

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*THE WOMAN IN CABIN 10*

# RUTH WARE

THE  
WOMAN  
IN  
SUITE 11

A NOVEL

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# **THE WOMAN IN SUITE 11**

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**RUTH WARE**



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*To everyone who wanted more*



*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.*

# **PART ONE**

# 1

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**W**hen 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 Rawsome!* 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.

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**"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 neighbors' 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 neighborhood 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](mailto: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 rawsome than I realized. And maybe... maybe Judah was right. Maybe this was the universe telling me so.

## 2

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“**M**ummy!” Eli barreled out of the door at kindergarten like a little brown-haired firework, slammed his head into my middle, and hugged me with a fierceness that suggested that I’d been away for a week. “I missed you soooo much.”

“You saw me last night at bedtime!”

“But you were gone this morning. Before I woke up!” His tone was reproachful. Teddy, hanging off my other arm, nodded vigorously.

“You left us!”

“I did, but Daddy took care of you, didn’t he?”

“We had to get dressed *by ourselves*.” Eli’s expression was tragic, as if Judah had left him home alone overnight rather than just asking him to choose his own T-shirt. “I told him that you always pick my pants out for me, but he said I was a big boy and could do it myself.”

*Pants.* By which he meant *trousers*, of course, not *underwear*. I would never get used to those words coming out of the mouths of my own children—but they *were* half Judah’s, I supposed, and getting more American by the day. When Eli had started at nursery, his accent was pretty similar to mine, a product of the amount of time he spent with me and the fact that I’d raised him on a steady diet of *Peppa Pig* and *Octonauts*. But within about five minutes of walking through the door at pre-K, or so it seemed, he’d picked up a flawless little New York accent, almost as broad as Judah’s Brooklyn one. Now he switched back and forth—American with his friends, a little more English with me and on Zoom calls with his English grandparents. At least I’d managed to hang on to “Mummy.” Other people were moms. Not me.

“Can we goooo,” Teddy demanded now. He was jumping around excitedly. “I want to go to the park. Can we go to the park?”



“Well...” I looked at the time on my phone, then at the weather, which was predicting rain, then gave a mental shrug. What did it matter. It would give Judah another hour to get his work done, and if it rained, we all had coats. “Okay, then. But only for half an hour.”

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**AT THE LITTLE** play park, the boys scrambled on the climbing frame, hung from the monkey bars, splashed in the puddles, and generally wore themselves out while I dithered between supervising them and crafting persuasive emails on my phone to a few of my remaining travel contacts, pitching a piece on the Grand Hotel du Lac. One problem was the *plus d'informations* on the QR code hadn't actually turned up a great deal of specificity. What would have been useful was some kind of hook or unique selling point—the first carbon-neutral hotel in the Swiss Alps or something. The only hotel in Europe with a swimming pool made of solid gold. Okay, that one seemed unlikely, but looking at the photos on the website, I thought it was maybe just fractionally less unlikely than being carbon-neutral. The hotel did look beautiful—and it was absolutely clear that no expense had been spared on either the building itself, which was a stunning eighteenth-century château on the shores of Lake Geneva, or on the renovations, which positively oozed money, from the hand-painted Delft tiles in the bathrooms to the enormous glass-sided infinity pool overlooking the lake. I didn't imagine I'd be doing much swimming in November, but I could very easily imagine snuggling up next to one of the antique ceramic woodstoves that dotted the lounges and parlors of the hotel or settling down to a martini in the 1920s wood-paneled cocktail bar. The website promised everything from winter sleigh rides to heli-skiing in nearby Morzine, so it was clear this was going to be a year-round destination for the super-rich. I just wasn't sure how newsworthy that was.

The other problem was that so many print magazines had gone out of business since I'd last been seriously pitching, and the ones that remained were mostly glorified blogs, with budgets to match. When the third reply came back to the same effect—yes to the piece, but “we can't offer much in the way of a fee”—I sighed and shut down my email. Judah had said this was the universe telling me to get back on the horse, and maybe it was,

but I wished it had offered me a fat pay check to shore up its hints. The fees I was being offered wouldn't even cover the flights.

Still, this *was* a pretty sweet opportunity, and it was also an excuse to see my mum, who'd lost her husband a couple of years before the pandemic and had been looking increasingly frail since a hip operation last year. Maybe I should just say fuck it and get as many puff pieces out of it as I could? It wasn't exactly the hard-hitting investigative stuff I'd once dreamed of doing, but it would be a byline, and maybe that was all that mattered at this point in the game.

Across the play park, Teddy fell off the swings and began to wail, interrupting my introspection. They were both tired, ready to head home for hot chocolate, *Bluey*, and dinner. As I picked up the sobbing Teddy, brushed off the worst of the puddle water, and fished in my tote bag for a Dino Bar to comfort him, I made up my mind: It was time. I was going to say yes.

We were almost out of the park when my phone pinged with an incoming message. I pulled it out of my bag, thinking it might be Judah asking when we'd be home for supper. But it wasn't. It was a reply from an old contact, now working on the features desk at the *Financial Times*, according to LinkedIn. She'd been my boss at *Velocity*, the travel magazine where I'd cut my teeth a decade ago, but I had no idea if she was still in travel. I'd shot off an email more out of hope than any real expectation of a response. Now I clicked, assuming it would be the usual polite brush-off. Only it wasn't. Not quite.

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**LO, GREAT TO** *hear from you and glad you're back on the beat. Sorry to say, I don't think we'd be in the market for a piece on the hotel. Sounds nice, but without some kind of hook, I don't think it's got the angle we'd need. But if you could get an interview with Marcus Leidmann, THAT I could definitely place. We'd be talking full-profile, 2000 words plus, depending on what he came out with. He's famously private, though, so that might not be on the cards. But just putting it out there. You don't ask, you don't get, right?*

—Rowan

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**IT HAD STARTED** to rain again, the raindrops trickling down my forehead and splashing onto the phone screen as I stood there reading and then rereading Rowan's message.

"Muuuumm," Eli said impatiently, hopping from foot to foot. "Can we *go*, I need to pee really bad!"

"Sorry, honey," I said. I shut down the phone and shoved it back into my pocket. "Just a work thing. Let's get you both home."

But as we began the wet walk back to our apartment, the rain dripping off the end of my nose and Teddy griping about how his pants were wet and his butt hurt, I couldn't stop a smile from spreading across my face. I was back. Back on the horse. And it felt good.

### 3

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“**W**hat time is the cab?” Judah was sitting on the bed, but I could feel him mentally hovering over me while I packed my case like an anxious parent sending his firstborn away to camp.

“Three. I don’t have to be at the airport until half four, but I thought with the traffic...”

“Yeah, good call. And you’ve got all your documents in your carry-on luggage? Travel insurance? Passports? Medication?”

“Yes, yes, and yes.” My passports were in my handbag, and now I held them up—my old travel-worn British passport and my brand-new stiff US one. “It’ll be kind of exciting to christen my American one. I’ve never traveled as an American citizen before!”

“You know you *have* to use that one at US customs, yes? If you’re a dual citizen, you have to use your US one to enter and leave the country.”

“Yes, I know. I can use Google just like you, Judah.”

“And you’ve got all the details of where you’re staying and who’s picking you up at the airport?”

“*Yes*, Judah, love, stop fussing! I know it’s been a while, but I *did* do this for a living, you know.”

“I know, I know, I’m sorry.” Judah had the grace to look a little sheepish. Truth be told, I wasn’t that bothered about my passports. I was more concerned about what the dress code would be for this place and whether any of my pre-pregnancy dresses would still fit. It was a long time since I’d been away for work and almost as long since I’d gone anywhere fancy. I honestly wasn’t sure if any of my extremely limited stock of evening dresses would still zip up. Judging by the photos on the website, the Hotel du Lac daytime vibe for this season was skinny jeans, fur-lined boots, and Scandinavian knits,

which I could just about manage. The knits and the jeans, anyway. I didn't have any fur-lined boots. Regular ones would have to do. But the evening photos were all willowy European women clad in monochrome designer dresses and... that might be a problem.

I was holding up what had been my favorite little black dress in the mirror and trying to gauge whether it was smart enough for a Michelin-starred restaurant when Teddy came trailing disconsolately through the bedroom door, his dinosaur plushie in tow.

"Whyyyy do you have to go?" he said for maybe the twentieth time.

"Because I have to work, honey." I shrugged out of my top and pulled the black dress over my head. Only one way to find out if it still fit.

"Mommies don't *have* to work," Teddy argued. "Daddies have to work but mommies only work if they want to."

"What?" I gave a snort as my head appeared out of the top of the dress. "Where did you get that?"

Teddy didn't answer, but when I thought about it, I guessed it made sense in toddler logic. After all, I hadn't worked for most of his childhood, and while there were several working mothers in his friend group, there were half a dozen more who worked part-time or not at all. It probably did look from Teddy's perspective like the dads always worked full-time but the mums did it only when they wanted to.

I zipped up the dress—noting with satisfaction that yes, it still did go all the way up—and then knelt in front of him.

"Listen, love, sometimes mummies stop working when their babies are little, like I did, and sometimes daddies do too. But I used to work before you were born, and now that you're a big boy, I need to start doing it again."

*Need. Need* was the right word. Not *have to*, because the truth was, I didn't totally have to. We could have rumbled on for a while longer on Judah's salary if we cut out some luxuries. But I needed to do this for me—and maybe I needed to do it for Teddy and Eli too.

"I will miss you and Eli so much while I'm away, but it's only a week—"

"A *whole week!*" Teddy broke in tragically as if this were brand-new information, though we'd discussed it several times already.

"Yes, a week," I said patiently. "Remember? I'm spending three days in Switzerland working, and then I'm going to see Granny Pam in England for a couple of days to make