

**THE
WOMAN
IN
SUITE 11**

ALSO BY RUTH WARE

In a Dark, Dark Wood

The Woman in Cabin 10

The Lying Game

The Death of Mrs. Westaway

The Turn of the Key

One by One

The It Girl

Zero Days

One Perfect Couple

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To everyone who wanted more

**THE
WOMAN
IN
SUITE 11**

In my dream, I was trapped. Locked in a cell, deep underwater, where no one could hear my cries.

There was no way to escape; I could only run from side to side of the little room, scrabbling at the locked door with my nails, tearing back the orange nylon curtains to find no window behind – just a blank plastic panel, cruelly mocking.

Desperately, I cast around for something, anything to help me break out of my prison – a piece of wood to pry open the door, something heavy to batter the lock. But there was nothing – only a metal bunk bolted to the wall and a rubber tray on the floor.

The door was fitted and flush with no helpful crack I could get my fingers into, no gap at the bottom I could peer beneath or shout into.

And as I scratched at the unforgiving plastic with broken, bloody nails, I realized: there was no way out. I was utterly and completely trapped. And the knowledge threatened to overwhelm me.

When I woke up, it was with a huge wash of relief. I lay there, my eyes closed, feeling my heart pounding and the blood singing in my ears. It was just a dream – the bad old dream I'd had more times than I could count. Just a stupid, recurring nightmare – a memory of a horror I had long since escaped. I was safe at home, where no one could hurt me.

Except . . . was I? Even before I opened my eyes, I could tell something was wrong. I wasn't in my comfortable bed at home, my husband lying beside me, a pair of little toddler feet jammed into my stomach. I was alone, lying on a thin, hard mattress with pain in my back and hips. And the sounds were wrong too – there was no friendly rattle from our old air-conditioning unit, no honking of horns or wail of sirens in the New York night.

No, here there was only the clang of doors, the sound of footsteps, the shout of male voices raised in anger.

'If you don't calm down –' I heard, and then something I couldn't make out.

My heartbeat began to quicken again, and I sat up, opening my eyes with a feeling of dread as the events of the day before came flooding back. There was no fake window, no beige panel behind nylon curtains. And the door wasn't plastic. But there was a door. It was metal and barred. And it was very much locked.

My dream hadn't been just a dream. I was trapped. I was locked in a cell. And I had no idea how I was going to get out.

The background of the page is a light-colored, marbled pattern with soft, greyish veins and swirls, resembling natural stone or paper with a marbled texture.

**PART
ONE**

1

When I walked into the bedroom, I sucked in my breath. The room looked like a bomb had hit it. Overturned drawers, duvet and pillows tumbled on the floor, a little side table upside down on the bed, and chairs strewn around like someone had been bowling with them, knocking them over like ninepins. There were clothes everywhere – on the carpet, on the bedside table, hanging off the window blind – I could barely even see the rug for the mess. In the middle of all of it was Delilah, my elderly tabby cat, washing herself placidly on top of a tumbled pile of what *had* been clean and folded laundry a couple of hours ago.

There were only two possible explanations. One, I'd been burgled in the night by someone searching for something with a frightening level of determination. Or two, Judah had let the boys dress themselves for school and this was the result. And I was pretty sure I knew which one it was.

Sighing, I picked up the chairs, retrieved Teddy's sippy cup from under his toddler bed, and shooed Delilah off the crumpled pile of washing. Then I began stuffing Eli's clothes back in his chest of drawers. *You're Rawresome!* said a little hoodie lying across the rug, complete with an appliqué dinosaur roaring. Why didn't adult clothes

have affirmations like that? There were days when I felt like I needed the boost of a smiley T. rex saying he believed in me – and today was one.

‘HOW WAS THE interview?’ Judah pulled off his headphones and looked up from his laptop as I set the sippy cup down on the kitchen counter. I never fail to get a lift walking into the main room of our apartment – it was what sold it to us in the first place. It’s long, almost the whole length of the old tenement, with a dark polished wood floor and tall windows overlooking the neighbours’ rooftops, and today it was full of low autumn sunshine and sparkling dust motes.

When we bought the place, it had two bedrooms, and we’d used one for ourselves and kept the other for an office/guest room. But then I got pregnant, and the office had become first a nursery and then the bedroom of two little boys. Now we worked – well, Judah worked – mostly from the kitchen table in a little alcove off the side of the main living space.

He’d been deep in a Zoom call when I got back, but now he had the air of someone very willing to be distracted. I shook my head.

‘Okay, but I don’t think I’ll get it. The girl who interviewed me was really nice, but she told me I was overqualified. Twice.’

‘Translation: they don’t think they can afford you,’ Judah said with a shrug. He pushed his reading glasses up on his forehead. ‘I told you – you should be aiming higher.’

‘It’s all very well to say that, but I’ve been out of the game a long time.’ I was trying not to let the irritation spill over into my voice, but I wasn’t sure I was succeeding. It was easy for Judah to talk – he’d walked into a cushy staff post at the *New York Times*, of all places, right before the pandemic hit. He’d won the journalist equivalent of the lottery – and the fact that he knew it didn’t make it any easier for me to stop comparing our career trajectories. ‘Staff jobs aren’t easy

to come by, Jude, especially not for someone with a five-year gap on their CV.

‘I know,’ Judah said. He stood up and came across to me, took me into his arms. ‘I know, I’m sorry, I’m not trying to make out like the jobs are there just waiting for you to pull them off the tree, I just think . . . you don’t value yourself high enough sometimes.’

‘I value myself fine, trust me. But I’ve barely worked since Eli was born – and that’s a big red flag for a lot of people.’

Eli had been, not a pandemic baby exactly, but born right before it hit. I’d been riding high on the success of my one and only book, *Dark Waters*, about my nightmare experience on board a cruise ship called the *Aurora* in the Norwegian fjords. Judah had just been hired as permanent staff at the *New York Times*. We’d bought an apartment in the trendy Manhattan neighbourhood of Tribeca on the strength of my book advance and his newly minted salary. The next step – surely it had to be trying for a baby?

For some reason, maybe the uncertainty of that word *trying*, I had assumed the process would take months, if not a couple of years. In reality, Eli had come along faster than either of us had expected and parenting a newborn had hit both of us like the proverbial ton of bricks. It seemed impossible that such a tiny person could wreak such devastation on two orderly lives and for me, three and a half thousand miles away from my home country and my mum, it had hit particularly hard. For a while things had got a little rocky – I had felt my mental health sliding back into a very dark place, my old medications no longer really working, the new ones fraught with unexpected side effects and dosage complications. But between us, we’d got things back on track. The hormonal tsunami retreated. Eli fell into a routine. Judah and I made things work, and I found a cocktail of antidepressants that put me back on an even keel. And then, just as I’d been thinking about hiring a childminder (or a sitter, as they called them here) and going back to work, the pandemic hit.

In a way, a way I'd never admit out loud, I'd been glad. Of course it had been tough – the isolation, the worry about my mother, far away in what the *Guardian* was calling 'Plague Island'. But it had also let me off the hook – the school and nursery closures had given me two glorious years at home with Eli with no real possibility of looking for full-time work, and then, when Teddy came along, the clock had reset and I'd been back in babyland again, albeit with tweaked medication and a better handle on how everything worked.

But now, somehow, we were six years on. Eli was in kindergarten. Teddy had just started pre-K. The book advance had disappeared into everyday living expenses. And both Judah and I agreed it was time for me to get back on the horse.

Only the horse was proving hard to catch.

I'd done a fair amount of freelancing – some here in the States, some for old bosses and contacts back in the UK. But what I wanted was a staff job with a pension and health insurance. At least I was a US citizen now, which gave me some measure of security. One of the things I had dreamed about obsessively, sweaty nightmares, back in the dark days of postnatal anxiety, had been my green card expiring and ICE coming to batter down the door. The idea had haunted me no matter how many times Judah told me it wasn't going to happen – that as the wife of a US citizen and the mother of two, I wasn't going to get deported. But even with that precious US passport, I was still aware that if anything happened to Judah, I would be pretty screwed. Our life here, our health insurance, our mortgage payments, they all rested on his job. And I didn't want that. And not just for me – I didn't want it for Judah either. I didn't want the whole burden of keeping our little family afloat to rest on his shoulders.

I tightened my arms around him, resting my forehead for a moment on his broad chest, then straightened up and smiled.

'You know what, it'll be fine. Something will turn up – it's just a matter of knocking on enough doors, right?'

‘Absolutely.’ Judah smoothed the hair back from my face and smiled down at me. ‘I mean, the *Times* position seemed like pie in the sky for me until it wasn’t. You’re an amazing writer with some seriously impressive credits on your CV. Something will come along for you. And in the meantime, keep your hand in, keep writing freelance stuff. And the right door will open, I know it.’

‘I love you, Judah Lewis,’ I said. And I meant it. With my whole being.

‘I love you, Laura Blacklock,’ he said back, smiling his lopsided smile that always tugged at my heart. We gazed into each other’s eyes for a long minute, and I thought again, as I had a thousand times before, how lucky I was to have ended up here – with this man I loved, who still quickened my pulse after ten years and two kids, in this beautiful apartment that neither of us could have dreamed of affording a decade ago. My life could have ended in a watery grave in Norway. It very nearly had. Every day since was a gift – and one I never stopped being grateful for.

The ping of Judah’s work computer made us break apart, still smiling at each other.

‘Sorry,’ he said. ‘That’s my calendar reminder. I’ve got a team call at half past.’

‘Gotta earn that crust,’ I said. And then, seeing the pile of mail on the table, ‘Oh, by the way, I brought the mail up. There’s a couple of parcels for you. I think one’s those shirts you ordered.’

Judah nodded and began sorting through the mix of junk mail, packages and bills, before stopping with a groan at a thick embossed envelope. He tossed it to me.

‘Yet another wedding, I assume. I’m amazed you’ve got any single friends left. Who is it this time?’

I looked down at the envelope, frowning. It did look a lot like a wedding invitation – stiff card, expensive cream paper. And it had a European stamp, but not UK. I wasn’t sure what country, in fact. The text on

the stamp said *Helvetia*, which sounded vaguely Scandinavian but wasn't any country or currency I could put my finger on. It was hand addressed to *Mme. Laura Blacklock* in thick black ink and beautiful calligraphy.

Only one way to find out.

I ripped open the top, wincing a little as I cut myself on the stiff edge of the envelope, and then pulled out the card and sucked the blood off my finger as I read it.

Marcus Leidmann and the Leidmann Group

cordially invites

Mme. Laura Blacklock

to attend the press opening of

Le Grand Hotel du Lac

Saint-Cergue les Bains

Lake Geneva

Switzerland

Monday 4th – Thursday 7th November

RSVP press@theleidmanngroup.ch

On the reverse was the same text in French, and below both sets of text was a discreet QR code labeled *more information / plus d'informations*.

Judah must have seen something, I don't know what, in my face, because as I finished reading he looked up, curiously.

'Not a wedding invitation?'

'No. A press thing actually.' I handed him the card and he read it over, then tapped the name at the top.

'I've heard of him. Marcus Leidmann. He's the CEO of the Leidmann Group. Do you know it?'

I took the card back and shook my head. 'Are they a travel firm?'

'They're kind of everything – they're a bit like a smaller version of Tata Steel, you know, started off with heavy manufacturing, then

diversified into everything from railways to communications – but I didn't know they were into hotels. That must be new.'

I shrugged. 'Probably a good time to move into travel. I mean, a lot of places went bust in the pandemic, so I guess a canny investor gets in at the bottom. Well, nice opportunity for someone to get wined and dined at this Marcus guy's expense.'

I plucked the card from his fingers and was about to toss it in the bin when Judah stopped me.

'What d'you mean? Nice opportunity for you, if you want it.'

I laughed.

'I can't go to Switzerland, Judah! Who'd take the boys to school? Who'd pick them up?'

'Uh . . . me?' Judah said. He looked a little offended. 'Like I did this morning when you were at your interview, *if* you remember. We all survived.'

I opened my mouth to retort that the boys' bedroom had looked like a war zone and that was just *one* morning, but then shut it again. I didn't want to be one of those women who nitpicked every time their husbands did something slightly differently to the way they would have done it. And it probably was good for the boys to be asked to take a bit more responsibility for getting themselves ready in the morning – it was just a shame they'd destroyed their room in the process.

'But what's the point?' I said instead, changing tack. 'I don't have a commission to write about it. I mean a free holiday is nice, but I'm not even sure if it *is* free. I'd probably have to pay for my own flights.'

'One,' Judah said, ticking the items off on his fingers, 'you've been saying you want to see your mom for, like, two years. Even if you have to self-fund your flights, this'd be a tax-deductible trip to Europe, which isn't nothing. Two, the place'll probably be lousy with travel writers and editors, so great chance to do a bit of networking. You might even catch up with some old faces. Three, Lo, you've been

stuck at home with the kids for *six fuckin' years*. If anyone deserves a free holiday, it's you. This is the universe telling you to get back on the horse. And hey, it's pretty flattering they thought of you, isn't it?'

I looked down at the card I was holding, now slightly smeared with blood from the paper cut on my finger. The thought of catching up with old acquaintances wasn't exactly enticing in some cases, but Judah's other points were valid. There was the lure of seeing my mum, which I'd been putting off for far too long, and that last remark . . . I couldn't deny that one had hit home. It *was* pretty flattering someone had thought of me. For a while after the publication of *Dark Waters*, I'd been a minor celebrity on the travel-writing circuit with a steady flow of invitations to attend the openings of everything from new resorts to luxury train routes. During the pandemic, that flow had slowed to a trickle and then dried up completely, and somehow it had never resumed. But it was nice to think that my name was still out there, still on people's Rolodexes – if anyone still used Rolodexes anymore.

Yes, it *was* pretty flattering that someone had thought of me. And it was a reminder that however I'd felt walking home after the interview, I wasn't a nobody. Maybe I was a bit more rawresome than I realized. And maybe . . . maybe Judah was right. Maybe this was the universe telling me so.

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