pout, and Miranda would give in to her every demand. But here she was now, telling her that she must learn to do her own cleaning and cooking *as well* as getting a job! It was preposterous! They had never taught her how to do domestic tasks at the expensive schools Daddy had sent her to. Needlework and piano lessons were the most gruelling things she had ever had to tackle up to now.

'And just what sort of a job do you expect me to do?' she snapped as she threw herself onto the bed.

'Well, as it happens I heard that they are looking for staff in Owen Owen. You might enjoy shop work,' her mother added hopefully.

Annabelle couldn't imagine anything worse than having to bow and scrape to awkward customers. She herself had often given shop staff a hard time; making them run here and there for things she wanted to look at, and now here was her mother daring to suggest that the roles should be reversed.

'I don't think Daddy would be too happy with your suggestions,' she spat peevishly.

'Actually . . . it was Daddy's idea.'

Annabelle felt the bottom drop out of her world. She had been praying that at any second her mother would chuckle and tell her it had all been a silly joke, but one glance at Miranda's pale face told her that she was dreadfully serious.

'And what if I refuse?'

Her mother shrugged. 'Then there would be little we could do to force you to go out to work. But I'm not at all sure how you would manage. You see, Daddy can't afford to give you your allowance any more.'

This was the final straw and Annabelle scowled as her mother looked about the room and sighed. Yesterday's lingerie littered the floor, and clothes that Annabelle had tried on earlier in the day then discarded were lying crumpled in the bottom of the wardrobe.

'You perhaps ought to hang those back up,' her mother suggested tentatively. 'Now that Mrs Fitton has gone you will have to be responsible for your own washing and ironing too, and there's no point in making unnecessary work for yourself.'

And with that the woman turned and walked from the room, closing the door quietly behind her as Annabelle stared after her. Throwing herself off the bed, she stormed to the window and flicked the snow-white net curtains aside to stare down gloomily into the tree-lined avenue where they lived in Cheylesmore in Coventry. It was one of the very best areas in the city, and the home she had grown up in was magnificent – a rambling Victorian four-bedroom detached house set in half an acre that had been tastefully furnished from top to bottom by her mother. A sweeping drive led up to the heavy oak door, and on it was parked her father's gleaming Triumph. Annabelle smirked. That would give people something to talk about, if her father were to drop her

off at some shabby workplace in *that*. But now as she calmed down a little she was sure that it wouldn't come to that. She would give it half an hour and then go downstairs and turn the tears on, and all this silly nonsense would be forgotten. She had always been able to wrap her father around her little finger before, so why should now be any different?

Humming to herself, she began to rummage through her wardrobe again to find the new dress. She must wear something decent at tonight's party at her friend's house. It was Jessica's eighteenth and if her dishy brother, James, was going to be there, Annabelle was determined she would look her best. Sadly, since the war had started there had been a shortage of young men, since a lot of them had already been called up. James had only missed it because of a minor heart defect, but Annabelle could live with that. He was one of the most eligible chaps she knew and his family were positively rich, occupying an even larger house than the Smythes. In a much happier frame of mind, she continued to rummage, taking no notice of her mother's suggestion of hanging up her other clothes.

Downstairs, Miranda entered the drawing room to find her husband staring into the fire with a glass of brandy in his hand and a dejected expression on his face. He was worried for the future, for his family; the comfort they had always known was under threat. He glanced up as his wife entered the room and his face instantly softened as it always did when he caught sight of her. Even after twenty-four years of marriage he was as besotted with her as he had been on the first day he had set eyes on her.

'How did she take it, darling?' he asked as his wife crossed to the decanter standing on the highly polished mahogany sideboard to help herself to a small sherry.

Miranda sighed as she joined him. 'Not well, I'm afraid – but then I think we expected that, didn't we?'

At forty-three years old, Miranda was a striking-looking woman. Her hair was still a lovely shade of pale blonde with barely a grey hair in sight, her face was unlined and she had retained her slim figure. Annabelle's hair was a darker shade of blonde and her eyes a deeper blue, but she was also a very beautiful young woman. Richard loved them both to distraction, although he was aware that the gossips said he had married above himself – which he knew to be the truth.

Richard Smythe was proud of the fact that he was a self-made man. He had started life on a slum terrace on the other side of the city, and after leaving school at the earliest opportunity he had got taken on in the stables of a big house near Shilton, eventually graduating to the garage when his employer acquired a Hispana-Suiza. Years passed, and he left to work for an old gentleman who owned an automobile business. Sales boomed in the 1920s and by scrimping and saving, Richard eventually managed to buy the garage from the old gentleman who had trained him.

The start of this war, a mere twenty-one years after the 'War to end all Wars', was causing sales to drop off alarmingly due to petrol rationing and, as far as he was concerned, it was time for them all to pull their belts in – especially Annabelle. Money dripped through that one's fingers like water, which was why he had ordered his wife to have words with her.

Miranda had been very good about it and was happy to let the charlady and daily help go and to tackle the chores herself, even though she had never had to do so before. But then she had a totally different nature from Annabelle – kind and thoughtful despite having enjoyed a very privileged upbringing. Richard could still remember the look of horror

on Mrs Hamilton Gower's face when Miranda had first introduced him to her. At that time, he had just bought the business and was painfully aware that he, with his oil-stained hands, was not at all the sort of chap Miranda's parents had planned for her. Even so, because he was their daughter's choice they had grudgingly accepted him, and that had spurred him on to work even harder to prove to them that he could give her the sort of lifestyle she was accustomed to. He had even changed his name from Smith to Smythe as Miranda's mother felt it had a better ring to it. He had known that what she *really* meant was that Smith was too 'common' for her daughter, but eager to be accepted, he had gone along with it.

They had married eventually and the wedding had been a lavish affair paid for by the bride's father. The newly-weds had been ecstatically happy and planned to have a large family straight away, but then years of heartache had followed as Miranda sobbed each month when she found that she was not pregnant. At last, after five long years, Annabelle had come along – and finally Richard could do no wrong; his in-laws had even come to admire him, especially as his business grew and they saw that he genuinely loved their daughter. Sadly, Annabelle was destined to be their only child, so she had been shamelessly spoiled by both her parents and grandparents. But now all that was going to have to stop. Things were, in fact, even worse than Miranda knew. Richard had tried to keep the bad news from his wife for as long as possible, but now it was time to make some serious economies or he could see them losing not only his business but the house as well – and then where would they be?

'Try not to worry too much, darling,' his wife said softly. 'This war cannot last forever and Annabelle will survive. She

might even enjoy working, once she gets used to it. She is often very bored stuck at home when she has nothing to entertain her, and at least she can look around for a job that she wants to do. Most girls her age are working in munitions factories now.'

'Hm, well, I'd like to think you're right – but I can't see it myself,' he replied glumly as she took his glass and went to refill it.

Miranda handed him the glass back and then they both sat down on the velvet upholstered settee as they waited for Annabelle to put in an appearance, which they were confident she would, given time.

Half an hour later, Annabelle breezed into the room in a waft of expensive French perfume, looking as if she had just stepped out of the pages of a fashion magazine. She was wearing the outfit that she had bought the day before – a very pretty red pleated cocktail dress that was cinched in at the waist by a broad belt, which showed off her slim figure. On her feet were her new high-heeled court shoes, and her face was made up to perfection.

'How do I look then? Do I pass muster, Daddy?' She twirled in front of him before bending to plant a kiss on his cheek. A little display of affection never usually failed to melt him; he was like putty in her hands. But she was quick to note this wasn't the case tonight.

Frowning slightly, he eyed her up and down before asking, 'And how did you manage to buy all this, miss?'

'With my allowance, of course. At the moment there are still some nice outfits in the shops, but once these stupid clothes coupons come into force there will be nothing decent left to buy,' she answered, trying not to sound resentful. 'How are we expected to look smart if we can't just go out

and buy what we need? Half of the shops don't have anything worth buying in them any more!'

'It's a case of make do and mend at the moment,' her father answered, uncharacteristically sharply. 'In case you hadn't noticed, there is a war on. Even as we speak, young men are being killed. And here you are, Annabelle, worrying about the lack of choice of clothes in the shops. Why, if you didn't buy another single thing, you would have enough to last most people for the next ten years. I happen to know that your wardrobe is bulging at the seams.'

'But I just had to have a new outfit for tonight,' Annabelle said resentfully. 'It's Jessica's birthday party and you wouldn't want me to go looking a mess, would you?'

When her father didn't respond as he usually did, Annabelle looked towards her mother for support, but for the first time in her life she didn't find it. Deciding to try a different tack she lowered her head and said quietly, 'I'm sorry. I didn't think. But don't worry – I'll be really careful from now on, honestly I will. You're quite right – I don't need any more new clothes and I won't buy anything else for ages.'

'I'm pleased to hear it, because as your mother has informed you, things are going to have to change around here for the foreseeable future.'

'I know, but you didn't really mean what Mummy said, did you? About me getting a job?'

'I'm afraid I did,' Richard said firmly. 'And I suggest you go about it as soon as possible, because as from now, I am stopping your allowance. I have no choice, I'm sorry.'

Annabelle's mouth gaped open. Things were not going at all as she had planned, but she guessed that she would only annoy her father more if she pursued it now, so she swallowed her temper and asked instead, 'Could you give me a lift to the party, please, Daddy?'

'No, I can't, dear. Petrol is getting very hard to obtain and Jessica only lives ten minutes' walk away.'

'But I can't be expected to walk there in *these* shoes,' Annabelle gasped. 'And it's so dark outside.'

'Then stay in. It's not wise to go out after dark at the moment anyway. And if you must go, don't forget to take your gas mask.'

Her new resolution forgotten, Annabelle stamped her daintily shod foot. 'Now you're just being mean!'

'No, I am not. It's called being sensible. And if the air-raid sirens go off before you get to Jessica's, make sure that you head for the nearest shelter.'

Annabelle had never seen her father in this mood before, and realising that for now at least he was not going to be swayed, she turned on her heel and marched off to fetch her new coat and the hated gas mask. She detested having to carry it everywhere with her and saw little point in it anyway. Word had it that the Germans would be targeting the factories on the other side of the city, so she didn't see why she should have to lug the damn thing everywhere. For a moment, a sense of the enormity of what was happening to them all overwhelmed her in a wave of fear about the future. Then she pulled herself together and brushed her feelings to one side.

Blasted war – I'll be glad when it's over and things can get back to normal, she thought, and in no time at all she had slammed the door and was making her way through the icy, darkened streets.